Supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts: A phenomenological study of the leadership role of circuit managers

By

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DECLARATION

I, Sithenjwa Hopewell Ncwane, declare that:

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This thesis has been submitted with~~/ without~~ our approval.

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Supervisor: Prof T.T. Bhengu Date

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Supervisor: Dr P.E. Myende Date

ETHICAL CLEARENCE CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
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9 May 2016

Mr Sithenjwa Hopwell Ncwane 210551399
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Dear Mr Ncwane

Protocol reference number: HSS/0466/016M
Project Title: Supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts: A phenomenological study about the leadership role of circuit managers

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 26 April 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has 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

.....
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanitities & Social Scinces Research Ethics Committee

/pm

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late parents, Thandeni Gladys Ncwane, and Reverend Bhekuyise Bernard Ncwane, for everything they did to ensure that we get our place in the sun by doing their best to ensure that we get education. I also extend my gratitude to my wife, Nonhlanhla, son Sibonelo and daughter, Sanelisiwe, for their understanding and giving me the time to complete this study and giving me encouragement when I needed it most. Without your support and love I would never have been able to complete this project.

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study was conducted among six circuit managers in schools that are located in challenging contexts. While circuit managers are not directly involved in the day-to-day management and leadership of schools, there is however compelling literature evidence that suggests that their leadership role has a great impact on the improvement of learner attainment. With so many of our schools being in areas that are very challenging, which makes teaching and learning difficult, circuit managers' support becomes more critical. Circuit managers, like all other Department of Education personnel, are expected to ensure that our education system functions properly.

The study draws from instructional leadership theory and context-responsive theory as critical lenses that constitute the theoretical framework used in the study. The study is underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm, with phenomenology used as the research design. Semi-structured interviews and document reviews were used to generate the data, which was analysed using phenomenological data analysis. The findings indicate that circuit managers perform many tasks that are beyond the scope of their job descriptions. They do this because of an overwhelming need for support as a result of the plethora of challenges that the schools that they support have to deal with. These challenges tend to distract their attention from issues that directly link to learner attainment. Human resources management seems to be the most important task that circuit managers undertake, from assisting the schools to get their requisite staff establishment to the development of staff, particularly of principals' leadership capacities. Circuit managers have developed key strategies to deal with the context as they work with schools.

ABBREVIATIONS

ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
AMESA	Association for Mathematics Education of South Africa
EMIS	Education Management Information System
HOD	Head of Department
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Material
MEC	Member of Executive Council
PED	Provincial Education Department
PPN	Post Provision Norms
SASAMS	South African School Administration and Management System
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
SASA	South African Schools' Act
RCL	Representative Council for Learners

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This study is about exploring the role that circuit managers play in supporting teaching and learning in challenging circuit contexts of South Africa. From the outset of this doctoral project, I have worked on the assumption that context matters (Bredeson, Klar & Johansson, 2011; Copeland, 2013; Langa, 2013; Tekniepe, 2005) in influencing teaching and learning. In addition, there is increasing evidence that circuit managers may play a critical role in supporting teaching and learning (Crankshaw, 2011; Furman, 2013; Mason, 2013; Mthembu, 2014; Ngubane, 2006; Waters & Marzano, 2016). This chapter introduces the study, by providing a background to and the focus of the study, and then explains the rationale of the study, the key concepts as well as the significance of the study. It further briefly presents the problem statement, the research questions, the significance of the study as well as the theoretical frameworks underpinning thinking in the study. It concludes by presenting the overview of the thesis and the summary of the chapter.

1.2 Background and focus

This study explores the leadership role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts. According to Bredeson and Kose (2007), circuit managers may have similar tasks and functions, however their performance of these tasks and functions is greatly influenced by the unique factors that are found in their contexts. South African circuit managers are not immune to this reality. When describing South Africa's education contexts, Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2015) state that South African education landscape has a sad mixture of first and third world institutions. Chikoko *et al.* (2015) continue and state that at one end of the continuum there are top schools that can compete with the best in the first world in terms of learner's attainment and teaching learning resources. Chikoko *et al.* (2015) further add though that there are also schools that are dysfunctional, where effective teaching and learning is non-existing. There are also a few schools that, despite being comparable to third world institutions, are sustainable and resilient, and perform at levels comparable to first class schools in terms of learner attainment (Chikoko *et al.,* 2015). Consistent with Chikoko *et al.* (2015)'s analogy, there is sufficient empirical evidence to suggests that most schools that have poor

learner achievement are in challenging contexts (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Crichton, 2014; Harris, 2002; Westraad, 2011) or in multiply deprived communities (Lamby, 2015; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015).

Of interest to this study are the challenges caused by poverty, the highly unionised school environment and the lack of human and physical resources. Although the focus of this study is not on rural or township contexts, it is worth noting that these challenges in South Africa are experienced mainly in rural and township schools (Bhengu & Myende, 2015; Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2015). As demonstrated below, poverty related challenges, unionisation, poor physical and human resources may influence the quality of education and the role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning in particular. Ylimaki, Jacobson and Drysdale (2007) argue that high levels of poverty can interfere with a school's ability to successfully improve student achievement. Further, Bhengu, Naicker and Mthiyane (2014) argue that schools that are situated in highly unionised contexts experience major leadership problems that interfere with teaching and learning. This view is supported by Lawton, Bedard, MacLellan and Xiabin (2000), who state that unions have a negative effect on education as they pursue narrow self-interests on behalf of members. In addition to the unionisation of teachers, it is a well-established fact that South Africa suffers from long standing major school infrastructure backlogs as a result of the apartheid system of education. This is confirmed by the findings of the study conducted by Bhengu, Naicker and Mthiyane (2014, p. 210) when they conclude that "the challenge of poverty of resources in many South African schools ranges from physical, financial, to human resources. They report that some schools still struggle with classroom teaching resources as well as over-crowded classes as a result of educator shortages, especially in Mathematics and Science.'' According to the World Bank (2001), rural areas have features that are challenging to the provision of quality education; these include teachers who do not want to serve in these areas, schools that are far apart, difficult communication between schools and circuit offices, long distances from homes, poor roads and, finally, a curriculum that may not be compatible with the community's needs.

Generally, the duties of the circuit manager include liaising with communities and the School Governing Bodies in giving effect to the South African Schools Act, organising and presenting induction programmes, seminars and workshops for principals and other school management staff, resolution of conflicts and maintaining good employee relations (Education Labour Relations Council, 2008). Furthermore, the Policy on Organisation, Roles and Responsibilities

of Education Districts clearly states that the circuit office is the closest point of contact between the school and the Provincial Education Department (PED), therefore principals depend on the circuit manager for information, administrative services and professional support (Department of Basic Education, 2013).

Particularly relevant for this study, about circuit managers' role in supporting teaching and learning in schools that are in challenging contexts, is the fact that circuit managers are mandated to provide instructional leadership to educational institutions (Department of Basic Education, 2013). Circuit managers are further mandated by the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) document to take a lead in ensuring that all schools receive sufficient and relevant learning and teaching materials on time (Department of Education, 2008). The QLTC document also spells out that a circuit manager should improve the quality of teaching and learning provided for all the children, with special focus given to learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, and that this should be evidenced by better learner achievements (Department of Basic Education, 2008).

Evident in this foregoing discussion is the view that circuit managers face a daunting list of tasks every day (Antonucci, 2012; Mason, 2013; Roegman & Hatch, 2012). In recent years the list has grown even longer as the emphasis in educational leadership has expanded from a focus on organisation and management to a focus on instructional leadership (Roegman & Hatch, 2012). As instructional leaders, according to Roegman and Hatch (2012), circuit managers are expected to engage directly in their circuits' efforts to strengthen the instructional core. This they are expected to execute by, among other things, guiding and supporting teachers, school principal and School Governing Bodies (SGBs) so that schools can deliver on their core function, which is teaching and learning (Mthembu, 2014). According to Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2000), the key players in school instructional leadership are the superintendents and curriculum coordinators, principal and assistant principal as well as instructional coaches.

Furthermore, circuit managers have a responsibility to build capacity and support principals to focus on and be effective at improving instruction (Saphier & Durkin, 2013). Circuit managers must ensure a good working relationship with their school principals because their leadership responsibilities are overlapping (Crankshaw, 2011). Crankshaw (2011) further states that circuit managers are expected to assist principals in creating school conditions that improve curricular instruction and that enable assessment practices that foster improved student learning and outcomes. In the view of Bottoms and Schmidt-Davis (2010), highly supportive

superintendents understand the challenging work principals must do and, in many cases, have been successful school principals themselves. Circuit managers have to deal with increased pressure to find solutions for stubborn and persistent differences in education access and outcomes for learners from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and contexts (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2016; Roegman & Hatch, 2012). These demands call for circuit managers to understand the contexts they work in and their inherent challenges if they are to provide effective leadership. Without their understanding of the context, it may be difficult to respond to the needs of the schools in these contexts.

Bush (2008) states that there is a direct relationship between leadership effectiveness and the success of the organisation, thus the success of the school in challenging contexts largely depends on the effectiveness of circuit managers' abilities to navigate the turbulence of the contexts they work under. Bhengu, Naicker and Mthiyane (2014), Fullan (2007) and Bush and Jackson (2002) commonly agree that effective leadership is an important prerequisite for high quality education. Effective leadership is known to have a significant impact on student learning and is second only to the quality of the teachers' instruction in the classroom (Chikoko *et al.,* 2015). Accordingly, this phenomenological study focuses on the leadership role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning in schools that are in challenging contexts. The purpose of this study was also to find out how the school contexts have the potential to dictate the leadership practices of circuit managers including how they navigate the dynamics of supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts.

1.3 Rationale for the study

The rationale for undertaking this study is partly my experience as a teacher, a member of the School Governing Body, Head of Department (HOD), Deputy Principal, Acting Principal and currently school Principal in different schools that are placed in challenging contexts. As a teacher, I started my teaching career in a rural area. In that school I always wondered why the circuit manager was not assisting the school to overcome the many challenges that it was going through. The school experienced a plethora of challenges that were consistent with its location in a rural area in South Africa. With more experience, I got to know that circuit managers were viewed by fellow teachers as glorified clerks whose task was reduced to passing circulars from circuit to schools.

After securing a promotion to the position of Head of Department (HOD), I was afforded an opportunity to be part of the member of the School Management Team (SMT), which was tasked with the role of finding solutions to challenges the school was facing. There were very few classrooms compared to the number of learners, multi-grade classes, no electricity and no running water, while poverty was rife in the school community, which made fund raising very difficult. The School Governing Body's (SGB) parent component were hardly available because they worked long hours, and the ones who were available because they were unemployed could not make any contribution and looked up to the principal for direction. This forced the principal to run around chasing departmental officials about improving school infrastructure and looking for private funders. All these challenges compromised the principal's role as an instructional leader.

My recent experience as deputy principal, as acting principal and currently school principal in different schools serving learners from informal settlement near the city of Durban has influenced my great interest in this topic. In all public schools, the Annual National Assessment (ANA) and matric results are used as the benchmark for school performance in primary and secondary schools respectively. Schools that are in challenging contexts like the one I worked at tended to experience low learner achievement. This type of experience invites a plethora of interventions from the National and Provincial Departments of Basic Education under the auspices of the National Strategy for Learner Outcomes Programme (NSLOP) (Langa, 2013). These ready-made interventions are brought to the school by officials who already have assumptions about what makes the schools underperform. The people who are familiar with the context, like the principal, the teachers and the circuit manager are not invited to share their views regarding what makes the school underperforms and what do they think needs to happen for the school to better perform. These programmes dictate that the duties of the principal will now have to revolve around implementation of the guidelines of the programme, at the same time overwhelmed by instructions from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and Provincial Education Department (PED) and the task of interpreting the external necessities rather than determining aims and objectives on the basis of needs experienced by learners, parents and teachers (Langa, 2013).

I hold a Master of Education (MEd) degree in Education Leadership, Management and Policy; and I have been exposed to literature about school improvement. As a result, I have found that the strategies that are encapsulated in the (NSLOP) are not appropriate for the problems they

seek to address. There is extensive literature that provides empirical tested evidence about the ineffectiveness of such measures (Chisholm, 2004; Christie & Potterton, 1998; Fullan, 2004; Jansen, 1996). I wish to briefly explain one such by Fullan. Fullan (2004) argues that such interventions (referring to programmes like NSCO) may yield some results but they tend to plateau at a particular point. This is caused by what he calls "lack of deep ownership". He says that, without local stakeholders' engagement you do not get the ingenuity and creativity of practitioners that is necessary for developing new, better and context-based solutions. He therefore proposes that we need a solution that meets two criteria. These criteria are the mobilisation of the ingenuity and the creative resources of the whole circuit system, a fostering of a "we-we" or collective commitment and identifying with the system as a whole and how it should be transformed (Fullan, 2004). It is my opinion that the person who should be empowered and given the necessary support to facilitate any school improvement in his circuit, through working with school-based stakeholders, is the circuit manager. The exclusion of the circuit manager as the principal's immediate senior left me with curiosity and with a desire to illuminate the role of the circuit manager as the instructional leader. I strongly believe that, if circuit managers can stand together with their principals, teachers, and SGB, learner achievement can improve. Moore-Johnson (1996) states that the best circuit managers work together with the principals, teachers and other staff to improve learner achievement. This will help to develop context-based solutions. Programmes developed by stakeholders and led by the circuit manager stand a better chance of being of being successful rather than the ready-made solutions imposed by the external players, like the national and provincial offices, which I find to be politically symbolic (Jansen, 2000), rather than meant for practical implementation.

This study is also a product of an extensive literature review that suggests that, while the roles of teachers and school principals have been well documented in school improvement and student achievement results (Crankshaw, 2011), *little is known about the role of circuit managers as immediate supervisors of school principals* (Mthembu, 2014). This is particularly so in South Africa, where we have the circuit office as an office below the district office and closest to schools. This view is also echoed by Björk (1993), who posits that, although the principal's role was initially emphasised, research indicates that superintendents use their bureaucratic positions in the formal organisation to improve instruction through staff recruitment, supervision of school principals, goal setting, monitoring financial planning and consultative management practices.

1.4 Statement of the problem

Traditionally, decisions about instruction have been the domain of the individual teachers in classrooms and principal in schools (Belden, Russonello & Stewart, 2005). The evolving of the role of the circuit manager has meant that instructional leadership can longer be the domain of teachers and school principals alone. The questions that many districts are facing is not whether district leaders should have a leadership role on instruction but rather how this can be achieved (Belden, Russonello & Stewart, 2005). The focus for this study is how the circuit managers' instructional leadership can be achieved in challenging contexts. Davidson (2005) argues that the instructional leadership practices of the circuit managers are expected to influence instructional leadership practice and outcomes in a more remote and indirect manner than the leadership provided by the curriculum administrator, staff developers and school principal. The many small actions of the circuit manager, by which he brings attention and resources to instructional problems, may have significant consequences for the school and the district (Davidson, 2005). Bredeson and Klose (2007) also add that circuit managers have been expected to create the working conditions in the district that will serve to improve teaching and learning processes. This is true in schools that are placed in disadvantaged areas, given that educational attainment and school quality is lower there (Lupton, 2004). The challenging context and the constrained school responses exert a downward pressure on the educational achievement of learners (Lupton, 2004). Thus, the supporting role of the circuit managers becomes important in ensuring that such a situation improves through working together with local stakeholders.

The leading and supporting role of circuit manager in challenging contexts is more critical in a new South Africa, where education is a human right (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The education system cannot afford to provide quality education for some sections of our country and inferior education to the others (Salmon, 1992). Poverty, rurality, lack of physical and human resources as well a highly unionised school environment make supporting teaching and learning a challenge. Thus, it is important to expose how those who are tasked with the responsibility of supporting teaching and learning in these contexts navigate all these challenges and what leadership roles they employ in ensuring that teaching and learning are supported.

Education, according to the South African Human Right Commission's (2006) *Report on the Public Hearing on Right to Basic Education*, is a component of human dignity, an indispensable means of realising other human rights effectively in a free society. This report further argues that education affects individuals 'ability to exercise other human rights, to develop the ability to make political choices and to be able to access other rights such as economic and social rights (South African Human Rights Commission, 2006). Education leaders have the responsibility to provide quality education to all South Africans irrespective of the context.

There are few studies that look at the circuit manager's role in supporting teaching and learning (Bredeson, 1997; Davidson, 2005; Waters & Marzano, 2006; Wright & Harris, 2010). These studies describe the generic role of superintendents and there is a knowledge gap about the role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning in schools that are in challenging contexts. There is literature evidence that suggests that some school leadership works well in schools that are in challenging contexts (Kemper, 2008). It is therefore critical to know how teaching and learning are supported in schools that are in challenging school contexts and what kind of leadership works in the support provided to schools that are in challenging contexts by those at circuit management level.

1.5 Research questions

- What role do circuit managers play in supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts?
- What are the challenges that affect circuit managers' role of supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts?
- How do contextual challenges influence the leadership role of circuit managers?

1.6 Significance of the study

Education is a human right, according to the South African Constitution, Act No. 108 of 1996, (Republic of South Africa [RSA]). It is therefore important that every endeavour is made to provide quality education to all citizens. It is also important that the kind of education that is provided develops citizens who will be able to make a meaningful contribution to the society, country and the world. Educating all our children must be one of our urgent tasks, because we know that education, more than anything else, improves our chances of a better life (Mandela, 2008). To this end, education officials have to work together with different stakeholders to

ensure that schools that are located in challenging contexts are not neglected and they are supported so that they can provide quality education. It is a well-established theory that poverty (Kemper, 2008), rurality Langa (2013), a highly unionised environment (Bhengu, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2014) and lack of human and physical resources (Bhengu et al*.,* 2014) make delivery of quality education difficult. It is also argued that challenging contexts do not necessarily have to mean poor education outcomes, because there are schools that are able to produce good results despite being in challenging contexts. Thus, it is important that every attempt is made to ensure that quality teaching and learning are supported so that learner achievement can improve.

Challenges faced by school-based education officials occupy a large part of both public and academic discourse and the media. There is mounting evidence that continues to be reported that schools alone cannot sustain a culture of efficient schooling systems, or acquire resources needed for the major improvement of student achievement without support from district leaders and the state (Leon, 2008). The role of circuit managers is also to a certain extent documented; however, the role of circuit managers in supporting schools in challenging contexts is less known. By listening to circuit managers' life stories about their enactment of instructional leadership in challenging contexts, the study intended to give them a voice and to bring their perspective and concerns to the forefront of education provision. Knowledge generated from this study is intended to assist in understanding the schools in challenging contexts, the role circuit managers are playing or not playing in performing their instructional leadership roles in these schools and what can be done to improve this role. This study has the potential to identify what education is needed to succeed in preparing school leaders and district leaders with the knowledge, skills and disposition needed.

1.7 Overview of the theoretical framework

Instructional leadership and context-responsive leadership theory were used as the theoretical lens to frame this study. These are discussed below.

1.7.1 Waters and Marzano's (2006) model of instructional leadership

Waters and Marzano's (2006) model is based on five pillars. The first pillar is collaborative goal-setting. The second pillar is non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction. The third pillar is board alignment and support of district goals. This pillar is based on the assumption that, in districts with higher levels of student achievement, the local board of

education is aligned with and is supportive of goals for achievement and instruction (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction is the fourth pillar. The last pillar is about the use of resources to support the achievement of instructional goals**.** Waters and Marzano's model is appropriate for framing this study because it links well with what are the mandated duties and responsibilities of circuit managers, as advocated by different South African legislation as well as with what is advocated by literature as the best practice. This model will also assist me to theorise and analyse how circuit managers navigate their role of supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts. It is possible to use the pillars proposed by this model to investigate how each pillar is executed in these challenging contexts and how contextual factors may dictate the way in which circuit managers execute the tasks proposed by each pillar.

1.7.2 Bredeson, Klar and Johanssons' Context-Responsive Leadership (2008)

A theory of context-responsive leadership was developed by Bredeson, Klar and Johansson (2008) after their examination of 12 superintendents' interview responses about the contexts in which their leadership was exercised. They define context-responsive leadership as practical wisdom in action, which reveals a complex mix of knowledge, skills and disposition appropriately deployed by effective leaders as they engage in fluid conversation with the variables of dynamic situations. Context-responsive leadership is expressed through action, the way the leader behaves, and not in any one predisposed style consisting of de-contextualized qualities or leaders' actions (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). They highlight five key variations in contexts to illustrate context-responsive leadership in situ. These include the district size, organisational culture, community contexts and geographic location, fiscal contexts and political contexts.

The context-responsive leadership theory as proposed by Bredeson, Klar and Johansson (2008) is appropriate for this study because this theory suggests that contexts have an influence on the manner in which circuit managers support teaching and learning. This study sought to understand how circuit managers navigate the challenges posed by contexts in schools they support. In attempting to do this, the study tapped into circuit managers' practical wisdom in action and the mix of knowledge, skills and disposition they use to engage in fluid conversation with the dynamic situation variables (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008).

From the foregoing discussion, the purpose of the study was to explore how circuit managers enact their leadership to support teaching and learning in challenging contexts. The study further aimed to provide relevant reasons behind the way the leadership of circuit managers in challenging contexts is acted out and how contextual realities may affect the way circuit managers enact their leadership. This study is underpinned by two related constructs that are relevant to teaching and learning, *instructional leadership* and *challenging context*. The triangulation of theoretical frameworks assisted me to have lenses to theorise about each of these constructs and the relationship between them in terms of circuit managers' experiences of supporting teaching and learning.

1.8 Key concepts

The key concepts that undergird this study about the leadership role of circuit managers are *challenging context*, *education circuit*, *circuit manager* and *superintendent*. These concepts are discussed below.

1.8.1 Challenging context

An analysis of the literature about challenging contexts provides a diverse view about what constitutes a challenging context. Some of the variables that are associated with challenging contexts include free school meals, socio-economic status, parental education and occupation (Chapman & Harris, 2004). Crichton and Onguko (2013) describe a challenging context as a setting in which individuals do not have access to consistent and available and affordable electricity, access to reliable, unfiltered and uncensored internet, access to transportation and mobility and access to prior learning, clean water and sanitation, but are exposed to situations linked to poverty (poor health, low fees, low wages, inappropriate clothing). Chapman and Harris (2004) also state that changing demographics, increased accountability and organisational reforms can be a challenge to schools.

1.8.2 Education district

An education district is a geographical area within a province that has been demarcated by the provincial Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Education for purposes of effective education management and service delivery. The Department of Education (2013) states that no education district should have fewer than 72 schools or more than 300 schools.

1.8.3 Education circuit

According to the Department of Education (2013), an education circuit office must be responsible for no less than 15 schools and not more than 30 schools.

1.8.4 Circuit manager

According to the Occupation Specific Dispensation (OSD), the circuit manager is the head of the circuit office whose function is to support school, school principals, and school management team, school governing bodies in the management, administration and governance of the school (Education Labour Relations Council, 2008).

1.8.5 Superintendent

In the public education systems of the United States and Canada, the title of superintendent is used when referring to the person who is responsible for supporting schools and the boards. In the South African context this position is equivalent to that of the circuit manager. It is a position just above that of the principal.

1.9 Demarcation of the study

Demarcation of the study refers to the setting of boundaries for the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). When conducting a study, an early and careful demarcation of the domain under study is essential (Swarborn, 2010). This study was conducted among six circuit managers with schools located in the Umlazi, Pinetown and Ilembe Districts in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. In the context of this study, the research focused on the instructional leadership role of six circuit managers who had schools located in challenging contexts. Three circuit managers with schools in the township context and three circuit managers with schools in rural contexts were part of this study, hence it worth noting that they did not represent the whole population of circuit managers.

1.10 Overview of the thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

This chapter starts by orienting the reader to the study. This is done by discussing the background to the study, rationale, and the problem statement. It also presents the research questions, the significance of the study, a brief discussion of theoretical frameworks and the key concepts.

Chapter 2: Review of related literature

This chapter presents a detailed literature review on circuit managers' leadership practices. It tackles this topic from both local and international perspectives.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the two theories that constitute the theoretical framework that underpin this study, the instructional leadership and the context-responsive leadership theories.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology used in this study and also provides reasons as to why it was used. The study is a phenomenological study exploring supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts through the lived experiences of circuit managers. In this chapter the ethical issues observed are also discussed.

Chapters 5: Data presentation and analyisis

This chapter presents data on how circuit managers support teaching and learning in schools.

Chapter 6: Data presentation and analysis

This chapter is a continuation of data presentation and analysis. This chapters focuses on issues of contexts and leadership practices of circuit managers. Specifically, it attempts to show how the contexts influences leadership practices of circuit managers.

Chapter 7: Discussion of findings

This chapter discusses the findings that are reported in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and recommendations

In this last chapter of this thesis, the synthesis of the findings and the recommendations conclude the thesis.

1.11 Chapter summary

Chapter 1 has provided an overview of the entire study about what is it like to be the circuit manager of schools located in challenging contexts. The introduction presents what the study sought to investigate, followed by the discussion of the background and focus of the study. The rationale, which outlines my connection with the research problem, is also presented and is followed by the problem statement, the significance of the study and the research questions. Furthermore, the overview of the theoretical framework, which is the theoretical lenses used in this study, the key concepts and the overview of the entire thesis are presented. The next chapter (Chapter 2) presents the review of the related literature.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2. 1 Introduction

Chapter 1 dealt with the orientation of the study, which included discussing the rationale, the problem statement and significance of the study. The previous chapter also presented and briefly introduced the theoretical framework underpinning this study, as well as the key concepts. This chapter discusses important literature that relates to this study. This focuses on the leadership role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts. This literature review provides a critical synthesis of available research into the role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts. Five broad themes inform the discussion of the literature review relevant to this phenomenological study. The first theme presents the evolution of this role within contexts in the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK) and South Africa (SA). This is followed by a theme about the common roles of circuit managers in the 21st century. Under this theme, the common, contextual as well as instructional roles of circuit managers will be discussed. The third theme presents the job description of circuit managers in the South African context. This theme discusses the legislative mandates that dictate the job of a circuit manager in South Africa. The fourth theme presents the challenges facing circuit managers; this looks at the common, contextual as well as personal challenges. The preparation of circuit managers constitutes the final theme. While some of these themes do not directly relate to the teaching and learning role of the circuit manager, they are closely related to how the circuit managers discharge their role of supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts. The literature used in this study largely emanates from the USA and UK contexts, due to the very limited literature from the South African contexts.

2.2 The changing role of Circuit managers: The historical perspective

To fully understand the current role of circuit managers, it important to trace its evolution. In their recent comprehensive study about the role of circuit managers, Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young and Ellerson (2010) argue that, to fully appreciate the circuit manager's position and its evolution over many years, one must understand how the roles and the responsibilities have waxed and waned over years. Kowalski *et al.* (2010) further add that conceptualising the evolutionary role of the circuit manager is essential for understanding the

complexity and skills of the position and the knowledge and skills required for effective practice. Heeding such views of Kowalski *et al.* (2010), this section will provide a brief historical perspective of the role of circuit managers from USA, UK and South African contexts.

2.2.1 The evolution of the American circuit manager's role

Drawing on the work of Kowalski *et al.* (2010), which highlights how the work of circuit managers has evolved in the United Sates, the evolution of the role of circuit manager can be traced back using five important roles that seem to characterise it. These roles are teacher-scholar, scientist manager, democratic leader, applied scientist and communicator. According to Kowalski *et al.* (2010), the role of circuit manager, from the time when it was created, can be referred to as a teacher-scholar. Under this role, circuit managers were expected to implement the state curriculum and supervise teachers. As teacher-scholar, circuit managers authored professional journal articles about philosophy, history and pedagogy (Kowalski *et al.,* 2010). Cuban (1976), when writing about the teacher-scholar role of circuit manager, states that circuit managers are supposed to train and inspire teachers with high ideals, to revise the course of study when new light shows that improvement is possible, and to see that pupils and teachers are supplied with the necessary equipment that would enable the best methods of teaching people.

The teacher-scholar role of circuit manager was to change, driven by the American transition from an agrarian to industrial society. Circuit managers were forced to become scientific managers (Kowalski, 2010). The industrial society was borne out of new factors which sparked a demographic chain reaction, firstly producing urbanisation and then large school systems. It is this context that made school board members focus more directly on resource management (Kowalski, 2010). Tyack and Hansot (1982) state that the circuit manager's role during this period focused on improving operations by concentrating on time and efficiency. The need for the circuit managers to become scientific managers resulted in pressure being put on public administrators to learn and apply the principles of scientific management, thus several prominent universities had to offer courses and degrees in school management (Kowalski, 2011). As result of changes in the American context, educational provision was also guided by these changes, to ensuring that it responds to the new goals. These goals were informed by the education support and the development of industrial society. This then meant that circuit

manager had a duty to ensure that schools they supervise are geared towards making a contribution to the development of the industrial society.

During the 1930s, circuit managers assumed the role of democratic leaders (Kowalski, 2011). This role was influenced by the 1930s, a period that was characterised by scarce fiscal resources that forced school officials to engage more directly within political activity, especially in lobbying state legislatures. This idea was not initially welcomed, as political circuit managers were viewed as unprofessional. This view later changed as it became apparent that the public schools had to compete with other government priorities to acquire funding.

Due to what Kowalski (2011) refers to as a mix of societal and professional forces, the role of circuit manager as an applied scientist emerged. This mix of society and professional forces was characterised by four main factors. These included the growing dissatisfaction with the democratic leadership model after World War 2, the rapid growth of social sciences in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the support from the Kellogg Foundation and the resurgence of criticisms of education in the 1950s. The role of circuit managers encouraged academics and practitioners to emphasise empiricism, predictability and certainty in their research and practice. Johnson and Fusarelli (2003) state that, as a result of these changes, by the 1970s the behavioural sciences had become thoroughly integrated into school administration literature, including primary textbooks. In addition to this view Kowalski (2011) adds that during the 1980s the emphasis on the behavioural lessened, while the research and theories from constituent disciplines had already become embedded in the school administration's base knowledge.

According to Kowalski (2011), another role of circuit manager that is very important is that of a communicator. This role came to prominence in the 1980s. This role was framed by the relatively new expectations that had become apparent. These new expectations were mainly driven by two new realities. The first one is the need for circuit managers to assume leadership in the process of school restructuring and the need for them to improve schools' culture as part of the restructuring process (Kowalski, 2011). Guided by the discussion above, it is clear that the evolution of the American circuit manager was influenced by what was happening in the American context at particular times, particularly the changes in what society wanted to be the goal of education. The evolution of the American circuit manager clearly demonstrates that circuit managers, as with other people involved in education, had a responsibility to work towards attainment of this goal and under a particular context. It also demonstrates that, if the

goal and context were to change, it is imperative that the duties of the person who works under that contexts should also be changed to reflect the new context and new goals. Teaching in some of the schools in South Africa is difficult because of the local context (as demonstrated in Chapter 1 and partly in this current section of discussion). Circuit managers should have the capacity to understand what the goal for education in particular contexts should look like. With this in mind, the work circuit managers could be more successful as they would be dealing with issues informed by their local contexts. In South Africa, at national level, the government has tried, as in the USA, to develop an education system for the new South Africa post 1994. These reforms need to filter to as many local contexts as possible for it to be meaningful. The circuit manager, as the link between the schools and the upper structures of the Department of Education, is assigned the responsibility to support and promote the successful implementation of these reforms (Department of Education, 2013).

What is also coming out from the evolution of the role of the American circuit manager is that all these five roles are very important in the life of any circuit manager. They are important because they highlight how the roles of circuit manager have altered for them to be able to deliver particular outcomes in a particular context. For example, during the 1980s circuit managers were expected to be communicators. This role, as mentioned above, was driven by reforms. The adoption of this new role did not mean that circuit managers were not expected to play other roles, for example of teacher-scholar, scientific leader, democratic leader or applied scientists. In fact, this meant circuit manager were still expected to play other roles, but the one of being a communicator was illuminated at a particular time. Furthermore, what is demonstrated by the literature above is the dearth of literature discussing how such roles are acted out in South African context.

2.2.2 The evolution of the British Inspector of Schools

Wilcox (2000) states that Inspection in the UK has been characterised by the Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) and the Office of Standard in Education (OFSTED). School inspection in England started during the 1800s; the first two school inspectors of schools were appointed in 1839 six years after government grants were made available to help establish elementary schools (Wilcox & Grey, 1996). They were tasked with supporting schools, inspecting schools already aided by grants and enquiring into the state of education in a particular district (Wilcox & Grey, 1996). Elliot (2000) further adds that the HMI inspectors undertook full inspections

with teams of up to 15 people, as well as short inspections on particular aspects of the schools. The results of school inspections were published, from 1983 onwards (Elliot, 2000).

The role of the inspectors changed drastically, due to the passing of the Revised Code for Inspectors in 1862, which saw inspectors getting involved in direct examinations. Consequently, the HMI became unpopular with teachers as it paid grants to school using the performance of learners in reading, writing and arithmetic as a guide. The manner in which inspections were done by the HMI changed again in 1960. This was due to financial crises and cut-backs in education, as well as the emergence of educational accountability, which created a climate for HMI to re-establish a successful national role in which informal visits and short visits were done (Wilcox & Gray, 1996). During the 1970s, fewer inspections were done and the inspections were generally short, consisting of a one-day inspection and ending with a discussion with the school head in which relevant issues were raised (Marshall, 2008). During the period between 1986 and 1988, the England education system witnessed another change in the manner in which the HMI worked. These changes resulted from the Education Acts of 1986 and 1988. As a result of these Acts, schools were given more freedom to manage their business as long as they taught the National Curriculum and were accountable to stakeholders (Marshall, 2008). By the end of 1990, new innovations were introduced to HMI, which entailed shorter and sharper inspections, together with self-evaluation as the starting point for future inspections.

Following a period of sustained criticism of the English state of education, the Office of the Standards in Education (OFSTED) was created. The new organisation was to be led by Her Majesty's Chief Inspectorate of Schools (HMCI), but there were to be fewer HMI inspectors; these were left, at least, with a largely monitoring role (Elliot, 2000). According to Wilcox and Gray (1996), inspections conducted under OFSTED were carried out by independent inspection teams, each lead by a Registered Inspector, while each team had to include one *lay person* who had no professional involvement in the provision or management of education.

OFSTED was initially welcomed, particularly by the school masters. Ferguson, Earley, Fidler and Ouston (2000) report that the majority of school heads in Great Britain responded positively towards an inspection process that would make provisions for inspection teams to provide assistance and advice to school. In 2004 OFSTED published a paper on "The Future of Inspection" wherein they proposed shorter but more frequent inspections, which would be undertaken with minimal or no prior notice to school (MacBeath, 2006). This was however

challenged by the Britain National Union of Teachers. As a result of this, a new policy was introduced in 2005. This policy increased the emphasis on self-evaluation, with regular feedback to stakeholders (Marshall, 2008).

The British role of superintendence is characterised by an emphasis on inspection. These inspectors are viewed as a critical instrument to ensure that certain standards in education are maintained. While there is no conclusive agreement among scholars about the effectiveness of such a model, there is however agreement that inspectors play an important role in the schooling system. This was confirmed by the study conducted by Rudd and Davies (2001) with head teachers and teachers, which revealed that self-evaluation has been a positive experience to both in diverse ways.

2.2.3 The evolution of the role of circuit manager in South Africa

When Lord Selborne was appointed the High Commissioner of South Africa in 1902, he initiated the appointment of school boards in all schools, as well as the implementation of advisory school boards for larger magisterial districts (Booyse, Le Roux, Seroto & Wolhuter, 2011). The school boards were tasked with supervising buildings and grounds, and to offer advice on the appointment of teachers, but not their dismissal (Behr & MacMillan, 1971). They were also responsible for the maintenance of furniture and equipment and the administration of funds (Booyse *et al.,* 2011). In addition to this, boards had a daunting task of receiving copies of reports by inspectors of schools which then had to make written recommendations to directors concerning such report or any other matter concerning the welfare of any institution under the supervision of the board (Behr & MacMillan, 1971).

Raath (2012) observes that these tasks became too much for the board to handle, hence in 1982 Sir Thomas Muir was appointed as the Superintendent of Education. Muir brought changes, which included the appointment of experienced principals and the teachers to the inspectorate (Raath, 2012). During inspection visits, a group of inspectors visit a school for inspection. These inspectors initially examined and promoted each individual child, but soon after 1920 this was abolished, as principals were given greater responsibility for the internal conduct of the school. Later the work of the inspector changed, and it had to include two main functions, namely guidance and administrative control (Behr & MacMillan, 1971) Inspectors during these periods were overworked. Behr and MacMillan (1971) posit that there were 20 inspectors for 64 000 school children in 1937, 25 for 164 352 in 1955, just over 30 inspectors for nearly 281

000 children and 40 inspectors for 331 000 pupils in 1962. In contrast, today, according to the *Policy on the Organisation, Roles and Responsibilities of Education Districts,* circuit manager may not have less than 15 and no more than 30 schools (Department of Education, 2013).

Professional supervision and inspection of schools during apartheid were initially carried out by white inspectors of education, assisted when necessary by black supervisors of schools. Jansen (2004) also notes that it was not until 1981 that the first black circuit inspector was appointed, and then only under the supervision and tutelage of a white circuit inspector. It was the responsibility of the circuit inspector to ensure teaching and learning conformed strictly to the content specification of the apartheid syllabuses and had a task of ensuring compliance with the apartheid system in all aspects of school functioning, from governance and administration to curriculum and assessment (Jansen, 2004).

Education during apartheid was complex, reflecting a racially fragmented society with differentiated systems of inspection, control and appraisal across the racially determined departmental sectors (Morrow, 2007). Jansen (2004) adds that, since the mid-1970s, a system of inspection was expanded with the goals of enforcing compliance in the face of growing resentment against apartheid education policy, which culminated in the Soweto and later national uprising. Contrary to what inspection was in Black African schools, the inspection employed within the White and Indian departments, although not entirely unproblematic, was largely more positive (Raath, 2012). The black schools bore the brunt of the negative connotations associated with school supervision during this era. Circuit inspectors were largely viewed as the extension of a system that was viewed in a negative light. Ngubane (2006) also adds that circuit managers of the past created an image of fault finder, examiner and guardian of standards, and they had no time for guidance and advice.

Soudien (2002) argues that, while the state inspection and examination systems were not water-tight systems of surveillance, it was the circuit inspector who played a central role in subduing teachers and holding them to account. According to Jansen (2004), the Soweto Uprising of 1976 led not only to a rejection of Afrikaans being expanded into black schools as a medium of instruction, but also generated an antagonism among black students and teachers against the entire state apparatus responsible for the administration of apartheid schooling. Chisholm (1999) also adds that teachers' action towards the end of 1980s became militant on a large scale, as they focused on defiance of the symbols of authority and control by the White department. Protest in 1990, the year of the unbanning of political organisation in South Africa,

took the form of stayaways, chalk down marches to regional offices submission of lists of grievances, sit-ins and prevention of departmental officials from visiting schools (Chisholm, 1999).

While prevention of the circuit managers who were viewed as an extension of an unjust system to enter schools may have been justifiable, Jansen (2004) observes an unintended consequence of this, when he states that this may have left a dearth of development inputs in the work of the teacher. As a result of this, there were no systems in place to monitor the work done by schools, as principals were also reluctant to stamp their authority, being viewed as part of what Jansen (2004) refers to as the state apparatus responsible for the administration of apartheid education. It is therefore not surprising that this may have had a very negative effects on schooling for black children although the consequences of such behaviours were not studied. Jansen (2004) further states that this also led the position of circuit inspector to be viewed with suspicion and as an extension of an apartheid system, a legacy that would come to haunt this position long after apartheid. A study conducted in Limpopo, South Africa by Sadiki (2003) reported that the problems of educators in Limpopo started during the period of the collapse of apartheid system. As a result of this, educators were reluctant to change from the state of defiance and negativism, which was used during the fight against apartheid, to that of cooperation, dedication and sacrifice (Sadiki, 2003). The study by Sadiki (2003) further reports that teachers disliked being supervised and regarded class visits by school managers and high-ranking officials of the Department of Education as interference with their work.

Another important point to consider when looking at the evolution of role of the South Africa circuit manager is the influence of the British and the American systems of education. The early South African circuit managers were referred to as Inspectors. Ngubane (2006) noted that, in most countries that were colonised by the British, the present circuit manager is still referred to as the inspector. This title is still used especially by IsiZulu speaking-people which is *Umhloli* (meaning the inspector) even though the English name has been changed. The working style of the early South African circuit manager was similar to that of British inspector, not surprising considering that South Africa was a British colony. In what could be viewed as an attempt to break away from its colonial, era circuit managers were referred to as the Superintendent Education Management (SEM) after 1994 (Ngubane, 2006). This title seems to have been influenced by the American system. The role of the modern circuit manager has changed compared to the one they played pre- and during apartheid in South Africa. Though

circuit managers still visit schools, that process is no longer referred to an inspection but as monitoring and supporting (Education Labour Relations Council, 2008). The inspection task has been taken over by the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) and Whole School Evaluation (WSE). The IQMS is characterise by self-evaluation and peer evaluation in a school whereas the WSE is done by external officials after the school has been selected for this evaluation. Again, the British influence is observed, as the self-evaluation used in IQMS and the process of external inspection used in WSE are elements of the British OFSTED system.

This illustration of the evolution of the role of the South African circuit manager does help us to understand the negative perceptions that seem to continue to haunt this position more than two decades after democratic government has been installed. This became apparent, according to Mthembu (2014), when Mr Jacob Zuma, the President of South Africa suggested bringing back the school inspectors. His view was strongly opposed by the teacher unions (SADTU and NEHAWU) because of the role they played pre-1994 (Mthembu, 2014). This then means that the 21st century South African circuit managers have the challenge of changing teachers' and other stakeholders' perspective about them so that they can be viewed as partners.

2.3 Common roles and responsibilities of Circuit managers in the 21st Century

Circuit managers have common roles that they all seem to perform, irrespective of the context in which they are. A review of related literature pertaining to leadership role of circuit managers is replete with plethora of viewpoints as to what should be the common roles and responsibilities of circuit managers in the 21st century. The list of these common roles and responsibilities is growing in numbers and in complexity as are the complexities that characterise modern education systems. This section presents and discusses some of these roles and responsibilities.

2.3.1 Circuit managers as communicators

The role of circuit manager as a communicator is the most important. *What, when, how, and why* he or she communicates is equally important. Circuit managers are expected to be great communicators of information. Communication, according to Kindred, Bagin and Gallagher (1984), is a cooperative enterprise of ideas and information, out of which understanding develops and action is taken. Communication is involved in more than 90% of a superintendent's work time and takes place while on the phone, at meetings and appointments, while writing letters and reports (Stronge & Xu, 2012). It is therefore not surprising that there

is mounting evidence that the communication behaviour used by circuit managers has a great influence on both the culture and the productivity of the circuit (Kowalski, 2005). However, there is no published information that gives reference to the South African context; hence, the need for the study with the current focus on how this phenomenon plays out in the South African education system. This is more so if one considers the expectations which society has of the circuit manager. These expectations include that circuit managers are expected to engage others in open dialogue, facilitate the creation of a shared vision, build a positive school district image, gain community support for change and provide the essential framework for information management (Kowalski, 2005). It is clear that the work of circuit managers greatly relies on effective communication with the relevant stakeholders.

According to Kowalski (2005), the communication used by circuit managers during a reform period is even more critical. Kowalski and Björk (2005) further state that the communication role of the circuit manager is shaped by two conditions: the need to restructure and the need to use information in a timely manner to solve problems of practice. Witherspoon (1997) states that communication is not the essential aspect of a change, but effective communication may be seen as the foundation of modern organisation. South Africa has seen a fair share of education reforms aimed at improving the quality of education. These include curriculum related issues such as the recently implemented Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), a plethora of circulars about labour that mandate changes that must be implemented and governance issues, as well as other school related matters that should be communicated to school effectively, as failure to do so could have negative effects on teaching and learning. Clearly, communication strategies used by circuit mangers are very important in ensuring that the current educational reforms aimed at improving the quality of education are a success. This view was reported in a study conducted by Raath (2012), which concluded that principals were convinced that the communication strategies such as regular interaction, increased visibility of the circuit manager as well as timeous feedback to school have a big role in improving the role of circuit managers.

Baker (2002) states that there are elements that make communication essential during the period of organisational change. These factors are work is more complex and requires greater coordination and interaction among workers; the pace of work is faster; workers are more distributed, simultaneous; distributed work processes are more common.; knowledge and

innovation are more critical to an organisation's competitive advantage and communication technology and work are increasingly essential to organisational structure and strategy.

For circuit managers to be able to effectively communicate, Conrad (1994) advises that they need to employ a consistent form of symmetrical communication focused on engaging others in identifying and solving problems. Kowalski (2005) adds that this form of communication should be underpinned by mutual understanding, mutual influence, negotiation, openness, credibility and trust. A circuit manager works with many different stakeholders like principals, SGBs, teachers, unions, and community leaders. This therefore indicates that circuit managers need to find an effective method to communicate with all these stakeholders, taking into consideration who he or she is communicating with, for what purpose and the time circuit managers have to do that task.

In this regard, Kowalski (2005) advises that circuit managers must utilise communication technology because it can increase productivity through increased processing, speed, greater memory capacity, decreased costs and increased ease of use. If circuit managers are to contribute to the education of our youth for the uncertain future that we face, they must lead in a different way than they have in the past (Björk, 2000; Kowalski, 2003; Kowalski & Glass, 2002). Kowalski (2005) further adds that the old system has not failed us; it worked well for the era in which it was created.

What is equally important for circuit managers to master with regard to effective communication, in times of unremitting global competition and the availability of huge amounts of information, are skills of accessing and processing information and making decisions based on the information (Drucker, 1999)**.** Communication technology may help circuit managers save time when discharging all these responsibilities. Circuit managers are responsible for ensuring that certain important circular and meeting notices reach schools on time. Instead of them driving to schools to deliver these circulars, communication technology in the form of fax and e-mail can be used to save time and money. While the benefits of using communication technology are known, a study by Nyembe-Kganye (2005) about superintendents' role as a link between the district and the circuit laments circuit managers' inability to use new forms of communications such as e-mail, websites on the internet and electronic bulletins. Nyembe-Kganye's (2005) findings are similar to Raath's (2012) study, which reports that there is poor communication between circuit managers and school principal, thus recommending that circuit managers should create open channels of communication with

schools as well as units at the district office. The study further found that practical communication strategies by means of technology such as cellular phones, e-mail and fax were underutilised although these would ensure circuit managers remain in contact with schools and avoid a breakdown in communication.

Snowden and Gorton (2002) argue that the initial task for an education manager who wants to communicate to a particular individual or group think carefully about the strategy. They further add that strategy is vital in preparation for communication. An effective strategy involves tactical decisions that will help achieve a desired goal. The effective communication strategy, according to Snowden and Gorton (2000,) should be based on the acronym TEAMM. "T" stands for timing, of issues like urgency, time of the day, day of the week and the length of interaction. "E" stands for environment, for locations, formal or informal, setting, noise and privacy. "A' stands for approach style, tone, language organisation of ideas and amount of details. The first "M" stands for one-to-one group meetings, presentations, telephone and written material. The final letter, 'M' is about message content, exactly what the manager says to make the acceptable impact.

As indicated earlier (Chapter 1) some of the schools are challenged by a lack of resources, which means they cannot access some of the modern communication technology. From the discussion above it is clear that circuit managers who support schools that are in challenging contexts will find it difficult to communicate with their schools. In many cases the circuit managers of these schools battle with resources, as some of these schools do not even have a telephone line and ADSL line for internet. The advent of technology in terms of wireless connections like mobile phones and internet might assist but they cost money, something some of these schools do not have.

2.3.2 Role of circuit manager as politician

There seems to consensus in the literature that the 21st century circuit manager should be a politician (Antonucci, 2012; Björk, 2001; Dominguez, Ivory & McClellan, 2005; Glass, Björk & Brunner, 2000; Johnson, 1996). Björk and Keedy (2011) state that public education remains a political arena in which competing interests are hotly contested. According to Dominguez *et al.* (2005), the political role of circuit manager emerged in the 20th century due to scarce resources, when circuit managers needed to be skilled in political tactics to gain support for education. Within this role, circuit managers are expected to negotiate with diverse interest

groups to reach agreement about circuit priorities, policies and resource allocation (Johnson, 1996). It is clear that circuit managers of schools in challenging contexts need exceptional political skills to find ways of dealing with the limited resources that are in their schools. This may entail holding discussions and persuading certain sub-directorates like the Infrastructure Sub-directorate to prioritise their circuits for certain buildings that are needed or the Human Resources Sub-directorate regarding staff shortages. While this role may have been discussed as part of the evolution of the role of circuit managers in the 20th century, even the 21st century circuit manager needs to fulfil it. This is due to the presence of the same conditions persisting today, in other words, the contestation for resources that necessitated this role in the first place.

Cuban (1985) further adds that circuit managers assume a political role to secure cooperation from various social groups, with the goal of creating conditions conducive to successful management. The political role of circuit manager has been re-illuminated by the findings of the recent study done by Antonucci (2012) about the 21st century superintendent, which found that politics continues to be a significant part of the job. It further found that political leadership is exercised by circuit managers for several reasons and they act politically when dealing with various constituencies including staff, school board members, parent, union leaders and local officials. The findings made by Cuban (1988) and Antonucci (2012) are congruent with regard to the duties of circuit manager, as they both conclude that circuit managers are expected to deal with these stakeholders. Furthermore, these findings also highlight that circuit managers have to deal with unions as one of the stakeholders. In this study it has been mentioned earlier (Chapter 1) that while unions have a role to play in ensuring the culture of teaching and learning there is also evidence in the literature that they have a negative effect on the culture of teaching and learning. This places circuit managers at the position where he or she needs to continually engage the unions so that organizational goals of the circuit are attained.

However, while there is some consensus in the literature that suggests that the duties of a circuit manager entail a political role, findings of a study about American school superintendents conducted by Glass, Björk and Brunner (2000) provide interesting views about the feelings of superintendents in relation to their political role. Their study found that, despite research that suggests that politics in education has intensified over the past 30 years, superintendents prefer to enact their role as professional advisors to the board of education, initiating action like doing administration and delivery of policy. Though circuit managers, as Glass *et al.* (2000) concluded in their study of American superintendents, are not fond of their political role, it is

a role that they are not going to escape as it is part and parcel of circuit management. This view is confirmed by Antonucci (2013), whose study confirmed that dealing with politics and conflict are key elements of leadership effectiveness and simply part of the job. It therefore clear that politics will always remain part of the work of circuit managers and circuit managers must find ways deal with it.

2.3.3 Role of circuit managers in ensuring effective school governance

The important role of circuit managers in governing boards is clearly articulated by the findings of the study conducted by the IOWA Association of School Boards (2000) about the relationship between school boards and superintendents in high achieving and low achieving districts. According to the IOWA Association of School Boards (2000), both high and low achieving districts maintained a good relationship with superintendents and governing bodies. The study by the IOWA Association of School Boards also found that high achieving district members and their superintendents constantly said that their job was to release each student's potential and they were seeking ways to improve their district and viewed social and economic problems as a challenge. On the other hand, the members of the boards and their superintendents in low achieving district accepted the shortcomings in students or in the district. Their emphasis is on managing the district rather than to change and improve it. The findings of these study suggest that the circuit managers of low achieving schools are not prepared to work hard to change and improve on their performance.

Vickers, Pate, Brockmeir, Green and Tsemunhu (2014) conducted a non-experimental survey about whether enrolment, location, expenditure, the percentage of free and reduced lunch and percentage of minority students influenced the satisfaction of superintendents and school board chairpersons. This study also investigated whether respondents' satisfaction could predict student achievement. The findings of this study reveal that board chairpersons with a higher percentage of minority students receiving free and reduced lunches were significantly less satisfied with their superintendent than board chairpersons with lower percentages of students receiving free and reduced lunches.

More importantly, the study by Vickers *et al.* (2014) found that board chairpersons' satisfaction with superintendents significantly predicted student achievement and graduation rates. This finding was also confirmed by Marzano and Waters's (2009) study about good relationships between the board and superintendent and the positive outcome for student achievement. The

study by Petersen and Short (2001) about board members' perceptions about superintendent leadership found that a favourable board's decision for superintendent-recommended action items are closely related to the superintendent's trustworthiness, expertise and social attractiveness.

Drawing from the above-mentioned studies, it is therefore imperative that the circuit managers and the SGB should work together to form a relationship where holding each other accountable to the highest standard is acceptable and respected. The good relationship between the board, the community and the superintendent does not only spell good results in terms of learner attainment; it also plays important role in determining superintendent turnover. This is confirmed by the findings of Sybrant's (2012) study in the USA, which identified a supportive school board and a supportive community as local conditions that promoted superintendent longevity. However, these findings, though plausible, were conducted and established in a context different from the South African educational context. This study questions the role of the context in the findings that may emerge in the context of South Africa. Would the community be as supportive as the community in the United States of America? In the South African context, there seems to be no literature that looks at the relationship between the circuit managers and the SGB. Circuit managers are expected to deal with SGBs as part of their school governance duty.

The relationship between circuit managers and board or school governing bodies is at times subject to conflict. If this conflict is left unresolved, it may not only have an adverse effect on the governing board and circuit manager relations, but may also have a negative impact on staff, students and community. This conflict is caused by misconception of the respective roles and responsibilities (Castallo, 2003), shifts in the balance of power due to dynamics in the relation between boards and superintendents (Castallo, 2003; Glass, 2000) and lack of clear demarcation between roles of school boards and circuit managers, which results in overlapping roles (Glass, 2000). In trying to get a deeper understanding of this conflict between superintendents and school boards, Montenegro (2008) conducted a study in the State of Texas, USA about strategies that superintendents use to prevent and solve conflict with school boards. The study reported that issues of school finances were the most frequent causes of conflict. This study also found that strategies used by superintendent to solve and prevent conflict entailed discussing policy roles of school boards with school board members, having team building activities and providing training for the boards.

Numerous studies such as those presented above set out what should be attained in a positive relationship between the SGB and the circuit manager. In the South African context, the democratic dispensation brought about decentralisation of power to the local players through the South African Schools Act of 1996. According to South African Schools Act of 1996, the School Governing Body is tasked with school governance (Department of Education, 1996). Many studies (Chaka, 2008; Kumalo, 2009; Manamela, 2014; Mthiyane, 2006; Ncwane, 2012; Ndou, 2012; Sadiki, 2003; Xaba, 2011) continue to report that School Governing Bodies face many challenges, particularly those in disadvantaged backgrounds (Kumalo, 2009). While the international literature presented above paints a good picture about the good effects to learner attainment that comes from the circuit manager and the SGB working together, and, on the other hand, South African literature sets out the challenges facing SGBs, it is surely clear that circuit managers in South Africa have a big responsibility in front of them. This study, in the absence of South African literature that looks at the relationship between the SGBs and circuit managers, will shed a light, at least from the circuit managers' perspective, about what it is like for the circuit manager to work with SGBs. I developed the current study with part of the objective being to fill the literature dearth on this issue.

2.3.4 The role of the circuit manager as a manager

The role of the circuit manager as a manager, according to Cuban (1998), is underpinned by the lists of responsibilities, including planning, collecting and disseminating information. Brown-Ferringo and Glass (2005) list six major management tasks for superintendents. These tasks are governmental regulation, district personnel, finance, and budget, contractual negotiation for facilities and public relations. Kowalski (2005) states that when the management role of the circuit manager is not performed by the circuit manager it becomes apparent, as budgets are not balanced, school facilities are deemed not safe and personal problems routinely result in litigation. As part of the management role of the circuit manager, he or she has responsibility to ensure that schools are provided with the resources that they need. These may be both physical and human**.** Kowalski (2005) argues that one of the main important responsibilities of the circuit manager is to the appointment of good principals. Research (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Waters, 2003) continues to affirm that principals have indirect influence on student achievement through several key "avenues of influence": people, purposes and goals of the school, structure of the school and social networks, and organisational culture. As part of their curriculum delivery core

responsibility, circuit managers, according to the *Collective Agreement No. 1 of 2008* (Education Labour Relations Council, 2008), are mandated to assist with deployment of staff and resources and they are mandated to facilitate and coordinate the supply and delivery of equipment and resources to schools (Education Labour Relations Council, 2008). It is therefore important that, when circuit managers sit in interview committees where principals are recommended, they ensure that good leaders emerge from those processes.

Circuit managers are not expected to perform all these tasks themselves; some of these tasks can be delegated to other officials. This view is echoed by Cranston and Jarzabkowski (2009), when they state that the management role of superintendents has changed due to changes in district and school contexts brought about by implementation of school-based management reforms and decentralisation. According to their study (Cranston & Jarzabkowski, 2009), superintendents no longer work directly and almost exclusively with principals but assume a more corporate departmental responsibility. Cuban (1985) warns that, in delegating these tasks, circuit managers are held accountable for efficient and productive operation. This tells us that the supporting role of circuit manager is very important in the schooling system and particularly to those schools that are in challenging contexts. It also tells us that circuit managers have to work in a particular way to support teaching and learning as they cannot be able to undertake everything themselves.

2.3.5 Instructional leadership role of circuit managers

The instructional leadership has been traditionally viewed as the responsibility of the teachers in the classroom and the principal in schools. There is however a growing body of research which suggests that 21st Century circuit managers must also assume the role of being instructional leaders (Crankshaw, 2011; Furman, 2013; Glass, Björk & Brumer, 2000; Hanks, 2010; Valentine & Neale, 2010). As indicated in the foregoing discussion, the position of circuit manager has undergone a role change. These roles have changed in response to social and political pressures and expectations of nations (Hanks, 2010). These pressures are clearly reflected in the policies such as the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) document, which states that a circuit manager should improve the quality of teaching for all the children, especially the poor, and this should be demonstrated through improved quality and improved learners' achievements (Department of Basic Education, 2008) (see Section 2.5 below). Furthermore, our National Development Plan (NDP), which is a South African blue print that reflects our common expectations as a nation for different areas of our human

development, including education, also puts pressure on schools and education leaders. In this regard, the NDP regrets the wasting of significant human potential and harming of life chances as a result of South Africa losing half of every cohort that enters the schooling system by the end of the 12th year of schooling. This compared with secondary education completion rates of 77% in the United States, 87% in the United Kingdom and 93% in Japan (Planning Commission, 2011). It therefore sets a target of 90% retention, of which 80% should successfully pass the exit exam (Planning Commission, 2011). For circuit managers to have a positive impact and put the country on a positive trajectory, thus meeting the targets outlined by the NDP, it means a 21st Century circuit manager must have command of a diversity of leadership and technological skills (Hanks, 2010). He or she must also facilitate the work of groups of administrators, teachers, students and other stakeholder to build a collective vision and to set and monitor circuit and school goals (Glass, Björk & Brunner, 2000).

This transition of embracing instructional leadership seems to have been accepted by some circuit managers in Canada. This is confirmed by a study conducted in Canada by the Ministry of Education (2008) about how superintendents view their role in terms of supporting teaching and learning. This study concluded that superintendents see themselves as instructional leaders and they are more focused on instructional leadership than in the past. Another study conducted in the USA, which confirmed the acceptance of the instructional leadership role as part of their responsibility, was conducted three years later by Lewis, Rice and Rice (2011). In this study Lewis *et al.* (2011) sought to establish superintendents' beliefs and behaviours regarding instructional leadership. These researchers found that superintendents believe that support for teaching and learning is an important management standard for improving learner achievement. The study by Furman (2013) indicates that superintendents have increased their involvement with curriculum, instruction and assessment. According to the above-mentioned studies, circuit managers have embraced their instructional leadership role. In South Africa, the instructional leadership role has been infused into circuit managers' duties. This has been done through government policies like the *Policy on the Organisation, Roles and Responsibilities of Districts* (Department of Education, 2013) and the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign, which place instructional leadership role right at the doorstep of the circuit managers (Department of Education, 2008) (see Section 2.5 below).

While there is empirical evidence that suggests that some circuit managers have accepted their instructional leadership role, there seems to be some challenges with their state of their readiness. Dzikum's (2015) study conducted in Ghana, about the professional skills of superintendents in ensuring effective teaching and learning, reveals that superintendents have knowledge in the field of education but are deficient in the technical and interpersonal skills necessary for effective support of teaching and learning in schools. This study established that superintendents generally lack the material resources necessary for effective support of teaching and learning in schools. However, the study by Kolawole (2012), conducted in Nigeria, about the instructional leadership role of principals and superintendent, reveals that superintendents are alert to the possibilities for improvement in instruction. The study also reveals that circuit managers possess the ability to work and actively engage in discharging their duty in terms of instructional monitoring and evaluation. The aggregate of the findings of researches above commonly confirm that instructional leadership will no longer be the realm only of teachers and school principals and that circuit managers also have an important role to play.

Circuit managers work with diverse stakeholders (teachers, parent, parent governors, and unions) in discharging their responsibilities. Their success and failure as instructional leaders lie to a certain extent in the manner by which they are perceived by these stakeholders. The perceptions and expectations of stakeholders like teachers, principals and parent governors have regarding the leadership of circuit managers are important. The importance of stakeholders working together in supporting teaching and learning is highlighted by Lewthwaite (2006)'s study about the role of superintendents in curriculum delivery in Canada. The study found that the need for a circuit manager to develop a shared vision among leadership reflecting the needs and concerns of stakeholders was one of the most important factors. Findings from another study conducted by Lee, Ding and Song (2008) in China, about superintendents' role in school supervision and evaluation, emphasised the importance of working with all stakeholders, of shared school governance and of promotion of a dynamic contextual approach for addressing contextual differences, as well as better coherence among educational reform, supervision and evaluation policy. From the findings above, it is clear that there is a move towards emphasising the instructional leadership role of circuit managers and importance of stakeholders.

Teachers are among the most important stakeholders in the education system as they are the ones who directly influence learners' attainment. Petersen, Sayre and Kelly (2007) conducted a study in the USA about teachers' perceptions regarding superintendents' influence on instruction. Their findings established that superintendents were perceived as responsible for resources that impacted classroom instruction and capacity. Further, they were seen as models for professionalism in their work, which focused on student achievement, changing teachers' assumptions and beliefs and practices through professional development. Crankshaw's (2011) study conducted in the United States found that there is a positive correlation between teachers' belief that instructional leadership is an important role of superintendents and their willingness to work constructively with superintendents who demonstrate constructive leadership practices. Another study conducted in Tanzania by Matete (2009) aimed to explore teachers' views about the extent to which school superintendents have an impact on teaching and learning in the primary schools. That study found that, to a greater extent, school superintendents succeeded in establishing a positive relationship with teachers, and thus were successful in making a positive impact on the teaching and learning in the primary schools.

The studies presented above provide empirical evidence that confirms that teachers value the role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning. However, there is empirical evidence that seems to suggest that teachers have reservation about the circuit managers' expertise as instructional leaders. Polat and Uğurlu's (2008) study conducted in Turkey on teacher expectations about the guidance role of supervisors and the realisation level of these expectations testifies to this. Polat and Uğurlu's (2008) study found that while teachers have high expectations of guidance, superintendent have lower perceptions of their ability to realise teacher expectations. It further found that while expectation of teachers centred mostly on guidance for professional development and issues of the educational environment, superintendents could not meet teachers' expectations in all fields. Another study conducted by Obilade (1992) in Nigeria, about teachers' perceptions of school inspectors or superintendents who visit schools for improvement of instruction in secondary schools, seems to point to tensions between teachers and inspectors. The results of this study show that, contrary to the widely-held belief among educational authorities, professional superintendent practice is far from being a reality in Nigerian classrooms. This study further found that the relationship between inspectors and teachers is far from being cordial, with trust and open communication still lacking. These studies share important findings about relationship between circuit managers and teachers in Turkey and Nigeria, and in doing so reveal the literature gap

about the relationship between circuit managers and teachers of schools located in the challenging context of South Africa.

On the other hand, principals and circuit managers need to work hand in hand to discharge their responsibilities. It goes without saying that they should work together well. The perception and expectation one has of the other will affect the manner in which they work and ultimately the fulfilment of organisational goals. A study conducted by Raath (2012) shows that principals reportedly viewed circuit managers as persons that can support the principal and empower him or her through the sharing of knowledge. They further conclude that it is important for the circuit manager to ensure development of leadership that would lead to transformation of schools into learning organisations. This view is also echoed by the study conducted by Addi-Raccah and Gavish (2014) in Israel, which highlights the importance of the influence superintendents have on school principals. Their study suggests that principals' willingness to initiate assistance from superintendents and the Local Education Association (LEA) depends on the influence they have on schools. It therefore clear that, for circuit managers to fulfil their instructional leadership role, they must provide support to the school principal as the most important leader in the school. However, there is no guidance on how principals in South Africa are attitudinally positioned in relation to willingness to initiate assistance from the circuit managers.

2.4 Contextual roles of circuit managers

Common roles that underpin the role of the circuit manager have been discussed above. Leverett (2002) reminds us that circuit managers are also required to be equity warriors who are expected to use their positional authority at the head of schools to break the links between students' background and their educational outcomes. This indicates that circuit managers have responsibility to work with students that are in disadvantaged or challenging contexts. This section will discuss the work circuit manager do in these situations. This approach will be done to illuminate the role of circuit managers, taking into consideration variations in context. This will be done because variation in contexts, like school district size, governance structure, complexity, fiscal authority, community, demography, poverty, lack of resources, rurality, local political realities and other contextual dimensions influence the way in which circuit managers respond to, as an example, fiscal challenges and how they understand their role as circuit leaders. The illumination of these roles in a particular context does not mean that circuit

managers in these contexts may not have to play other roles. It means that these are the roles that are important in their context.

2.4.1 Supporting teaching and learning in rural settings

Education in rural contexts has for considerable past received research attention in developed world, especially in the USA. The same attention to education in rural settings is growing in the less developed world, such as in South Africa. The need to focus on education in rural settings is best described by Tekniep (2015), when he refers to rural school districts in the US. Tekniep (2015) argues that rural districts do not only provide nearly one in four US children with many skills, including those needed to enter college, but they also act as an economic and stabilising force for communities that they serve. This study is about the leadership role of circuit managers in challenging contexts, and challenging contexts in this study can be characterised by a highly unionised environment, poverty and lack of physical and human resources. Rural settings in this study have been found to possess some of these variables which make for challenging contexts. It is therefore important that this study looks at some of the work that has been done in rural contexts.

One of the important works that documents the role of circuit managers in rural settings was done by Copeland (2013). In his study titled "One head-many hats: The expectations of the rural superintendent", Copeland came up with five major roles or hats that rural superintendents perform. These roles are manager, planner, listener, communicator and community involvement.

The first role is that of a manager. In this role or hat as a manager the circuit manager is expected to be an organiser, decision maker and supervisor at school during school activities (Copeland, 2013). This hat demands that the circuit managers perform menial tasks that may not be generally regarded as management tasks like shovelling snow, driving a bus, emptying trash and sweeping the floor. This view is also echoed by Sperry and Hill (2015), who also echo that the shortage of staff means that rural circuit managers cannot delegate duties to someone. This hat is worn most of the time, in addition to others, because it is related to almost all the roles that emerged.

The second hat is that of a planner. In this role or hat the circuit manager is expected to plan for all things necessary in a school district. This includes the budget, curriculum, scheduling activities, remediation and financial among other. While the circuit managers' role or hat of

managing finances is important, planning for financial stability of the district is considered as paramount. The ability to plan for the academic progress of student and teachers is also an often-mentioned expectation. Circuit managers, while wearing the planner hat, are expected to diagnose needs and plan staff development. The third hat or role of circuit managers, according to Copeland (2013), is that of a listener. This role or hat covers a wide range of activities. It includes the expectation that rural circuit managers must be accessible. Access to the circuit managers is expected from boards (SGBs), the community, parents, teachers and students. Within this hat or role an important trait emerges, flexibility. This role is very important, as the different stakeholder the circuit manager works with from time to time will want to seek advice from him. This listener role of the circuit manager also emerged in the findings of Raath's (2012) study conducted in South Africa. In this study, principal participants mentioned the importance of the circuit manager being a good listener. Principals in this study also raised the issue of being accessible, stating that for them to be able to pick up a phone and talk to their circuit manager when the need arises is very important. For rural principals, when faced with challenges that are common in rural settings, it is important to seek support to the person they believe will have a listening hear and advice.

The fourth hat or role is that of a communicator. This hat or role is seen as especially vital. The significance of this hat for rural circuit managers is that, if not worn, or not worn completely, it would affect the success of that circuit manager. What seems to separate this role or hat of a rural circuit manager and the common communication role is that the communication role of rural circuit manager should be executed very carefully while taking local values into account. This is very important if one considers that rural communities are closely-knit and a distrust of outsiders often place barriers to collaboration between education personnel and the community (Redding & Walberg, 2014). Circuit managers who work in rural areas have to work harder to gain the trust of the rural community. They have to try to find ways to belong; otherwise they may find it difficult to get the necessary co-operation.

The final hat or role is that of community involvement. Contrary to the pattern of stakeholders in larger or urban district or circuit, which may not be able to identify their circuit manager, rural communities know which church their circuit managers attend, how often they attend and how they tithe. The findings of Copeland's (2013 study demonstrate that the role of the rural circuit manager is unique. Circuit managers who are working with rural schools face the responsibility of understanding the dynamics of their contexts. Community involvement can

go a long way in assisting a circuit manager to understand the community he or she is serving. This role also implies that circuit managers' behaviours whether on duty or not will always be scrutinised by the community.

2.4.2 Supporting teaching and learning in urban settings

There is also literature that looks at the role of circuit managers in the urban context, particularly from the USA (Cuban, 1976; Farmer, 2007; Fuller, Campbell, Celio, Harvey, Immerwahr & Winger, 2003; Kolawaski, 1995). Urban schools in the USA have within them challenges that are similar to those found in our township and city schools. Urban schools operate in densely populated areas serving significantly more students, are frequently marked by higher concentrations of poverty, greater racial and ethnic diversity, larger concentrations of immigrant populations and linguistic diversity, and more frequent rates of student mobility (Kincheloe, 2010). South African townships, according to Mampane and Bouwer (2011), are residential areas in South Africa that originated as racially segregated low-cost housing development for black labourers to remain closer to their places of employment within cities. They further state that today life in the township is mostly associated with poverty, crime and violence (Mampane & Bouwer, 2011).

When describing the role of the urban circuit manager, Sperry and Hill (2015) state that the urban superintendent holds one of the most important jobs in the American education system. They must break down barriers to reform and build capacity for learning in education and they must unite parents, educators, school boards, and business and community leaders behind a clear and coherent vision of instructional purpose. Sperry and Hill (2015) further add that, amidst the highly politicised environments of big city school districts, superintendents must serve as collaborators, visionaries, good communicators, and agents of change.

This they must do in contexts that Kowalski (1995), Kowalski and Brunner (2011) describe as characterised by poverty, the dilemma of children rearing children and gang violence symptoms, which are symptoms of deep-rooted social problems that are steadily worsening. This environment is further characterised by changes for young people, brought about by ways in which the entertainment industry, professional sport and other parts of pop culture have supplanted the family as a source of values and belief. According to the Education Writers Association (2012), for urban circuit managers to succeed in their environment they must effectively manage change in a highly complex, politically charged and often contentious

system. If they are to survive and thrive in their role as superintendents, they need to understand, and be adept at, the politics of this job. The Education Writers Association (2012) further adds that this can be done by adopting flexible and collaborative leadership, rather than authoritative leadership, as confronting complex and often unanticipated problems calls for flexible thinking, collaboration and shared decision-making.

Forgione, Houser, Lyons and Rips (2003), in their study conducted in the USA about urban circuit managers' perspective on enhancing quality in urban schools, found that to be able to stay afloat of this rising tide of expectations requires the ability to have high-quality teaching and learning in every classroom led by highly qualified teachers. They also found that, to achieve quality teaching and learning in urban areas, a continuous teacher development programme, guided by goals that the circuit has set for itself, remains the most important strategy for success. Rigorous professional development is crucial because new state standards place higher expectations on the level of performance to be achieved by students under the state accountability system. South Africa has also had its fair amount of accountability frameworks, being the Annual National Assessment, the National Senior Certificate and CAPS. These policies have not affected the urban areas only. However, urban circuits have to find ways to deal with these policies based on their context. Staff development, as advocated by Forgione *et al.* (2003), can have a great impact. Organisations engaging staff in triple loop learning (high quality professional development that alters beliefs and practices) undergo profound change, transforming the organisation into an innovative, creative entity where individuals own and understand their own learning (Peschl, 2007).

2.5 Job descriptions of circuit managers in South Africa

In South Africa, circuit managers are mandated and guided by a collective agreement between labour and the employer, as well as different education department policies to support teaching and learning in schools. *Occupation Specific Dispensation for Educators School-Based and Office-Based, Collective Agreement No. 1 of 2008* explicitly spells out the aim of the job and core duties and responsibilities (Education Labour Relations Council, 2008). According to this collective agreement, the aim of the job of the circuit manager is threefold. Firstly, it is to support school principals, school management teams and school governing bodies in the management, administration and governance of schools (Education Labour Relations Council, 2008). Secondly, it is to monitor the effective management, administration and governance of the school. Lastly, it is to facilitate curriculum delivery through support and in various ways.

The *Collective Agreement No. 1 of 2008* further enumerates ten core duties and responsibilities of the job, which are presented as leadership, communication, financial planning and management, strategic planning and transformation, policy, research and development, curriculum delivery, staff development, general or office administration, management and support and, finally, providing an administration service to schools (Education Labour Relations Council, 2008). Amongst these ten core duties, leadership, communication and curriculum delivery are the most important core duties for this study as they directly link with the instructional leadership role of circuit managers.

Leadership, as one of the ten core duties of circuit managers, is one of the most important roles. Circuit managers are mandated to provide an environment that creates and fosters commitment and confidence among colleagues and educators while promoting the value of fairness and equity in the workplace (Education Labour Relations Council, 2008). As part of their leadership responsibility, circuit managers are expected to create and maintain sound human relations amongst colleagues and enhance the spirit of co-operation (Education Labour Relation Council, 2008). According to Kowalski (2005), leadership, leadership strategy and leadership styles all factor prominently in the success of a superintendent, specifically when one considers how many stakeholders the position relates and reports to on a daily basis, including the school board, the public, the parents, funders, and of course, the students themselves.

While a democratic leadership style is the one that seem to be ideal style of leadership, circuit managers, as with all leadership positions, must apply a leadership strategy or style that it suitable in a particular context or situation. Kowalski (2005) asserts that superintendents "have been encouraged to be democratic, ethical and transformational" in their leadership approaches. Gober (2012) adds that the democratic leadership style values the core tenets of democracy; as such, the democratic leader understands that the relationships between a leader and the organisation's members are bound by collaborative efforts to achieve mutual goals. Within this democratic style of leadership, the circuit managers' role is well explained by Gober (2012) when he describes leadership in reference to two core functions. One function is providing direction; the other is exercising influence (Gober, 2012). Therefore, for circuit managers to succeed, they need to have a great deal of influence and an ability to guide the multi stakeholders that report to them towards the attainment of organisational goals.

Communication is enlisted as the second core responsibility of circuit manager in the *Collective Agreement No 1 of 2008* document. Circuit managers are mandated to do a variety of tasks as part of their communication role. This entails establishing clear channels of communication with schools and other stakeholders. They are tasked with communicating effectively both orally and in writing with principals, other staff, parents, School Governing Bodies (SGB), external agencies and the Department as well as ensuring timeous feedback from institutions. They are mandated to serve on recruitment, promotion, advisory and other committees as required and to communicate decisions to different stakeholder (Education Labour Council, 2008). From the tasks presented above that are part of the circuit managers' communication role, it is clear that circuit managers' work revolves around communication. For example, the leadership role discussed above has to be demonstrated by effective communication. It is not surprising that the finding of a study conducted in the USA by the American Association of School Superintendents (2006) found that successful circuit managers demonstrate a valuable and confident communication style; their people skills are well honed. Communication has been found to be one of the important roles that has informed the evolution of the circuit manager role in the USA up to the present. This role will be further discussed in the sections that deal with the evolution of circuit managers' role in the USA and the communication role of the 21stCentury circuit manager, below.

Fundamentally important for this study about the circuit managers' role of supporting teaching and learning, the *Collective Agreement No. 1 of 2008* mandates circuit managers to facilitate curriculum delivery through support in various ways (Education Labour Relations Council, 2008). In this study about the leadership role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning, the core curriculum delivery duty is highlighted. As part of the fulfilment of this responsibility, circuit managers are mandated to support quality education delivery and, in particular, teaching and learning in educational sites for purposes of both accountability and improved learner achievement (Education Labour Relations Council, 2008). This role puts circuit managers' position as one of the important tools to ensure quality teaching and learning so that our learners' achievement can improve. This role is articulated in a manner that acknowledges that some of our learners' achievement are not where they are supposed to be. It then places a responsibility to circuit managers working with different stakeholders to effect changes that will lead to our learners receiving quality education.

Furthermore, the *Policy on the Organisation, Roles and Responsibilities of Districts,* while it represents the adoption of *The Collective Agreement No.1 of 2008* as departmental policy, states that the circuit office is the closest point of contact between schools and the PED (Department of Basic Education, 2013), therefore principals depend on the circuit manager for information, administrative services and professional support. This support includes the provision of a channel of communication between the district office and schools, provision of management and administrative support to schools, the facilitation of training of principals, SMT and SGBs, and monitoring the functionality of schools.

The *Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign* (*QLTC)* document sets out a clear directive to different school stakeholders to focus on teaching and learning (Department of Education, 2008). It mandates the circuit managers, as one of the important stakeholders, to take a lead in ensuring that all schools receive all relevant learning and teaching material on time (Department of Education, 2008). The QLTC document also spells out that a circuit manager should improve the quality of teaching for all the children, especially the poor, and this should be demonstrated through improved quality and improved learners' achievements (Department of Basic Education, 2008). The QLTC document acknowledges the importance of context. To this end, it bestows on the circuit manager the responsibility of ensuring the quality of education to all learners, including those who are poor. This is very important if one considers that, according to the Amended National Norms and Standard for School Funding, schools are organised in quintiles of 1-5, each quintile consisting of 20% of schools in South Africa. Quintiles 1-3 are granted a No-Fee Status as they are considered poor schools (Department of Education, 2016). It is therefore rational to conclude that 60% of South African schools are poor schools (in a financial sense). The poor status of these school should not also mean poor learner attainment.

2.6 Challenges facing circuit managers

The job of circuit managers has challenges like any other job. Challenges facing circuit managers vary; there are those that appear to be universally common, while others are contextual (Mason, 2013). This section will present the challenges that are common, contextual as well personal.

2.6.1 Common challenges facing circuit managers

The previous section looked at studies into the role of circuit managers. This section will now look at the challenges faced by these circuit managers. Several researchers (Antonucci, 2012; Björk & Keedy, 2001; Mason, 2013) have investigated the challenges faced by superintendents in fulfilling their instructional leadership role. These challenges include the high expectations and high accountability (Antonucci, 2012; Björk & Keedy, 2001; Mason, 2013), and the complex nature of the work (Sutton, 2013). These will be discussed below.

2.6.1.1 Complex nature of the job

The work of the circuit manager is very complex. The complex nature of the circuit manager's job is well documented (Cuban, 1988; Glass *et al.,* 2000; Sutton, 2013). Circuit managers, according to Antonucci (2012), are expected to concurrently perform educational, managerial and political roles. This view is echoed by Sutton (2013), when he argues that the work of circuit managers is challenging as they are expected to lead the organisation of schools that report to them, to ensure the educational success of all the students and to manage the myriad of financial and business operations while serving as good stewards for tax payers. To further illustrate this, Cuban (1988) states that the circuit manager's job is written by the genetic code of diverse and conflicting goals, such as addressing the illiteracy of citizens, preparing workers for the marketplace and cultivating individual character. Cuban (1998) argues that these goals are conflicting because public schools are limited in their human and financial resources, yet they are expected to overcome the grim effects of family background, poverty and fragmented communities. A circuit manager's job is hard and difficult, as it demands careful balancing between the managerial, educational and political responsibilities.

The challenging nature of the job of circuit managers has resulted in some scholars equating it to that of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) (Antonucci, 2012; Kowalski, 1995). Circuit management is no longer limited to keeping the district running smoothly by providing direction and insight (Houston & Eadie, 2000). Houston and Eadie (2000) further add that circuit managers who are effective function as fully-fledged contemporary CEOs, seeing themselves more fully as a leader, not just an administrator**.** As the CEO of the school district, the circuit manager is responsible for ensuring that legislated mandates, policies and regulations are implemented properly and for providing oversight and support to local schools (Björk, Kowalski & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). In his study conducted in the USA about the role

of the 21st century circuit manager, Antonucci (2012) found that participants saw themselves as similar to private sector CEOs as they were tasked with managing the day to day business of the circuit/ district, the product being learner education (Antonucci, 2012).

The complexity and the challenges surrounding the nature of the circuit manager's job has been in the recent past been exacerbated by the expectation that they must be instructional leaders (Leverett, 2002). Roegman and Hatch (2012) state that, as instructional leaders, circuit managers are now expected to engage directly their district to strengthen the instructional core, which is the relationship between student, teachers and the content. The instructional leadership role makes the circuit managers' work difficult as they have many schools that they lead. For them to be instructional leaders demands that they develop ways to fulfil this task. In terms of Antonucci's (2012) three main roles of circuit managers, this is part of the educational role, while the other two, which are management and political, also need attention. What is also important about these three roles is that you cannot neglect any role and be successful. All of them need the circuit manager to work on them.

2.6.1.2 High expectations and high accountability

Governments all over the world are using education to fulfil or respond to social and economic challenges that countries face (Glass *et al.,* 2000). This has brought high expectations and greater accountability for the school system to improve learner achievement. Circuit managers, as some of the most senior officials in the education system, have not escaped this pressure. Mason's (2013) study, conducted in Calgary, Canada on challenges to instructional leadership practices of superintendents, found that accountability requirements are the most significant challenge. In this study (Mason, 2013), superintendents reported that the lack of time created by meeting accountability requirements, paperwork, meetings, and emergent issues greatly distracted them from focusing fully on managing the curriculum and instruction. This view is echoed in the findings of a study conducted by Antonucci (2012), who argues that the wave of state and federal reform has created a major challenge for superintendents. The study also found that the pressure of high expectations and high accountability puts unreasonable demands on superintendents, and that so many things are beyond their control. The Education Writers Association (2010) argues that expectations and accountability impede the effective implementation of the superintendents' role. They argue that the accountability and resources are mismatched, and also that accountability and authority are misaligned. They further state

that the work of superintendent is conducted in an environment that over time has grown increasingly political and often downright abusive.

Kelley (2016) further argues that accountability policies may result in superintendents who lead districts already in sanction status to implement a quick fix to address the challenges of accountability requirements. They might do so at the expense of a more proactive long-term improvement strategy. The above studies indicate that circuit managers are unable to focus on directly supporting teaching and learning in their school as a result of these requirements. The accountability requirements seem to create a situation in which circuit managers become office clerks who chase after paperwork. This has a negative effect on the instructional role of the circuit manager, as he or she is unable to focus on his instructional goals for the circuit.

2.6.1.3. Political challenges

Research is in agreement that political pressures pose a serious challenge for circuit managers to fulfil their role if it is not well managed (Antonucci, 2012; Björk & Keedy, 2001; Glass, 2000). Unfortunately for superintendents, engaging in the political process is potentially fraught with controversy and conflict (Antonucci, 2012). To survive and thrive in their role, they need to understand, and adapt to, the politics of this job (Education Writers Association, 2010). Björk and Keedy (2001), in their study about politics and superintendents, make an observation that educators have been socialised throughout their career to eschew political activities, whereas superintendents are continually drawn into contact with the elected public officials, special interest groups and board of education members. These groupings have specific contesting expectations that make the job of the superintendent very difficult. Glass *et al.* (2000) assert that this affects the work of the superintendent when the broad-based political actors exert pressure at the local level, pressing the superintendent and boards of education to support their demands in the board. This view is also echoed by a study conducted by the Education Writers Association (2010), which found that complexities associated with political negotiation are part of the superintendent's job and that superintendent leadership needs to be effective within a political context.

2.6.1.4. Insufficient financial resources

Different scholars (Sutton, 2012; Trevino, Bradley & Slate, 2012) have reported that a significant problem affecting the work of circuit managers is the lack of financial resources allocated to education. The lack of financial resources also affects the provision of other

resources, like physical and human resources. This inadequate financing of public education compounds the already difficult work of circuit managers (Sutton, 2012). Trevino, Bradley and Slate (2012) conducted a survey about challenges facing public superintendents. The analysis of data collected through questionnaires indicated that circuit managers experienced many challenges as a result of financial constraints. The participants in this study viewed obtaining highly qualified teachers as being the greatest challenge due to funding constraints. Participants in this study further viewed the lack of funding received by schools as a challenge that makes it difficult for them fulfil their goals. This challenge of insufficient funding was also reported in a study conducted in Nigeria by Nwakpa (2005) about challenges facing Nigerian inspectors. The study found that, while cut-backs and underfunding of education in Nigeria has affected education provision in general, they have specifically paralysed school inspection.

Different scholars have put on record that South Africa has spent a lot money in education since 1994, hoping that such expenditure will enable schools to contribute in improving the quality of life of its citizens (Chisholm, 2004; Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014; Naicker, Chikoko & Mthiyane, 2013). Chisholm (2004) states that, while attempts to deal with intentions of the state to address equity and social justice are laudable, there is a long way to go in achieving good quality education, particularly for marginalised and disadvantaged schools. A number of schools in poor rural and urban working-class communities still suffer the legacy of large classes, deplorable physical conditions and the absence of learning resources, despite a major Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the National School Building Programme and many other projects paid for directly from provincial budgets (Chisholm, 2005). Circuit managers who work with schools in these contexts will have to work harder to ensure the quality of teaching and learning under such conditions. It is therefore the aim of this study to get the life stories of circuit managers who work under these conditions.

2.6.2 Contextual challenges affecting circuit managers

As with the role of circuit managers discussed above, challenges facing circuit managers can also be contextual and personal. This section will look at contextual challenges in both rural and urban settings, for example, gender. Rurality, as a setting in which circuit managers conduct their work, appears to present a varied set of challenges compared to urban settings. These challenges are well conceptualised by the work of Tekniepe (2005), Lamkin (2006), Copeland (2010), Rey (2014) and Sperry and Hill (2015). According to Bredeson, Klar and Johansson (2011), superintendents describe common primary priorities, challenges and

contextual variations, the differences in district size, organisational culture, community characteristics and geographic location as factors that significantly influence their work. In their study about contextual influences on superintendents' time usage, Jones and Howley (2009) found contextual factors, especially enrolment and location of the district in a rural region, as the most pronounced factors affecting the superintendents' attention to management tasks.

Lamkin (2006) also conducted a study that explored the challenges and changes faced by rural superintendents. This study was conducted in rural contexts of New York, Pennsylvania and Tennessee in the USA. Data generated from focus groups indicates that circuit managers who work in rural settings face unique challenges. All circuit managers in this study described their role as that of the "jack of all trades" as they are expected to perform many tasks which ordinarily will not be expected to be done by a circuit manager, like cleaning the floor. This finding is also confirmed by Copeland's (2010) study, which refers to these tasks as "many hats". Participants in Lamkin's (2006) study further indicated that circuit managers that work in rural areas face obstacles that persist over time and that include isolation, limited resources and community resistance to change (Lamkin, 2006). They further describe the insufficient training and professional preparation skills and conclude that the challenges of rural superintendents were distinct enough to warrant some specialised preparation.

Copeland (2010) found that there are differences in the expectations applied to rural superintendents from those applied to superintendents serving urban or suburban areas. This further found that training for circuit managers is a challenge if it does not take into consideration the contextual realities of the work of circuit managers. Copeland's (2010) study recommends an administrator training programme at colleges and universities to prepare circuit managers who serve those students in rural superintendent positions and who specialise in rural school administration. While in South Africa there seem to be no literature that relates to circuit managers' preparation for working in the rural areas, there is some work that documents the importance of rural principal training programmes. One such work is s study conducted by Msila (2010) about rural school principals' quest for effectiveness. The participants (principals) from rural schools were registered in the new Advanced Certificate in Education, School Management and Leadership (ACE-SML).The findings of the study suggest that participants showed initiative and they attributed many of these to their involvement in the ACE-SML programme, they also showed signs of being transformational leaders in the face of adversity,

as principals who want to challenge the status quo for the benefit of the learners and the community (Msila, 2010). Msila's study (2010) also made important findings about the relationship between schools and Higher Education institutions. In this regard, the study reported that principals benefitted by working with the higher education institutions and they all agreed that working with people with the expertise of university lecturers as facilitators in their programme helped them to identify the challenges they are facing in their work environment (Msila, 2010). The participants said they gained by the on-site visits by the university staff to their schools as apart from their mentors; they received another view as to how to face the challenges in their schools (Msila, 2010).

Circuit managers have something to learn from the findings of Msila's study (2010). Firstly, if training programme designed for rural school principals can help them became better leaders in their contexts, surely rural circuit managers can also benefit from programmes designed for them. Secondly, if South African universities can develop training programmes for rural principals, it can also do the same for circuit managers. In fact, *The Collective Agreement No.1 of 2008* mandates circuit managers to encourage and support research initiatives with universities, colleges of education and other agencies (Education Labour Relation Council, 2008).

Sperry and Hill's (2015) study, commissioned by The Council of Great Schools, a coalition of 65 school districts in the USA, also found that rural circuit managers face many challenges including a shortage of human and physical resources, dropping numbers of learners, funding challenges, isolation, aging facilities, political and leadership challenges as well as paper work. There is conclusive agreement in the literature that rural circuit managers perform many different roles, some of which as circuit managers they are not expected to perform (Copeland, 2013; Lamkin, 2006; Ramirez & Guzman, 1999; Sperry & Hill, 2015). Since some rural circuit managers operate a central office with a staff of one, it becomes very hard for them to do all these tasks well.

Financial problems are also a major source of difficulty for rural circuit superintendents. Ramirez and Guzman's (1999) study conducted in Colorado, USA found that financial resources are a major problem for rural districts in comparison to urban districts. This, they found, results in poor operating expenses, unsatisfactory distribution of funds, lack of resources for technology and inadequate revenue to help students meet new academic standards. The problem with the lack of financial resources is the ripple effect it has in terms of the other

necessary resources. It is therefore not surprising that rural districts suffer from difficulties in retaining and attracting quality personnel (Ramirez & Guzman, 1999; Tobin, 2006). The lack of resources, as discussed in Chapter 1, is also a problem in South Africa. Some rural schools seem experience this problem more than other areas (Brown, 2003). The findings of the study conducted by Du Plessis (2014) in Mpumalanga, South Africa, established that, due to conditions found in some rural areas, which include the lack of basic infrastructure for sanitation, water, roads and other transport, electricity and information technology, rural schools find it difficult to attract good and suitable teachers.

While urban circuit managers may experience challenges commonly experienced by circuit managers in rural contexts, there are challenges that seem to be uniquely found in urban circuits. Some of these challenges maybe the same but differ in their nature and complexity. One such challenge is politics (Kowalski, 1995). A study conducted by Fuller, Campbell, Celio, Harvey, Immerwahr and Winger (2003) in the USA found that politics, as a result of contesting interests of unions, boards and the head office, is a major problem for circuit managers in the USA. Most circuit managers (80%) who participated in the study cited local politics, conflicting public demands, mandates from above and pressures related to accountability as a moderate or major challenge. In another study conducted by Kowalski (1995), politics is a central theme in virtually all discussions of the urban superintendence. Most members of the reference group of urban circuit managers that participated in the study affirmed that they had experienced tough, "hardball" approaches when dealing with unions and boards (Kowalski, 1995). What seems to be coming up from the literature presented above is that while political challenges are also found in rural contexts, urban circuit managers' experiences suggest that it is a major challenge.

In their study conducted in the USA, Trevino, Bradley Brown and Slate (2012) found that urban circuit managers face interconnected challenges related to the diverse population of learners in the era of increased public accountability, for demonstrated student achievement outcomes. This study further found this challenge is worsened by the diversity of race, ethnicity, native language and socio-economic conditions among the student within the circuit (Trevino *et al.,* 2008).

2.6.3 Personal challenges

There is some development of gender related literature that looks at challenges facing female circuit managers (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Glass *et al.,* 2000; Kelsey, Allen, Coke & Ballard, 2014; Kelsey & Johnson, 2012; Shava & Sibanda, 2015; Sutton, 2012). These studies seem to focus on three main themes: inhibitors to becoming a circuit manager, entry experience and challenges facing women once employed. Circuit management has always been viewed as a male dominated profession. This is despite the fact that there are more females in the education system than males. This has triggered research aimed at understanding the dynamics surrounding female circuit managers. Glass *et al.* (2000) posit that the reasons that there are fewer female circuit managers include the fact that females enter education administration too late. This he argues is as a result of women spending more years teaching in the classroom then men. Derrington and Sharratt (2009) further add that the reason the position of circuit manger continues to be male dominated includes discrimination, the fact that employers are not educated regarding the qualifications of female candidates, the inability of candidates to relocate and family responsibilities.

Another study conducted in Zimbabwe by Shava and Sibanda (2015) focused on challenges faced by women in education leadership. It found that culture, as reflected in a set of beliefs, norms, values and procedures in institutions and the local communities, negatively affected the execution of women leadership. Women participants in this study reported they have challenges, especially when the community associated the position of education leader with men and especially when the school has been operating with male heads for a long time. The findings of this study further indicate that female school heads experienced resistance from their teachers, especially male teachers.

In the South African context, a study was conducted by Greyling and Steyn (2015) that also paints a negative picture of women's leadership in education. Their study focused on challenges that face women aspiring for leadership position in education. It found gender discrimination, the pressure of family responsibility and socio-cultural consideration to be the main factors. Most importantly, Greyling and Steyn's (2015) study shows that although the professional profile of women in management posts differs from that of their male counterparts in schools, women can also effectively lead and manage schools. The most prevalent challenges facing newly appointed female circuit managers, according to Sutton (2012), are associated with school finance, time and the personal costs associated with the role. The less prevalent are

challenges associated with isolation, organisational deficit and personal administration. In their study, Kelsey *et al.* (2014) looked at the leadership of female circuit managers and the challenges they face. The findings of this study indicate that women circuit managers focus on building relationships and participatory leadership. This study also found that women circuit managers face struggles with gender stereotyping.

Johnson's (2012) study, conducted in the American context, made findings similar to those of the study discussed above. This research suggests that gender and ethnicity present a unique challenge for circuit managers (Johnson, 2012). This is important in an environment where female non-Whites are joining circuit management. One such study, by Johnson (2012) in the USA, focused on resilient female African American superintendents. The data generated from interviews of six circuit managers indicated that being a female African American superintendent came with a different set of challenges, which were found to include abuse of power and personal attack. This study also found that female African American circuit managers worked very hard to earn respect from peers, to have a place at the table and to have their voices heard.

The findings of all the studies presented above indicate that a lot needs to be done to level the playing field so that female leaders can lead well. This is very important in our country, particularly if we take Greyling and Steyn's (2015) findings that indicate that women lead very well. The role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning, irrespective of gender, is important and also it is equally important to understand and document the role of female circuit managers. This will help in learning how best the circuit manager roles can be enacted by women, taking into consideration what we learn from the research about them.

2.7 Preparation and professional development

Circuit managers, like any other officials in the education system, must be well trained and prepared so that they can discharge their responsibilities well. The importance of preparedness for the role by circuit managers has been subject of several studies (Glass, Björk & Brunner, 2000; Haar & Robicheau, 2008; Mwinyipembe & Orodho, 2014; Petersen, Furaselli & Kowalski, 2009; Valentine & Neale, 2010). Preparation of superintendents is a critical component, or essential element of systematic education reform (Petersen, Furaselli & Kowalski, 2009). This is particularly important in this age of accountability, where learner achievements have become a critical outcome more strongly expected from schooling systems

than before. In keeping with the accountability reforms and the role of circuit manager in ensuring learner attainment, Waters and Marzano (2006) conducted a meta-analysis study about the effectiveness of circuit managers in relation to student achievement. The findings of this research indicate that there is a strong correlation between effective superintendent performance and student achievement. In other words, Waters and Marzano's (2006) findings suggest that when district leaders are carrying out their leadership responsibilities effectively, student achievement across the district is positively affected. Mwinyipembe and Orodho's (2014) study conducted in Kenya about the effectiveness of superintendents' role in enhancing student academic performance in national examinations found that the training and experience of superintendents have a direct impact on their ability to effectively ensure a high standard of learning.

Several studies have been done about the preparedness of superintendents (Adewale, 2014; Gober, 2012; Levine, 2005; Murphy, 2007). What seem to be common about most of these studies is the finding that points to the general weaknesses in the programmes aimed at developing superintendents. One such study was conducted by Glass, Björk and Brunner (2000) in the USA. This study laments the lack of hands-on application, inadequate technology and the failure to link content to practice. Kowalski's (2005) study found weaknesses relating to preoccupation with management, insufficient attention to leadership, lack of curriculum relevance, inadequate funding and staffing for professional education, inattention to gender related issues and low admission and graduation standards. Levin's (2005) study, conducted in the USA, found that the lack of meaningful or field-based experience was a challenge in the training programme. In Murphy's (2007) study, also in the USA, he states that it is the application of skills, not theory, that superintendents need. There should also be an emphasis on the importance of making practice the centre of preparation. In the same vein, Gober's (2012) study, conducted in the USA about superintendent preparation, highlighted a clear lack of cohesion between what superintendents learned in their university professional preparation programmes and what they practise in their day to day activities.

All the studies presented above have a common thread, that there are insufficient training programmes given to circuit manager in the USA, and that such programmes also have a range of deficiencies. A phenomenological study conducted by Antonucci (2012) in Massachusetts, USA, found that superintendents were generally satisfied about their level of preparation. Though participants reported a level of satisfaction with their preparation, they also felt that

they will be better served by programmes that incorporate more case studies, scenario-based instructions and hands-on experience. This seems to suggest that circuit manager in that context need assistance in terms of the training that will link with what they face in their daily lives. Levin (2005) argues that, in a time of significant social and cultural change, superintendents are faced with challenges that demand high levels of skill and knowledge in management and leadership. He further states that these challenges include the demands relating to issues of accountability, changing demographics, aging professionals, demanding publics and challenging school board/superintendent relations; all while being expected to inspire a shared vision. Further, in these studies the issue of context arises; they make the point that circuit manager training should be informed by the context that circuit managers are likely to face in their work.

From the African continent, a study was conducted by Adewale (2014) in Nigeria about the effectiveness of superintendents in relation to student achievement in public secondary schools. This study found that there is serious lack of understanding of the role of superintendents in Nigeria and that there were poor training programmes for circuit manager to assist them to effectively discharge their responsibilities (Adewale, 2014). Another study was conducted in Kenya by Mwinyipembe and Ordho (2014) about the effectiveness of circuit managers in influencing learner achievement. One of the main findings relates to the training level of circuit managers. In this regard, the study established that the training level and experience of circuit managers have a direct impact on their ability to effectively undertake quality and assurance assessment. The results show that the circuit managers do have the necessary training and experience that matches with the role and the expectations for their supervision of teachers and head teachers. A South African study conducted by Van der Westhuizen, Mosoge and Van Vuuren (2004), on capacity building provided by the Department of Education for educational managers, found that circuit managers are satisfied with the quality and adequacy of their training and agreed that the training was in the range of effective to very effective.

The findings of studies from Africa (Kenya and South Africa in particular) are surprising, compared to those from the USA. It appears that circuit managers in the USA are not happy with their level of work preparation in relation to the challenges that they meet on their daily work based on the context (Antonucci, 2012; Gober, 2012). This is despite the fact that, in the USA since the 1950s, state education agencies, universities, and professional associations have collaborated in defining the requirements for licensing administrators (Kowalski, 2005).

Looking at Kenya and South Africa, circuit managers seem to be pleased with their training (Mwinyipembe & Ordho, 2014; Van der Westhiuzen, Mosoge & Van Vuuren, 2004). In our country, South Africa, the requirements for becoming a circuit manager and the level of training provided seem not to match the responsibilities of the job. In South Africa, the *Collective Agreement No. 1 of 2008* states that, to become a circuit manager, one needs to have a basic four-year diploma/degree in education and 12 years' experience in education, of which three years should be in management (Education Labour Relation Council, 2008). The *Collective Agreement No. 1 of 2008* states that among the core duties of circuit managers is that of undertaking research and development. This requires circuit manager to undertake small scale as well as large scale research to improve delivery and policy (Education Labour Relation Council. 2008). For circuit managers to conduct small- and large-scale research work they need at least post-graduate qualifications. Otherwise, it becomes the responsibility of the employer to develop these skills through professional development.

For circuit managers who are in challenging contexts, professional development seems very important for them to be better prepared. Brandon *et al.* (2014) conducted a study in Canada into an adaptive superintendent induction programme. This study found that the transition of education leaders into new positions as superintendents is likely to be successful through access to quality induction programmes that feature five components: standard based design, orientation, trained mentorship, like group support and large group support**.**

Once circuit managers are appointed in their position, there should be an on-going professional development. This is very important because, among other things, the field of education is constantly changing. Stronge and Xu (2012) state that on-going professional development options for superintendents are narrow because of the excessive responsibilities placed on them as chief executive officers of schools and because of the isolation of their work and positions. On-going professional development will help the superintendents to bridge the gap that exists between them and the classroom where they are expected to influence learner-achievement. Ongoing professional development will be successful when the tenets of adult learning are followed, which should entail case studies, Socratic dialogue and critical inquiry (Stronge & Xu, 2012). These scholars further state that the process of on-going professional development should include four major phases (Stronge & Xu, 2012). These phases are need, create, implement and evaluate. The first phase, the need, is about identifying the learning needed so as to achieve the goals. The second is about creating a strategy and resources to achieve the

learning goal. Implementation of the learning strategy and use of learning resources is the third phase. The final phase is about assessing the attainment of the learning goal and the process of reaching it.

Dominguez, Ivory, and McClellan (2005) argue that mentoring is another important tool that should be part of superintendent development. They define mentoring as a continuous and daily activity carried out through listening and collaboration, observation, networking and promoting vision and encouragement to maintain the focus on education. Superintendents need a network of mentors to provide support, empathy, encouragement, counselling and friendship (Hansford, Tennent & Ehrich, 2002). The value of mentoring is, according to findings of a study by Alsbury and Hackman (2006), the primary source of assistance in becoming a successful school leader, as opposed to the assistance provided by coursework or teaching on educational leadership. Mentoring for superintendents is particularly important because they participate in unique activities that only other superintendents have experienced (Dominguez, Ivory, & McClellan, 2005). Those who have been through the experience can share it with those who have just joined the profession.

Regarding development of the instructional leadership role of circuit managers, Spanneut, Tobin and Ayers' (2011) study, conducted in the USA on the professional development needs of school superintendents, found that superintendents indicated strong interest in their development in relation directly to instructional leadership. Also in this regard, Russel's (2012) study, also in the USA, highlights the need for a clear instructional leadership development plan based on the clear expectations, specific goals and areas of focus that can assist a new superintendent in gathering critical information quickly about needs of students, staff and community.

Several studies have also been conducted in the South African context of the role of circuit manager. These include Nobin's (2004) study about the leadership practices of circuit managers. This study found that the leadership practices of many circuit managers are still shaped by the ethos, system and procedures inherited from the apartheid past. Nyembe-Kganye's (2005) study about the superintendent's role as a link between the district and the circuit found that superintendents are not familiar with new forms of communications such as e-mail, websites on the internet and electronic bulletins. Ngubane (2006) also conducted a study about what principals think is an effective superintendent. His study found that feedback regarding school performance was an important determinant of the effectiveness of

superintendents. This was viewed as important information that could uplift the school. The study also found that superintendents understand the importance of a healthy school climate for effective teaching and learning. A phenomenological study done by Mthembu (2014) focused on circuit managers' instructional leadership role. It found that circuit managers are performing this role by providing a safe and orderly academic environment, providing a positive and supportive environment for student and staff, maintaining a district vision and setting goals focused on high levels of student expectation that are visible and accessible to staff and students, on decision making, on staff empowerment, and on the modelling of instructional leadership.

Demonstrated in the literature above is that the role of the circuit manager has changed significantly over the years (Petersen, 1999), resulting in gaps in scholarship. Dominating the research, as is indicated above, is that an extensive body of literature is from the developed world (Jones & Howley, 2009; Lewis *et al.*, 2011; Valentine & Neale, 2010; Waters and Marzano, 2006). In contrast there is little from the developing world, particularly from South African contexts, that looks at circuit managers' role in supporting schools. What is common about these studies is that they document common elements in the work of the superintendents, whilst what is less known is how superintendents' leadership may be expressed very differently given varying contexts (Bredeson, Johnson & Klar, 2008). Gronn and Robbins (1996) also make a case for studies of contexts and leadership when they argue for the need for studies that will use the context to theorise about leadership. Accordingly, this study intends to fill the gap that exists in the literature about how circuit managers' instructional leadership role of supporting schools that are in challenging contexts is enacted. It seeks to establish the manner by which circuit managers play their roles. It further seeks to explore and describe how contextual realities influence the way circuit managers enact their leadership in supporting teaching and learning.

2.8 Chapter summary

This chapter presented a literature review of available research into the role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts. Five broad themes informed discussion of the literature review of this phenomenological study. The first theme presented the evolution of this role in various contexts in the United States (USA), United Kingdom (UK) and South Africa (SA). This was followed by a theme about the role of circuit managers in the 21stCentury. Under this theme, the common roles, the contextual roles as well as the

instructional role of circuit managers were discussed. The third theme presented the job description of circuit managers in the South African context. The fourth theme presented in this chapter was about the challenges facing circuit managers. Under this theme, the common, contextual as well personal challenges were discussed. Circuit managers' preparation constitutes the fifth and the final theme. While some of these themes do not directly relate to the teaching and learning role of the circuit manager, they are all relevant to how the circuit managers discharge their role of supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts. The literature used in this study largely emanates from the USA and UK contexts, due to the very limited literature from South African contexts.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 presented a review of the related literature that reports on the role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. Two theoretical frameworks guide thinking in this study about the role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning in schools that are in challenging contexts: instructional leadership and context-responsive leadership theories. The first part of this chapter explores the three widely used models of instructional leadership, the Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Murphy (1990) and Weber (1996) models. These widely used models were designed to guide the analysis of the instructional leadership role of school principals. They have played a major role in analysis of the role of the circuit managers in relation to instructional leadership. This is followed by the presentation of two theories that guide thinking in this study, the Waters and Marzano's (2006) Model of Instructional Leadership and Bredeson, Klar and Johansson's Context-Responsive Leadership (2008).

3.2 Models of instructional leadership

Research over the years has developed many models of instructional leadership. Hallinger and Murphy (1985)'s model of instructional leadership is widely used. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) collected information on the behaviours of school principals in addition to perceptions of school staff and district administrators of those behaviours. A questionnaire on instructional leadership behaviour was used as the main data generation method. Data from questionnaires were further supplemented by information from school documents, observation of principals during clinical assessments, narratives that described engagements with the principals that address the support of curriculum and instruction in the school, as well as faculty meeting minutes and agendas.

From the synthesis of their questionnaire data and organisational information, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) created a framework of instructional leadership theory, with three dimensions and ten job descriptors as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

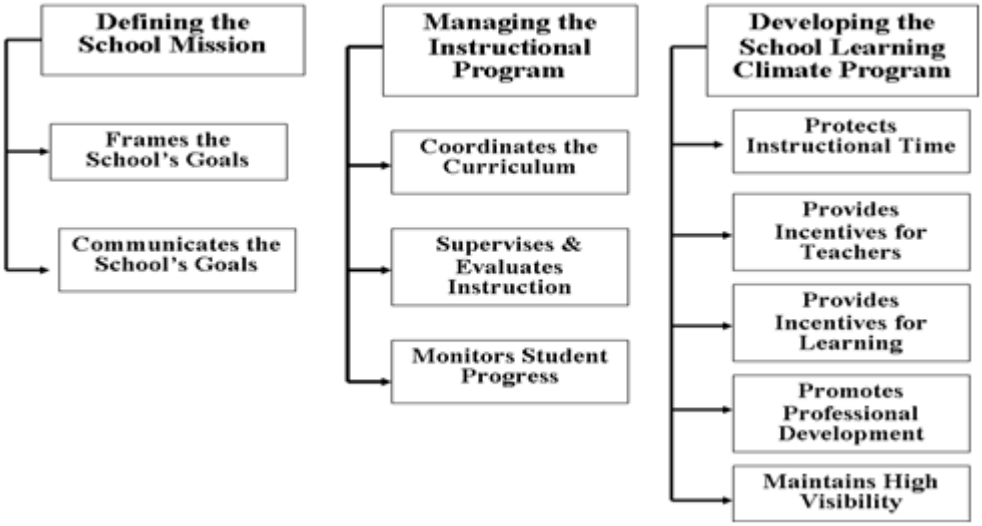


Figure 1. Framework of Instructional Leadership: Adapted from: Hallinger and Murphy (1985).

The first dimension of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model is defining the school mission. This dimension has two descriptors, which are *framing school goals* and *communicating school goals*. The framing of school goals can be attained by working with parents and staff to identify the areas of improvement within the school and developing performance goals on these areas (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The function of communicating school goals refers to the ways in which the principal expresses the importance of the school goals to staff, parents, and students. This can be achieved through the use of formal or informal communication (e.g., handbooks, staff meetings, school assemblies, conversations with staff or students, bulletin boards, and teacher and parent conferences).

Supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum and monitoring students are three descriptors that constitute the second dimension, which is *managing the instructional programme*. According to Hallinger and Murphy (1985), this dimension focuses on the role of the principal in managing the technical core of the school. *Supervising and evaluating instruction* comprises activities that provide instructional support to teachers, monitoring classroom instruction through informal classroom visits, and aligning classroom practice with school goals (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). *Coordinating the curriculum* refers to those activities of a principal that promote staff collaboration in aligning the curriculum to standards and achievement tests. The instructional management function of *monitoring student progress* refers to the principal's use of test results for setting goals, assessing the curriculum, evaluating instruction, and measuring progress toward school goals (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

The third dimension of this model of instructional leadership is developing a school learning climate. This dimension includes several leadership functions: *protecting instructional time*, *promoting professional development*, *maintaining high visibility*, *providing incentives for teachers*, and *providing incentives for learning*. This dimension is broader in scope and intent. It embodies the direct and indirect activities that are necessary to create a positive learning climate. It conforms to the notion that successful schools create what is referred to as an 'academic press', through the development of high standards and expectations and a culture of continuous improvement (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Academic press focuses on the extent to which school members, including teachers and students, experience a normative emphasis on academic success and conformity to specific standards of achievement (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986).

The Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model of instructional leadership is one of the most important frameworks, as other scholars who came up with their own models seem to have drawn from it. Though this framework was designed for school principals, literature about the instructional leadership role of both principals and circuit managers suggests that it has had an influence in development of the other relevant models. One such model was developed five years later by Murphy (1990). Contrary to Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model, Murphy's (1990) model is made up of four dimensions.

The first dimension of Murphy's (1985) model is about developing mission and goals. Similarly to that of Hallinger and Murphy (1985), this dimension identifies two descriptors, which are *framing school goals* and *communicating school goals*. Managing the educational production is the second dimension, with *promoting quality instruction*, *supervising and evaluating instruction*, *allocating and protecting instructional time* as its descriptors. The third dimension is promoting learning climate with *establishing positive expectations and standards*, *maintaining high visibility*, *providing incentives for teachers and students* and *promoting professional development* as its descriptors. Developing a supportive work environment is the fourth dimension. This dimension has five descriptors, which are *creating a safe and orderly learning environment*, *creating opportunities for meaningful student involvement*, *developing staff collaboration and cohesion*, *securing outside resources in support of school goals* as well as *forging a link between the home and the school*.

Another instructional leadership model that has been widely used is that of Weber (1996). Weber's model (1996), like that of Murphy (1990), has five dimensions. The first dimension

is defining the school mission; this dimension suggests that the instructional leader must collaboratively develop a common vision and goals for the school with stakeholders. When comparing the first dimension of the three models, it is clear they commonly articulate the importance of the mission and goal setting. However, in Weber's (1996) model, the mission and goals must be developed in collaboration with other stakeholders. The second dimension of Weber's (1996) model is managing curriculum and instruction; to fulfil this dimension, the instructional leader must provide instructional resources and support in the use of instructional best practices-modelling and providing support in the use of data. What further distinguishes this model from the other two models is the emphasis on the use of data to drive instruction. This in my view was greatly influenced by the evolution of the roles of both school principals and circuit managers, which suggest that the 21st century principals and circuit managers must have the skills to work with data. These skills must also be transferred to teachers on the ground. The third dimension is promoting a positive learning climate where the instructional leader is expected to promote a positive learning climate by communicating goals, establishing expectations and ensuring an orderly environment. The fourth dimension of Weber's (1996) model is observing and improving instruction, under which dimension the instructional leader must observe and improve instruction through the use of classroom observation and professional development opportunities. The last dimension is assessing the instructional programme, whereby the instructional leader must contribute to the planning, designing, administering and analysing of assessment that also informs the evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculum.

These three models of instructional leadership play an important role in the understanding and development of instructional leadership theory. Instructional leadership theory has been prevalent in education literature for more than two decades (Southworth, 2002). Despite the restructuring and accountability reforms that education systems have undergone, the instructional leadership construct has maintained a consistent stronghold in the education leadership literature (Hallinger, 2008). This domination of instructional leadership theory is partly as a result of the focus governments are placing on accountability for learner achievement and the leadership that is needed to improve learner achievement. South Africa has not been spared from either of these reforms and from the emphasis on instructional leadership. Since the dawn of democracy, South Africa has shifted its focus to education, as education was and is seen as a way to help the country alleviate many of the social ills it has inherited from years of colonisation and apartheid policies. To this end, education has been

elevated as the apex priority of the South African government. This has also resulted in development of research that focuses on the instructional leadership role of principals (Kruger 2003; Moonsammy-Koopasammy, 2012; Mthombeni, 2004; Zulu, 2004) and of circuit managers (Mthembu, 2014; Ngubane, 2006) in South African contexts. The next section will look at Waters and Marzano's (2006) model.

3.3 Waters and Marzano's (2006) Model of Instructional Leadership

This study's thinking was guided by the Waters and Marzano's (2006) model of instructional leadership. The Waters and Marzano's (2006) model identifies five pillars. The first pillar is collaborative goal-setting. According to Waters and Marzano (2006), effective circuit managers establish goals for the circuit. This view is echoed by Mason (2013), when he states that the first role of superintendents and principals in fulfilling their instructional leadership role is to explicitly frame the school system's goal, purpose and mission. This is very important because the circuit or the school that fully considers how it will go about the process of education has a specific criterion for judging whether it is successful in that process. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) state that having goals helps people make sense of their work and enables them to find a sense of identity for themselves within their context. Circuit managers who work with schools that are in challenging contexts can help those schools by ensuring that the circuit has goals. These goals will help both the circuit as a collective and individual schools to improve learner achievement by having something that they work towards. This view is further echoed by Locke and Lathan (1990), when they state that goal setting is the most effective way to increase motivation and performance as it places the attention on the attainment of tasks, increases the persistence to achieve and increases the development of strategies to obtain goals.

When setting circuit goals, Waters and Marzano (2006) state that this should be done in a collaborative manner. Walters and Marzano's (2006) theory, like that of Weber (1999), postulates that goal setting should not only be the responsibility of circuit managers but should involve principals, governing structures, unions and other stakeholders. According to Walters and Marzano (2006), this does not mean consensus must be reached among these stakeholders, it however implies that once stakeholders reach an acceptable level of agreement regarding circuit goals, all stakeholders should agree to support the attainment of those goals. Alig-Mielcarek (2003) further adds that shared goals foster group unity and help provide for a climate characterised by high standard of teaching learning, trust and commitment.

Collaborative setting of goals assists in ownership of the goals. Goals attainment becomes the responsibility of all the stakeholders because they own them, since they were part of their development.

Collaborative goal setting further provides schools in a circuit, particularly those in challenging contexts, an opportunity to set realistic goals, taking into consideration their local context. Leithwood *et al.* (2004) add that it is critical that stakeholder inputs for goal setting are viewed as context sensitive. When these goals are set in a context sensitive approach, they increase the effort exerted by school members to develop strategies and to increase persistence (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003). School goals are informed by the challenges that the school experiences in ensuring effective teaching and learning.

The second pillar is non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction. In this pillar, Walters and Marzano's (2006) model of instructional leadership advocates that effective circuit managers ensure that collaborative goal setting process results in non-negotiable goals in at least two areas; student achievement and classroom instruction. This is put into practice by setting specific achievement targets for the circuit as a whole, for individual schools and subpopulations of students within the circuit. For the circuit manager, the purpose of having a strong articulated mission and a set of non-negotiable goals act as a "road map" of what is to be achieved. This prevents the random selection of priorities and stops the implementation of unnecessary initiatives (Petersen, 1999). What is critically important about this pillar is that each school will have to develop its action plan detailing how the targets and goals are to be attained. Having each school setting specific targets ensures that each school sets realistic targets, taking into account its context. Walters and Marzano (2006) further caution that, with respect for classroom instruction, it does not mean that the circuit establishes a single instructional model that all teachers must employ. However, it does mean that the district adopts a broad but common framework for classroom instruction design and planning, common instruction language or vocabulary and consistent use of research-based instructional strategies in each school. This pillar further puts responsibility on circuit managers to ensure that all principals support the goals explicitly and implicitly. Explicit support means that the school leader engages in the behaviour described above. Implicit support means that the school principals do nothing to subvert the accomplishment of those goals, such as criticising the circuit goals or subtly communicating that the goals the circuit has selected are inappropriate or unattainable.

The third pillar is board alignment and support of circuit goals. This pillar is based on the assumption that, in districts with higher levels of student achievement, the local board of education is aligned with and is supportive of goals for achievement and instruction (Waters and Marzano, 2006). In the South African context, School Governing Bodies (SGBs) are mandated by the South African School Act to adopt the vision and mission statement of the school (Department of Education, 1996). They are further expected to approve the school improvement plans. The school vision and mission set goals that the school aims to fulfil, whereas the improvement plan is seen as the vehicle that will assist the school to get where it wants to be. The SGB, as one of the stakeholders, is expected to adopt the mission and the vision statement of the school as well as the school improvement plan. It is therefore important that it well vested with the circuit goals. Circuit managers are expected to ensure that SGB members are capacitated and are able make informed decisions, including shaping the school direction. The SGB members must also be properly appraised with what are the circuit goals. This will assist schools, for example, to fund the attainment of goals, as the SGB are responsible for school budgets.

Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction is the fourth pillar. This pillar suggests that, for the circuit manager to be an effective instructional leader, it is important that he or she monitors the circuit's progress towards achievement and instructional goals to ensure that these goals remain the driving force behind the circuit actions. Walters and Marzano (2006) warn that, when there is failure to continually monitor them, district goals can become little more than pithy refrains that are spoken at circuit and school events and highlighted in written reports. The effective circuit manager must ensure that each school regularly examines the extent to which it is to meeting achievement targets. This view was confirmed by Mason's (2013) study, which found that an analysis of the school and district three-year education policy, school improvement plan and annual education reports displayed a clear mission that reflected the beliefs and values of the school and the circuit. Discrepancies between the articulated goals and current practices stimulate the need to change or redouble efforts to enhance student achievement. Using data generated through tests, examinations and school visits, circuit managers should be able to establish if the goals are attained and, if not, where are the challenges and how to address them.

The last pillar is about the use of resources to support the achievement of instructional goals**.** Lack of physical and human resources is another problem that makes some school contexts challenging. These resources, according to Ebersohn and Ferreira (2012), can be person-based (individual, strength), family-based (household income, employment) school-based (infrastructure and expertise) community-based (institutions, services, beliefs) and society-based (policies and structure). With low levels of resources in school narrowing the opportunities for education (Langa, 2013), circuit managers as instructional leaders are expected to assist schools to acquire the necessary resources that will ensure the improvement of learner achievement. Circuit managers using their knowledge of bureaucracy can assist school principals in dealing with red tape. The circuit manager in this regard has a responsibility to ensure that the resources of the circuit are used to benefit all schools in the circuit. Some of the schools in challenging contexts do not have libraries, laboratories or sport fields. Circuit managers, using the knowledge of the circuit, can, for example, develop a system where schools can share some of these resources. The findings of the studies presented above are very important to this current study about the role of circuit managers as supporters of teaching and learning in schools that are located in challenging contexts.

Waters and Marzano's (2006) model assisted me to analyse and theorise how circuit managers navigate their role of supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts. It is possible to use the pillars proposed by this model to investigate how each pillar is executed in the challenging contexts and how contextual factors may dictate the way in which circuit managers execute tasks proposed by each pillar.

This study notes that instructional leadership theory has several criticisms levelled against it. Hallinger (2003) notes that sceptics have questioned whether most circuit managers have the high level of drive, knowledge and ability needed to increase school effectiveness and student achievement through instructional leadership. This suggests that, even if circuit managers engage in instructional leadership, one circuit manager could not be capable of being an expert in all areas. Secondly, instructional leadership is hierarchical in nature (Hallinger, 2003). There is a top-down relationship between the leader and the subordinates, as the leader takes the role of the curriculum expect and supervisor of curriculum instruction (Goddard, 2003). However, some scholars, including Hallinger and Heck (1996) and Southworth (2002), continue to argue that school leaders contribute to school effectiveness and student achievement indirectly through actions they take to influence school and classroom situations. These scholars further

add that, through instructional leadership, effective leaders tend to enact the same basic leadership practices across schools but in a manner that is responsive to a particular context. Hallinger (2003) further adds that this conclusion is broadly consistent with general contingency leadership theory, which suggest that those who attempt to define successful school leadership practices must be content with a high level of abstraction. This point is clearly demonstrated by the study conducted by Murphy and Hallinger (1986). This study sought to understand the nature of the differences in schools that were instructionally effective for low-Socio-Economic Status (SES) and high-SES student and communities.

The research found that defining a shared mission was important in both sets of social contexts, but that practice was enacted quite differently by the school leaders. In low-SES effective schools, clear, specific, measurable, goals were prominently displayed around the school and featured in the principal's active efforts to create a shared vision. In high-SES effective schools, interviews with different stakeholder groups revealed a clear understanding as well as strong agreement and support for school vision. Yet in contrast to low-SES schools, this vision was embedded in the culture of the school, even in the absence of clear, specific measurable goals. The leader's actions involved supporting and developing a strong academic culture rather than turning around a weak culture through goal direction. Taking into consideration the implications of this argument for this study about the leadership role of circuit managers in challenging contexts, I have adopted context-responsive leadership to complement the instructional leadership theory. Context-responsive theory is discussed below.

3.4 Bredeson, Klar and Johanssons' Context-Responsive Leadership theory (2008)

Context-responsive leadership theory was developed by Bredeson, Klar and Johansson (2008) after their study of the leadership of 12 superintendents in specific contexts. They define context-responsive leadership as practical wisdom in action, which reveals a complex mix of knowledge, skills and dispositions appropriately deployed by effective leaders as they engage in fluid conversation with the variables of dynamic situations. Context-responsive leadership is expressed through action, the way the leader behaves, not in any one predisposed style consisting of de-contextualised qualities or leader actions (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). Instructional leadership in challenging contexts is indeed fluid; it demands a leader who understands the terrain.

Context-responsive theory highlights key variations in contexts to illustrate context-responsive leadership in situ, which fall into five major areas. These include the district size, organisational culture, community characteristics and geographic location, fiscal contexts and political contexts. They further suggest strategies that circuit managers can use to deal with each variation in context. The importance of this theory in this study is that it complements the instruction leadership theory. As the first major area of variation in context, district size, according to Bredeson *et al.* (2008), plays a role in the manner in which circuit managers discharge their responsibilities. They argue that, in smaller circuits, managers must perform a variety of operational duties, interact directly with school community members and develop personal relationship and trust with all community members. Circuit managers who are in larger districts can perform strategic roles, interact indirectly with school community members and work through principals and leadership teams to establish trust. This view was confirmed by Hentschke, Nayfack and Wohlstetter's (2009) study about circuit manager leadership in smaller urban circuits. This study found that the leadership behaviour of circuit managers in smaller urban circuits appeared remarkably distinct from that of circuit managers in larger circuits. Circuit managers in small circuits were found to be hands-on and personally engage in instructional leadership. Consistent with the findings of Bredeson *et al.* (2008), Hentschke *et al.* (2009) also found that large circuits were experiencing challenges that relate to communication, co-ordination, delegation and overall managerial effectiveness. In South Africa, according to the Department of Basic Education (2013), a circuit should have no less than 15 schools and not more than 30 schools. The number of schools alone does not only help to understand how difficult or easy will it be for circuit managers to work in a particular circuit. Some circuits have schools that are scattered far apart from each other. This demands a particular strategy from circuit managers compared to those circuits where schools are close to each other.

The second major area is organisational culture. In this regard, context-responsive leadership, as advocated by Bredeson *et al.* (2008), suggests that circuit managers must identify and be sensitive to organisational traditions, norms, symbols, communication styles, relationships, processes and capacity to change. Culture has been known to have an impact on the success or failure of organisations. This view is echoed by Elbot and Fulton (2008), when they argue that organisational culture, whether vibrant, adaptive and thriving or toxic and dying, affects everything that is associated with the organisation. Culture, according to Masuku (2011), influences virtually every part of the enterprise, from what members talk about to the type of

instruction that is valued to the manner in which professional development is viewed. Circuit managers must adapt a leadership approach to the unique organisational culture and seek opportunities to build relationship and develop trust. Once relationship and trust have been attained, circuit managers are faced the responsibility of instilling a culture of excellence. This, according to Van Deventer and Kruger (2011), circuit managers can do by working together with school principals in providing sound convictions about education, implementing effective school policy, caring for the school building, modelling acceptable norms and values, enhancing a genuine culture of teaching and learning and formulating a guiding vision and mission. Circuit managers as instructional leaders are expected to assist in developing a school culture of continual improvement in which rewards for student and staff are aligned with purposes and practices.

Community characteristics and geographical location are another variation in the context-responsive leadership (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). This factor is very important in this study about the leadership of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts. Circuit managers who are part of this study have schools that are in areas where levels of poverty and unemployment are very high and low levels of education among community members. The schools are no-fee paying, they participate in feeding schemes and learner achievement is very low. Circuit managers who want to be instructional leaders need to understand these dynamics. Bredeson *et al.* (2008) posit that, as a strategy, circuit managers must understand and be sensitive to local norms and expectations. The circuit manager can do this by identifying and managing community expectations for communication, academic performance, circuit managers' involvement in the community and the level of involvement in setting district direction. The circuit manager can advance teaching and learning by identifying and preparing for demographic trends and geographical influences. He or she can establish partnerships and personal relationship with local and community organisations. Bredeson *et al.* (2008) also warn that circuit managers must balance circuit needs and community needs and must monitor the community's readiness for change. Managing change is very important for circuit managers. This should be done in such a way that communities see the benefit that the proposed change might bring and change should be introduced at an opportune time after vigorous monitoring of the readiness and preparation for such. Change is known to be very painful; if not well managed, it does not matter how much good it will bring, as people will reject it if it is not well introduced.

Another major area in context variation that underpins context-responsive leadership is the financial situation of the circuit (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). One of the strategies circuit managers can use to improve the financial situation of schools is to monitor the community's ability and willingness to fund the school initiatives. They may further identify and communicate the impact of change in demographics, legislation and funding. They need to be able to identify the initiatives for raising circuit funding. When seeking funding, circuit managers must promote circuit success and highlight the needs and most importantly demonstrate fiscal stewardship. This may motivate the stakeholders to support educational initiatives of the circuit because they can see the success that the circuit is recording and that the resources they give to the circuit make the difference and are managed well. The financial situation of schools influences the quality of education the school can provide. Circuit managers as people who have been successful as principals can advise the SGBs and principals about strategies that they can use to supplement the funds that the government allocates to school.

The political climate is the final major area in context variation that influences context-responsive leadership (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). Under this variation, an emphasis is placed on developing strong relationships with the boards and other stakeholders. This can be done by providing the school boards with the information required to develop realistic expectations and make informed decisions. Board members must be used as information sources for the general public. Public perceptions about the circuit and the schools in the circuit must be managed well. These can be best managed by using various media outlets to manage public perceptions and use any bad headlines as catalysts for reform (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). Circuit managers have a responsibility to ensure that there is a peaceful environment that is conducive to a culture of teaching and learning. Political climate is very important in the South African context, where levels of unionisation are very high. A study conducted by Bhengu, Naicker and Mthiyane (2014), about the barriers to translating instructional leadership learning into practice, found that teacher unions are a barrier to the use of leadership learning. A circuit manager has the responsibility to work with teacher unions at the circuit level to ensure that culture of teaching is sustained. It is common in some township and rural schools that we witness community members unofficially closing schools because of the disputes that they have with their schools. Circuit managers are then called to mediate. This result in many hours of teaching and learning being lost, while negotiations take place to solve the problem. In circuits where there is good communication amongst the school community and where relevant stakeholders are consulted, such occurrences can be avoided.

The context-responsive leadership theory proposed by Bredeson, Klar and Johansson (2008) is appropriate for this study because this theory suggests that contexts have an influence in the manner in which circuit managers support teaching and learning. This study seeks to understand how circuit managers navigate the challenges posed by contexts as they do their job of supporting schools. In attempting to do this, the study tapped into circuit managers' practical wisdom in action, and the mix of knowledge, skills and disposition they use to engage in fluid conversation with dynamic situation variables (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008).

The purpose of the study was *to explore how circuit managers enact their leadership in supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts.* The study *further aimed to provide relevant reasons behind the ways the leadership of circuit managers in challenging contexts is displayed and how contextual realities may affect the ways circuit managers enact their leadership*. This study is underpinned by two related constructs, supporting teaching and learning, also known as instructional leadership, and challenging contexts. The triangulation of theoretical frameworks assisted me in using different lenses to theorise about each of these constructs and the relationship between them, in terms of circuit managers' experiences of supporting of teaching and learning.

3.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter I reviewed three of the widely used models of instructional leadership. This was followed by discussing Waters and Marzano (2006) model of instructional leadership as one the theories used in this study. The last section of this chapter presented the review of Bredeson, Klar and Johansson's theory (2008). The next chapter presents the research design and the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 presented the theoretical framework that was used to frame this study. It discussed and justified the use of instructional leadership theory and context-responsive leadership theory as two theories that constitute the theoretical framework used in this study. This chapter discusses and presents the research design and methodology that has been used in this study. It opens by presenting the research paradigm and approaches used and their effectiveness Furthermore, this chapter discusses and presents the research design that has been used in this study. Finally, the selection of participants, data generation tools, data analysis, ensuring trustworthiness and issues of ethical consideration are presented.

4.2 Research paradigm

A paradigm is a principal example among examples, an exemplary or a model to follow, according to which design actions are taken (Niewenhuis, 2011). It is a basic set of beliefs that guides research actions dealing with the first principles, the ultimate truth or the researcher's world views (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). A paradigm is a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts or prepositions that orient thinking and research (Mack, 2010). A research paradigm plays an important role in research by guiding the process of inquiry and it also forms the basis of the practice of science by directing the research towards an appropriate research, methodology depending on the nature of the phenomenon being studied (Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004).

This study *about the role of circuit managers of supporting teaching and learning in schools that are located in challenging contexts*. It intends to give voice to circuit managers' understanding and interpretation of their world. The interpretivist paradigm was used to orient thinking and research in this study by directing it towards appropriate research methodologies that were used informed by the phenomenon under study. In the interpretivist paradigm, knowledge is constructed not only by observable phenomena, but also by descriptions of people's intentions, beliefs, values and reasons, meaning making and self-understanding (Henning *et al*., 2004). Niewenhuis (2011) clarifies that the ultimate aim of interpretivist research is to offer a perspective of a situation under study and to provide insight into the way

in which a particular group of people make sense of their situation. Another important element of this study that clarifies understanding of how challenging contexts influence the manner in which they discharge their responsibilities. Similar to the focus of qualitative research designs, the interpretivist research paradigm makes contexts an important aspect of the study. It is also this element of the study which makes the interpretivist paradigm appropriate for it, because the interpretivist paradigm regards all human action as meaningful and as interpreted and understood within the context of social practice (Usher, 1996). This paradigm assisted me to tap into the world of circuit managers when they share their experiences, beliefs, values and reasons on how and why they support teaching and learning in challenging contexts in the manner in which they do.

Every paradigm has its own ontological and epistemological assumptions. It is these ontological and epistemological assumptions that make the interpretivist paradigm appropriate for this phenomenological study. Grix (2004) defines ontology as the claims and assumptions that are made about the society's reality, claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact. An interpretivist paradigm assumes that reality is individually constructed and that there are as many realities as individuals (Scotland, 2012). Scotland (2012) further adds that reality, according to the interpretivist paradigm, is individually constructed through interactions between language and aspects of the independent world. The interpretivist paradigm denies the existence of an objective reality, thus it focuses on discovering the multiple perspectives of all players in a social setting (Henning *et al.,* 2004). These assumptions about reality are compatible with what I sought to do, which is to elicit the views about circuit managers' reality about their role of supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts, how it is enacted, what units make that reality up and how these units affect their role. The language and dialogue used between myself as a researcher and key instrument for data generation and the participants were a very important part of this study. Through language and dialogue in the interviews I was able to tap into the individual reality of the participants in this study.

Henning *et al.* (2004) point out that epistemology comes from the Greek word *episteme*, a term that means creating knowledge. Epistemology is the philosophy of knowledge or "how we came to know" (Henning *et al.*, 2004, p.15). Epistemologically, knowledge, according to the interpretive paradigm, is subjective and is built from experiences and interpretations and can only be understood from the point of view of the individuals who are directly involved. In

keeping with the epistemological assumptions of the interpretivist paradigm, the use of interviews as the data generation tool enabled circuit manager to express themselves about what is like to be a circuit manager who support schools in challenging contexts. Accordingly, the knowledge generated in this study is not intended for generalisation but for in-depth descriptions of the circuit managers' role in supporting teaching and learning in schools that are in challenging contexts.

4.3 Research approach

This study adopted a qualitative approach to research because qualitative research is the form of research that focuses on the way people make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live in (Holloway & Wheeler, 1997). Burns and Grove (2003) further add that qualitative research is a systematic, subjective approach used to describe life experiences and give them meaning. This contrasts with quantitative research, which is a process that is systematic and objective in its way of using numerical data from only a selected subgroup of universe to generalise the findings to the universe that is studied (Nieuwenhuis, 2011). Qualitative research is concerned with understanding from within; its findings are not generalisable but provide richness and depth regarding the phenomena under study (Nieuwenhuis, 2011).

A qualitative approach to research is appropriate for this study about the circuit managers' experience of their role in supporting teaching and learning in challenging context. In this qualitative study, the investigator seeks to understand the thoughts, feelings and experiences (Guest *et al.*, 2013) of circuit managers concerning their role in supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts. Qualitative researchers study people or phenomena in their natural settings and diverse contexts in order to explore, understand and analyse their subjective meanings (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

4.4 Research design

This study adopts phenomenology as the research design appropriate for this study, which focuses on the role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning in schools that are located in challenging contexts. According to Niewenhuis (2011), research design is a plan or strategy which moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to specifying the selection of respondents, data generation techniques to be used and data analysis to be done. Holloway and Wheeler (1997) posit that research design means the framework of theories and

principles on which methods and procedures are based. In keeping with the definitions of both Niewenhuis (2011) and Holloway and Wheeler (1997), this section will start by presenting the philosophical assumptions underpinning this study and move on to discuss phenomenological research design.

The choice of a research design is based on the researcher's assumptions, researcher's skills, and influences that he or she has on the data he or she generates and most importantly the kind of data that is required to answer the research questions (Nieuwenhuis, 2011). Phenomenology is deemed to be an appropriate design that will help me answer the following research questions of my study.

- What leadership roles do circuit managers play in supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts?
- What are the contextual challenges that influence circuit managers' role of supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts?
- How do contextual challenges influence the leadership role of circuit managers?

Phenomenology was selected as the most appropriate design for this study as it seeks to further examine the particular experiences of unique individuals in a given situation, thus exploring not what is (reality), but what it is preconceived to be (Burns & Grove, 2003). This study seeks to understand circuit managers' experience in particular contexts, which are challenging contexts. For example, it seeks to understand circuit managers' experience in supporting schools that have high levels of poverty, where unionism is very high and where there is shortage of human and physical resources. The suitability of phenomenology in educational settings is also illustrated by Nieuwenhuis (2011) when he states that educational researchers are attracted to phenomenology as it fits the natural setting, the school environment, and preserves the integrity of the situation where it is employed.

Phenomenology is a science whose purpose is to describe a particular phenomenon or appearance of things as lived experiences (Streubert, Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). It is the study and description of 'lived experience' of a phenomenon (King, 2004). Phenomenology was appropriate for this study because phenomenology focuses on human experience as a topic in its own right, it concerns with meaning and a way in which meaning arises in experience (Langdridge, 2007). The main purpose of phenomenology is to seek reality from individuals' narratives of their experiences and feelings and to produce an in-depth description of the

phenomenon (Cilesiz, 2011; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Phenomenology is appropriate to the aims of this study which are to explore, understand and describe the lived experiences circuit managers of supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts.

Phenomenology is useful for studying phenomena that are not well described (King, 2004). Lester (1999) states that phenomenological methods are effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives and are therefore good at challenging structural or normative assumptions. There is very limited literature that describes circuit managers' support of schools in challenging contexts. This study drew from the work of Groenewald (2004), Creswell (2006) and Moustakas (1994) on phenomenology. This illustrates the historical background of phenomenology and how phenomenological studies can be conducted. Groenewald (2004) states that, although the origin of phenomenology can be traced back to Kant and Hegel, Husserl, a Germany mathematician, is regarded as the fountain head of phenomenology in the 20th Century.

According to Creswell (2013), phenomenology is both a philosophy and an educational qualitative research design. The philosophical component of phenomenology draws heavily on the work of Husserl and those who extended his view, such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Creswell, 2006). Creswell (2006) further adds that, while there may be some different philosophical points in the work of writers who followed in the footsteps of Husserl, the philosophical assumption rest on the same common ground. This common ground is underpinned by the common phenomenological assumptions that state that phenomenology is about the lived experiences of persons and the view that these experiences are conscious ones (Van Manen, 1990). It is about the development of the descriptions of the essence of these experiences, not explanation or analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is about focusing on people's perception of the things as they appear with a view to reaching true meaning through penetrating deeper and deeper into the reality. It is generally these assumptions that drew my attention to phenomenology as a research design for my study about the role circuit in supporting teaching and learning in schools that are in challenging contexts. While circuit managers are tasked with the responsibility of supporting teaching and learning in their respective circuits, there is an expectation that improvement in learner achievement should be an end result. However, since the dawn of democracy, learner achievement in South African education system has been a cause for concern for stakeholders. Phenomenology assisted me

to describe the essence of circuit managers' experience (Van Manen, 1990) by penetrating deeper and deeper into their reality (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology as research design has evolved into a process that seeks reality in individuals' narratives of their lived experience of the phenomenon (Cilesiz, 2010). In its role as research design, phenomenology is divided into different approaches, which are highlighted in this discussion: transcendental descriptive phenomenology, as advocated by Husserl, and hermeneutical or interpretive phenomenology, as advocated by Heidegger, a student of Husserl. Whilst the general purpose of phenomenology is to understand and describe a specific phenomenon in-depth and reach an essence of participant's' lived experiences of the phenomenon (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015), transcendental phenomenology is characterised by Husserl's view, which purports that there are features common to all persons who have a lived experience and thus generalised descriptions can be obtained (Lopez & Willis, 2004). This view was dismissed by Heidegger's hermeneutical phenomenology, arguing that participants' experiences are influenced by social cultural and systematic factors which cannot be separated from human experience (King, 2014). Furthermore, transcendental phenomenology posits that, in order to be open to the meaning implicit in the respondents' experiences and to collect data as cleanly as possible, the phenomenological researcher must set aside their own presuppositions, biases and prejudices, through bracketing (King, 2004). Bracketing involves the researchers holding in abeyance ideas, preconceptions and personal knowledge when listening to and reflecting on the lived experiences of participants (Drew, 1999). This view was dismissed by hermeneutics phenomenologists like Heidegger, who argue that nothing can be encountered without reference to our background understanding, for all knowledge originates from the people who are already in the world and seeking to understand others in the world (Kafle, 2011). While acknowledging the importance of dealing with bias, contemporary phenomenology researchers suggest that experience should not be denied but rather made explicit to the reader for inspection when validating the study (King, 2004).

In this study I adopted a hermeneutical phenomenology approach. This approach, underpinned by the interpretive approach, is premised on accepting that the lived experiences are ultimately influenced by the world in which individuals live (Lopez &Willis, 2004). In complying with the bracketing requirement, I took a contemporary approach to bracketing, as advocated by King (2014), of not separating myself from the study. Instead I examined, identified and acknowledged my values, experiences and expectations in relation to this investigation, as well

as my reason to be interested in this topic, of the role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning in schools that are in challenging contexts. This information is provided in Chapter 1 of this report where I present the rationale. Now that phenomenology has been explored, the following section outlines how the research unfolded.

4.5 Selection of research participants

The selection of research participants is a process of selecting subjects to take part in a research investigation on the grounds that they provide information considered relevant to the research problem (Oppong, 2013). Morse (1994) defines selection of research participants as a deliberate selection of the most appropriate participants to be included in the study, according to the way in which the theoretical needs of the study may be met by the characteristics of the participants. While many terms may be used to describe qualitative sampling, most of these represent a variation of three major categories of sampling namely, convenience, purposive and theoretical (Higginbottom, 2004). Convenience sampling is selecting the sample by including participants who are readily available and who meet the study criteria (Nieuwenhuis, 2011). In purposive sampling, according to Patton (2002), the logic lies in selecting information-rich cases to study in depth. *Information-rich* cases are those that from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term 'purposive sampling' (Morse, 1994). Adopting both convenience and purposive sampling allowed me to sample participants that were easily available and are information rich.

While sample selection in qualitative research has a profound effect on the ultimate quality of research, it is not so rigidly prescribed as in quantitative research. Using convenience and purposive sampling, six circuit managers were selected as the participants in this study. Convenience sampling, according to Nieuwenhuis (2011), refers to situations where population elements are selected based on the fact that they are easily and conveniently available. Convenience sample may be used at the beginning of the sample process, when the investigator does not know the pertinent characteristics of the sample selection (Morse, 1994). Accordingly, convenience sampling allowed me to choose ten circuit managers that had schools that were located in challenging contexts and who would be easily accessible. Using the internet, I was able to identify these ten circuit managers from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education's website. While there is an element of convenience sampling in many qualitative studies, convenience sampling is viewed as the least rigorous technique (Oppong, 2013), as it does not result in a representative sample and may result in poor quality of data and lack of intellectual

credibility (Nieuwenhuis, 2011). Taking into consideration the negative connotations associated with using convenience sampling, this study will further use purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allowed me to further screen the ten circuit managers in terms of the information they may provide based on the location of their schools. As a result, six circuit managers were selected to participate in the study.

In phenomenological studies like this one, a homogeneous group of individuals are selected to participate in the study because they have significant and meaningful experience of the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2007; Yuksel & Yilidrim, 2015). Purposive sampling is considered as one of the appropriate sampling strategies for phenomenology. This is because in purposive sampling participants are selected based on some defining characteristics that make them possessors of relevant knowledge (Nieuwenhuis, 2011). Accordingly, circuit managers who were part of this study are those have experienced the phenomenon under investigation in this study, which is supporting teaching and learning in schools that are located in challenging contexts, as explained in the literature review section. This enabled me to develop insight into the topic; participants were chosen because they were likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon that I was investigating (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). As part of negotiating access to participants, I communicated with district directors, who are the gatekeepers for the circuit managers. Using purposive sampling, with the help of district officials who were able to guide me in terms of the location of schools served by different circuit managers, I was able to select six circuit managers from the list of ten circuit managers I had, guided by the location the schools each circuit manager supervised. Communicating with district managers who were gatekeepers raised the issue of *gatekeeper bias*, a problem raised by Oppong (2013). Gatekeeper bias happens when managers or team leaders liaise with the probable subject of the study, thereby taking over the control of the sampling or acting as gatekeepers to the facility through which researchers get in contact to potential participants. In this study, the role of the gatekeeper was limited to identifying circuits in the district that have a high number of schools and that meet the requirement of being in challenging context as defined in this study. The onus was then on myself to identify circuit managers that I had to include in my sample and to contact them.

Unlike quantitative research, which captures a shallow band of information from a wide swath of people and seeks objectively to use their correlations to understand, predict or influence what people do (Baker & Edwards, 2014), qualitative research generally studies fewer people

but delves more deeply into those individuals' setting, subculture and scenes, hoping to generate a subjective understanding of how and why people perceive, reflect, role take, interpret and interact (Baker & Edwards, 2014). This view is supported by Cohen *et al.* (2011) when they state that sample size is likely to be small in qualitative research. In this study, six circuit managers participated in the study. The purpose, the research problem, the major data collection strategy, the availability of information-rich cases and the insights generated from qualitative inquiry depend more on the information richness of the cases and the analytical capabilities of the research than on sample size (McMillan &Schumacher, 2010). As stated above, circuit managers who have experienced the phenomenon under study were handpicked because they were viewed as information rich.

Scholars hold different views about what constitute a good the sample size. There are scholars who suggest that for the research work to be considered properly done, researchers should conduct a certain number of interviews. Creswell (1998) suggests five to twenty-five, Morse (1994) says at least six, and Douglas (1985) suggests 25. Some scholars suggest that the number is not important but argue that the size of the sample is controlled by saturation of information (Seidman, 2006; Streubert, Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). Saturation is a point where, according to Seidman (2006), the researcher hears the same information and he or she is no longer learning anything new. In this study I adopted Seidman's (2006) model on sample size which suggests that a researcher must set a goal for a certain number of participants. Bertaux (1981), cited in Seidman (2006), states that at some point the researcher may recognise that he or she is not learning anything that is decidedly new and that the process of interviewing itself is becoming laborious rather than pleasurable and that this is the time to stop. Having set a goal of six participants, I was able to stop after the sixth participant as I felt that I was no longer learning anything new.

Participants	**Gender**	**Age**	**Highest Qualification**	**Years of experience as the circuit manager**
Raymond	Male	51-60+	PhD	8 years
Skhakhane	Male	41-50	Med	9 years
Ngubo	Male	50-60+	BA	5 years
Ntanzi	Male	50-60+	B. Ed (Hons)	3 years
Myeza	Female	41-50	B. Ed (Hons)	6 years
Skhwelo	Female	41-50	M. Ed	3 years

Table 1: Biographical information of research participants

The table above indicates that the participants in this study had experiences in the position of circuit manager ranging from 3 years to 9 years. The experience circuit managers had in the position ought to have provided them with an understanding and knowledge about what it means to be circuit managers in their respective circuits. Almost all of the circuit managers who participated in this study had been school principals before they were appointed to positions of circuit managers. The only exception was Skhwelo, who was a Deputy Education Specialist based in the district office. The participants in this study had been in the education system for a very long time, with all them having started as teachers and having progressed to become circuit managers. All circuit managers have a post graduate qualification, the highest being the PhD. This indicates that circuit managers who participated in this study were well educated, as the minimum qualification requirement for this position is a junior degree.

Participants	**Location of schools**	**Number of schools supervised**	**Quintile ranking of schools**	**Fee paying**
Raymond	All in rural	24	1,2 &3	No
Skhakhane	All in rural	27	1,2 & 3	No
Ngubo	All in rural	24	1,2 & 3	No
Ntanzi	Rural/Township	29	3 & 4	No/Yes
Myeza	All in township	25 (23)	3,4, & 5	No/Yes
Skhwelo	Rural/Township	25	1,2, 3 & 4	No/Yes

Table 2: Profile of schools supervised by participants

Table 2 above shows that the majority of circuit managers who participated in this study had schools located in rural areas. Some circuit managers had also schools located in both contexts, rural and township. Ntanzi is the circuit manager that had the highest number of schools supervised, while Myeza was an acting circuit manager in another circuit, thus supervising 25 of her schools and an additional 23. In terms of the quintile ranking, only Myeza had some schools in Quintile 5. It is also noted that only three circuit managers had some schools in Quintile 4. Most schools in these circuit where in Quintiles 1, 2 and 3. The fee-paying status of the schools in circuit also follows the quintile pattern. There seems to be many no fee schools in these circuit compared to fee paying schools.

4.6 Data generation methods

The purpose of a phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by actors in the situation (Lester, 1999). In the human sphere, this normally translates into gathering 'deep' information and perception through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions, and participant observation and in representing it from the perspective of the research participant (Lester, 1999). The researcher in this study employed semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

4.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

Qualitative interviews were aimed at obtaining rich descriptive data that helped me to understand the participants' construction of knowledge and social reality (Nieuwenhuis, 2011). This study used semi-structured interviews as the main data generation method. Interviews are a powerful way to gain insight into education and other social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; 2011; De Vos, 2002; Kvale, 1996; Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Yin, 2009). Research interviews are but one of many types of interviews, all of which assume that the individual's perspective is an important part of the fabric of society and of our joint knowledge of social processes and of human condition (Henning *et al*., 2011). Semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask probing questions so that participants can clarify their views. This method was used in this study because the researcher wanted to tap into the individual circuit manager's perspective about how she or he experiences her or his role of supporting teaching and learning in schools that are in challenging contexts. The key features of the semi-structured interviews are that they are interactive and use a range of probes and techniques to achieve depth in soliciting the answers (Nieuwenhuis, 2011). This allowed me to be able to probe participants so that they can be able to explain how and why.

This phenomenological study used semi-structured interviews, while I am fully aware that the type of interview that is mostly advocated for such study is that of the unstructured, open ended interview (Giorgi, 1997; Seidman, 2006). In this study I adopted the Bevan (2014) model of structured interview within phenomenology. This model draws from the work of Ihde (1971) as cited in Bevan (2014), which suggests that phenomenology must be structural and has no universal method. While making a case for structure in phenomenology interviews, Bevan

(2014) states that it is understandable that there will be those who consider structure and phenomenology as antithetical, but they should not be alarmed because structure does not necessarily tell you what to ask, but rather how to manage the process of questioning. Mason (2002) further adds that even referring to interviews as unstructured provides an inaccurate picture of the process, because even the most unstructured interview had some underlying structure to remain focused on the phenomenon under investigation. It therefore goes without saying that, even in unstructured interviews, there will always be some form of structure.

Seidman (2006) and Mason (2002) warn phenomenological researchers not to use interview guides or schedules, or, they are used, they should be used with caution and flexibility. Accordingly, in this study I used the interview schedule as a guide and it was not followed to the letter, as I noted that some of the issues were already covered in by the preceding responses. Before the data collection began, I phoned participants. During the telephonic conversation, I introduced myself and explained how I got their cellular phone number so as to calm them. I then told them briefly why I phoned and asked to see them so that I can explain myself properly. During the interviews, I took notes of what the participants were saying so as to prepare for probing questions. The digital voice-recorder was used to record all interviews. Using a digital voice-recorder assisted me to be able to listen to interviewees and identify gaps in the information so that they could be explored in a follow-up interview (Nieuwenhuis, 2011). Using a digital voice recorder also assisted in focusing on the interview because I did not have to write everything down. Data generated for each interview was transferred to the computer for transcription and analysis. Voice data was transcribed as soon as possible while everything was still fresh.

Researching the powerful people or upwards come with its own challenges. In education, for example, the powerful could include head teachers, senior teachers, politicians and senior civil servants (Cohen *et al.,* 2010). Circuit managers fall in this category of powerful people as they are senior civil servants who are in charge of many schools in their circuits and they are senior to me as principal. One of the challenges which is associated with researching those of higher status is the issue of access to the participants. In this regard, Fits and Halpin (1994), as cited in Cohen *et al.* (2007), state that gaining access to the site is a challenge because of elites' privileged positions and ability to deflect researchers. This often occurs via gatekeepers (secretaries) who either ignore e-mails or send dismissive e-mails. In this study, the circuit managers that I approached were very willing to participate and tried to accommodate me in

their busy schedule. However, there were some challenges of gatekeeping, for example, when I needed the consent of the district director, as the person who is in charge of the circuit managers. This was exacerbated by the fact that both circuit manager and district director are very busy people. This created difficulties in my ability to keep to my data generation schedule, as it took me longer generate data than I had planned, even though I was mindful of this issue in my data generation plan.

Secondly, Busby (2011) states that participants who are likely to have positions of power and may want to protect them tend to be conscious of the image they want to portray to the outside world of themselves and their organisations, and have means and skills to control the release of information about themselves and their work to you. In dealing with this issue, this study adopted a suggestion made by Busby (2011). I had to build a good rapport, relationship of trust and negotiate the power terrain when gathering information. At the same time, I was critically aware of the information given, the information not given, and the motivation for either.

4.6.2 Document review

This study used interview as the main data generation method. Document review was also used in this study as one of the data generation methods. Documents are a major source of data in qualitative research and can help to uncover meaning, develop understanding and discover insights relevant to the research problem (Merriam, 1998). Reviewing of the documents allowed me to triangulate the data generated from interviews (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, documents exposed information that was not established through the interviews.

I asked the circuit managers for permission to review their document. I made copies of the documents and other circuit managers e-mailed copies of documents. The documents reviewed in this study included school improvement plans, minutes of meetings circuit managers held with school leaders, school, district annual plans, education results, reports on school functionality and circuit managers' itineraries. These documents gave me insight and understanding to effectively answer the research questions. To facilitate generation of data through document analysis, I designed a document review guide (see Annexure G) which made this task easy me to generate information form the documents.

4.7 Data analysis

According to Cohen *et al.* (2011), data analysis is a process that consists of organising, accounting for and explaining the data. McMillan and Schumacher (2011) posit that data analysis is a systematic process of selecting, categorising, synthesising and interpreting data to provide an explanation of the single phenomenon of interest. To explain the single phenomenon of interest in this study, which is about the enactment of circuit managers' support of schools in challenging contexts, this study employed phenomenological data analysis.

To analyse data in this study, Giorgi's (1975) phenomenological data analysis method was used. Several scholars have developed different methods of phenomenological data analysis, such as Giorgi, (1975); Hycner (1985); Van Manen, (1997); Moustakas, (1994) and Cresswell (2013). Giorgi's (1975) phenomenological data analysis method was chosen after carefully studying the different methods of phenomenological data analysis provided by scholars. Giorgi's (1975) phenomenology data analysis method is appropriate for this study because it is flexible and does not require the adherence to certain fixed criteria (Whiting, 2001). Giorgi's (1975) method has four stages, these stages being *reading through the whole protocol to get the sense of the whole, ddetermining the natural 'meaning units' as expressed by the participant, interrogating in terms of the specific purpose of the study* and *tying together into descriptive statement the essential, non-redundant themes.* The section below discusses these stages and how they were followed in this study.

4.7. 1 Stage 1: Reading through the whole protocol to get the sense of the whole

This stage is characterised by reading through the whole protocol to get the sense of the whole (Girgio, 1975). This, according to Hycner (1985), is a crystallisation and condensation of what the participants have said, still using as much as possible the literal words of the participants. Bracketing and phenomenological reductions also emerged during this stage. As indicated in the 4.5 of this chapter I took a contemporary approach to bracketing, as advocated by King (2014), of not separating myself from the study, I however, ensured that I engaged with the words of the participants and did not attempt to interpret the meaning. I read the transcripts and listened to the tape a number of times in order to provide a context for the emergence of specific units of meaning and themes later.

4.7.2 Stage 2: Determining the natural 'meaning units' as expressed by the participant

The first step of the analysis itself at this stage is to try to determine the natural 'meaning units' as expressed by the participant (Giorgi, 1975). This I achieved by reading and re-reading the transcripts and then identifying areas of the interview which highlighted the participants' experiences (units) in relation to the phenomena under investigation (Whiting, 2001). These 'units' were separate entities, which together formed the whole meaning of the experience. I tried to determine if any of the units of relevant meaning naturally cluster together, whether there was a same common theme or essence that unites several units of relevant meaning (Cohen *et al.,* 2011). This allowed me to indicate, in a clear, simple manner, the theme that dominated each unit.

4.7.3 Stage 3: Interrogating in terms of the specific purpose of the study

This stage was to interrogate in terms of the specific purpose of the study (Giorgi, 1975). Therefore, this stage of the analysis involved looking at both the natural units and the central themes (Whiting, 2001) and asking myself what they told me about the circuit managers' role of supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts. Giorgi's (1975) model of phenomenological data analysis does not attribute a term for the final themes generated. As a result, at this point I was able to come up with 'revelatory' themes. Furthermore, I used research questions to guide me and to ensure that I remained focused to the research objectives. During this stage, I was able to reduce the number of themes as a number of same points were arising a number of occasions. As a result, I had themes that related to each of my research questions. These themes I referred to as the main themes.

4.7.4 Stage 4: Tying together into descriptive statements the essential, non-redundant themes

This stage demanded that, once themes have been enumerated, an attempt is made to tie together into a descriptive statement the essential, non-redundant themes (Giorgi, 1975). Giorgi (1975) suggests that this is conducted by formulating a description of each theme in relation to the specifics of the research situation. Again, this process was guided by the research questions. This allowed me to further refine my themes and to develop sub-themes. Sub-themes assisted me to describe the phenomenon under study clearly and in a precise manner. The themes that emerged from the analysis provided insight (Whiting, 2001) into the circuit managers' role of supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts. After completing this stage of

analysis, it was easy to examine each theme that was generated in relation to relevant literature and illustrating it with participants' quotes.

4.8 Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative research generally is often questioned by positivists, perhaps because their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way as in naturalistic work (Shenton, 2003). Guba and Lincoln (1985) came up with a model that can be used to ensure research rigour in qualitative research like this one. This study used Guba and Lincoln's (1985) model, based on the four concepts of credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability, to ensure trustworthiness of the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985), Marrow (2005) and Shenton (2003) coincide on the view that, in qualitative studies like this one, concepts like credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are preferred in ensuring trustworthiness and rigour instead of validity and reliability, the concepts used in quantitative studies.

4.8.1 Credibility

Credibility is defined as confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings (Marrow 2005). Credibility deals with how congruent the findings with the reality are (Meriam, 2002). Different strategies to ensure the credibility of the findings have been suggested by different scholars. These include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, member check, thick rich description (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Guba & Lincoln 1985) triangulation of data generation strategies, random sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marrow, 2005).

In ensuring credibility of the research findings in this study, I first adopted a thick, rich description strategy. Thick, rich description, according to Creswell and Miller (2000), is a process whereby the researcher describes the setting, the participants and the themes of the qualitative study in rich detail. This was done, first, by describing the participants' professional details in terms of qualification, years of experience in the education system and as circuit manager (see Table 1). I provided details about the work environment of each circuit manager in terms of schools being supervised and the conditions they work under. This has been done by providing profiles of schools these circuit managers (see Table 2).

Secondly, the researcher ensured credibility of this study by using a peer debriefing strategy. Peer debriefing (Creswell & Miller, 2000) or peer scrutiny of the research report (Shenton, 2004), entails the review of the data and research process by someone who is familiar with the research process or a phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this regard, the researcher asked one person who was familiar with the research process and phenomenon to evaluate the data and the research process. Finally, in ensuring credibility, this study used a triangulation strategy. This study triangulated data generation methods since it uses semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

4.8.2 Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the result of the research can be applied in similar contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Merriman, 1985; Maxwell, 1992). Rule and John (2011) state that transferability has emerged as an alternative to what the positivists refer to as generalisability or external validity of a study. Guba and Lincoln (1985) add that the researcher can ensure transferability by providing the thick descriptions necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether the transfer can be contemplated as a possibility. Firestone (1993) posits that it is incumbent upon the researcher to ensure that enough contextual information about the fieldwork sites is provided to enable the reader to make such a transfer. In an attempt to attain transferability in this study, a detailed description of the research design, participants, methods of collecting data and the contexts under which the study took place has been done in this chapter. This was not done with the intention of generalising the study, though readers may exercise their judgement in deciding the extent to which the findings can be applied in other contexts.

4.8.3 Confirmability

Confirmability entails steps to ensure that, as far as possible, the work's findings are the results of experiences and ideas of informants rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researchers (Shenton, 2004). This view is further echoed by Tobin and Begley (2004) when they argue that confirmability is about confirming that the data is not from the researcher's imagination, but rather from the respondents' evidence. Trochim (2006) argues that ensuring confirmability should entail the researcher's own admission of his or her pre-disposition and the belief underpinning the decisions made. Merriam (1998) argues that one of the ways of reducing researcher bias is clarifying the researcher's assumption, views and theoretical

orientation before starting the research. Accordingly, to ensure confirmability of this work's findings, my assumptions and theoretical views underpinning the study have been declared.

4.8.4 Dependability

Lastly, in order to ensure dependability, Guba & Lincoln (1985) argue that processes within the study should be reported in detail so that future researchers who want to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results, are able to do so. To comply with this requirement, I have provided a detailed description of the research design underpinning the study, the methods used to gather data, their effect and the reasons for choosing them.

4.9 Ethical considerations

Nieuwenhuis (2011) states that an essential ethical aspect is the issue of the confidentiality of the result and findings of the study and that of the protection of participants. This include obtaining letters of consent, obtaining permission to interview undertaking to destroy audiotape and so on (Nieuwenhuis, 2011). Accordingly, several actions to address ethical considerations were made in this study.

First, I wrote to the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education requesting permission to conduct research in circuit offices under its jurisdiction. As part of my application for the permission to do research from KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, I attached information about the nature of the research I intended doing. Permission was granted early and this helped me apply for ethical clearance from the university. I then applied to the University of KwaZulu-Natal for ethical clearance to conduct a study. I signed and undertook to comply with the University's Code of Conduct for Research. I also wrote to district offices who are *gate-keepers* of the circuit manager I sought to work with as part of my application for my university ethical clearance and this was granted.

According to Yates (2004), informed consent means that people must consent in an unconstrained way to being researched, making their decisions on the basis of comprehensive and accurate information about it. Henning *et al.* (2004) further add that participants must be fully informed about the research for which the interview is going to be used. Participants were given a written statement that explained all the aspects of a study. Furthermore, all participants who agreed to participate in the study were informed that they their participation was voluntary and had a right to withdraw from the study at any time when they felt so.

The use of research interviews can result in ethical dilemmas. One such dilemma could be that the participants may not be comfortable to give particular information, fearing that such information may be used in a manner that will prejudice them, hence the participants must be assured that the interviewer will not reveal their identities (Crawford, 1997). When participating in a study, participants need to know that their privacy, sensitivity and anonymity will be guaranteed. In this study participants were informed that pseudonyms for circuit and circuit managers would be used when the report is written. The findings were available to them on request. To ensure confidentiality during public presentation, conference presentations and publication, no names of participants were disclosed.

4.10 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed and presented the research design and methodology that has been used in this study. It started by presenting the research paradigm and the research approach. I discussed and justified the use of the phenomenology research design in this study. I further explained how sampling was done and the type of interviews that were used and why. This chapter concluded by discussing trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 5
SUPPORTING TEACHING AND LEARNING: THE ROLE OF CIRCUIT MANAGERS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning in the schools in challenging contexts. It sought to understand the contextual realities that inform the manner in which circuit managers discharge their responsibilities from their own perspective. In the previous chapter, I provided a detailed discussion of the research design and methodology used in this study. This chapter presents the data generated from interviews with circuit managers and from the review of documents kept in their offices, to examine their role in supporting teaching and learning in schools. This chapter responds to the first question of this study which is: '*What role do circuit managers play in supporting teaching and learning in schools that are located in challenging contexts?'*

In discussing the data presented in this chapter, I use Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick's (2008) traditional model of data presentation. According to Burnard *et al.* (2008), there are two main approaches to writing up the findings of qualitative research. The first is to report key findings under each main theme, using appropriate verbatim quotes to illustrate those findings. This is then accompanied by a linking, separate discussion chapter in which the findings are discussed in relation to existing research. These scholars refer to this as the traditional approach. The second approach is to incorporate the discussion into the findings within one chapter. The traditional approach is adopted here; this chapter and the following chapter (Chapter 6) present data. The discussion in Chapter 7 integrates literature and the theoretical framework underpinning this study, to make deeper meaning from the issues emerging from the field.

Furthermore, through phenomenology data analysis, eight themes emerged that explained what circuit managers were doing to support teaching and learning in their circuits. These themes are (a) Curriculum delivery monitoring and support (b) Planning and provision of curriculum management tools (c) Delivery and facilitating provision of professional development (d) Training of School Governing Body Members (e) Learner leadership development, motivation and support (f) Having a vision mission and collaborative goal setting (g) Collaborating with

different stakeholders (h) Facilitating provision of human and physical resources. The section below provides a detailed discussion of each of the eight themes.

5.2 Curriculum delivery monitoring and support

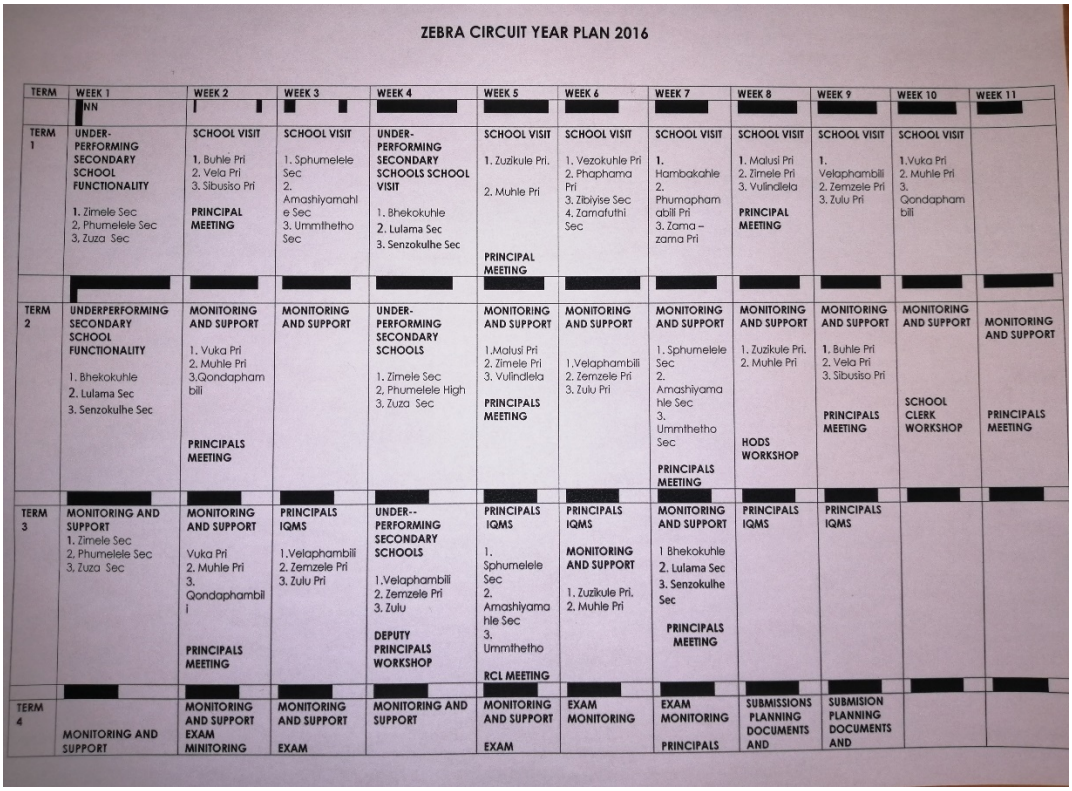
The data generated through interviews and reviewing of documents reflect that one of the roles circuit managers played to support teaching and learning in their schools is curriculum delivery monitoring and support. Each of the six circuit managers viewed curriculum delivery as very important because teaching and learning is the core business of the school and thus supporting its delivery was seen a special role. This data suggestion is supported by views shared by one circuit manager, Raymond, who, when asked about the role he played in supporting teaching and learning in his schools, highlighted the promotion and close monitoring of the curriculum as one of the things that he had started to do:

> *I have now moved to promotion and monitoring of the curriculum closely.*

When the same question was posed to Myeza, she shared similar views to those of Raymond, and explained that she tried to monitor curriculum delivery in all her schools at least once a term. This is how she put it:

> *I try to try visit each school at least once a term to monitor curriculum delivery*.

The utterances made by circuit managers above were also corroborated by document analysis. Myeza's year planner (Figure 2, below) indicated that Myeza used the second term and the third term to monitor and support schools and the first week of every term for school functionality, focusing on underperforming secondary schools. This has been re-word processed and pseudonyms for schools and circuits used to ensure anonymity



ZEBRA CIRCUIT YEAR PLAN 2016

TERM	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6	WEEK 7	WEEK 8	WEEK 9	WEEK 10	WEEK 11
	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
TERM 1	UNDER-PERFORMING SECONDARY SCHOOL FUNCTIONALITY 1. Zimele Sec 2. Phumelele Sec 3. Zuza Sec	SCHOOL VISIT 1. Buhle Pri 2. Vela Pri 3. Sibusiso Pri PRINCIPAL MEETING	SCHOOL VISIT 1. Sphumelele Sec 2. Amashiyamahle Sec 3. Ummthetho Sec	UNDER-PERFORMING SECONDARY SCHOOLS SCHOOL VISIT 1. Bhekokuhle 2. Lulama Sec 3. Senzokulhe Sec	SCHOOL VISIT 1. Zuzikule Pri. 2. Muhle Pri PRINCIPAL MEETING	SCHOOL VISIT 1. Vezokuhle Pri 2. Phaphama Pri 3. Zibiyise Sec 4. Zamafuthi Sec	SCHOOL VISIT 1. Hambakahle 2. Phumapham abili Pri 3. Zama – zama Pri	SCHOOL VISIT 1. Malusi Pri 2. Zimele Pri 3. Vulindlela PRINCIPAL MEETING	SCHOOL VISIT 1. Velaphambili 2. Zemzele Pri 3. Zulu Pri	SCHOOL VISIT 1.Vuka Pri 2. Muhle Pri 3. Qondapham bili	
	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
TERM 2	UNDERPERFORMING SECONDARY SCHOOL FUNCTIONALITY 1. Bhekokuhle 2. Lulama Sec 3. Senzokulhe Sec	MONITORING AND SUPPORT 1. Vuka Pri 2. Muhle Pri 3.Qondapham bili PRINCIPALS MEETING	MONITORING AND SUPPORT	UNDER-PERFORMING SECONDARY SCHOOLS 1. Zimele Sec 2, Phumelele High 3. Zuza Sec	MONITORING AND SUPPORT 1.Malusi Pri 2. Zimele Pri 3. Vulindlela PRINCIPALS MEETING	MONITORING AND SUPPORT 1.Velaphambili 2. Zemzele Pri 3. Zulu Pri	MONITORING AND SUPPORT 1. Sphumelele Sec 2. Amashiyama hle Sec 3. Ummthetho Sec PRINCIPALS MEETING	MONITORING AND SUPPORT 1. Zuzikule Pri. 2. Muhle Pri HODS WORKSHOP	MONITORING AND SUPPORT 1. Buhle Pri 2. Vela Pri 3. Sibusiso Pri PRINCIPALS MEETING	MONITORING AND SUPPORT SCHOOL CLERK WORKSHOP	MONITORING AND SUPPORT PRINCIPALS MEETING
	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
TERM 3	MONITORING AND SUPPORT 1. Zimele Sec 2. Phumelele Sec 3. Zuza Sec	MONITORING AND SUPPORT Vuka Pri 2. Muhle Pri 3. Qondaphambili PRINCIPALS MEETING	PRINCIPALS IQMS 1.Velaphambili 2. Zemzele Pri 3. Zulu Pri	UNDER-PERFORMING SECONDARY SCHOOLS 1.Velaphambili 2. Zemzele Pri 3. Zulu DEPUTY PRINCIPALS WORKSHOP	PRINCIPALS IQMS 1. Sphumelele Sec 2. Amashiyama hle Sec 3. Ummthetho RCL MEETING	PRINCIPALS IQMS MONITORING AND SUPPORT 1. Zuzikule Pri. 2. Muhle Pri	MONITORING AND SUPPORT 1 Bhekokuhle 2. Lulama Sec 3. Senzokulhe Sec PRINCIPALS MEETING	PRINCIPALS IQMS	PRINCIPALS IQMS		
	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
TERM 4	MONITORING AND SUPPORT	MONITORING AND SUPPORT EXAM MINITORING	MONITORING AND SUPPORT EXAM	MONITORING AND SUPPORT	MONITORING AND SUPPORT EXAM	EXAM MONITORING	EXAM MONITORING PRINCIPALS	SUBMISSIONS PLANNING DOCUMENTS AND	SUBMISION PLANNING DOCUMENTS AND		

Figure 2: Extract of Myeza's year plan

It further emerged that circuit managers undertake curriculum delivery monitoring so that they can be able to establish the kind of support the schools need**.** Once they have done the curriculum delivery monitoring processes, it becomes easy for them to design appropriate teaching and learning support, based on the needs identified. Therefore, whatever support they give to school is determined by the schools' needs. This view was shared by all the circuit managers; Ntanzi in particular indicated that the support he gave to schools was informed by the needs that exist in that school. This is how he put it:

> *We give support to the schools in terms of curriculum needs of the school.*

While echoing the views articulated above, Skhakhane stated that the curriculum support that he provided to his school was informed by necessity and went further to explain that he helped school principals with curriculum management strategies:

> *As a circuit manager, I ensure that I provide necessary support to school curriculum delivery. I also help principals with curriculum monitoring strategies given so many things they have to do.*

When circuit managers were asked about the manner in which they monitored and supported curriculum delivery, it was noted that all the circuit managers monitor and support curriculum delivery by checking if teachers in their schools have Annual Teaching Plans (ATP). Curriculum coverage is monitored by school principals and their School Management Teams (SMTs). Amongst the things she does to monitor and support curriculum delivery, Skhwelo named checking if her schools' teachers have ATPs, checking of teachers' files, learners' books, and whether schools order textbooks in compliance with the norms and standards and have plans to ensure that these books are used well. This is how she illustrated her role in this regard:

> *I check the teachers' annual teaching plans... I also ask and check teachers' files and learners' books and see if they kept well. I also look at school textbooks requisitions as per department allocation for norms and standards. I want to see if the school has a retrieval policy for textbook issued to learners and try to assist.*

Ngubo also numerated documents they want, some similar to those named by Skhwelo above. He also mentioned minutes of different meetings, time-book, financial records, LTSM and general administration of the school records:

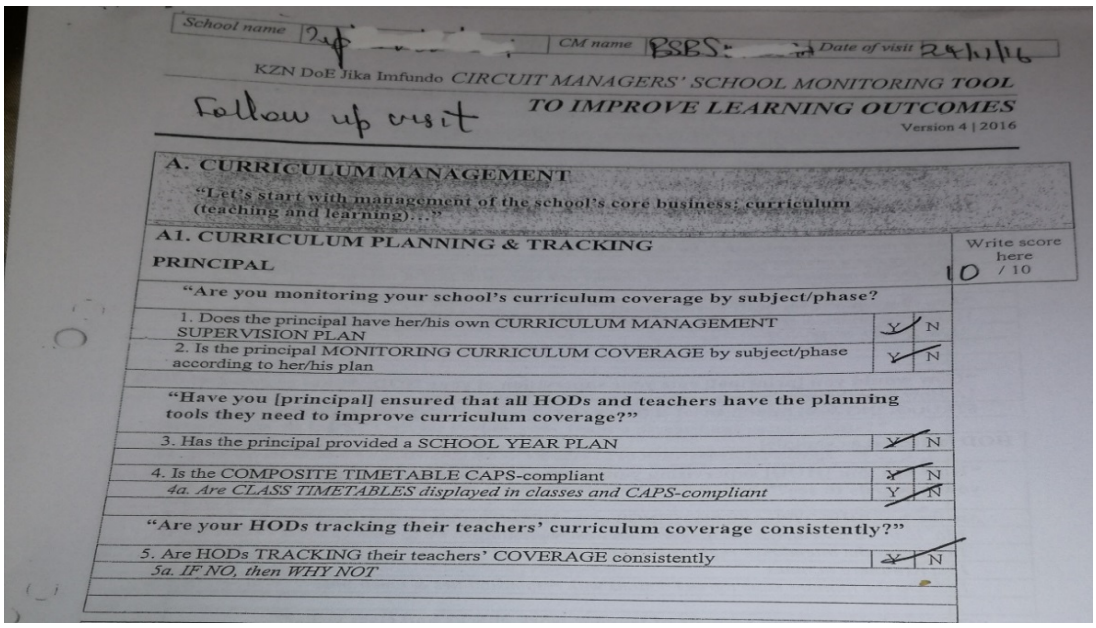
> *I visit schools and monitor curriculum delivery by checking if teacher have ATP, Assessment Plan, enough textbooks for the learners, financial records, minutes of SMT, Staff, SGB, and committee meetings, time-book, general administration records of the school. After checking I then provide guidance where necessary and also help principals with planning and curriculum monitoring strategies.*

Ntanzi's explanation about her school visit showed that he focused on the work done in the classroom. He named checking of the principal's and HOD's management file, ATPs, assessment issues, CAPS compliant time-tables, lesson planning records of teachers' and learners' written work as well looking at issues of school management and administration with the SMT.

> *Principals and HoDs just check their curriculum planning and tracking work. They give me their curriculum management file. By looking at the copies of reports the HODs wrote after checking teachers file. I can see*

what is happening with the Annual Teaching Plans, assessments issues, CAPS compliant time-table lesson planning, learners written work. I can also ask for teacher' files and learners books just to compare with the HODs report, tracking curriculum coverage. I also look at school management and administration issues with the SMT.

Utterances made by circuit managers were also corroborated by the extract of Ntanzi's document, called Circuit managers' Monitoring Tool below (Figure 3). This asks for information on principals planning and tracking. Under this topic it seeks information about the principal's curriculum management plan, whether the principal is monitoring curriculum coverage by subject/phase according to his/her plan and whether the principal ensured that the HODs are tracking the curriculum.


School name [redacted] CM name BSBS: [redacted] Date of visit 24/11/16

KZN DoE Jika Imfundo CIRCUIT MANAGERS' SCHOOL MONITORING TOOL TO IMPROVE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Follow up visit

Version 4 | 2016

A. CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT

"Let's start with management of the school's core business: curriculum (teaching and learning)…"

A1. CURRICULUM PLANNING & TRACKING

PRINCIPAL

Write score here 10 / 10

"Are you monitoring your school's curriculum coverage by subject/phase?

1. Does the principal have her/his own CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT SUPERVISION PLAN	Y	N
2. Is the principal MONITORING CURRICULUM COVERAGE by subject/phase according to her/his plan	Y	N

"Have you [principal] ensured that all HODs and teachers have the planning tools they need to improve curriculum coverage?"

3. Has the principal provided a SCHOOL YEAR PLAN	Y	N
4. Is the COMPOSITE TIMETABLE CAPS-compliant	Y	N
4a. Are CLASS TIMETABLES displayed in classes and CAPS-compliant	Y	N

"Are your HODs tracking their teachers' curriculum coverage consistently?"

5. Are HODs TRACKING their teachers' COVERAGE consistently	Y	N
5a. IF NO, then WHY NOT		

Figure 3: Extract from Ntanzi's Circuit managers Monitoring Tool to Improve Learning Outcomes

Furthermore, Skhwelo illustrated that her monitoring and supporting of curriculum delivery by schools was influenced by how well the school was doing. She indicated that, for example, she had established through her school visits that some principals do not check teachers' work and some do it for the sake of doing it. In such instances she explained that she made sure that she kept an eye on that school and the principal by visiting it now and then

In some schools I when I visit them I find that principals are not checking the teachers' work, some do it for the sake of saying they did it, but you

see that they did not do it properly, so I keep an open eye in those principals that aren't doing things thoroughly by visiting them every now and again until I are satisfied with their progress

Ngubo also added that he may not have expertise in some subjects such as Mathematics and Physical Sciences since he has not studied these. When he encountered problems that require technical expertise in these subjects, he referred them to subject advisers for providing support. Ngubo explains:

I also refer some issues that emerged during curriculum monitoring and support which I do not have expertise like Mathematics and Physical Science to subject advisers. I tell them that I have a school that needs help in this and that. They go there and assist the school.

It was evident from the responses of circuit managers that they undertook curriculum delivery and support in their schools. It also came up that circuit managers' interventions aimed at supporting curriculum delivery are informed by the issues that they find when visiting schools. In cases where they cannot provide support, like in a case where they lack expertise in a subject, they communicate with subject advisors who are to provide subject-specific support.

5.3 Planning and provision of curriculum management tools

Planning and provision of curriculum management tools emerged as one of the roles circuit managers play to support teaching and learning in schools. Firstly, there is evidence from the data that circuit managers worked very hard to ensure that schools plan and that such planning covered all the areas of school management. The aim of this planning, as suggested by the views of participants, is to ensure that when the new academic year begins, schools are ready to start smoothly especially with their curriculum programme. The assumption here is that if schools are able to plan well and prepare themselves, they stand a better chance of succeeding and providing effective teaching and learning. Raymond indicated that in his circuit he spent a lot of time planning with his principals for the coming year. The planning they did is very detailed, according to Raymond. It started from year planners to outlining what will be done from the first day of school year, how and by whom. This is what he said:

I take it upon myself to ensure that first of all, my schools have planned very well. This month, we spent the whole month planning and preparing

for the following year, and we do everything from the year planner to the agenda for day one of school re-opening. We put in place the items that are going to be addressed to learners on the day they arrive: who is in charge on that, class lists time-tables, duty loads, and every element of the school management is covered.

Skhwelo also concurred with the views shared by Raymond above by indicating that she talked a lot about planning in her principals' meetings. She indicated that the emphasis on planning for the following year is aimed at ensuring that teaching happened on the first day of the schooling year. It is for this reason that he wanted her school principals to submit planning documents for the coming year. She explained:

In my principals' meetings I talk a lot about planning I help them with planning for the coming year. I want teaching to happen on the first day for this to happen schools must be ready. Therefore, we agree with all the principals must submit documents that are part of their planning for the coming year.

Similar views were shared by Skhakhane, talking about the planning that occurred in his circuit, when he explained that the planning documents he wanted from schools included things like timetable, duty roster, subject duty loads, school development:

I ask them to submit all the planning before the beginning of each academic year. This include things like timetables, duty roster, subject duty loads, school development plan.

Another circuit manager, Myeza added her voice, stating that in her circuit each principal is expected to submit planning documents. According to Myeza, these documents helped her to establish if the school is ready for the start of new academic year:

...towards the end of the year my principal meetings focus on planning. The principal is expected to sit down with his or SMT and develop documents that relate to how is school going to do certain things. Each principal must eventually be able to submit Learner Admission Records, Stationery and Textbooks Delivery Reports, Year Plan Educator, Time tables Duty Loads School Improvement Plan (*SIP). These document helps*

me to understand how ready the school will become the beginning of the year.

Views shared by Myeza above were also corroborated by the agenda of the meeting held in November (Figure 4, below). The agenda of the meeting corroborated that, towards the end of the year, this circuit manager focused on planning as this is the agenda of the meeting that took place in November. Secondly, issues the circuit manager raised as part of the planning aimed at ensuring the smooth start of a new year were part of the agenda of the meeting. For example, stationery and textbooks delivery reports featured on the agenda, as teaching and learning cannot start without stationery and textbooks. The circuit manager also discussed staffing matters, which entailed the renewal of contracts and educator duty loads, year planner admission records, School Improvement Plans (SIP), Staff Development Plan, Educator, Performance Management which include Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) and Personal Growth Plan.

8.3. LTSM: Stationery/ Textbooks delivery reports and plans
8.4 Finances
8.4.1 SGB Budget Meetings (AFS)
8.4.2 Staffing Matters; Renewal of contracts and educator duty loads
8.4.3 Contestations
8.5. Performance Management: IQMS Scores; PGPs, SIPs, Staff Development Plan
8.6. Admissions Records
8.7. Year Planner
8.9. Submission of all outstanding documents – School Profiles, etc.
8. Professional Development: Circuit Retirees; Year End: Lunch
9. Closure:

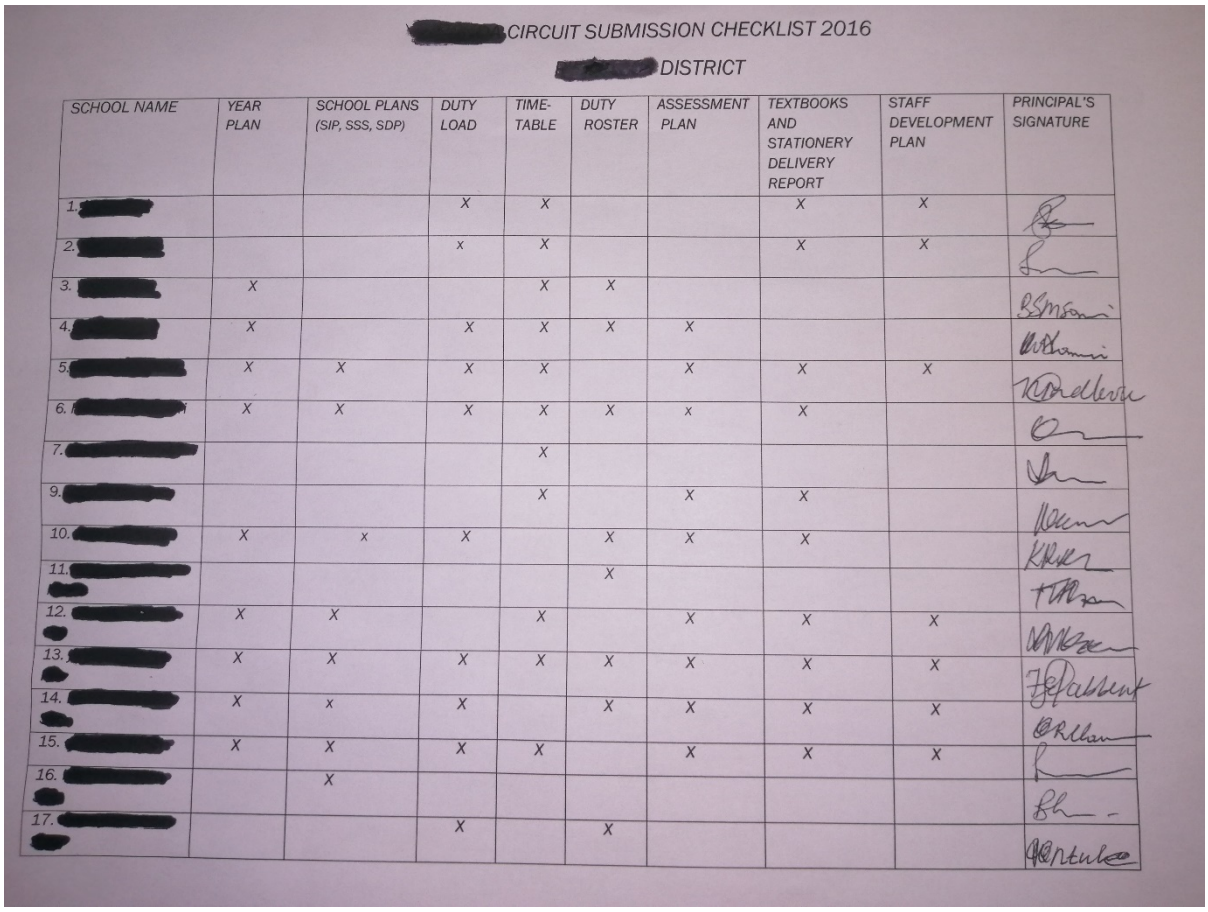
Thank you,
Duly Signed
Yours in Education
SP Myeza

Figure 4: Extract from Myeza's principals' meeting agenda

Furthermore, it emerged from the utterances made by Skhwelo that circuit managers took planning very seriously. Skhwelo indicated that she compiled a check-list for schools that sets out all the items that need to be submitted. Over and above that she designed her own with all the schools in her circuit and all the submissions the school has done and those that are still pending.

We compile a check-list of things I want them to submit to me before the beginning of the year. I also develop my own with school's names and the list of items schools must submit this help me to easily know which school has not submitted what. Among the things I want to see are Year Plan, ATP Reports Assessment Programme, Educator Duty Load, Duty Rosters, School Improvement Plan.

Below is the submission tool (Figure 5) developed by Skhwelo to track submission of planning documents. It named all the documents the school needed to submit. Once they have been submitted, there is a cross indicating the document submitted. It also clear from the table that there are schools that are struggling with submission of this document despite the amount of time the circuit spent on planning. The table also indicates that many schools submit critical documents that relate to day-day running of the teaching and learning like duty load allocation and time-tables.



[redacted] CIRCUIT SUBMISSION CHECKLIST 2016

[redacted] DISTRICT

SCHOOL NAME	YEAR PLAN	SCHOOL PLANS (SIP, SSS, SDP)	DUTY LOAD	TIME-TABLE	DUTY ROSTER	ASSESSMENT PLAN	TEXTBOOKS AND STATIONERY DELIVERY REPORT	STAFF DEVELOPMENT PLAN	PRINCIPAL'S SIGNATURE
1. [redacted]			X	X			X	X	
2. [redacted]			x	X			X	X	
3. [redacted]	X			X	X				
4. [redacted]	X		X	X	X	X			
5. [redacted]	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
6. [redacted]	X	X	X	X	X	x	X		
7. [redacted]				X					
9. [redacted]				X		X	X		
10. [redacted]	X	x	X		X	X	X		
11. [redacted]					X				
12. [redacted]	X	X		X		X	X	X	
13. [redacted]	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
14. [redacted]	X	x	X		X	X	X	X	
15. [redacted]	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
16. [redacted]		X							
17. [redacted]			X		X				

Figure 5: Extract from Skhwelo submission checklist

In addition to detailed planning as discussed above, the data suggests that circuit managers provided curriculum planning and management tools. Skhakhane mentioned that, given that some of the schools do not have electricity and using computers and photocopiers is not possible, he therefore took it upon himself to help these schools with curriculum planning and management tools. Skhakhane went on to explain that he encouraged schools to design their own tools and he helped them with computer processing and duplication. In cases where schools cannot design their own tools, he helped them design or provided them with the tools designed by themselves or by subject advisers. Skhakhane explained:

> *Because of the lack of infrastructure, some of the schools do not have electricity and therefore cannot use computers. They can't even design tools to plan and monitor work. Sometimes we make copies of the ones designed by subject advisors and give them to schools*

Raymond also echoed views shared by Skhakhane above. He was very proud of the planning he did with his principals. He highlighted that after a month long planning, his principals leave with a thick flip file containing all the tools they need to plan, monitor and manage the curriculum:

> *They leave me at the end of the month with a thick flip file with sleeves inside with all the tools that they need to plan, monitor and manage curriculum delivery from the index, the organogram, to the end. Those that have challenges with photocopying I arrange more copies for them. That's is what we I am very strong on.*

Data has also shown that planning and the curriculum management tools help teachers with systems to present their work. Raymond indicated that the tools made it easy for him during school visits to establish the effectiveness of curriculum management in the school by asking for the HODs to provide curriculum management files which contained different tools used to manage the curriculum, such as samples of teachers' files and learners' books to corroborate what is in the HODs' file. This file will give him an indication of the work that is being done at the school.

> *When schools are using curriculum management tools it became easy for me as circuit manager to establish quality of curriculum delivery at the*

school. Even for the principal it is easy to follow-up as they have information at their disposal.

Circuit managers value the curriculum planning and management tools because they provide evidence about the kind of work that is done in the school. When circuit managers visit schools for curriculum delivery monitoring and supporting purposes, they are able to have documents that give them an indication about the school curriculum delivery.

5.4 Facilitation and delivery of professional development activities

Facilitation and delivery of professional development activities to school principals, teachers and administration clerks by circuit managers have been found to be another role played by circuit managers to support teaching and learning. While circuit managers are mandated to work directly with school principals and are accordingly responsible for their professional development, circuit managers provide professional development to teachers and non-teaching staff. This section focuses on the professional development circuit managers deliver to school principal, teachers and the administration clerks.

5.4.1 Providing coaching, mentoring, motivation and workshops to different school staff categories

One of the methods some circuit managers used to support principals' leadership is coaching and motivation. When visiting schools, they spend a lot of time coaching principals about best management practices. Skhwelo explained that during her school visits she set aside time to talk to the principals after she had done her monitoring work. She used this time to coach the principals, share her experiences and also to motivate them. Also, during the conversation with the principals, she is able to identify more issues that may need to be attended to at a later stage and through another intervention.

I discuss what I have found and try to coach him or her. Whenever I find time, I do coach and motivate my principals, share my experiences with them. I also identify issues that will need continuous development at a later stage during these conversations.

Ntanzi concurred with the experiences shared by Skhwelo above by describing her approaches of developing his principals. He explained that, based on knowledge of his principals and the

information he gathered during normal scheduled school visits, he is able to establish which principals were doing well and those that needed his coaching and guidance. He then paid more visits to these principals so that he is able to coach and guide them.

> *What I am trying to say is that as a circuit manager I understand my principals you will find that some school principals when I visit the school and I say okay its fine let me leave this person she or he is fine. In some principals I find that should increase the frequency of my visits and I need to spend more time coaching and guiding this person,*

Another view was added by Raymond, who suggested that, given his busy schedule and the high number of principals he supervised, he cannot have a one on one meeting with them as much as he wants. He therefore used mentoring, whereby he allocated an experienced principal to mentor the less experienced. He had found this to be helping the less experienced principals develop leadership skills from the knowledge and experiences of long serving principals who have demonstrated good leadership abilities.

> *I use mentorship to develop good school leadership. I like to pair some of better experienced principals with less experienced as their mentors*

It emerged from the data that all circuit managers who were participating in this study used the principals' meeting to develop their school principals. Ngubo elaborated that he held monthly principals' meetings. In these meetings he always tried to find time to develop his principals on governance and on leadership in general.

> *I hold monthly meeting with school principals in particular. Among the issues we discuss are governance issues. Our meetings a long I therefore try to have time to develop school principal on how to deal with many issues including dealing with parents and I develop them on leadership in general.*

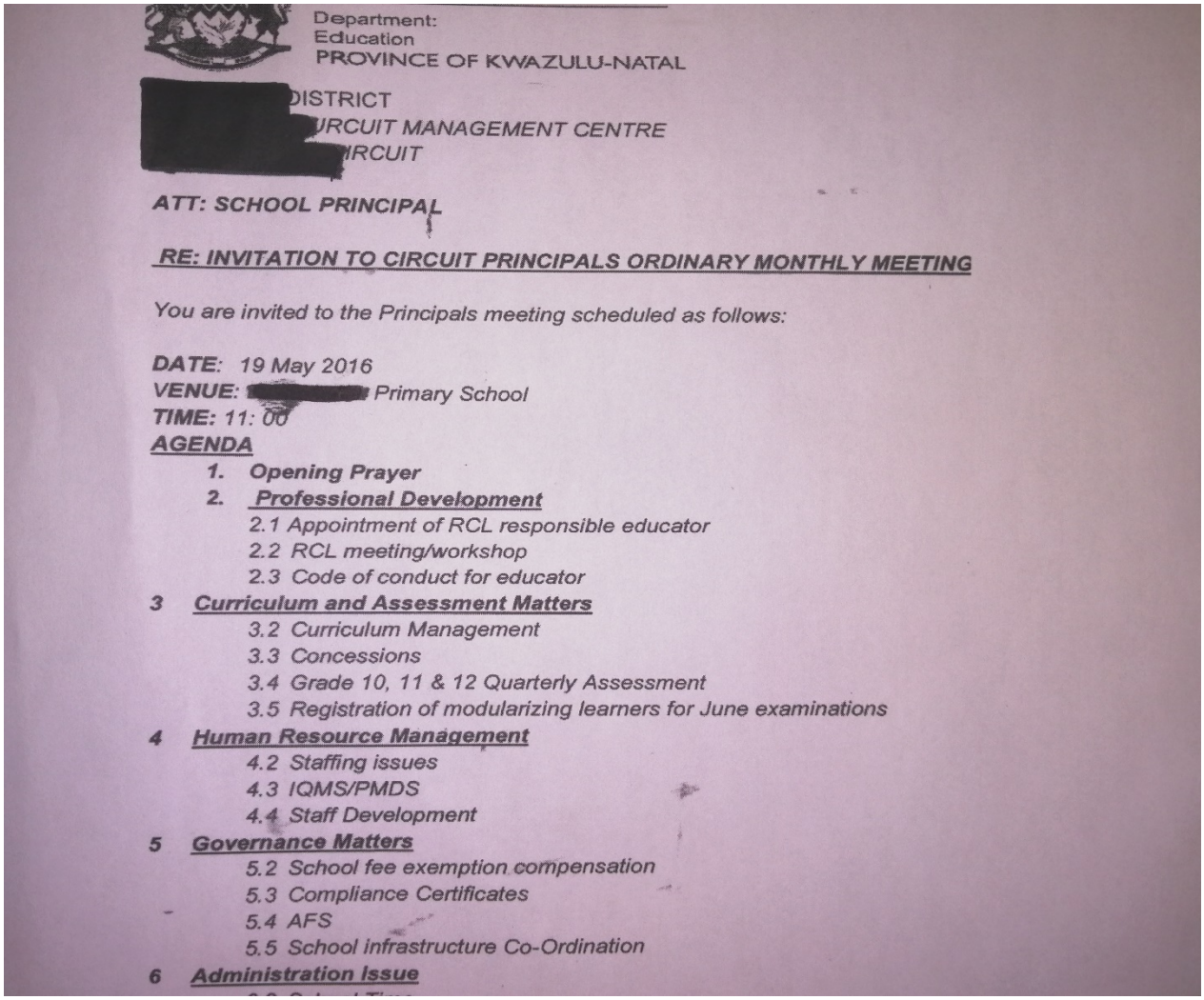
Another circuit manager, Raymond, commenting on the issue of using principal meetings to develop school principals, explained that during his principals' meeting he set aside a large percentage of the meeting time and dedicated it to professional development. He chooses topics that principals need development on. He then prepares and delivers a power point presentation. Raymond explained:

> *I leave in my meeting a big chunk of my meeting* (*time) for leadership and development workshop. I take a topic like I'll talk about being an agent of change, I'll do a power-point presentation to give them real life examples of what is the meaning of an agent of change and then create a discussion and then once they understand it you'll hear them talking about what they are doing and not doing.*

When Skhakhane was asked about who set the agenda of his principals meeting and what is discussed in these meetings, he was proud to indicate that he as the circuit manager set the agenda about what will be discussed in the meetings. He went further and highlighted that in his meeting agenda he had standing items. Among the standing items was the professional development of principals. In these meetings he also has a prerogative to invite someone to develop principals.

> *I set the agenda, I set the agenda as circuit manager. I have standing items which includes things like curriculum issues, infrastructure, personnel, and professional development. Most of the time there is someone I bring to develop principals.*

The views shared by circuit managers above were further corroborated by the analysis of documents they use. The schedule of their meetings indicated that circuit held monthly principals' meetings. The agenda of their meeting also shed light on issues discussed in these meetings**.** Figure 6 below sets out an agenda of the principals' meeting held by Skhakhane. From the agenda below, it is clear that there are four main items: professional development, curriculum management matters, human resource management matters, governance matters and administration. In this meeting, curriculum tracking was part of the professional development. This pattern of having certain main items was also found across the agendas of all circuit managers' meetings, and professional development was always featured.



Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

[redacted] DISTRICT
URCUIT MANAGEMENT CENTRE
IRCUIT

ATT: SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

RE: INVITATION TO CIRCUIT PRINCIPALS ORDINARY MONTHLY MEETING

You are invited to the Principals meeting scheduled as follows:

DATE: 19 May 2016
VENUE: [redacted] Primary School
TIME: 11: 00
AGENDA

1. **Opening Prayer**
2. **Professional Development**
   - 2.1 Appointment of RCL responsible educator
   - 2.2 RCL meeting/workshop
   - 2.3 Code of conduct for educator
3. **Curriculum and Assessment Matters**
   - 3.2 Curriculum Management
   - 3.3 Concessions
   - 3.4 Grade 10, 11 & 12 Quarterly Assessment
   - 3.5 Registration of modularizing learners for June examinations
4. **Human Resource Management**
   - 4.2 Staffing issues
   - 4.3 IQMS/PMDS
   - 4.4 Staff Development
5. **Governance Matters**
   - 5.2 School fee exemption compensation
   - 5.3 Compliance Certificates
   - 5.4 AFS
   - 5.5 School infrastructure Co-Ordination
6. **Administration Issue**

Figure 6: Extract from Skhakhane's circuit monthly principals meeting agenda

Despite all circuit managers in this study speaking with one voice about using staff development to develop school principals, one circuit manager, Skhakhane, shared his dissatisfaction about the time he is able to use for staff development in his meetings. He highlighted that while he had tried to develop his principals during principals' meetings, he however felt that it was not enough. He felt that more was needed to deal with the leadership challenges facing school principals in his circuit.

> *I do not want to defend that area, that area is very weak. As a circuit manager my role is also to develop principals' leadership, but I have little time to do it. That area is very weak because we hardly focus on leadership that support teaching and learning in our principals' meetings. We talk about burning issues like new circulars, we talk about appointments for a long time, now that the Department has no money it*

> *is not going to appoint new teachers, they want to appoint teachers who are surplus so that if there is vacancy for example if there is person who is going to accouchement leave we should look for the teacher who has been declared surplus from the pool who is placed in another school...*

Drawing from the foregoing discussion it is clear that circuit managers work closely with their principal in their attempts to develop them. It is also evident that coaching and mentoring workshops are presented during principals' meeting and that school visits are commonly used by circuit managers to develop their school principals.

Another staff component that circuit manager provide development to is that of teachers. Data generated from interviews indicates that, while circuit managers are mandated to work directly with school principals, they also work directly with teachers. Circuit managers provide workshops for their teachers. Some of the contextual challenges that exist in some of these circuits' schools include lack of subject content knowledge among educators, learner ill-discipline and multi-grading. Multi-grade teaching at a school is the practice of grouping together pupils of several grades in the same classroom, due to the limited number of pupils in each grade (UNESCO, 1989) (this is discussed in detail in Chapter 6). Circuit managers who have schools that are multi-grading provide workshops focusing on how to teach multi-grade classrooms. Skhwelo confirmed that she organised and delivered workshops to teachers about content knowledge, multi grading, discipline and other issues that she saw the need for.

> *I conduct workshops to teachers about improving content knowledge, multi grading classroom, discipline and in many other issues.*

Furthermore, whilst Skhwelo had taken upon herself to work directly with teachers through presenting workshops, she also facilitated and coordinated workshops conducted by subject advisors and other organisations like EMESA who possess specialist knowledge and skills. Skhwelo explained:

> *The development of competency of our Mathematics teachers is important. I have developed relationship with association like EMESA to help our teachers by providing workshops for them. I also co-ordinate content workshop with subject advisor and other specialised services to help. I work with them prepare material and presentations for my teachers.*

When circuit manager Myeza was asked what took most of her time as a circuit manager, she mentioned that she wished it was professional development. She went on to explain that she liked to spend time with newly appointed teachers. She revealed that newly appointed teachers were not familiar with rules and procedures. This was evident when some will just absent themselves from work without following correct procedure or reporting to the principal. She highlighted that she developed these teachers so that they can know what is it that is expected from them as teachers:

> *I wish it was professional development since there are many developmental needs. In my circuit, you'll find that sometimes in schools a newly appointed teacher is absent and didn't report and the principal will say that teacher has just vanished, instead of asking the principal for permission or report absence from work as per expected procedure. Some of them don't follow the rules not because they are rude, they do not know them. I develop these newly appointed teachers as well for them to know what's expected from them.*

Another method that circuit managers used to develop teachers as a way to support curriculum delivery is the use of clusters. Using clusters to facilitate professional development helps circuit managers to ensure that those schools or teachers that are doing well can share ideas with those who are not so doing well. Skhakhane described how he worked with his clusters by stating that he had conveners that report to him. He also highlighted that he is able to keep tabs about what is being done by receiving feedback reports from conveners**.**

> *I have set up clusters and they have conveners. I ask for reports from the conveners and their plans and programme so that I can make my inputs. I remember one plan or programme was ending at the beginning of July, so they have to draw another one I have not received it.*

Myeza also provided a detailed description of how she has set up her clusters:

> *I also capacitate the school SMTs to form the cluster within the schools where they are going to work together in various subjects for instance in English FAL, Maths and Science. As there are many schools that I am responsible and they are further apart, using clusters helps me. The clusters for the different learning areas in neighbouring schools' teachers*

meet together to plan and share good practice because in order to assist each other as you'll find that other schools are performing better than other. The clusters members are able to help each other. I also do individual school visits to monitor if what they are doing in the cluster is working

Myeza further added that she had a coordinator for each cluster that she liaised with about the work that is done by that cluster:

The cluster coordinator sends me the minutes and records of the cluster meetings held, so these cluster meetings are being held once a month they do planning and reviewing of each subject work. Moving forward, then the very same cluster sets up test papers so there won't be a school saying it's highly performing and the others are not and they write the standardised papers.

What is suggested above is that circuit managers are very much alive to this responsibility and are trying different methods to develop their teachers. This is despite challenges they face in their respective circuits. Data analysis indicated that, while it may be challenging for circuit manager to visit some of their schools because they are far apart, they rely on involving subject advisers and other organisation like AMESA, as well as using clusters to bridge the gap.

Another category of staff with whom circuit managers work is non-teaching staff, like school administrative clerks. Administrative clerks are part of school support staff and play an important role of supporting the SMT and teachers with critical expertise. Like every employee, to be able to perform optimally needs professional development. Administrative clerks perform many tasks that require them to be knowledgeable. Myeza indicated that she met all her schools' administration staff twice a year. The first meeting, which takes place at the beginning of the year, is for discussing expectations and also another meeting in September is organised for purposes of preparing for examinations and capturing result through SASAMS:

I meet the administration staff twice a year and give them the expectations at the beginning of the year and how to go about in dealing with issues such as SASAMS and others, and at the end of September we meet for the last time in preparation for exams, capturing of the results and so forth.

This view expressed by Myeza above was also supported by Skhwelo, who indicated that the work done by administrative clerks is important. It demands that they are properly trained so that they can understand the policies that guide their work. She also emphasised the point that she works with the EMIS directorate in presenting workshops for SASAMS, because the Department of Education demands that the school statistical data be submitted using this software.

> *I also co-ordinate training for our administration clerks. They work they do is very important and requires them to be familiar with many aspects of policies that guide it. I like to organise with EMIS people to workshop our school clerk about SASAMS. It is compulsory that school data must be submitted through SASAMS*

School administrative clerks play an important role of supporting the SMT and teachers. They are responsible for South African School Administration and Management System (SASAMS) which is computer software that contains everything about the school administration. Circuit managers understand that, when schools are required to submit any information by the district province or even national department, that information must be generated from SASAMS. SASAMS also provides the schools with important statistics that are analysed for easy use. They then take it upon themselves to ensure that these people are well trained by working with the district sub-directorate called EMIS. The data presented above suggest that circuit managers seem to be overwhelmed in providing coaching, mentoring, motivation and workshops to different school staff categories. Circuit managers, while they are the immediate seniors to principals and are expected to develop them, go out of their way and provide support to all sections of school staff.

5.4.2 Capacitating of School Governing Body members

There is evidence in the data that circuit managers played an important role of capacitating SGBs about their roles and responsibilities. According to Myeza, as part of her year plan she puts SGB training and development in the first term. This is what she has to say about this:

> *The first term I use it to capacitate the SGB about their roles and their responsibilities*

Myeza went on and explained that she also holds SGB forums twice per year, where she meets with the chairpersons, the treasurers and the principals in her circuit. The SGB Forums, according to Myeza, afford her and these important members of the SGBs an opportunity to discuss burning issues as well as to emphasise to these SGBs members what are their responsibilities.

> *Over and above workshops that I conduct with my SGBs, I also have a forum where we meet with chairperson, treasurer and the principal twice a year where we discuss burning issues and emphasise to them what are their responsibilities as part of the governing body.*

On the other hand, Skhakhane indicated that he engaged the School Governance sub-directorate to provide workshops for his SGBs. He stated that whenever he got the sense that there are common problems in his schools' SGBs he tried to identify the issues for development that needed to be attend to.

> *We work with people from School Governance. When I pick up that there are common problems in different schools SGB, I then identify the issues for development for an example the issue is management of school funds, I contact School Governance Section to conduct workshops.*

Similarly to the views shared by Skhakhane above, Ntanzi also indicated that he did not like to train his SGBs, he preferred to organise School Governance Sub-directorate officials located at the district office to conduct the workshop. He cited that, given that high level of illiteracy in his SGBs, he felt that a district sub-directorate that has more resources should conduct the initial comprehensive workshop. He then would come in to explain certain issues when there are disputes.

> *I try to organise workshops for them with School Governance Section because my SGBs are challenging to workshop because of their low-levels of education. I prefer Governance Section because of better resources it has to do a comprehensive workshop when their term begins and during the course of the term I assist them and explain certain issues to them especially when disputes arise*

While circuit managers above worked with the School Governance sub-directorate officials in planning and delivering workshops to SGBs, Raymond indicated that the Governance Section located at the district office interacts directly with the SGB. This Directorate conducts workshops and meetings, and provides SGBs with new information. According to Raymond, at his level he worked with the SGBs when they decided on promotional posts or there is a specific complaint or suggestion that needed to be attended to by a school or they wanted to make an input or ask for his. He highlighted that his engagement with the SGBs is based on a needs basis as there are no formally structured meeting between them.

> *Governance Section at the District Office that interacts directly with the SGBs', they conduct workshops, they conduct meetings, and they bring in new information. At my level I work with them when they do promotion posts, when they have specific complaints or suggestions about something that needs to be attended to at the school level and they make or ask for input. I work on a needs basis to interact with them. I do not have regular structured meetings with them.*

Another circuit manager, Ngubo, highlighted the different roles he played in capacitating the SGB. He named training the SGB members whenever their schools are going to fill promotional posts, he workshopped the interview committees to ensure that bi-elections are done so that the SGBs are properly constituted. He also indicated that he maintained a good communication line with the chairperson on his SGBs. He did this by calling and meeting them on a regular basis. This is what Ngubo had to say:

> *I capacitated them, we conduct workshops as we have just done with HRM NO, 28 OF 2016 I had to conduct and capacitate interviewing committees which are subcommittees of SGBs and we also ensured bi-election are done before the processes begin so that SGBs are properly constituted. I call and meet SGB chairpersons on a regular basis.*

Skhwelo highlighted that she always asked her principals to invite her when they are having SGB meetings and there are problematic issues that are going to be discussed. According to Skhwelo's experiences in her circuit, financial management and learners' pass rates are major sources of conflict. She therefore availed herself to be part of the meeting. Skhwelo also emphasised that her coming to the meetings was aimed at ensuring that she would remind the

SGBs about the importance of them assuming their role and she paid special attention to the parent component.

> *SGB, I usually say that when the principal and the SGB are having a meeting they must invite me so that I can be part of the meeting, if there is a problem. For example, if there* ***is*** *problem with financial management which is a big issue and a source of many conflicts is the pass rate. I make sure that I remind them* (*SGB members) about the importance of them assuming their role particularly the parent component*

Another important observation made here is that circuit managers valued SGBs that are functional, indicating the importance they attribute to the role of the SGB in the life of a school. Such views were best captured by the utterances of Ngubo, who highlighted that working with the SGBs was one of his key responsibility because a functional SGB will make contribution to the improvement of teaching and learning in his schools.

> *Working with the SGB is part of my key responsibilities as a circuit manager as it helps to improve teaching and learning in my schools.*

Futhermore, Raymond also made an interesting comment about the value of the SGB when it came to dealing with disputes or flare-ups. He stated that, in instances where there are challenges in a particular school and the community is angry about something, he relied on the SGB to provide information about the feelings of the community on the ground about a particular incident.

> *Sometimes there is community that is irate about the absentees of teachers in the school and it flares up and my immediate reaction with the SGB would be do our best to see to it that we bring the situation under control. The SGB, especially the parent component, is always aware about what is feeling of the community on the ground.*

Circuit managers who participated in this study seemed to appreciate the critical role of the SGB in a school. With this in mind, circuit managers used different ways to capacitate their schools' SGBs to be able to perform their responsibilities. Some seemed to work very closely with their SGBs while others seemed delegate the role of capacitating the SGBs to the School Governance Sub-Directorate.

5.5 Learners' leadership development and motivation and discipline

Data shows that some of the circuit managers play a role of helping schools with developing of learner leadership abilities and motivation as well as helping with disciplinary issues. This section will present this under the following sub-themes. 1) Development of learner leadership 2) Motivation.

5.5.1 Development of learners' leadership and motivation

Circuit managers also indicated that they tried to improve teaching and learning by working with learners, especially in secondary schools. Ngubo stated that he ensured that there is a teacher in every secondary school who works directly and indirectly with the Representative Council of Learners (RCL). In return, he meets these teachers who are responsible for the RCLs from different secondary schools to capacitate them about some of the issues that they need to assist their learners with.

> *I ensure that schools have a teacher that is responsible for the RCLs who ensures that RCLs are functional and well capacitated in terms of leadership because they provide leadership to the entire learner population in the school. I also make time to meet these teachers from all the secondary schools that work RCL. I capacitate them about issues they need to capacitate these young leaders with.*

Ntanzi also indicated that in his circuit he liked working with RCLs because it provided him with an opportunity to develop learner leadership skills.

> *I also like working with Representative Council for Learners, developing the learners' leadership skills. It is however hard to find time to meet them as much as I would like to because of my busy schedule. At least once year I meet them with their responsible teacher.*

An analysis of document circuit managers used to guide their work, especially the year plans and meeting schedules, corroborated the views shared by Ntanzi above about the work they do with learners. For example, Myeza's year plan Figure A above indicate that she met with RCLs twice each year in the first and the third term.

It also emerged from data analysis of interviews done with circuit managers that they motivated learners to focus on their work and to do well. The motivation Circuit managers provided targets learners in matric or Grade 12**.** Skhakhane indicated that whenever he visited secondary schools, he tried to see Grade 12 learners (the final school class) so that he can motivate them. This idea is borne of his appreciation that, for learners to be successful, they need to know why they are learning. He went further to explain that he wanted to motivate all the learners, but it will be impossible for him to do so because of time constraints, thus he focused on Grade 12s. This approach of meeting Grade 12 learners only seemed to worry him very much because he claimed to appreciative of education not starting in Grade 12.

> *The first thing here is to motivate learners to realise the importance of going to school and to be serious about school. As it does not matter how well your preparation may be as a teacher, if you go to class to teach learners who do not know why they are learning. When I go around schools I always ask to see Matrics; in some instances I can see it is just a teaspoon of sugar in the sea. Trying to make the sea to taste sweet. It is just making the ocean sweet with a teaspoon of sugar to talk to Matric only when schooling does not start in Matric. I always feel like I need to call all of them, but the challenge is I do not always have the time to visit one school often. I always try to address them on the significance of learning.*

Such views were also shared by Ntanzi, who also indicated that he visited schools whenever he had time to motivate learners, particularly those who were in matric. He highlighted that, in his engagement with matric learners he focused on demonstrating that education can take them out of poverty and give them a better life. He was quick to acknowledge that such a task was not easy:

> *I even visit schools when I get chance just to motivate learners about the value of education especially matric students. I get report from principals about the kind of learner they have who are not motivated. I try to convince them that education can give them a better life, but it is very hard to be honest if one considers the social-economic challenges these learners have to overcome.*

The data presented above suggests that circuit managers understand the value of developing young leaders. Learners in the high school serve in leadership position through the RCL and in the SGB. These circuit managers appreciate the value these learners can add to the schools if proper guidance and skills are afforded to them, hence they spend time trying to develop their leadership capabilities**.**

5.5.2 Dealing with learner ill-discipline

The data in this study also shows that circuit managers assisted schools in holding learners accountable for their ill-discipline, especially those related to gross misconduct. They ensure that schools have a school code of conduct that can deal with disciplinary problems that the school may face. Skhwelo also explained the work that she did with learners in dealing with the faction fights and gangsterism that are a major problem in her circuit. She helped schools by ensuring that the learner who partake in faction fights are held accountable:

> *The children that were involved we hold accountable individually and the learners that are found to be involved in this faction fights and gangster wars we make them sign contract. We also ensure that the school code of conduct is re-read to the learners. They are made aware of the consequences if they are found guilty of the similar offence in future.*

Ngubo added that he encouraged his principals to involve learners, as they are members of the SGB, in the process of the development of policies, especially discipline policies.

> *I encourage my school principals, particularly those from secondary schools, to ensure that learners as members of the SGB take part in developing of disciplinary policies because it begins from the class rule and those class rules are combined to form the code of conduct for learners.*

From this sub-theme of working with learners, circuit managers perform different role which include learner leadership development and motivation, sharing with some learners (in matric, particularly) the world of possibilities that awaits them, preparing them for the future, developing their leadership skills, instilling discipline and assuming the role of a parent and the significance of values of Ubuntu.

5.6 Having vision, mission and collaborative goal setting

Data indicates that at least circuit managers have vision and mission statements as a broad statement that guides their work. When circuits were asked if they had a mission and vision from which the goals of the circuit were derived, only one circuit manager, Myeza, indicated that her circuit has mission and vision statements and went on to explain how these were developed. She also gave an indication that her circuit's mission and vision have been developed with some of the stakeholders, as the principals were given an opportunity to come up with their version of the mission that they thought should guide the circuit. The principals were also given a chance to consult with their respective constituencies at school level and their submissions were consolidated to form a circuit mission and vision statement. This is what Myeza has to say:

> *Yes, we have our circuit vision and mission. We went to the Circuit Management Centre (CMC) principals meeting and we requested principals to give us the vision that they would like us to follow as a CMC. They then went to their constituencies, the SGB, teacher's learners and they submitted their proposals. We sat down and studied them. We realised that they were saying more or less the same thing that we also wanted to guide our circuits' direction. We then formulated and compiled our mission sentence.*

Another circuit manager, Ngubo, indicated that his circuit did not have a mission or a vision but had a mantra (short statement aimed at motivating followers) for their circuits and they use as their district's mission and vision. Ngubo indicated that he developed this mantra himself without the consultation of other stakeholders. He also communicated it to principals during principals' meetings:

> *Yes. Apart from the mission and vision of the department at a district level. We have mantra which is quality education, securing and creating a brighter future it also says creating excellence and challenging mediocrity. It's mine and I use it in my ward with my principals. I came up with it.*

Similarly to Ngubo, Ntanzi stated that his circuit did not have a mission. Unlike Ntanzi, he did not have a mantra but used the Provincial Department of Education's vision and mission.

He added that they used the province's mission and vision statements to guide them in drawing up this plans and goals. Ntanzi said:

> *We will mostly stick on the vision and mission from the province because we do not want to be running away and to make sure that we do not deviate from the Provincial. We put the department's vision and then mission statement from that, we make our plan and goals.*

Skhakhane indicated that, while he appreciated the need to have a vision and mission, he believed that such should be developed with the people with whom he is going to work with to realise it. He argued that it is very difficult in his circuit to have such a vision and mission statement, as the situation is very fluid. Teachers and school principals that he worked with are leaving and they are either resigning or go to other circuits in urban areas:

> *Things like mission statement we do not have. I do have to say we do not have a mission statement that says this we what we want to achieve. But I do have what I wish to see happens. It is just the way things happen, things are so fluid in the circuit such that if I were to say I have that thing I would be lying. This is because my teachers leave from left to right and principals. So if for instance I have a vision it may mean I am talking about an outdated thing because those who will come to replace the other may say we were not part of the people who adopted the vision*

When circuit managers were asked how the vision, mantra or plan they had are communicated to other stakeholders, this is what Myeza said:

> *We went back to principals and we launched our vision and communicated it through our Chief Education Specialist.*

Ngubo indicated that he communicated the circuit mantra at meetings and the circuit has banners at the circuit office entrance office that display the circuit mantra. He stated that he reminded the principals about the mantra when the opportunity arises:

> *We talk about it when we have principals' and circuit meetings, we have banners at the entrance displaying that. We always remind principals about it when opportunities arise.*

Some circuit managers indicated that they do have goals as a circuit. These goals were developed by circuit managers and are used to guide work in the circuit. Circuit managers indicated that their goals are mainly to improve on the results in matric and to ensure that they get suitable staff for certain subjects. This is what Skhwelo had to say:

> *Yes, we do have goals in my circuit, we want to ensure that there is quality teaching and learning in schools in that I look at the human resource present in schools even though it's not everything. I make sure they follow the ATPs until they finish them, the curriculum.*

Skhwelo added that she does have goals and one of her goal is to find solutions to educator absenteeism in her schools. This is how expressed herself in this matter:

> *Yes, I do have the goals as I have mentioned. One of our goals is to find ways to deals with educator absenteeism.*

As presented by the voices of circuit managers above, it is clear that some circuit managers are able to develop goals with key stakeholders while others are not able to do so, due to challenges that include mass resignation of school principals in some circuits. Those that are unable to develop a vision, mission and goals acknowledged their importance and find alternative methods, even if it means having something that will be known only by themselves.

5.7 Collaborating with different stakeholders

The data suggests that circuit managers worked with different stakeholder to ensure that a conducive environment for teaching and learning is created. Skhwelo stated that she spent a lot of time dealing with different stakeholders so that an environment that supports teaching and learning is created in her schools. She engaged both traditional leaders like *Izinduna* and *Amakhosi* (Chiefs) as well as elected leaders like councillors and mayors. She also involved police, the priests and the local municipality officials.

> *I involve all the stakeholders the police, the Induna, the priest, district director, local municipality we meet with all of them and talk to the children and the elders depending on who caused the fights, at the end the problem is solved. In some schools that I was forced to close the school. The Induna intervened by stating that anyone who wants to go*

back the school must first come to him and get a letter that will allow him or her to go back and be re admitted at school.

Skhakhane, who has schools in his circuit that experience gangsterism, stated that in an attempt to sustain and support teaching and learning in these schools he had mandated his school principals to develop a relationship between their schools and the South African Police Services (SAPS) through the establishment of Safety and Security Committees. He went further and explained that the Department of Education has mandated that all schools must have Safety and Security Committees. These committees work hand in hand with SAPS by having the local SAPS adopting each school and have one police officer who will be responsible for that school. Skhakhane stated that, from his experience, this relationship improves communication between the schools and SAPS, because schools have a person they can directly call. This is what Skhakhane has to say:

Each school is supposed to have a Safety and Security Committee. Each school is allocated an officer who adopts the school. As a circuit manager I ensure that this committee is created and is functional by looking at its meeting minutes and helping with creating good relationship with the SAPS officer through regular contact with a police officer in charge of officers who adopts my schools.

Furthermore, it emerged from the data that circuit managers play an important role of mobilising the community structures and leadership to motivate parents to be active participants in the education of their children. Skhwelo lamented the poor parental involvement in some of her schools. She indicated that she worked with community leaders because these leaders are well respected in the community. She however shared her unhappiness that active participation improves after the traditional leader's intervention and decreases after some time. This is what she said:

We talk to the community leaders, Izinduna, to motivate parental involvement and members of the community about how important education and how important for them as parents to play a role in their children education. This goes a long way in helping as those people still respect what is being ordered by the chiefs or headman. It gets better once they intervene though at times as the time goes on tends to decline

but it helps a lot. When we go to report to the induna and he calls a meeting we see result instantly.

Raymond indicated that the community structures are very supportive of the work they do. He also stated that there is so much respect for their work. He further added that the community structures, which include the Police Service, Izinduna and the Chief, want to work with them and they seem to rely on them for possible solutions.

Whenever there is an issue… for example if learners attack their teachers, I bring in the councillor, the Induna, the Chief, the community, the police service. In the broader community co-operation is excellent. They like to see things getting resolved all the time. They ask us, the department to come, they expect us to come there and give them a solution.

Skhakhane shared his that in some of his schools he has asked the SGB to co-opt one representative of the chief to serve in the SGB. This person will be the eyes and ears of the Chief. This person will be the responsible for dealing with social issues in the community that interfere with education.

There should be a person who is seconded by the chief, who has interest in education a person who has knowledge in the area. The age should not be consideration as long as this person has knowledge about education. This person must sit in the Governing Body he must be co-opted. His responsibility is to listen to social challenges facing the school, for example the issue of break-ins in the schools, robbery that affects the teachers where teachers' cell phones are taken from them.

Another important stakeholder that circuit managers work with is teacher union. It emerged that circuit managers engage teacher unions. Skhwelo indicated that among the things she did to support teaching and learning is holding bilateral discussions with teacher unions.

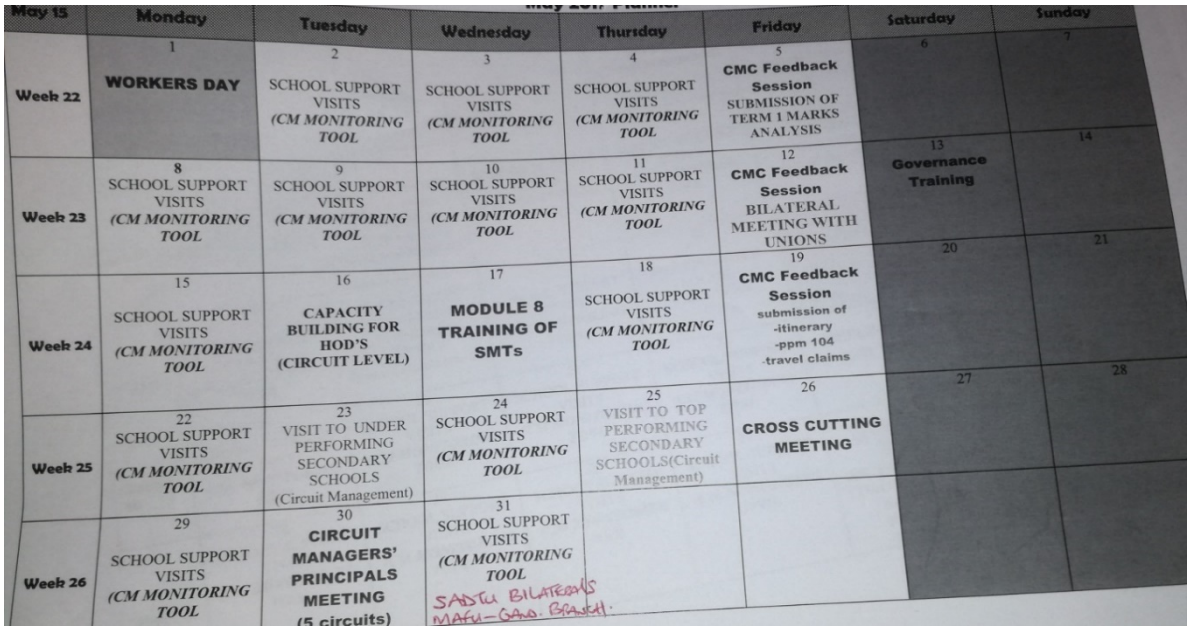
Another thing I do is bilateral with unions, where labour issues are discussed.

Myeza highlighted that she engaged teacher unions so that labour peace can be maintained in her circuit. This she did by holding bilateral meetings with teacher unions four times per year.

She also mentioned that the lines of communication are open between them when the other issues that needed discussion arise.

> *We try to work with unions to keep labour peace. We hold meetings with Unions, bi-laterals, we have planned bilaterals which are four times per year. If however there some issues that come up or if they feel there is something they would like us to discuss they will call for an urgent meeting and discus that.*

The views echoed by participants above were corroborated by document analysis of circuit managers' year plans (see Figure 7 below). From this year plan, it is clear that this circuit manager has two bilateral meetings with teacher unions scheduled for the month.



May 15	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 22	1 **WORKERS DAY**	2 SCHOOL SUPPORT VISITS *(CM MONITORING TOOL*	3 SCHOOL SUPPORT VISITS *(CM MONITORING TOOL*	4 SCHOOL SUPPORT VISITS *(CM MONITORING TOOL*	5 **CMC Feedback Session** SUBMISSION OF TERM 1 MARKS ANALYSIS	6	7
Week 23	8 SCHOOL SUPPORT VISITS *(CM MONITORING TOOL*	9 SCHOOL SUPPORT VISITS *(CM MONITORING TOOL*	10 SCHOOL SUPPORT VISITS *(CM MONITORING TOOL*	11 SCHOOL SUPPORT VISITS *(CM MONITORING TOOL*	12 **CMC Feedback Session** BILATERAL MEETING WITH UNIONS	13 **Governance Training**	14
Week 24	15 SCHOOL SUPPORT VISITS *(CM MONITORING TOOL*	16 **CAPACITY BUILDING FOR HOD'S (CIRCUIT LEVEL)**	17 **MODULE 8 TRAINING OF SMTs**	18 SCHOOL SUPPORT VISITS *(CM MONITORING TOOL*	19 **CMC Feedback Session** submission of -itinerary -ppm 104 -travel claims	20	21
Week 25	22 SCHOOL SUPPORT VISITS *(CM MONITORING TOOL*	23 VISIT TO UNDER PERFORMING SECONDARY SCHOOLS (Circuit Management)	24 SCHOOL SUPPORT VISITS *(CM MONITORING TOOL*	25 VISIT TO TOP PERFORMING SECONDARY SCHOOLS(Circuit Management)	26 **CROSS CUTTING MEETING**	27	28
Week 26	29 SCHOOL SUPPORT VISITS *(CM MONITORING TOOL*	30 **CIRCUIT MANAGERS' PRINCIPALS MEETING (5 circuits)**	31 SCHOOL SUPPORT VISITS *(CM MONITORING TOOL* SADTU BILATERALS MAFU-GAU. BRANCH.				

Figure 7: Extract from Skhwelo's year plan

Skhwelo explained that she preferred to engage unions before any drastic measure is taken against an ill-disciplined teacher. Skhwelo added that she reported teachers' ill-discipline to unions who also try to discipline their members and sometimes it works. If it does not and the teacher is formally charged, it makes the job of the circuit manager easy when the formal disciplinary measures are to be taken against that educator, as unions will not try to defend the teacher and frustrate the process. This is what Skhwelo had to say:

> *…before I charged that educator, I firstly made the Union aware and they tried to discipline the educator. At first it worked but as time went by the*

problem started again so I ended up intervening as the 14 days had lapsed without the teacher at work. The educator was eventually suspended. I had to use the law in this case and the teacher had to be suspended. The union just represented her to make sure the process was fair.

The circuit manager worked with these unions to solve these disputes that arise from appointment of principal processes because it is very important for the school to have a permanently appointed principal. If they fail to resolve these issues, they are referred to the district. This what Skhwelo had to say:

When there are disputes, we usually sit down and talk about it and if we do not agree the district takes over the process.

The conflict resolution role of a circuit manager emerges in these sub-themes. Circuit managers seem to work very hard to help create an environment that support teaching and learning. To be able to secure this environment, they have to work with all the stakeholders. They need to eliminate sources of conflict' at times this task seemed too much for them, especially when dealing with unions.

5.8 Facilitation of human and physical resources provision

Circuit managers use different methods to provide resources to their schools. One such method is the principals' monthly reports to the circuit manager. Skhakhane explained that in his monthly principals' meetings he encouraged school principals to make sure that in these reports they mention challenges of infrastructure. He further indicated that once he received information, he wrote his own reports about school that have specific infrastructure challenges and forwarded it to the Infrastructure Sub-Directorate (there are sections in the districts that specialise in specific area of school functions for example School Governance, Planning and Infrastructure). Skhakhane advised principals to make sure that their monthly reports always included items that they need until such items are provided. He also advised them to send some of the reports directly to district sub-directorates. For example, Skhakhane said:

I cannot say our assistance or support in that regard is direct. Ours is to gather information and forward it to the relevant section (*sub-directorates) for example Infrastructure section. If the principal had reported about the infrastructure in the previous month's report for*

example that there are no toilets, no electricity and this and that is not available, he must continue reporting about it until the school is assisted. I will then write mine saying that there are so many schools that do not have electricity.

Another circuit manager, Myeza, who has schools in African and Indian townships, indicated that her circuit struggled with libraries and laboratories. She always asked schools to improvise by having corner libraries and to use whatever small amount they get from the Norms and Standards allocations for Learning and Teaching Support Material to buy some books:

They need to have corner libraries in the classrooms because you have to start small, when I get to schools I tell them I want to see that they've established corner libraries and to use the standard funds for the LTSM and buy the library books.

When looking at the provision of human resources to support teaching and learning, data indicated that circuit managers monitor the placement of educator during process of deployments. Guided by the Post Provision Norm Policy and other related prescripts that relate to Human Resources Management (HRM), and under the control of the HRM sub-directorate, circuit managers try to make sure that, when an academic year starts, their schools have all the vacancies filled. This is not easy as they deal with placement of teachers who have been declared additional to their schools and find schools that have vacancies. This task is made difficult by the mismatch between the skills of teachers declared additional and the posts available. For example, this happened when there are more senior phase trained educators declared than senior phase vacancies declared and fewer foundation phase trained educators declared compared to foundation phase vacancies. Circuit managers also indicated that they tried to monitor and make sure that the scarce subjects (subjects like Mathematics and Science) have teachers. They worked with school principals and tried to get people to fill those posts and at times they end up filing these posts with foreign national teachers. This is what Myeza has to say:

At the beginning of the year there are placements, teachers being moved where they are needed most; after that I monitor this process whether my schools received the needed teachers, sometimes you find that scarce

subjects like maths and science teachers are hard to find, now I have to step in and help recruit those needed teachers, we end up recruiting foreigners to help us.

Circuit managers also worked with schools to encourage them to raise funds as the Department of Education is not able to meet all their school's needs. Myeza highlighted that she encouraged schools to look for more funding to supplement the amount of money schools receive through the Norms and Standards as all the schools that these circuit managers supervise are no-fee schools. The funds raised can help schools employ more people as opposed to the current situation where the Department is freezing some posts. She advised her schools to approach the big multi-national companies to help the schools. If schools want services of these additional teachers, they have to pay them themselves. This how Myeza explained this:

Yes, the posts are frozen, therefore schools need to fundraise and employ the SGB paid clerk, or cleaner, or security guard. Mondi and other big companies do come to our rescue. Schools… must write to companies because education is for all, it is not only for the Department of Education.

Adding her voice on this matter, **S**khwelo indicated that she encouraged the schools to supplement the funds allocated by the department through fund raising. She further indicated that some of the schools do not succeed as fundraising with parents is hard, as many are poor and the private companies are reluctant to sponsor schools that are in rural areas. This is how she explained this:

We encourage them to fundraise. But some don't succeed because parents are very poor and it is not easy to find private businesses that wants to support our schools that are in rural areas. All my school are in rural areas. We give them ideas that they can use to raise school funds.

Circuit managers encouraged their schools to use and access state resources as much as possible. They are also aware that state resources are very limited, therefore they encourage their schools to build relationship with the outside world for them to access more resources. They believe that companies can help schools if approached.

5.9 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the data on the role that circuit managers play in supporting teaching and learning in their circuits. The data revealed that circuit managers play different roles in supporting teaching and learning in their circuits. From the data, it clear that circuit managers play role of being monitors of curriculum delivery as one of their key responsibility. It can be concluded that circuit managers play multiple roles, some of which are not their formal mandate but are nonetheless crucial for effective teaching and learning. The next chapter, Chapter 6, presents circuit managers' perspectives on how contextual challenges affect the manner in which they support teaching and learning.

CHAPTER 6

THE CONTEXT AND ROLE OF CIRCUIT MANAGERS

6.1 Introduction

This study sought to explore circuit managers' leadership roles in supporting teaching and learning in schools that are located in challenging contexts. It provides circuit managers with an opportunity to tell their lived experiences about how the different challenges found in their context influence the manner in which they discharge their responsibilities. I argue that effective support of teaching and learning in challenging contexts requires leadership that takes the contextual factors into consideration. In keeping with the phenomenological assumptions of the research design I adopted in this study, the finer details of what it is like to support teaching and learning in schools that are located in challenging contexts are presented. The previous chapter presented the different roles circuit managers play in supporting teaching and learning in their schools. This chapter focuses on the contextual realities and on how these realities influence or do not influence the way circuit managers discharge their roles of supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts. The chapter further focuses on how circuit managers navigate the contextual challenges they encounter.

This chapter is organised into two main themes that emerged from the data. These two main themes are: (a) The influence of contexts in the role of supporting teaching and learning and (b) The impact of contextual realities on circuit managers' leadership. In presenting this chapter, the same traditional approach that is advocated by Burnard *et al.* (2008), as earlier indicated in chapter five, is used. This approach allows for presentation of data without discussing it in relation to the relevant literature**.**

6.2 The influence of contexts in supporting or failure to support teaching and learning

The analysis of data revealed several contextual realities that circuit managers identified as influencing their work. These realities range from poverty and related social issues, cultural and traditional practices, poor parental involvement, faction fights and gangsterism, poor road conditions and the relationship with District and Provincial officials. These contextual realities are discussed below.

6.2.1 Poverty and related social issues

The analysis of data suggests that circuit managers' role of supporting teaching and learning is influenced by poverty and related social issues. All the circuit managers who participated in this study mentioned poverty as one of the challenges that make teaching and learning in the school difficult and their role of supporting it difficult. They agreed and reported that, in the communities they serve, there were high levels of starvation, child-headed homes, learner pregnancy and drop outs, absent parents, unemployment and drug abuse, all which they attribute to high levels of poverty. These challenges were further compounded by the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in these communities. The high-level of poverty in these communities served by circuit managers in this study was described by Skhakhane, who highlighted that in some of the families there were high levels of starvation. He stated that poverty and other social challenges, like high levels of child-headed families, create a fertile ground for teenage pregnancy and drug abuse: This is how he explained it:

> *Poverty is another one, people are hungry, and there is starvation. There is high level of child-headed family which results in teenage pregnancy. Teenage pregnancy also goes hand-in-hand with drug abuse.*

Concurring with the views shared by Skhakhane above, Ntanzi highlighted that poverty together with unemployment are common in the school community they work with. He raised his concerns about the living conditions of the learners where their families lived in shacks and in two-room houses.

> *Poverty and unemployment are very high amongst the people who live in shacks or two-room houses.*

Myeza, who had schools in both township and suburbs, acknowledged that in some of her schools poverty exist and she was quick to clarify that such poverty is not wide spread. It is mostly confined to her township schools.

> *I also observe that in some of the school communities, poverty is very high. It is not widespread, but I do come across it especially in township communities.*

Similarly, one participating circuit manager, Raymond, confirmed what was said by other circuit managers, observing that a very high level of poverty in the community where his learners came from.

> *The school community or outside of the school has its own set of challenges: the rurality of the area, and the poverty.*

According to Ntanzi, poverty made it difficult for teachers and learners in his circuit to focus on learning outcomes. There were some necessities that households needed to possess to support their children's education. For example, poor households are unable to access or pay for necessities like running water and electricity or any convenient sources of energy like gas for cooking. These necessities were critical in supporting learning at home. In some schools in these circuits, learners found it difficult to do homework and other school projects as they live in shacks or two room-houses. It is common to find these homes populated by extended family members because unemployment is high. Ntanzi indicated that the poverty situation in the community where his schools were located is compounded by diseases like HIV/AIDS and TB. The learners at times missed school while looking after their sick parents. This is how Ntanzi explained this phenomenon:

> *You find poverty, poor homes, where there are no or there are limited facilities to manage a child's education, no electricity or sources of energy, no running water, you give the child homework and you find him/her being unable to comply. Some families are child-headed homes. HIV/AIDS pandemic, TB and so on and that cause the child to lag in school work as they stay at home looking after sick relatives.*

Data in this study further suggests that poverty and other social issues have an impact on circuit managers' attempts to improve quality in their schools, especially since some of their schools are declared under-performing schools. This emerged from utterances of circuit managers about the extra classes they co-ordinate to improve learner attainment. Circuit managers and school principals of secondary schools worked hard to improve learners' achievement. Amongst the initiatives they undertook was to encourage schools to conduct extra classes. These classes are taken after school, to provide learners with opportunities to study and do homework as some do not have a conducive home environment to study from. According to participants, these initiatives were also affected by poverty. Skhwelo indicated

that some of their learners could not stay at school for extra classes because their families could not afford to provide them with enough food that would make it possible for them to attend. These extra classes took place in the afternoon after the completion of the normal school daily academic programme. Some learners could not attend because they did not have an extra set of school uniform. Arriving home late after participating in extra classes made it difficult for them to wash their school uniform and have it ready for the next day. Poor school attendance emerged as another challenge circuit manager identified. Some learners stayed far from schools and paying for transport to school posed a problem. When money was not available, they had to walk long distances or did not go to school. The absenteeism rate is high. Skhwelo explained:

> *Sometimes, you'll find learners can't stay for afternoon classes because at home they do not have a way of giving him lunch on the limited food that they have… Learners do not go to school if they do not have money for transport or they have to walk long distances. When it is raining they do not go to school. You find that a learner cannot attend extra-classes as he has one pair of trousers he needs to go home and wash it for following day.*

Given the challenge of poverty found in some of these schools, some circuit managers seemed to be frustrated, not knowing exactly what to do. Such frustration was echoed by Skhakhane, who shared views about poverty and other socio-economic challenges. He explained that at times he does not know where he should start, he gets so overwhelmed. He further reported that, to mitigate the impact of some of the poverty and social related issues, he had decided to use his principals' meetings to encourage the school principals to be part of Sukuma Sakhe's War Room (a municipal ward structure that has different government departments like Home Affairs, Social Development, SAPS, local schools represented and community organisations). Skhakhane also highlighted working with chiefs and chiefs' council.

> *Where do you start? Do you start by addressing the elders? Poverty and many other socio-economic challenges facing my school community have become a subject of our discussion in our principal's meeting. We spend a lot of time talking about these issues. I always insist that principal must be part of the Sukuma Sakhe war room.*

Commenting about the influence of poverty related issues on her work as circuit manager, Skhwelo highlighted that, as a result of challenges related to poverty and social issues, she ended up assuming a parental role by buying some necessities for some learners for them to be able to attend extra classes that they would otherwise unable to attend, because of their not having enough school uniforms and food.

> *So, I end up donating money or buying some of school uniform from my pocket to schools and some teachers end up making sandwiches just to make sure that learners remain at school for extra lesson. You go and buy two pairs of trouser and maybe three shirts.*

Another circuit manager, Ntanzi, explained that poverty and related social issues impacted on his role of supporting teaching and learning. Ntanzi went on to explain that, instead of focusing on teaching and learning, he spent a lot time capacitating the school principals to enrich the school life to mitigate the social impact of poverty on the learners. Ntanzi argued that this could be done through extra-curriculum activities, which may include sports, social activities and professional motivation. He also invited organisations that work with youth's social ills to talk to principals about these issues. This participant believed that it helps to keep learners busy, rather than creating dead time that allows them to do drugs and other unacceptable things. However, this, as concluded by the participants, was the source of tension with the principals who argued instead that the lack of time is a source of bad behaviours, as they directed all their energies to teaching and learning and working with the massive administrative paperwork that is inherent to an underperforming school, which applies in most cases.

> *I always advise school principal to try to enrich the school life by having extra-curriculum activities. They should invite organisations that deal with social issues even it means motivating or talking to the learners. I also invite some organisations in my principals' meetings to talk to them about these issues. This tends to create tension between me and school principals because they tell me especially high school principals, that they do not have time and resources to enrich their school life. These principals stated that they hardly have the time for anything other than teaching and learning and related administration which goes with their schools being declared underperforming.*

Some of the utterances made by Ntanzi were also corroborated by document analysis of his principals' meeting agenda, as indicated in figure 8 below. In the meeting agenda, it emerged that this circuit manager planned to have a person to discuss the social challenge of drugs. It is clear in this agenda that as part of professional development this circuit manager had invited Mr X (not his real name) form Drug Forum to talk to teachers about drug problem amongst learners.

8.11 Filling System.

9. Professional Development – Mr X– Drug Forum.

9.1Women/Men Principals Forums.

10. Closure.

Figure 8: Except from Ntanzi's principals' meeting agenda

On the same issue of poverty and related social ills, Ngubo highlighted that many people in the community he served depended on the social grants. Due to high levels of illiteracy among community members, some do not know about social service assistance programmes other than the usual pension and child support grants. He explained that he has developed good relationships with different stakeholders, and has asked school principals to create and maintain good relationship with relevant government department like Home Affairs, Social Development Department officials and non-governmental organisations.

> *People here are poor, there are no jobs. People survive on social grants and some do not even know about social security services that are there since some of them are illiterate. I ask school principals to work with social partners like Social Development Department, Home Affairs, NGO and other stakeholders. I have, myself ensured good relationship with them, this helps me to communicate with them. For example, I use my influence and ask them to attend to special case which the principal told me needs urgent attention. These people can even visit a child at home and establish the kind of social security that is needed.*

Drawing from the comments made by circuit managers above, it is clear that poverty and related social issues make supporting teaching and learning challenging and greatly affect the work of circuit managers. Schools in challenging or deprived contexts tend to have poor

learner achievement. Circuit managers assume responsibility when schools they supervise underperform. They need to work with school principals and other stakeholders to mitigate the manifestations of poverty and other social issues to ensure that their schools deliver on quality teaching and learning. In pursuit of better learner attainment, they are compelled to deal with many issues which are not directly linked to teaching and learning. It is apparent from the views of Circuit managers above that they have integrated a social worker role into their jobs.

6.2.2 Migration from rural to urban areas

The migration of learners from poor areas to affluent and developing areas impacted the work of circuit managers. In some circuits, especially those that are in rural areas, as a way of escaping grinding poverty, people leave these areas and move to urban areas, hoping to find jobs and a better life. This results in numbers of learners leaving rural schools. Ntanzi explained that, if many learners leave a school, such a school is allocated fewer teachers and other resources by the Department of Education. He pointed out that some schools in the circuit, especially schools in rural areas, end up being two-plus one teacher-schools (a two plus one school is a school that has two main stream teachers (Grade 1-7) and one Grade R teacher in primary schools.

> *Also because of poverty people move from rural areas looking for greener pastures in urban areas they leave their homes. This results in the dropping learner enrolment in those areas. The more learners that move and leave the school the less number of teachers that are allocated in that school. As a result, two-plus one schools are common here* (*Ntanzi).*

Congruent to the same view, Skhwelo, who also had all her schools in a rural area, said that the people are leaving the area where her schools are and are going to developing areas. She added that: “Unfortunately, these people cannot take their schools with them, by doing so they are creating a dilemma both in where they are going to and from where they are leaving.” The schools they are leaving suffer as a result of PPN (the Post Provision Norms) and some of the schools end up with 14 learners in a school with grades from Grade R to Grade 7.

> *While some people are moving they cannot take the school with them. There are those that cannot move. For instance, a school with 14 learners …was affected by the PPN problem as it was allocated two teachers* (*two-*

teacher school) and it starts from grade R to grade 7 and some grades have only one child, some five, so teaching and learning becomes a problem. So, you can see that teaching and learning is challenged

Skhakhane, another circuit manager with many rural schools, articulated his views very strongly about this migration and its impact on the support of teaching and learning. He emphasised that, because of migration which impacted teacher allocation through PPN, there is no proper teaching in some of his schools. Referring to schools that start from Grades R-7 with PPN of three teachers, he pointed out that if he considers teaching hours for Grade 7 (five hours), subject taught per grade (nine subjects), teacher allocation per school of three, it was clear that some of the learners learn about one third of the work they are supposed to. He further linked this to the existence of extra classes in Grade 12 where teachers work very hard because learners reach Grade 12 without having mastered the work from other grades. He concluded that these classes are intended to correct some of these things.

In grade 7 there are nine subjects and how many teachers are there – remember (*three), one of them is a principal? It tells you the amount of teaching and learning that is happening in those areas. If I may, for argument sake they learn one-quarter one quarter or one third of what they are supposed to learn per year. By the time a learner is in Grade 7, he or she is physically in Grade 7 he or she is in Grade 2 in terms of content knowledge. Hence you will find classes the so called "extra classes" in Grade 12. This is because of something that happened long time ago caused by the movement of people moving from disadvantaged contexts looking for greener pastures in the city.*

Ntanzi brought another dimension to this discussion, that of non-viable schools, school closures and school mergers as a result of the rapid drop in learner population, as parent migrate to other areas. He reported that some of his schools are being closed the year after they are first referred to as non-viable schools. He described the non-viable schools as schools where there are very small number of learners and allocation of resources to them is deemed a wasteful expenditure. He lamented about spending a lot of time negotiating the closure of these schools with members of the community who have not migrated. The community did not want these schools to be closed as they do not understand the resources that are needed to run a school. Ntanzi indicated that at times a school is closed and merged with another school. This then started a physical

and human resource management dilemma. He argued that this creates a physical resource dilemma when one school buildings become a white elephant (not used) as it is vacated, whereas the human resource dilemma emanates when they must place these teachers, including the principal, in other schools. This is how Ntanzi confirmed the theme:

> *The community will disagree saying that they still need the school. This they will say without having the information and calculations that I have about the costs of running that school because the department says non-viable schools are draining its resources. I end up having to close these non-viable schools and have loitering teachers* (*teachers that have not been placed in a school). For example, if two schools are merged it results in two principals.*

On the issue of migration, data in this study suggests that this problem further plays itself out in the township schools. When the learners who have migrated with their parents get to other schools, mostly township or urban schools, they create another administration challenge. Schools in the township areas must create space for them. Because of late learner migration, circuit managers in these contexts face problems of late learner admission and of finding space for these learners. This is worsened by some schools exploiting this by over enrolling learners. To some schools, admitting more learners means an upwards review of their PPN status. They thus stand a chance of getting extra promotional posts and better grading, which means a better salary for the principal. Myeza submitted that she had to ensure that this does not happen as it means teaching and learning takes place under difficult conditions during the period in which the PPN has not been reviewed, which can take three years. She reported that she tried to manage school enrolment closely so that schools do not over enrol or under enrol learners.

> *I see to it that schools are staffed according to their Post Provision Norms and see to it that they are not enrolling more or less then their capacity.*

Utterances made by Myeza above were also corroborated by document analysis of her principals' meetings, as indicated in Figures 9 and Figure10 below. Analysis of these minutes confirms that this circuit manager discussed the issue of learner admission, and from a review of the minutes, it has been found that in at least two consecutive meetings this matter was discussed. In the minutes it is clear that Myeza was encouraging the principal to ensure that learners are registered on time so that planning for the following year is done accordingly.

Indicating the importance of this subject, Myeza also discussed this issue with principal at the following meeting. In the second meeting this circuit manager went further and warned the principal not to enrol learners above their PPN allocation because Department of Education would not allow the school to employ new teachers. Another important observation noted in these meetings is that the circuit manager asked her principals to reserve a few spaces in their schools for learners that are relocating. The extracts of the meeting minutes are presented below:

> *8.8.2. Application of S38 A and Learner Admissions: Please inform all parents and community members that registration for new learners close on 29 September. Use whatever strategy to get information across with some schools advertising. Those schools that are full need to call the circuit manager to sign log book that school is full. Few spaces must be kept for relocations.*

Figure 9: Extract from principal meeting minutes

> *8.7.2. Admissions: As per circular this must be completed by end of 29 September. Do not take more learners than you have (above your current school PPN), the Department will not be giving schools new educators.*

Figure 10: Extract from principal meeting minutes

Another circuit manager, Ntanzi, also added his frustration in that in his circuit he had tried to ensure that schools do learner registration before the end of a year for the following year. Despite his school principals' attempts to register learners on time, parents of learners in his circuit do not register their children during the registration periods. They then go to schools when the schools re-open at the beginning of the year with the aim of registering their children. He added that this is made worse by learners who are leaving rural areas for urban areas. He argued that such action interferes with their planning for teaching and learning.

> *The parents and the communities are not coming on board to ensure that their children are registered and admitted in school timeously for the coming year so that there is proper planning that will result in proper teaching and learning in our school. This is made worse by high number of learners that leave rural to urban areas every year. People are leaving rural areas for urban.*

The data presented above illuminates the challenges brought by migration to the circuit managers' role of supporting teaching and learning. The movement of people from rural to urban areas, which results in school closures and non-viable schools, keeps circuit managers in rural circuits on their toes and hampers their ability to implement plans that they have done the previous year. The urban and township areas are also not spared as they too have to deal with late admission, which also interferes with their objective of ensuring that teaching happens on the first day of the school year.

6.2.3 Cultural and traditional practices

Cultural and traditional practices emerged as having a major influence on the manner in which some circuit managers support teaching and learning. According to Skhakhane, the effect of cultural and traditional practices in his circuit is illustrated by the practice in which parents encourage their young girls to get married because they receive ilobolo (bride prize) in the form of money, gifts and or cows. When he meets school principals through school visits or in circuit principals' meetings he receives these reports from school principals. He explained that the housing arrangement in some rural areas is characterised by rondavels (a house built in a circle). Boys who have reached a particular age are built their own rondavel. Such living tradition seems to create an environment where young girls and boys date (ukuqoma nokuqonywa) and there is no way for parent to supervise them. Skhakhane stated that parents have become match makers for their children; they are the ones who tell their girls when the boyfriend has arrived. As a Circuit manager, he had tried to talk to parents about this tradition as it creates an environment where learner fail to focus on their school work:

> *I call parents and tell them that the issue of marrying young girls, and boys and girls dating* (*ukuqoma nokuqonywa) while staying in their own rondavels* (*ilawu) is wrong. It makes learners not to focus on the school work. You have a girl who is 16 or 17 years old who is told that the boyfriend* (*isoka) has arrived… Where do you start? Do you start by addressing the elders?*

Another cultural practice which is common in the area where Skhwelo and Skhakhane's circuits are situated is called *icece* or the Raising of Doek ceremony. Skhwelo tried to explain it by stating that, according to this tradition, once a boy and girl agree to date, the young boy must put up a white handkerchief indicating that he has a girlfriend. Both sets of parents are

informed about this. Skhwelo further explained that the boy and the girl are not expected to have sex until they are married and if they do and the girl gets pregnant it becomes easy for the parents to establish who is responsible. The boy will now acquire a certain status in the community. Unfortunately, for some boys this status may have a negative effect on their schooling. Skhwelo added that these boys tend to attend the school as they please or they end up dropping out of school and look for work because they may impregnate a girl. The young girl may also attend school on the decision of the boyfriend, get pregnant, and/or drop out as well.

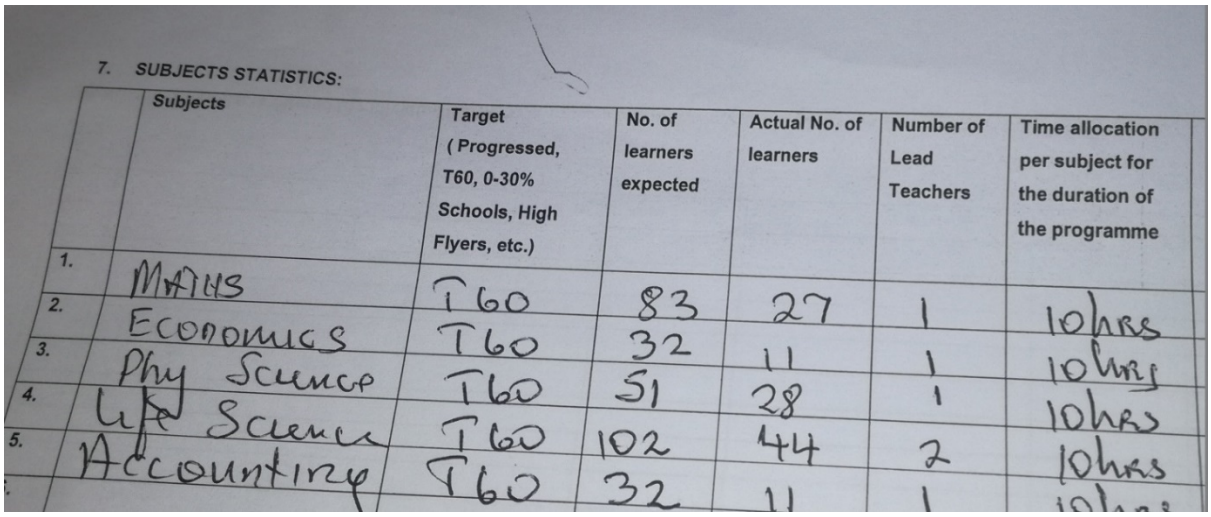
> *In this area, there is tradition called **icece**, where children go to choose their partners **(ziyoqomisana)**. That is where they raise white cloth or handkerchief* (*a traditional ritual of showing that a person has a girlfriend), **useqonyiwe**. The parents have no problem but only the teacher seems to have problems as once this happen learner school attendance is affected. They want the child to be in class, but they get absent because of such traditions.*

Such traditions tend to greatly affect circuit managers' attempts of improving matric results. In some circuits, Circuit managers working with teachers, principals and district officials organise vacation classes for matric students. These classes are unlike the extra classes discussed above in Section 6.2.1 that take place after school, as vacation classes take place during the first to the third terms' holidays. Explaining this, Skhwelo highlighted that in these vacation classes highly qualified teachers also called 'lead teachers' are brought to schools to help with teaching. One circuit manager, Skhwelo expressed her frustration with these traditions, saying it is very discouraging after she had done so much work of organising these classes and then receive reports that many learners do not attend classes as they went to *icece*:

> *You find that teachers want learners in schools* (*centres) and they are not there because they had to attend **icece**. This is the kind of reports we receive when I monitor these classes and it is frustrating because I spend a lot of time coordinating these classes.*

The non-attendance of these vacation classes was corroborated by document analysis of the circuit managers' year plans and their monitoring instrument of these classes. The year plans have an item called *monitoring of vacation classes.* According to the year plan, these were

held at the end of each term except the last term. The monitoring instrument for the vacation classes, as shown in Figure 11 below, contains information about attendance in these classes and the general condition. Item number 7 of the monitoring instrument is a subject statistic which present the number of attendances of different subjects, the learners targeted, teachers present as well as the time allocated per subject. This tool corroborates the information presented by circuit managers about the poor attendance of learners in these classes. For example, in subjects like Maths, out of 83 learners expected, only 27 attended. An extract of this vacation classes monitoring tool is presented below as Figure 11.



7. SUBJECTS STATISTICS:

	Subjects	Target (Progressed, T60, 0-30% Schools, High Flyers, etc.)	No. of learners expected	Actual No. of learners	Number of Lead Teachers	Time allocation per subject for the duration of the programme
1.	MATHS	T60	83	27	1	10hrs
2.	ECONOMICS	T60	32	11	1	10hrs
3.	Phy Science	T60	51	28	1	10hrs
4.	Life Science	T60	102	44	2	10hrs
5.	Accounting	T60	32	11	1	10hrs

Figure 11: Extract from Vacation Classes Monitoring Instrument used by circuit managers

Skhakhane and Ntanzi also shared that the community they work with held traditional and cultural views about boys and girls. These views tended to cause a lot of tension and conflict which resulted in them having to come to the schools to intervene. According to Skhakhane, in one of his schools he was called to intervene because the learners and parents were fighting over the introduction of tracksuits for the school. Learners wanted tracksuits with pants for the girls and parents were not happy with that because, in their traditions, girls were not allowed to wear pants. The principal had to call the circuit manager because learners were starting to boycott classes and threatening violent protests.

> *The talk that the school is going to buy track suits and the problem parents say that in this area they do not want women who wear pants. The parent will say there is no girl that is going to wear pants here, while the learners want introduced the tracksuit.*

On the same issue, Ntanzi reported that parents treated girl and boy children differently. The boys were given certain roles and more opportunities than girls. Parents seemed not to be bothered by their under 16 girls getting pregnant. They do not view this as rape because the child was under 16. Once the principal would raise the matter with the social worker, the parents would chase him from their school as they viewed his action as an interference and a source of conflict which means the circuit manager must come in:

> *Parents are still conservative here. They are very respectful but they still some traditions that they still want to maintain. For example, they instil certain roles and expectation for boys and girls. The girls in the community I serve are not given more opportunities like boys. When learners go school and teachers tell them that boy and a girl are equal. This causes tension; some community members even try to chase the principal from the school when the principal learnt that a learner who is under 16 years is pregnant tried to intervene by involving the social worker. These issues a tradition and there is lot of secrecy about them. The principal and teachers view this as rape as the child was still under age. As a circuit manager I have to get involve now try to protect this principal.*

The cultural tradition practised by communities served by these circuit managers impacts the education of their children, which is also the responsibility of circuit managers. The manner in which girls and boys were treated by community was very conservative and impacted education of the learners. Marrying of young girls, *icece,* raising doek and ignoring abuse of young girls when they are impregnated at a young age are some of the issues that came up. As a result of circuit managers struggled to focus on issues of teaching and learning.

6.2.4 Low parental involvement in children's education

Circuit managers in this study reported experiencing low parental involvement in the education of their children. Parents were not involved in the education of their children. Skhwelo described that teachers invite parents to school, but parents do not go to schools as per invitation. Working with her school principals, they use different strategies including issuing reports to parents directly. This means that parents are invited to school on a particular date to collect reports rather than issuing them to learners to take home**.**

...teachers invite parents to the school, but parents do not come. They have tried many things even if they ask for school reports to be collected by parents, with an intention of drawing parents to the school. Even this attempt failed as parents do not come. All of these things are to try and solicit support from parents, but it also does not seem to work.

The utterances made by Skhwelo about poor parental involvement, as well the strategies used by circuit schools, were also shared by other circuit managers such as Myeza, Skhakhane and Ntanzi. Myeza highlighted the strategies he has designed to attract parents to attend some of the important activities of the school like the school budget. Working with her schools they prepare refreshments for parents whenever there are going to be parents meeting. Given their schools limited financial resources, they raise funds with local business for the refreshments. Myeza highlighted this:

When they (*parents) are invited for curriculum issues we receive reports from principals that parent attendance is very low. With some of my schools we have even devised measures to attract parents to attend school activities like budget presentation by using the little money that they have and fundraising and ensure that there are refreshments in the meetings. We advise schools to engage local business for donations Parent involvement in some of my school is a challenge.*

Skhakhane gave an example of dealing with faction fights and gangsterism as an important example of a severe manifestation of the lack of parental involvement. He observed that it is very challenging for him when parents of learners who participate in faction fights and gangsterism are unresponsive. He experienced lack of cooperation from parents of these learners when they do not take part in stakeholder meetings to discuss the faction fights and gangsterism.

One other thing that frustrates me is the lack of parental support from the parents of these learners that do these things (*faction fights and gangsterism).Parents do not want to be involved in working with the principals to discipline learners especially regarding their involvement in faction fights and gangsterism. Parents distance themselves from working stakeholders in finding solutions and it only become the*

responsibility of the school, myself and few parents and other stakeholder like chiefs and induna.

On the other hand, Ntanzi revealed the lack of parental participation when dealing with faction fights. He indicated parents are unable to ensure that their children do not bring weapons to school.

The parents are not also supporting the educators because the learners are bringing dangerous weapons to the school from home. This also affects the teaching inside the school as principal and educators fear for their lives.

The data shows several reasons for the non-involvement of parents. These different views are summed up in the utterances of Skhwelo, Myeza and Skhakhane. Skhwelo indicated that in the community he served parents' illiteracy levels are very high, and because of this, parents tend not to encourage their children to value their schooling. Skhwelo concluded that as result of the low education levels amongst parents, they also do not encourage their kids to go to school.

Parents are not encouraging learners to go to school and to be active participants in teaching and learning because education levels among the parents are very low they do not seem to care.

On the hand, Myeza suggested that non-participation of parents can also be attributed to high levels of poverty which makes some parents avoid visiting schools as they have an inferiority complex.

This can be attributed to very low standard of education among the parents and poverty which make them feel inferior.

Another circuit manager came up with a reason different from what was advanced by Skhwelo and Myeza. Skhakhane indicated that from his experience of working with the parents in general and SGB, the parent component in particular, he has established that despite parents of the community he serves being illiterate and poor, it does not mean they do not know what they want. He went on to explain that parents know what they want and perhaps they want their children to be educated differently. They do not support the kind of education that is provided by our schools. This is the type of education that says to their children, they must

stop observing their culture and tradition and glorify a western way of life, by getting educated and leaving their area for the suburbs. He supported this argument with another observation about the way teachers teach where they speak highly of city life at the expense of the local traditions. Thus, they consider that the best thing for the learners if they want a better life is for them to go to the cities.

> *When you meet the SGB* (*parent component) you are talking with people who know what they want. We must not say just because they are uneducated and poor, they do not know what should happen with their children. Like for example they say they do not like the habit where by their children once they get educated they leave the area. They also say that they wish their area can develop and their children should get educated and not leave the area. Then you now have the teachers talking to them saying that, "You see once you get educated you must build your house in Ballito."*

Drawing from the voices of circuit managers, it is clear that they value parental involvement for teaching and learning to succeed in their schools. It is also clear that they are not getting the desired support from parents, hence the faction fights and gangsterism remain a continual challenge. The contextual realities of their communities, such as illiteracy among parents and poverty, impact parental involvement. This lack of parental involvement is further compounded by the way the education is delivered, which is not consistent with local values. This is evident in the accounts of circuit managers about teachers encouraging learners to look for better life in towns and cities. One such value which is common in African communities is that of children looking after their parents when they age.

6.2.5 Faction fights and gangsterism

One of the contextual phenomena that affects the work of some circuit managers is violence in the form of faction fights and gangsterism. Having schools that are located in areas that have faction fights and gangsterism makes circuit managers' role of supporting teaching and learning difficult. What has emerged from data is that rural schools are prone to faction fights whereas the African, Coloured and Indian township schools faced gangsterism. Faction fights took place between *izigodi* (traditional wards). Faction fights affected the work of circuit managers directly because, when they broke out, they are compelled to find ways to deal with them. Principals contacted the circuit managers whenever they experienced these fights.

Circuit managers involved the parents and the local structures like chiefs, induna, councillors and at time even the district director. They worked with these structures to find the solution to end these wars as they emanated from the community. According to Ntanzi, Skhwelo, Raymond and Ngubo, faction fights were a common occurrence in their area. Ntanzi mentioned that boys who come from the warring wards brought their conflict to school and they start to fight.

> *There are many faction fights. The learner population come from these wards* (*izigodi) that are divided and do not get along. They come and meet at the school as different warring wards. As they come to school they fight.*

In concurrence with Ntanzi's views, Skhwelo highlighted that, as a result of the faction fights, teaching and learning was affected because learners were unable to go to school as they were supposed to.

> *The problem that is common that I came across is this area that I serve in since it is rural there are faction fights. You find that there is an area* (*isisgodi) that is fighting another. As a result, children are unable to attend school as they are supposed to.*

While other circuit managers dealt with challenge of faction fights, other circuit managers had to contend with gangsterism in the schools they supervise. In these schools their role of supporting teaching and learning was compromised by the violence and drugs that are associated with gangsterism. According to Myeza, young boys joined gangs and caused problems when gang wars and drugs are brought to the schools. Myeza, who had schools in African, Indian and Coloured areas, experienced gangsterism. Ngubo, the circuit manager of schools in both African and Coloured townships and in rural areas, described the challenges posed by both gangsterism and faction fights in his circuit. Ngubo shared that the teachers in these schools are compelled to suspend teaching and learning as the gang wars entered the school. Learners from different gangs bring weapons to schools and get involved with drugs and fights. When these wars broke out the school principals are unable to deal with it alone and they need the support of the circuit manager*:*

> *In some of my secondary schools in Malala* (not the real name)*, gangsterism is very rife and many boys are members of these gangs and*

> *they carry weapons into the school premises and it affects teaching and learning in the school because teachers now and again have to get involved in the trying to get in trying to dealing with waring gangsters and that create a problem and is big challenge in our schools. As circuit manager I get called by principals to come and assist.*

This violence impacted the objective of ensuring a safe environment for teaching and learning, something that is very important for circuit manager as instructional leaders. When this violence broke out, teachers and SMT became demotivated and demoralised. They also felt that they were no longer safe working in some of the schools that had these gangs. Ngubo explained that in one of her schools, teachers refused to go to their school and went to report at the circuit office as they felt unsafe in their school.

> *I pick up that educators and SMT members some of them are frustrated, demotivated and demoralised by these things that happen on daily basis in our schools. At one stage the educators threated to go and report at the circuit office after an incident that took place at the school and teacher felt very unsafe. As circuit manager I had to come in and intervene.*

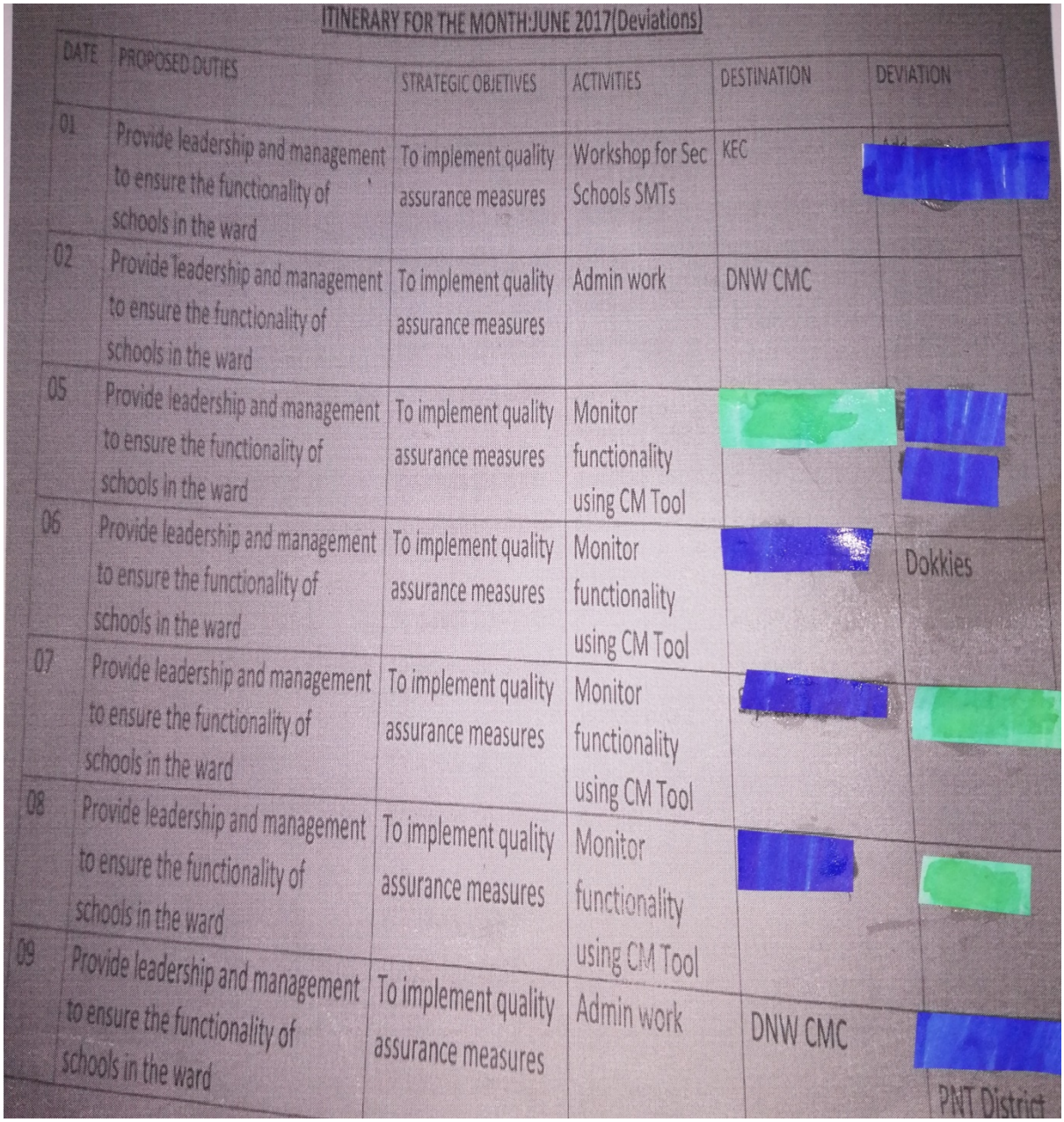
Faction fights and gangsterism added another layer of responsibility to circuit mangers. With schools unable to deal with gangsterism and faction fights on their own, the circuit managers' intervention is always requested by school principals. This was confirmed by Ntanzi, who stated that faction fights and gangsterism do not only put an extra burden on him, they also shifted his focus from supporting teaching and learning.

> *These fights put an extra burden on me because I now have to shift my focus from other important matters like teaching and learning to maintaining peace because the war through these learners has now entered the school. This now means we have to go out and ask the warring community to stop the fighting by joining in the multi stakeholder team working on this. This team includes the police, the chiefs, the municipality, district officials and even the provincial office send a representative.*

Dealing with faction fights also affected circuit managers' planning. This was evidenced by circuit managers' inability to follow their monthly itinerary. Circuit managers compiled an itinerary every month based on the year plans. It was however difficult to follow their itinerary partly because of these faction fights and gangsterism. When report of outbreaks of faction fights and incidents of gangsterism are received by circuit managers, they were compelled to drop everything and attend to them because they viewed themselves as fire extinguishers. Therefore, their first task is to go there and put out that fire. They do this by using their positional power (legitimate power) through engaging the police, induna, the chiefs and the councillors to facilitate community discussion and police to provide security during the outbreak period. Secondly, some of these events are covered by media, and thus draw the attention of the Provincial Head Office and the Member of Executive Council (MEC) for Education and public in general. The person who must provide the report about what happened to these stakeholders is the circuit manager, based on reports by the principal and his or her assessment on the ground. This is what Ngubo described as the disturbance to his planning, experienced due to the prevalence of gang fights in his circuit:

> *Monthly, we develop an itinerary. We plan on day one we visit this school, day two, it's a visit to that school until the end of the month. However, having said that, it ends up not being followed because as a circuit manager you are a fire extinguisher. When you receive a call about the incidents you drop everything and attend to them because the media, the Head Office and MEC or the politician have an interest in them.*

As part of the data generation methods used in this study, different documents used by circuit managers to do their work were analysed. Below, figure 12 is the Itinerary Deviation used by circuit managers. Schools' names are shaded to protect the identity of the schools and circuit manager.



ITINERARY FOR THE MONTH:JUNE 2017(Deviations)

DATE	PROPOSED DUTIES	STRATEGIC OBJETIVES	ACTIVITIES	DESTINATION	DEVIATION
01	Provide leadership and management to ensure the functionality of schools in the ward	To implement quality assurance measures	Workshop for Sec Schools SMTs	KEC	
02	Provide leadership and management to ensure the functionality of schools in the ward	To implement quality assurance measures	Admin work	DNW CMC	
05	Provide leadership and management to ensure the functionality of schools in the ward	To implement quality assurance measures	Monitor functionality using CM Tool		
06	Provide leadership and management to ensure the functionality of schools in the ward	To implement quality assurance measures	Monitor functionality using CM Tool		Dokkies
07	Provide leadership and management to ensure the functionality of schools in the ward	To implement quality assurance measures	Monitor functionality using CM Tool		
08	Provide leadership and management to ensure the functionality of schools in the ward	To implement quality assurance measures	Monitor functionality using CM Tool		
09	Provide leadership and management to ensure the functionality of schools in the ward	To implement quality assurance measures	Admin work	DNW CMC	PNT District

Figure 12: Extract from Itinerary Deviation used by circuit managers

Circuit managers indicated that they find it difficult to keep up with their itineraries; as a result, their itinerary deviations become completely new documents as they can hardly follow their itineraries. Data from the analysis of the copies of circuit managers' itinerary deviations corroborates what was explained by the circuit managers about spending more time in schools that have challenges, at the expense of focusing on the core business of supporting teaching and learning. The itinerary deviation above shows that school shaded in green was scheduled to be seen for monitoring functionality on the 5th. This did not happen, and it was seen on the 7th and 8th. When the circuit manager was asked about why was this the case, he indicated that it is one of the schools that has a problem with faction fights. This trend of excessive visiting

of such schools was seen in more than 12 of this circuit manger's schools, a similar pattern applied also to other circuit managers who deal with faction fights and gangsterism.

I conclude that circuit managers who supervise schools in these contexts find it very difficult to focus on the support of teaching and learning because of these challenges. It is evident from the findings of this study that circuit managers are frustrated by the ever-present socio-economic problems that they face in these schools that make it difficult for them to focus on issues of teaching and learning.

6.2.6 Shortage of school resources and infrastructure

It was noted that schools in rural areas face shortages of critical infrastructure like toilets, whereas the township schools experienced to have problems with library and laboratories. Skhakhane, whose schools are in rural areas, emphasised that in some of his schools it is common to have the pit toilet system and have boys and girls sharing the same toilets.

> *Lack of toilet facilities, lack of electricity, they* (*toilets) have pit, sometimes learners* (*boys and girls) share toilets*

Myeza, whose schools are in townships, does not have major infrastructure problems in her circuit; she however indicated that her schools do not have libraries and laboratories.

> *I do come across schools without libraries and laboratories. This is very concerning especially for our secondary school.*

They end up having to sympathise with schools and demonstrate their understanding of the situation. Circuit managers are not happy with their limited role in the provision of infrastructure to schools. To this effect, Skhakhane described this role as frustrating:

> *Frustration emanates from the fact that you go to schools give support yet some of these things that I have mentioned above as challenges are not controlled by me. I am not in control of infrastructure I am not in control of the provision of electricity. I go there to mourn with the principal in that school. The support that you give is just to empathise just to say I understand. After understanding what help I will be offering? An additional toilet or electricity?*

6.2.7 Human resources provision

The data suggests that circuit managers are held accountable by the District Director if there are schools in their circuit that are without teachers. This means circuit managers must work tirelessly to ensure that all the schools receive their full staff complement (as presented in Chapter 5). This was confirmed by Skhakhane who indicated that they are held accountable for resource provision to the school, especially human resources:

> *If in one of my schools, there a class without a teacher. I have to find solutions to that issue; I have to account on what I did to help the school out.*

Despite circuit managers being held accountable for the provision of human resources, particularly teachers, it is the District Office that controls the appointment of teachers. The district uses the Provincial Post Provision Norm (PPN) policy which determines the staffing of schools according to the number of learners in the school. The circuit manager's role is limited to taking information from school principals and motivating for employment of the teacher if there is a vacancy in a school.

Given so many challenges that some of the schools face, the PPN policy seems to be a major problem for circuit managers' role of staffing schools in these contexts, since some of the schools are 'two teachers plus one' schools, have very low number of learners and have parents who are too poor, while all schools in these circuits are no-fee schools. This means that circuit managers have to support teaching and learning in school where there are in some cases two teachers teaching Grades 1 to Grade 7 in primary schools. In secondary schools, subject choices are impossible to balance and teachers' workloads are enormous. The parents are unable to pay the school fees, hence these school are no-fee schools. The conditions on the ground make it very difficult for circuit managers to facilitate staffing for their schools using the PPN policy. The PPN policy seems to negatively affect circuit managers in these contexts. They do not like this system as it fails to take into consideration the conditions found in different schools. Skhakhane explained:

> *Model used for allocating teachers to the schools the so called PPN, I am not in charge of it. It should be revisited so that it can be determined by individual circumstances of each school. I would have requested that each school must be looked on its own merit.*

Over and above the issue of PPN, another human resource challenge that impacts circuit managers' work in this context is the inability to retain teachers in their schools. Ngubo narrated that that teachers and the principals come to these areas as novices and acquire experience and expertise, and some even improve their qualifications while there. They then leave for schools in better circuits because of the difficult working conditions. This creates a circle of frustration, as after they have trained teachers, they leave once they are competent, and the schools have to start from scratch again. This what Ngubo had to say about this:

> *Another thing will be that once we have trained educators and they have confidence they leave and go to urban districts. These are some of the problems that we face.*

Poor retention of personnel is not limited to the teachers; it also affects the principals. Principals in these circuits do not stay long in their positions. They either resign or take up positions in other better resourced circuits. This make it difficult for circuit managers who want their schools to have leadership stability so that quality teaching and learning is ensured. Skhakhane explained that the problem with poor retention of school principals is that it affects his ability to achieve the circuit goals. When people have worked together to develop a set of shared goals, and then leave, it undermines the pursuit of such goals. This issue is made worse because the circuit manager has invested time and energy in developing the principals. He explains:

> *Out of the seven secondary school principals there is only one principal who has been in a school for the past four years. This affects me as I need people to work with that were part of our planning, development of shared goals and work who will towards achieving them. It is very depressing to work with person, teach and coach him or her. Once you are about reap the fruit of your hard work, the person leaves or resigns.*

The general reasons for the teacher to leave these schools is the long distance they drive in bad roads every day. The less than ideal working conditions, characterised by a lack of resource and a community that is often uncooperative, were also found to be issues that drive teachers away. Skhakhane explains:

It is long distances drive in these bad roads every day. When they are at our schools they are met with difficult conditions which include lack resources, community that is non-cooperative.

On the other hand, the reason that make the secondary school teachers and principals in particular leave, according to Raymond, is the pressure for good matric results in the secondary schools. He stated that matric results in secondary school are very important. The Department of Education puts so much pressure on the schools with matric to ensure the good pass rates. Raymond explained that the matric pressure, as well as the difficult terrain the principal has to navigate, make some principals look for schools in other better resourced schools or consider resignation. There are also those principals who misuse school funds by taking advantage of the illiterate parents in the SGB. When such principals realise that they are caught and that they will be fired they just resign:

Some leave, as I had indicated, it is hard to work here especially as principal, the environment is difficult there are many challenges. For secondary schools resulted are non-negotiable, there is pressure, to some it becomes too much, some just steal the money; when they see that they are getting caught they resign.

Some circuit managers feel helpless when it comes to providing schools with resources because they are not in control of the availability of resources. Skhakhane stated that he shared some of his responsibilities with different sub-directorates. He wished his job description could to be revisited and be clarified. It should allow him to be able to deal with the provision of resources quickly. This makes circuit managers to want their job description to be re-visited. From the analysis of the data from interview and document, it was also evident that some circuit managers were not happy with the powers that they have to provide resources and to take quick decisions in the interests of their schools, since some of the decisions have to be taken at provincial or district level, like allocation of teachers.

There is no clear definition or job description. If you talk about this issue that we are talking about of teaching and learning subject advisors say it is their responsibility when you talk about issues of teaching material like desk there a people from LTSM. Then the question is what your

responsibility is. So, the job description needs to be clear, what does the job description say.

Contrary to the views shared by participants above, Myeza, who supervises schools in the African and Indian townships, described circuit management's experiences with the way her job description is structured. She described the experiences of a circuit manager as the first layer of support to schools and the different sub-directorate as the second layer, consisting of officials with specialised skills. She stated that once she has attended to the problems and she feels that it is beyond what she can help the school with, she brings in the district sub-directorate. This how Myeza interpreted her job description:

A circuit manager is a general practitioner and it depends on the seriousness of the problem in the school. For example, the problem is referred to me, and I employ my own expertise and then when I find that I have my own challenges then I go to relevant sub directorate which has officials who are specialists.

6.2.8 Scattered schools and poor road conditions

School visits, as shown in Chapter 5, are a very important strategy that circuit managers use to support teaching and learning. Ngubo explained that the schools in his circuits are scattered and the distance between them is very big. The road conditions are very bad as most roads are not tarred. He added that the situation becomes worse when it rains, as it becomes difficult to drive to schools. This, he argued, limits his ability to visit schools as they are only able to visit schools that have better road conditions. When circuit managers are unable to visit all the schools as it is required, the support of teaching and learning is compromised. Ngubo explained that:

They (*schools) are scattered because the furthest school from the circuit is 35km, some are in bad locations with bad roads that are inaccessible when it has been raining. Those in bad locations it's hard to reach them I won't lie to you when it rains I don't go there because of the conditions.*

Raymond also echoed the above sentiment by stating that his schools are also spread over a wide area. However, unlike Ngubo, access to his schools is by gravel road, which makes it possible for him to travel even when it is raining. The challenge that he has is that it takes

longer for him to drive in the gravel road and thus he is only able to visit two schools a day. This is how Raymond elaborated:

> *I supervise 35 schools, all 35 are deep rural schools. All of them have to be accessed by gravel road and all the roads are bad. Geographically they are spread out over a wide area so if I did two schools in a day I would have achieved a lot because the schools may be20 kilometres away from each other but to travel the long kilometres takes a long time.*

The location of schools and the school visits also present another administrative challenge for circuit managers. Circuit managers are allowed to travel a particular number of kilometres a month. Once they have reached that number of kilometres, they are unable to visit schools. With their schools scattered, these circuit managers seem to reach their kilometre allocation more quickly. They are then expected to motivate for permission to go beyond their monthly allowed kilometres. This can also take some time, hence circuit managers resort to using their phones to monitor and communicate with schools. Ngubo explained:

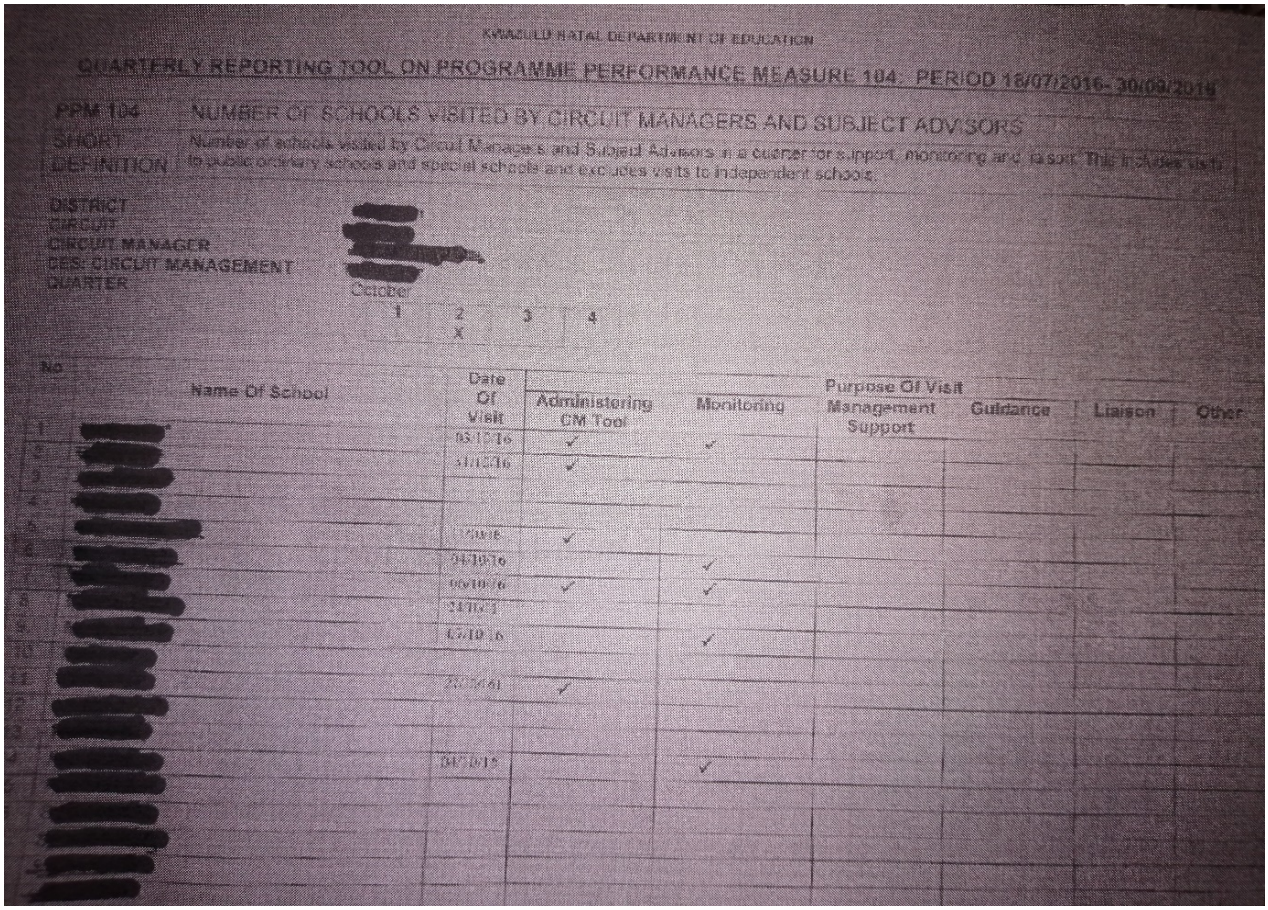
> *I've reached those kilometres it becomes a challenge. It is difficult because I rely on my phone, I can't visit schools. I sometimes use my phones to monitor schools and communicate with some of the schools and ask principals provide me with certain information that will assist me get to know how the school is progressing.*

The data suggests that given the fact that the schools are scattered, so circuit managers find it difficult to visit all their schools as is expected of them. In this regard, Myeza stated that, as the circuit manager, she is required to visit all schools in the circuit at least once a term. After visiting a school, she has to complete the form called PPM 104 which serves as the evidence of school visits.

> *In terms of job description as a circuit manager I have to visit all schools as per department prescript once per term, all schools have to be visited because at the end of the term I need to fill in the PPM 104 which is report template for the department. At times not possible to visit all this schools.*

A document review of circuit managers' PPM 104 (see Figure 13) indicates that circuit managers indeed struggle to visit each school in a term in their circuits. This document, used

by circuit managers to report on their school visits, was used to corroborate the findings from interviews, that circuit managers are not able to visit all the schools per term. Looking at Ntanzi's PPM 104, in one of the terms, out of 29 schools that are in his circuit, he was only able to visit 16. It also emerged that circuit managers seem to do school visits for the purpose of compliance.


KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

QUARTERLY REPORTING TOOL ON PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE MEASURE 104: PERIOD 1/07/2016- 30/09/2016

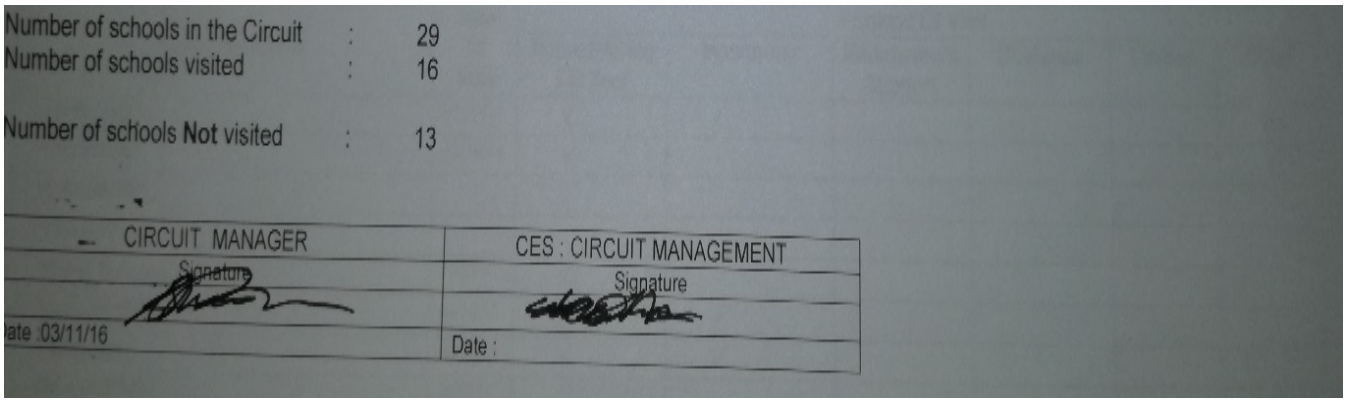
PPM 104 NUMBER OF SCHOOLS VISITED BY CIRCUIT MANAGERS AND SUBJECT ADVISORS

SHORT DEFINITION: Number of schools visited by Circuit Managers and Subject Advisors in a cluster for support, monitoring and liaison. This includes visits to public ordinary schools and special schools and excludes visits to independent schools.

DISTRICT
CIRCUIT
CIRCUIT MANAGER
CES: CIRCUIT MANAGEMENT
QUARTER

October
1 2 3 4
X

No	Name Of School	Date Of Visit	Purpose Of Visit: Administering CM Tool	Monitoring	Management Support	Guidance	Liaison	Other
1	[redacted]	05/10/16	✓	✓				
2		11/10/16	✓					
3								
4		20/10/16	✓					
5		24/10/16		✓				
6		06/10/16	✓	✓				
7		24/10/16						
8		07/10/16		✓				
9								
10		20/10/16	✓					
11								
12								
13		04/10/16		✓				
14								
15								


Number of schools in the Circuit : 29
Number of schools visited : 16

Number of schools **Not** visited : 13

CIRCUIT MANAGER	CES : CIRCUIT MANAGEMENT
Signature	Signature
Date :03/11/16	Date :

Figure 13: Extract from Ntanzi's PPM 104 Tool Form

Based on the voices of circuit managers above, it is clear that the distance between circuit offices and schools impacted on their ability to visit schools and provide necessary support.

This seemed to impact rural circuits more as they have schools that have worse road conditions and long distances between them.

6.2.9 Relationship between circuit office and district, provincial and national offices

Circuit managers seem to be under pressure from all sides. Circuit managers who participated in the study have many schools that they support that are underperforming. Secondary schools that have matric are always the ones in the spotlight as they write an external examination. Getting less than 60% in matric attracts massive interventions and accountability processes for schools and their circuit managers. Data indicated that circuit managers' work in their circuit is characterised by a plethora of interventions, brought by upper structures like the district, provincial and the national department officials, aimed at improving matric results.

While these interventions are done to help the schools, they create a context which makes the work of the circuit manager difficult. Raymond expressed his discontent with these interventions as having no value other than to artificially improve the matric results. He argued that if the general standard of education is improved across all the grades, matric results will also follow. He viewed these interventions as short cuts which in the end are not helping education as the underlying causes of under-performance are not attended to. He stated that, to really improve the quality of education, the Department of Education has to deal with many issues. This is what Raymond had to say about this:

> *I mean that they are trying to improve the matric results. That is not going to the root out cause of the problem. The programmes that are introduced by the district and the province are mainly to fix results. However, in order to make those successful and make education vibrant again you will have to deal with a lot more issues.*

Along the same line, of these programme designed to fix matric results, raised by Raymond, Skhakhane lamented the fact that the programmes that target matric have caused secondary schools not to pay attention to all the grades but to focus on the matric learners as they write external examination. These results are used to benchmark the quality of teaching and learning in the school, circuit, district, province and the country. This also puts schools and learners under so much pressure to such an extent that some resort to cheating. This is how Skhakhane rationalised this:

> *These (programme) tend to overlook junior classes but I always say we must remember that all classes are matric. People want quick result that is why some school go to the extent of cheating.*

Over and above these programmes designed to fix matric results, Raymond further experienced issues that are related to a political exercise aimed at showing the electorate that the political elite is doing something to fix education. He also suggested that these initiatives need to take into consideration the local contexts and challenges. He views them as top down initiatives aimed to put undue pressure on them, pressure that will not improve the quality of education. This is what Raymond had to say:

> *Politicians are starting to ask what you (senior management) are doing about the results. So, they put the pressure on the bureaucracy and the pressure on us.*

The data further suggests that some circuit managers' negative attitudes about these programmes are borne out of the manner in which they are brought to them. Skhakhane shared that these officials are very arrogant, which is underpinned by an assumption that they as an upper structure can impose whatever they want to the lower structure. He further added that when these programmes are brought to school, he is expected to set aside whatever plans that he had, and he is told about this in an unprofessional manner. He added that the senior officials, when telling them to put their plans aside, ask them why learners have been failing if their plans were working. This is how Skhakhane defined this situation:

> *There is someone who says put whatever you had as a circuit manager aside, here is the most important thing because tomorrow these officials from district or officials from province are coming. These officials are going to visit your schools so put that aside. You see that is done so negatively. In some instances, they will say that if this thing of yours was working learners should have passed last year, with those techniques of yours with those strategies.*

Such attitudes that seek to undermine circuit managers and school principals displayed by senior officials also emerged in the document reviews of Myeza's circuit meeting minutes with school principals. According to the minutes of the meeting whose extract appears below, it emerged that while the circuit manager was discussing curriculum management with her school

principals, one principal highlighted the utterances made by the District Director. One principal remarked that the remarks made by the District Director at the meeting the circuit manager held with her under performing schools was counter-productive to the good work they were trying to do. These remarks according to the meeting minutes were also echoed by the circuit manager.

> *8. Curriculum management*
>
> *Principal together with SMT must ensure that meetings are held at all levels and minutes are kept thereof. The Principal and his/her D.P must scrutinize the Term results and check whether the school is underperforming or not. If underperforming need to come up with Improvement strategy. This is not new but ongoing and should be reflected in the SIP. The Principal, Mr Shange stated that the District Directors' tone at underperforming schools' meeting was counter-productive to good work.* Myeza, *circuit manager agreed with him.*

Figure 14: Extract from Myeza's principals' meeting minutes

Participants showed that communication was limited and this created a high level of confusion among educationists. Skhwelo illustrated that, when these programmes are rolled out, there is a lack of communication with the circuit manager as the supervisor of school principals. She stated that these senior officials tend to do things with schools without informing her as the circuit manager. She further highlighted that such action creates confusion as they (district and provincial) come up with their own project whereas she had her own programme with her schools. They give schools tasks to do without her knowledge and then involve her when the schools are not responding positively to the tasks they gave them. This is what was stated by Skhwelo about this:

> *What I can tell you is sometimes the district and the provincial officials tend not tell me things. Sometimes they go directly to schools with programmes or instructions. This tends to come back to me, where you'll find that the schools have not responded, and you are now required to intervene.*

According to this finding these officials even fail to communicate among themselves, as a result of the uncoordinated communication. This results in a situation whereby many activities are done on the same day. It is common to have different structures wanting to see the same group of teachers at the same time. Sikhakhane explained that these officials seem not to understand

the dynamics on the ground. For example, since some of the schools were multi-grading, circuit managers understand that calling a workshop for two teachers per school means in some schools teaching and learning will be compromised. Skhakhane summarised this finding in this way:

> *They do not talk to each because you will find that one comes from Province and he or she is not aware that there is another one from National or another coming from a particular District section. One from this section comes to the school or calls for the workshop on this and the other one has called for the very same person to attend his or her workshop. How? Remember in some of these schools there is multi-grading.*

Views raised by circuit managers in the foregoing discussion about their relationship with upper structures show that it is important to present the views shared by Ngubo, who indicated that, despite the challenges they had with upper structures, there was a Management Committee that is headed by the District Director. The structure provided him and other circuit managers with an opportunity to table their concerns. While the Management Committee presented circuit managers with an opportunity to communicate their concerns, it did not help much since some of their complaints were not taken into consideration. There was a lack of understanding about the unique challenges that were found in their circuits. Circuit managers needed district director who would be a reasonable, imaginative person, and attempt to be empathetic to their contexts:

> *Yes, they are, they are taken into consideration though sometimes we have complaints but there is nothing to be done and it's also dependent on the character of the district manager. For now, what you are expecting is kind of a person who must accommodate the circuit Kwa-Phuthuma [not the real name for the circuit] with its challenges and district has its challenged. I expect someone who will be reasonable, an imaginative person who will attempt to get into our shoes (as Circuit managers) if ever there are issues and he/she might say he or she must get to the point where she says "if it was me it would feel like this I would see myself working like this."*

What is emerging from this finding is that circuit managers seem to be overlooked and not treated with respect by the upper structures. Their knowledge of the local dynamic is not considered as important and, most importantly, whatever they do is undermined by these structures and put aside. They expressed frustration by this, because they had experience of the contexts, however little is done to accommodate such an experience. The structures that were designed to help them seem to be in no position to assist them.

6.2.10 Circuit managers working with corrupt SGBs and unions

Data generated through the interviews suggests that the circuit managers' role of supporting teaching and learning is impacted by the inability of the SGBs of some of their schools to discharge their responsibilities. Circuit managers experienced some illiterate parent component members of the SGBs in some schools who live in poverty. Data further provided allegations that the few parents that avail themselves to be elected into the SGBs, do so so that they have access to the food that schools receive through National School Nutrition Programme and partake in allocating who will do small jobs for the school.

> *Parents are illiterate, live in poverty, they are not participating in the school activities and some avoid being elected to SGB and there are those who want to serve. These parents do not want to serve for genuine reasons they want food from the feeding scheme and playing a role in management of school funds and appointing people who work in the school. Despite these issues I work well with some of them because there is an element of Ubuntu.*

One responsibility that compels the circuit managers to work closely with the SGBs is during the appointment of the school principals. It is during the appointment of school principals that challenges associated with the parent component of the SGB are more apparent. Participants generally revealed that some SGBs fail to recommend principals for appointments. Many of the parents who serve in the SGB are illiterate and cannot speak English, they find it difficult to follow what the candidate is saying. The situation is so bad that while the SGB is, according to the South African Schools Act, allowed to form an Interview Committee by co-opting other parents who are not SGB members, as long as it is chaired by a member of the SGB, they still fail to find people who are literate and whom they can trust to be co-opted to the interview committee. Skhakhane explained:

Appointing principals, parents have failed to recommend principals for appointment. Interview principal: they cannot interview a principal. We say the principal must not only be a person who speaks English, though we interview him in English. We say he or she is going to liaise with different people on behalf of the school community, so he needs to be fluent in English. So, if he or she cannot speak English, he will disadvantage the school and the community. So once English is used, the SGB (parent) component will not follow.

Another dynamic that characterises the role of circuit managers, when working with SGBs during the appointment of school principal, is the relationship with teacher unions. While a circuit manager acts as a resource person during the process of appointing the principal, Raymond indicated that during the interview process he could see or suspect that something was not right, and he saw that the SGB has been infiltrated by union members.

I do promotions of principals and I sit in the interview committee as a resource person, but I know that when I am sitting there and I am listening I can see that the SGB has been infiltrated by the union. There is an undue influence on that governing body. I see to it that the panel is chosen properly, democratically and everything, but the scoring is going in a particular direction.

In addition, data suggests that the work of some circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning is compromised by union contestation for posts. Skhwelo raised her discomfort with the state of instability that is created in schools when unions declare disputes continually if a person they wanted to be a principal did not get the post. She indicated that in her circuit she has two contesting unions. When promotional posts are advertised unions want their members to get those posts. When a particular union member does not get the post, the other one will launch a dispute. This tends to negatively affect teaching and learning because a school without a permanently appointed principal is very difficult to work with, she added.

When there are promotional posts advertised I start to see problems of fighting. There will be this fighting based on declaring disputes continually. While the post is not filled, it's a negatively affects the school because a

school that does not have a permanent principal is hard to work with. The school becomes unstable and it is hard to work with it.

Adding to the views shared by Skhwelo above, Myeza expressed discomfort that certain appointments take a lot of her time. She has to prepare and attend dispute hearings, instead of focusing on supporting teaching and learning. The instability resulting from having an acting principal for a long time caused teachers, among other things, not to respect acting incumbents.

As results there are lot of tension that arise because of this where disputes are launched because Unions want their members to get certain posts. This is indeed disturbing because dispute hearings are time-consuming, and they can take a long time. As Circuit manager, I have to face the panel and explain what happened. This also have a negative impact on the school. Teachers tend not respect an acting principal as result as circuit manager I always try my best to ensure that principals' appointments are done speedily and correctly to avoid long disputes

The challenge posed by unions were very difficult for circuit managers to deal with because the unions had infiltrated the very senior management of the department. This was evident when union members participated in an illegal strike for three weeks and no action was taken against them. Raymond summarised the general view from the participants:

I am telling you this as a department official I also know that at the provincial level unions dictate to the provincial officials. There were incidents where the unions decided to stop all schools for three weeks, stand outside the District Office and demand the removal of the District Director because the candidate they wanted as the director did not get the post, there was a wildcat strike. Those union officials are back at work no one was fired, no one was removed. That's the power of the union in this country.

While almost all circuit managers who participated in this study accepted the important role of unions, as was in Chapter 5, they also indicated a major challenge in dealing with teacher unions. One circuit manager who reported as having no difficulties in working with unions was Skhakhane, who indicated that he worked well with the unions. When it was time to do the principal appointment processes, he told them that he was a conservative Zulu man and did not

take bribes. For example, one circuit manager indicated he could not ask for work from the person who gave you a bribe.

> *They told me that they will never say someone must be put in a particular position because those that they previously put disappointed them. So, they said that circuit manager you will take care of the process. I then said no when I get there I do not want anything I am a Zulu man ngiBhinca. So, my word is that lets go there and look for a person to fill the position in a fair manner. They will also say that they want their people to get some positions, so they will workshop them.*

Based on the voices of circuit managers above, it is clear that challenges associated with the ineffectiveness of SGBs impact on the ability of circuit managers to support teaching and learning. This situation is further impacted by unions who took advantage of it. The state of infighting alluded to in this section by some circuit managers, and the continual declaring of disputes by rival unions when their members did not get appointments, create an environment where teaching and learning are compromised. Furthermore, if undeserving teachers were appointed as principals, the teaching and learning in the school where such teachers are appointed is likely to be negatively affected. The circuit manager would eventually have to find ways to deal with that situation later when the teacher is unable to effectively discharge his or her principalship responsibilities. While one circuit manager acknowledged that parents had failed as a major component of the SGB, he seemed to be happy with working with unions.

6.3 The influence of contextual realities on circuit managers' leadership

While the previous theme of this chapter presents the contextual realities that circuit managers encounter, this theme seeks to further share the light about the influence of context on the work of circuit managers by presenting the influence of context in the leadership of circuit managers. From data generated through interviews and documents it emerged that circuit managers' leadership is greatly influenced by their contexts. To this effect they have developed strategies and methods for them to be able support teaching and learning. These strategies were influenced by their local situation. Circuit managers use these strategies to navigate their local challenges. These strategies include ensuring good relationships based on mutual trust with the school principal, promoting ownership of problems rather than being punitive, understanding

community values and culture, looking for contexts-based solutions and advancing qualifications and professional development. These strategies are discussed below.

6.3.1 Ensuring good relationship based on understanding and mutual trust with school principals

It emerged that some circuit managers believe that having a cordial relationship with school principals based on understanding, and mutual trust is essential in these contexts. Skhakhane explained that the manner in which he worked with his principals in supporting teaching and learning in his schools is greatly influenced by the understanding that it is not easy to lead there. Skhakhane sympathised with his school principals because of he understands the daily challenges that they faced in these schools. Skhakhane explained:

> *In these schools it difficult to lead, I know it is worse for the principals who are there all the time.*

Ngubo promoted good relations based on mutual trust with his school principals. For example, he indicated that in his circuit a good working relationship with the school principal was very important. This is how Ngubo expanded on this:

> *The principal must trust the circuit manager. If ever they are facing problems, principal must not keep the problems to himself or herself.*

Data further shows that circuit managers use communication to develop and sustain good relationships based on mutual trust with their school principals. They encourage principals to communicate and not suffer alone. They want their principals to inform them about any challenge that they are facing. Ngubo stated that:

> *I encourage principal to communicate with me and I build up good human relations and trust. When things are not happening, I want to know why and how we can help.*

Communication being an important issue in this theme, it emerged that circuit manager use different communication strategies to mitigate the challenges brought by contexts. Myeza created and used a circuit WhatsApp group since all her principals have smart phones. They use this medium to post information and get responses instantly. "I *communicate via emails, SMS's, WhatsApp, and through telephone calls".*

Skhwelo highlighted circulars, social networks, SMS and urgent meetings as some of the communication strategies she used:

> *I send circulars to schools, I use social networks and SMS if there is something urgent that I need to address, we also conduct meetings.*

Another strategy that they used to build human relations based on mutual trust is through strategic school visits. Ntanzi described these school visits as outside of the normal scheduled visits. As a circuit manager, he is able to tell if a principal is struggling or doing well. He then used these school visits, which are less formal and open, to create a relationship with the principals while professionally developing them. He believed that given the number of challenges that some of the principals work under, they may not feel comfortable to talk to their superiors about their fears, since they may be viewed as failures. He thought that by establishing good working relations and mutual trust he stands a better chance of supporting principals and their schools. Ntanzi elaborated:

> *As a circuit manager I understand because I will find that some school principals I visit, and I say okay this one is fine let me leave this person. I should increase the frequency of my visits and support to that one because I need to build this person, I need to develop good working relation with this principal and work on trust issues so that we can be able work on the number of challenges that are in her.*

It emerged from this finding above that circuit managers, having been principals in schools like that of the current principal, understood that teaching and learning in these schools is not easy. They understood that, for them to have any chance of being successful, they require to have the support of the school principals. They went out of their way to ensure that they create positive working relations based on mutual trust with the school principals.

6.3.2 Promoting ownership of the problem as opposed to being punitive

Promoting ownership of the problem rather than being formal and punitive has emerged as a way circuit manager operated in their circuit when dealt with school principals. This understanding appeared to extend to the manner in which circuit managers dealt with unacceptable performance or misconduct issues of school principals. Unpacking this view, Raymond pointed out that dealing with issues of poor work performance and disciplinary issues

by school principals requires patience, and he avoids rushing to use formal disciplinary procedures as provided for in the Employment of Educator Act's Section 17 and 18. He emphasised persuasiveness in leadership and being developmental. He thus avoids destroying the character and the relationship with the school principal. This is how it was indicated in his previous comments:

> *I try to use persuasion. I say to them you know the consequences of your actions. And in many cases, it works after a while they see the light and now that is one of the things that support my work. If I reach the phase where the principal suddenly sees and say that heyi man I must do this thing correctly and manage well then I would have achieved more than if I had charged him.*

This finding and approach is unique and important; as was discussed in Chapter 5. Getting teachers to work in some of these schools is a challenge. In South Africa circuit managers are compelled to invest in the personnel in their circuits through provision of continuous development rather than instituting formal disciplinary processes. Formal disciplinary processes may lead to suspension or dismissal, which can be preceded by a long period of legal processes and leaves the school without a principal, a problem that comes back to haunt the circuit manager if it is for an extended period. This does not mean they allow lawlessness, it means they carefully think about everything. Raymond explained that he warns principals and tells them about the consequences of objectionable workplace behaviour. Although he is always ready to evoke formal processes, he does not take such decision in a hurry.

> *I can warn them, I can tell them what the consequences are but I always think about instituting formal disciplinary processes carefully.*

This approach is preferred by circuit managers because they value enabling workplace relationships with the school principal. According to circuit managers, some offences may require instituting formal disciplinary action against the principal. Circuit managers however think carefully about such action, because they believe that if such action is taken without carefully thinking it through, it may have a negative impact on the circuit managers-school leaders relationship. While they appreciate their responsibility of holding principals accountable, circuit managers prefer principals to take responsibility and ownership of their

action as leaders. They derive success through having school principals taking ownership of their actions rather than having to charge them. Skhakhane explained:

> *I need this person (principal) to work with again. I have to teach him. If I can teach them about taking ownership of their work rather than to charge them I can say I've won.*

For example, participants in this study indicated that they delay invoking the law to charge principals and opt instead for developing a trusting relationship, for responsibility and professionalism.

6.3.3 Understanding community culture and values

Understanding the culture and value systems of the community where one works comes up as one of the strategies circuit managers used to mitigate the impact of context in their role of supporting teaching and learning. Skhakhane highlighted that one of the strategies he used is to position himself as part of the community. This strategy helps circuit managers when they deal with challenges like faction fights or resistance to change. This is what Skhakhane, a circuit manager who has schools that are in the rural areas, said:

> *One I always try to be in their level, I just tell them that ngibhica I am from rural area, telling the truth because I was born in the rural area. I tell them that I know Zulu culture and Western things both of them. I always say you cannot beat me in terms of knowledge about Zulu culture.*

Participants in this study also indicated that, as part of their empowerment of the parent components of the SGB, they try to undo some of the cultural stereotyping that may hinder their children's education. During the parents meeting circuit managers ask principals to invite them. They use the meeting to discuss some of these things. They explain to parents that the world is changing, they must accept change so that their children will leave a better life. The wearing pants by girls is not well accepted in some communities. The girls are supposed to wear track suits during sports and this will be the source of conflict between the school and the parents. Parents will protest against the principal who is suggesting this. The circuit manager will be required to intervene. This is evident in the articulation made by Ngubo when he stated that:

> *I remember the issue of girls and track suits, there was one man even today he is my best friend because I explained to him that why it is important for girls to wear pants though some people do not want women to wear pants not because of culture but because of some habit* (*umkhuba). I explained to them. I tell them that I do accept the wearing of pants by women after stating that I am for Zulu culture and tell them why.*

Circuit managers, when they intervene in these instances, tread very carefully so that they gain the support of the community. This view is also echoed by Myeza, a circuit manager who has schools in the previously Indian only townships, African townships and shack areas. She believes understanding diversity, preaching it and ensuring that as the circuit manager you are well vested with community values goes a long way in ensuring cooperation of the community as well as stakeholders. This is what she has to say about this:

> *You have to understand the community its values and embrace diversity. and make the people that you work with to do the same because some of them will look at the colour of your skin and say "maybe I cannot be led by this kind of person" so if you know your story then it will make things easier for you to be acceptable into schools and the governing bodies.*

Evidence from the data is that some circuit managers work very hard to understand the values of the community in which they serve, by positioning themselves with the community and purporting to be at their level. This seems to help the circuit managers to disarm some negative connotations which may emerge, when he is viewed as an outsider. By being part of them the circuit manager gains the ability to talk to the community about some of the things that may be otherwise difficult.

6.3.4 Looking for contexts-based solutions by working with local stakeholders

When supporting teaching and learning, circuit managers find solutions to problems that are best suited for a particular school, even though, on the surface, many of their schools face common challenges. Circuit managers expressed that they believed that it was important to get their own perspective by understanding the whole situation. Working with the principal to come with the solution, as they understood the context better than them, is important, rather than imposing oneself as the principal's senior. According to one circuit manager, Ngubo, they

were making an effort to understand each school's problems and working with local players to find the solution for that school. This he does by ensuring that he works closely with the leadership of the schools. He gets to know the staff, the SGB, community profile and the general dynamics in each school.

> *The closeness, the circuit managers becomes close to his/her schools and understands them, the schools understands the personnel, and the dynamics in that school.*

This view is also echoed by Raymond, who added that, in pursuit of the solution to challenges that affect instructional methods in his circuit, he makes persistent and consisted effort to improve teaching and learning. The solution to the challenges at times take time to achieve, they have to try different strategies. Although they may not win the first time but always go back and forth try different strategies. In doing this, they are guided by the assumption that no two schools are the same, thus whatever solution is found has to work in that school. The nature of the challenges in these schools was such that, when visiting these schools, circuit managers go there with an open mind and with no preconceived ideas, as they are not sure about what they will find when they get to the school. This is an important finding. This is what Raymond had to say:

> *You know there are no two schools that are the same. You can't take the same solution you had for one school and just transplant it to other. You have to understand what is happening in this place. What is emanating from the ground? And try and give them a home-grown solution. You have to go back and forth, try this and that. So there's no one bag of solutions that goes around, about how to do this job properly. You don't go with a preconceived idea of what you will do when you get into a school.*

Participants indicated that working with the chiefs was a very important way of getting to know and understanding the local contexts. They indicated that principals were not from the area they work in, thus, it becomes difficult for them to solve all the problems. They needed more people over and above the parent component they have in the SGB. They explained that they had asked the chiefs to have persons who will be co-opted by the SGB and who participate in the chiefs' council activities. They also asked the chiefs to have a standing item in his council meetings about educational issues. These persons co-opted by the SGB then

report to the council about the challenges schools are facing in which the chief can assist. Skhakhane explained:

> *I recommend that SGBs should co-opt the chief. However, it was not possible for the chief to be co-opted since he cannot attend meetings in all the schools because there are many schools in his tribe. I then pleaded with the chiefs to allocate people to represent him. I then requested that there should be a standing item to be part of the meeting agenda whenever the chief's council sits, which is "education issues or progress on education matters". So, these people will the report about issues from a particular school for example that teacher from that school have been robbed. The principal indicated that they are failing to deal with this matter because they are not from the area. The chief will then request answers from people who live in that area.*

Another example expressed by the circuit manager was from Raymond who went on to explain that when he visits schools, he spends enough time in the school. He did not rush; he planned to get the perspective and the insight of the manner in which the school is functioning. This approach is aimed at ensuring that the solution to the problem is as a results of discussion between himself and the principal, is suitable for the school and not an imposition. This is how Raymond illustrated this category:

> *When you visit schools, you don't want to rush, you want to go there and soak in what is happening, do your business but help the principal with other things that a found in his or her school, as he or she might have his own challenges that he might want to talk to you about them.*

The emerging view from these reflections from the participants strongly emphasised the new finding that is, while circuit managers understand that generally their schools face common challenges, their experience has taught them that no two schools are the same, that they need to work with principals to find solutions and that such solutions should not be advanced by the circuit manager alone. Solutions should emanate from a clear understanding of the problem and how it presents itself in a particular school.

6.3.5 Qualifications and professional development

Participants in this study have post graduate qualifications from BEd (Hons) to a PhD in Education Management. Given the challenging contexts under which they work, this reality of their life also needs to be explored. Circuit managers were asked how such qualification and knowledge attained through studies enhanced the manner in which they discharged their responsibility. Findings from this study indicated that these qualifications and knowledge gained through their various studies helped them. Skhakhane, who holds a BEd (Hons), indicated that his qualification first and foremost gives him confidence to stand up in front of the school principal and address them. This is because he believed that, as he studied educational management, he clearly understood all the relevant legislation pertaining to education. Furthermore, knowledge and skills acquired through post graduate studies enhanced the ability to prepare and present staff development activities.

The views held by Skhakhane were also echoed by Dr Raymond, who indicated that his qualification opened his mind and broadened his general worldview and has enabled him to approach situations from more than one perspective. Dr Raymond also explained that such an open mind helps to deal properly with each and every task that he undertakes. This how Raymond (PhD) summarised this experience:

> *Yes, they have in many ways. On a general level, research broadens your outlook and it opens up your mind to approach situations from more than one perspective. This I found was the greatest outcome of my studies which therefore adds value to tasks I undertake. When one goes through the rigorous process of working towards a PhD, it then becomes habit to delve deeper into any topic or issue that one is dealing with. By this I mean you are not afraid to research the area you are working with and are always looking for new ways to do old things especially in the dealing with the so many challenges my schools are facing This, I found, always makes my presentations interesting to those who are listening.*

Raymond further indicated that working on a rigorous process like the PhD has helped him to prepare for his presentations in a manner that caters for everyone. He further suggested that PhD studies broadened his thinking when dealing with issues and always helped him look for new ways to deal with challenges. While some circuit managers highlighted that their post-

graduate education helped them a great deal, some showed an inclination to have more professional development planned for them. This they argued was owing to the fact that as circuit managers, they deal with issues across all disciplines like human resources, labour, infrastructure and many others. Myeza indicated that, as circuit managers, they were always appointed to investigate certain incidents in schools. For example, when a teacher has been charged with improper conduct with learners which is a serious misconduct (an offence that carries a discharge sanction if found guilty) she must do a preliminary investigation before the District Labour Section takes over. Having no background or skills in investigating compromised their work.

> *We are expected to investigate as well, but if you don't have a labour background you will have issues in your investigation because the department is sometimes only capacitating labour or HR people on that particular team, but all the circuit managers are expected to do some kind of preliminary investigation before they hand over cases to labour section. You are expected to submit to them your preliminary investigation with your recommendation*

Skhwelo emphasised that as a circuit manager she still needed to grow and was willing to be developed. She specifically explained that she was very much interested in the development that would capacitate her about how to better support schools that were located in challenging contexts.

> *Development is always needed because it helps us grow, I am always willing to be workshopped. It helps us mature. I can benefit from professional development that relates to understanding and dealing with the challenges that our schools are facing and how as circuit managers we can support them better.*

The theme of circuit manager professional development emerged in this study as critical for impacting the manner in which they responded to the challenging work of supporting teaching and learning in their schools. Drawing from the above discussion, circuit managers value their post-graduate education because their post graduate education helped them to discharge their responsibilities. Some circuit managers wish they could be provided with appropriate professional development that will improve their performance.

6.4 Chapter summary

This chapter presented data that relates to the contextual factors that affect the work of circuit managers. This has been done under two overarching themes which are: (a) The influence of contexts in the role of supporting teaching and learning and (b) The impact of contextual realities on circuit managers' leadership. The next chapter extracts the major issues and patterns emerging from the data presented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 7

KEY THEMES EMERGING FROM THE STUDY

7.1 Introduction

Chapters 5 and 6 presented raw data that emerged from the field. This chapter engages with the evaluative and theoretical analysis of themes that emerged from data. This was done by using both the literature and the theoretical framework as presented in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 respectively. In this process, I also look at how the findings confirm or challenge and extend debates around the instructional leadership role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning. Furthermore, Chapter 7 sparingly uses verbatim quotes from the data with the aim of exploring more deeply the meaning of the findings and to emphasise some arguments advanced.

Therefore, Chapter 7 is organised into three broad themes that that emerged from the findings of my research question and thereafter the sub-themes that emerged in the data analysis are then used: The main themes from research questions are: (*a) The role of circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning* (*b) Contextual realities that impact on the work of the circuit managers* (*c) Leadership approaches adopted by circuit managers when supporting teaching and learning.*

7.2 The role of the circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning

This section presents findings that relate to the role circuit managers play in supporting teaching and learning in schools located in challenging contexts. This is presented under the following descriptive categories or sub-themes: (a) Working with and without a vision, mission and goals (b) Capacity building for different stakeholders (c) Monitoring curriculum delivery and creating system of accountability (d) Facilitating resource provision (e) Working with multi stakeholders (f) Working within and beyond policy.

7.2.1 Working with and without a vision, mission and goals

The importance of framing vision, mission and goals as a pillar of instructional leadership is well argued by Hallinger and Murphy (1985); Locke and Lathan (1990); Waters and Marzano (2006); Mason (2013); Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004), as indicated in the theoretical framework (see Chapter 3). In line with this, circuit managers and principals, in

fulfilling their instructional leadership roles, must explicitly frame the school goals, purpose and mission. This is important because these provide the circuit with a criterion for judging whether it is successful in that process of providing education. Against this important claim, this study discovered that circuit managers that participated in the study work without a vision, mission and set of goals for their circuits, with the exception of one circuit manager. The circuit manager who had a vision and mission, and collaboratively set goals, also followed an exhaustive and stakeholder-inclusive process of developing a vision, mission and goals for her circuit. This circuit manager had a circuit with fewer schools that were in challenging contexts than the other circuit managers, though most of her schools are in poor Indian and African townships.

While some circuit managers were found to be working without a collaboratively set vision, mission and goals, it was established that, nonetheless, these circuit managers understood the importance of having a circuit vision and mission as well as goals. This is echoed by utterances of one circuit manager who said…*things like vision, mission statement and goals while I know their value and that they are very important, we do not have*. The challenge of framing the vision, mission and goals of the circuit emanates from the assumption underpinning instructional leadership, that vision, mission and goals must be framed in a collaborative manner (Waters & Marzano, 2006). This study has found that it is this collaborative framing of vision, mission and goals which seemed to be a hindrance; hence, some circuit managers do not have the vision, mission and goals. The challenge, one circuit manager argued, stems from the fluid situation they deal with in his circuit where the attrition rate is very high among teachers, especially principals; as a result they always work with acting principals. To re-visit the data, one of these circuit managers was very clear as to why he did not have a vision, mission and goals: *"my principal and teachers leave from left and right".* This circuit manager was indicating that her principals are leaving the profession in numbers**.** The circuit manager looked at the principal (and teachers) as the very important stakeholder(s) in the process of framing a vision, mission and goals.

Secondly, the study found that the fluid environment that circuit managers work in subjects them to the '*fire extinguisher'* role. This role of fire extinguisher emerged in data chapters (see Section 6.2.5)*;* Circuit managers are called upon to attend to multiple-emergent issues that interfere with the creation of a conducive environment for teaching and learning, which is one of their core duties**.** One circuit manager explained this when he stated that "*as a circuit*

manager, you are a fire extinguisher". This finding was also reported in a previous study conducted by Mthembu (2014). Mthembu's (2014) study found that circuit managers were frequently spending their time dealing with crises and putting out fires. The study further found that during any given week there were a million things a circuit manager was called upon to do. I therefore argue that for the circuit manager who has schools located in challenging contexts, the role of a fire extinguisher is even greater. This circuit manager is always on the road, putting out fires in their circuits that make it difficult for them to be forward looking and be able to have time, energy and resources to lead a process of vision, mission and collaborative goal setting.

Furthermore, circuit managers are expected to work with many stakeholders, thus developing a vision, mission and goals in a collaborative manner through getting views from all stakeholders, takes time and resources. In a circuit there are many stakeholders, which includes the circuit management and all the staff members based there, school principal, the teachers, SGBs, unions, AmaKhosi, Izinduna, the Councillor, non-departmental organisation and many others. This study conclude that circuit manager were found to be reluctant to start the process of consultation given the wide and diverse stakeholder constituencies they have in their circuits, thus reaching an agreement about the mission, vision and goals of the circuit may be difficult.

This finding about the difficulty of developing a vision, mission and goals has been reported in previous studies. For example, Mason's (2013) study, conducted in the United States, found that one of the greatest challenges of developing a vision, mission and goals was that it took considerable effort to synthesise. The same study further reports that, for the superintendent, the initial challenge for the development of the vision/mission was the lengthy process to collect input from all stakeholders. It took considerable time and energy and many staff members to analyse feedback from stakeholders. This key finding from this current study is also confirmed and expatiated on by another study conducted by Rueter (2009). This leads to the general view that the number and diversity of organisational stakeholder have the potential to add to the amount of work required to develop mission statement that guide effective operation in the schools, making it impossible to fully operationalise the school mission. Congruent to this finding in my study about working with multiple stakeholders, Brown and Hunter (1986) add that circuit managers are required to exhibit great patience regarding the possible abuse they may receive from those who work in collaboration with them. By way of extending or adding to the current body of literature, this study revealed that, the more

challenging the context where the circuit and or schools the is located, the more difficulties for the circuit managers to start a process of collaboratively developing a mission, vision and goals for the circuit.

Given the difficulty and the challenges associated with working towards the achievement of vision, mission and goals framing, circuit managers try to find other methods that they can used to guide their work and to supplement a vision, mission and goals. These included a mantra (a short statement aimed at motivating followers) that was personally developed, self-developed goals, a plan discussed with principals, while others used just a plan which may only be known by themselves. Some circuit managers have been found to use the provincial education department's mission and vision and then develop goals from it. The circuit manager who used a mantra developed it and presented it to the school principals. The goals the circuit managers have set seem to be informed by the immediate problems the circuit manager is facing in the circuit. One circuit manager indicated that her goals are to *"…improve matric results in schools…deal human resource challenges…ensuring that the ATP's* (*Annual Teaching Plans) are completed…"* (See Section 5.6). Another circuit manager who indicated that he used a mantra was very clear that the mantra was his, as did the circuit manager who indicated that he used goals (See Section 5.6). "*It's mine and I use it in my circuit with my principals. I came up with it."* The mantra was however different as it was more forward looking compared to the goals that these circuit managers had, which were short term.

However, my argument is that within the framework of instructional leadership set out in Chapter 3, using Murphy and Hallinger's (1986) study, a clear vision and specific goals are not always the answer. Findings from this study generally indicate and lead to general implication that, *in challenging contexts, the leader's actions involve supporting and developing a strong academic culture rather than turning around a weak culture through goal direction.* For the leader to be able to do this task, context-responsive leadership theory invites circuit managers to use their practical wisdom in action, a mix of knowledge, skills and dispositions to engage in fluid conversations with dynamic situation variables (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008) (see Section 3.4). The logical deduction from this study is that, despite some circuit managers' inability to develop a vision, mission and goals in a manner that may be consistent with instructional leadership theory, they have however been able to act in a context-responsive manner by developing a mantra, using the provincial and district vision and missionm and to be able to plan so that there is something that the circuit looks up to. Furthermore, circuit managers need

to be able find ways of developing a shared vision for the goal setting process (Walter & Marzano, 2006) because a clearly focused vision also helps the superintendent shape the context of their professional work (Bredesen *et al*., 2008).

7.2.2 Capacity building of different stakeholders

Drawing from Cranton and Jarzabkowski (2009), and deducing from Chapter 2, effective circuit managers no longer work directly and almost exclusively with principals but assume a more corporate departmental responsibility (Section 2.3.4). Consistent with this argument, circuit managers in this study were discovered to have been building the capacity of their schools' different categories of staff (school principals, teachers and administration clerks) and SGB members. The next section discusses the capacity building activities provided by circuit managers for each school staff category, like school principals, teachers, administration clerks, and SGB members.

7.2.2.1 Investing in the capacitation of school principals

The earlier review of related literature (Bredeson, Klar & Johansson, 2008) indicated that supporting and developing principals or leadership teams is one of the most important things circuit managers do in supporting teaching and learning. This study similarly concludes that circuit managers pay more attention to the staff development of their school principals than to that of any other category of staff. Their actions were driven by the appreciation of the fact that, for teaching and learning to improve the circuit, managers need to ensure that school principals are well capacitated with the necessary skills to lead teaching and learning in their schools. This view is shared by Saphier and Durkin (2013), who add that skilful teachers learn their craft not in preparation programmes but in the workplace. The same scholars add that teachers learn quickly and achieve proficiency only when properly supported and surrounded by conditions that provide constant learning with good feedback. The same is arguably true for principals. Furthermore, quality in education derives from effective school management and leadership, thus the quest for quality in education necessitates that principals be up to date with developments in the education and training fields (Mathibe, 2007). Also in this study, the capacity building of principals has focused on developing their leadership abilities in general and instructional leadership abilities in particular. The finding that circuit managers develop the leadership abilities of school principal is supported by Raath's (2012) study, which found that principals view circuit managers as persons that can support them and empower them

through the sharing of knowledge (Section 2.3.5). It has also emerged that a variety of strategies are used by the circuit managers for this purpose. These include mentoring**,** coaching, monthly principals' meetings and workshops.

The study has found that circuit managers provide one-on-one coaching for principals, especially the new principals. These coaching sessions are done by circuit managers during school visits. According to Celoria and Roberson (2015), coaching is important because it offers new principals a space of support to grow into the principalship, and to identify areas of strength and needed professional growth. It also underscores the importance of the coaches' responsiveness to the emotional stress and isolation of the new principals, acting not as supervisors or evaluators but as supporters (Celoria & Roberson, 2015). An instructional coach working in a crafted partnership with the principal can be a game-changer in school improvement. This is because the principal and the coach form a deliberate partnership to build an adult culture of honesty, non-defensive examination of teaching practice in relation to student results and continuous improvement (Saphier & West, 2009). Similarly, in this study circuit managers seemed to value the space provided to them to coach their principals as they can share ideas about the principals' work in a school, focusing on common and unique challenges, especially because they have been principals themselves. These engagements between principal and the circuit manager seem to focus on curriculum management, financial management and many challenges from the context on which the principal needs guidance from the circuit manager.

Since circuit managers are always too busy with management and other urgent matters to be able to mentor, supervise and coach all the principals (Saphier & Durkin, 2013), they try to find experienced and successful principals in their limited pool of experienced principals to mentor new and less experienced principals. Mentoring school principals has been found to be an important strategy used by superintendents to develop school principals, according to Glass, Björk, and Brunner's (2000) study of the American school superintendent. This study (Glass *et al.,* 2000) found that mentors and mentoring are important aspects of superintendence. It further found that a great deal of knowledge is best transferred in the mentoring relationship, rather than in a university or in-service workshop. Saphier and Durkin (2013) further add that the mentor is required to make sure that the principal knows in a very substantive way what successful instructional leaders do, to be able to communicate clearly the expectations to make

that happen, to observe it in action, and to coach their principals towards sustained effective practice as instructional leaders.

Principals' meetings have been found to be the most important platform used by circuit managers to capacitate their principals and to discuss other issues that impact on teaching and learning. KZN Circular No. 41 of 2012 compels circuit managers to hold monthly meetings with their school principal (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, 2012). This circular provides for standing items at meetings from the district to the school subject committees and the frequency of meetings. Circuit managers, according to this circular, are mandated to hold monthly meetings with school principals and to have matters like school functionality, problematic school issues, matric and teacher and learners' absenteeism, unpaid teachers on their agenda for discussion. Circuit managers use these meetings to do PowerPoint presentations on important topics, to allow principals to share ideas among themselves and to model good behaviour. Circuit managers are also able to bring guests who specialise in certain areas to develop school principals. This finding has been reported in a previous study conducted by Saphier and Durkin (2013), which found that monthly principals' meetings can be designed to help principals improve teaching and learning in their schools through round table sharing of their own case studies, professional development input and joint problem solving. The principals' meeting also provide circuit managers an opportunity to bring special guests to address the principal about unique challenges they face in their contexts. For example, as evidenced by Ntanzi's principals meeting agenda (Section 6.2.1), circuit managers use these meetings to bring in organisations that deals in drug abuse to educate principals about this subject. Drug abuse, which has been found to be a major problem, especially in township schools, makes the work of the circuit manager difficult. The circuit managers with schools facing this challenge are forced to shift their focus away from issues that directly impact teaching and learning to educating principals about the drug problem.

According to Walters and Marzano's (2006) model of instructional leadership, school principals are among the category of staff that circuit managers are mandated to provide with extensive staff development. The circuit manager's role of capacitating school principals is also suggested by context-responsive leadership theory, as explained by Bredeson *et al.* (2008), who state that circuit managers who act in a context-responsive manner support the development and growth of principals. In this study, circuit managers have been found to paying attention to principals' professional development needs. Their action of using

principals' meeting as their key platform of developing principals allows them to see more principals at the same time given their busy schedule. Circuit managers also rope in their experienced and successful principals, in the limited pool that they have of such principals, to mentor others who struggling.

7.2.2.2 Investing in the professional development of teachers

According to Peterson, Murphy and Hallinger (1987), effective superintendents work directly with teachers rather than only with principals, they also work directly with teachers in developing their capacity. This they do because they see a need for teacher development with the aim of improving teaching and learning in the classroom. A similar finding was reported in Mason's (2013) study. This study found that the superintendent articulates the desire to be "in tune" or oriented to the needs of staff development and their requirements for managing classroom instruction. Circuit managers appreciated that teachers are important in their own endeavour to support teaching and learning and, most importantly, that teachers need to be properly capacitated to teach effectively. This finding indicates that circuit managers take their instructional leadership role seriously. According to Sayre (2007), instructional leaders focus on teacher development as they recognise that teachers are at the centre of instructional improvement, and only teachers can change and improve instructional practices in the classroom. Crucial here is that circuit managers embarked on different strategies to capacitating teachers in improving classroom teaching in their schools. These include workshops organised and presented by circuit managers, workshops organised by circuit managers presented by subject advisors and developing professional learning communities (PLCs) for teachers.

Circuit managers organised and presented workshops to capacitate teachers about the methodology that they need to use when teaching in the different contexts. Some circuit managers served communities where schools have multi-grade classes because of the decrease in learner enrolment due to migration**.** According to Joubert (2009), most teachers in South African schools have been trained in mono-grade teaching approaches. In attempting to close the knowledge gap, circuit managers organise workshops for teachers to train them in teaching a multi-grade class. Teachers in multi-grade schools often face unique challenges and have specific developmental needs (Joubert, 2009). The workshops conducted by circuit manager are aimed at capacitating their teachers to be able to teach effectively in the multi-grade classes.

This study has also found that circuit managers worked with subject advisors when capacitating the teachers. They also enlisted the help of organisations that specialise in certain subjects, like the Association of Mathematics Education of South Africa (AMESA), which helps with the teaching of Mathematics and with Olympiads. This is also very important, given that circuit managers cannot be expected to know everything. By seeking the support of organisations that work with schools to capacitate their teachers, some circuit managers can be seen to be cognisant of their own weaknesses and to be prepared to deal with them.

Circuit managers have been found to play an important role of creating the space for peer support, mutual learning and collaborative working among teachers through PLCs. According to Petersen *et al.* (1987), in effective districts teachers are encouraged to work collaboratively to address curriculum issues and experiment with curriculum innovations. Using PLCs, circuit managers help to develop the capacity of teachers by encouraging them to share ideas and find solutions to common problems.

Circuit managers, according to instructional leadership theory, must train all instructional staff members in common but flexible instructional models**.** The use of PLCs helped circuit managers by providing an opportunity for teachers in their circuits to come together and discuss different approaches that they use when teaching amongst themselves, drawing from the skills and knowledge from other peers and adapting to one's context. Clusters, or learning communities as they are known, have been found be an effective vehicle for professional development compared to workshops by various scholars (Dickson & Mitchell, 2014; Hardy, 2010; Katz, Earl & Jafaar, 2009). Hardy's (2010) study is not in favour of workshops, because most of the workshops organised by circuit and district officials use top-down models whereby teachers and principals are told what professional learning needs to take place and how it will be done. Dickson and Mitchell (2014) add that the content of these workshops is often based on a perceived systemic need or "best practice" as determined by district-level administrators and staff. Professional learning communities, as members of a group, engage together in dealing with challenges of practice so that their understanding of those challenges grows deeper and more unified (Katz, Earl & Jafaar, 2009).

Dickson and Mitchell (2014) argue that circuit and district leaders are key players in building sustainable learning communities. Circuit managers, as instructional leaders in the circuit, seek to challenge teachers' ways of thinking about instruction and learning through the development of a strong learning community where expertise can be shared across the district (Sayre, 2007).

This professional development role played by circuit managers has been found to be consistent with the role of a teacher-scholar, as advocated by Cuban (1976) (Section 2.2.1). Cuban (1976), when discussing the teacher-scholar role of circuit manager, states that he or she was supposed to train and inspire teachers with high ideals.

7.2.2.3 Investing in the capacitation of administration clerks

Circuit managers have also been found to develop the capacity of the support staff like school administration clerks. Schools are allocated administration clerks, cleaners and security guards. Circuit managers worked with administration clerks as they deal with technical work that directly impact the provision of education. Administration clerks run the principal's office. They process data that is used by the school, using a computer programme called South African Schools Management System (SASAMS). Administration clerks need to understand many areas of school administration, as they deal with documents that are used to employ teachers, staff leave documents and financial records, as in most schools they are appointed as the financial officers.

As concluded in the work of Hallinger, Murphy and Petersen (1998), part of circuit managers' instructional leadership role must be mandatory staff development for administrative staff that focuses on curriculum and instruction, thus preparing them for their role to improve teaching and learning. Circuit managers have been found in this study to be using workshops to build competency among administration clerks. The work done by these clerks is critical in assisting teaching and learning, given the amount of data they deal with in SASAMS. The data they process provides the school with valuable information on which decisions that impact on teaching and learning are based.

7.2.2.4 Circuit managers investing in the capacitation of School Governing Bodies

According to the South African Schools Act no. 84 of 1996, the School Governing Body has a responsibility to promote the best interest of the school and to strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all the learners in the school (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). Bischoff (1997) further adds that, for effective teaching and learning to take place, it is essential that the SGB is given empowerment to execute their functions. The *Collective Agreement No.1 of 2008* states that circuit managers are responsible for assessing the support needs for capacity building of the SGBs (ELRC, 2008) (see Section 2.5). In their attempt to fulfil their role of capacitating SGBs, some circuit managers have been found to be

directly providing training to their SGBs themselves, whereas others indirectly provide capacitation through district-based governance directorate facilitators. Their discharge of this responsibility has been found to be underpinned by their understanding that it is their responsibility to facilitate the training of the SGB.

Furthermore, different methods are used by the circuit managers who have taken it upon themselves to train their SGB. These include workshops, circuit forums and meetings to explain certain things that need clarity. This is what Myeza had to say about her forums: *"I also have forum where we meet with chairperson, treasurer and the principal twice a year*." The training provided by these circuit managers was geared to supplement the one provided by the Governance Section Directorate. This training given by these circuit managers was also intended to address areas that circuit managers may find to be problematic or to be the source of conflict. On the other hand, the reluctant circuit managers, who prefer that this task be done by the Governance Directorate officials, wanted their role to be that of facilitators. They preferred to deal with emerging issues only when there was a need for further clarification or when there are disputes. These circuit managers' views were influenced by the contextual challenges they face when dealing with SGBs. These are discussed in the next section of this chapter. It is also argued by one participant that he preferred the Governance Directorate be responsible for SGB development, citing the low-level of education amongst the parent governors as a major challenge. Ntanzi stated that:

> *I try to organise workshops for them with School Governance Section …my SGBs are challenging to workshop because of their low levels of education.*

It also been found that all circuit managers are at times mandated to train SGBs if there are special tasks that are to be undertaken, like the process of recruiting school principals or drawing up school budgets.

As explained in Chapter 3 (theoretical framework), Waters and Marzano's (2006) model of instructional leadership encourages circuit managers as instructional leaders to provide access to professional growth opportunities through the design of a master plan to coordinate in-service activities of the circuit. Through their actions, circuit managers have been found to be providing some form of staff development for school principal, teachers, administration clerks and SGB members, while taking into consideration the resources they have and the difficult contexts within which they work. The staff development provided by circuit managers was however not

informed by a master plan. These staff development activities were informed by circuit managers' identified development areas in the circuit, which were influenced by the findings of school visits conducted by educators**.** Drawing from context leadership theory, I argue that circuit managers should have the plan to ensure that their capacitation of school principals is informed by both the immediate and the long-term development needs of their circuit.

7.2.3 Monitoring curriculum delivery and creating systems of accountability

In the literature review in Chapter 2, it is stated that according to the *Collective Agreement No. 1 of 2008,* circuit managers are mandated to facilitate curriculum delivery in various ways (Education Labour Relations Council, 2008). Furthermore, as part of the fulfilment of this responsibility, circuit managers are mandated to support quality education delivery and teaching and learning in educational sites, for purposes of both accountability and improved learner achievement (Education Labour Relations Council, 2008) (see Section 2.5). This study has found that circuit managers used planning and ensuring that schools have tools to monitor curriculum delivery and school visits, as a way of supporting curriculum delivery and a system to ensure accountability.

All circuit managers who participated in this study indicated that helping schools with planning was one of the important roles they played to support teaching and learning. One circuit manager indicated that:

> *I take it upon myself to ensure that first, my schools have planned very well. This month, we spent the whole month planning and preparing for the following year, and we do everything from the year planner to the agenda for day one of school re-opening* (Raymond).

Circuit managers' actions and the way they do planning suggest that they made sure that principal received the structure of what it is that they were supposed to do. They provided a detailed guidance for schools during planning so that schools would add a few items that differed from school to school. This further confirms the view held by circuit managers in relation to their principals' level of leadership competency (this is discussed in this chapter, Section 7.3.7 on poor school leadership) as this eliminates the possibility that there may be a school that has not planned or not planned properly for the coming year. Despite this, circuit managers were not succeeding with all the schools, as some schools were not able even to submit these planning documents. Context-responsive leadership theory assumes that a

leadership-context absent is meaningless (Bredeson *et al*., 2008). Circuit managers were mindful of their school leadership challenges (the context) and responded accordingly.

When looking at the planning that circuit managers do with school principals, one realises that it started from school level and was about what principals should be doing in schools. I argue that the most important omission in relation to planning, is circuit planning and goals setting. Circuit managers missed an opportunity to start by talking about circuit wide planning, for example, strategic planning, mission and vision goals setting. This could then be followed by supporting schools to do their own planning. However, as indicated above, circuit managers focused on immediate things that they think will impact teaching and learning.

As part of the planning circuit managers did with principals, they made sure that schools have tools for the School Management Team (SMT) to monitor curriculum delivery at a school level. These tools consisted of the different templates the school needs to prepare lessons, design assessment plans and control curriculum coverage. They wanted all schools to possess and use these tools. In the principals' meetings and in workshops, principals and SMTs are capacitated on how to monitor curriculum delivery at the school level using these tools. They provided curriculum monitoring tools to schools that did not have the capacity to develop their own tools**.** These tools played an important role in providing evidence of curriculum delivery and monitoring at the school. Through these tools, circuit managers could see if the SMT monitored curriculum, how was the quality of this monitoring and the level of the teaching and learning. For example, there are tools the SMT members used for reporting after checking teachers' files, lesson planning content coverage and doing class visits. These tools are used by the SMTs to monitor, support and ensure accountability. When circuit managers visited the schools, they wanted to see if the SMT is monitoring curriculum delivery and they wanted to see the copies of these tools that were used by the SMT to monitor curriculum delivery and support. They also wanted to see implementation of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) which they had helped principals develop during the planning process. Circuit managers checked the extent to which the school is meeting the goals and targets outlined in the SIP. They will also complete their tools (Chapter 5, Figure 3) using information on the SMTs' tools and verifying them by sampling work of teachers and learners. The usage of forms or tools during school visits recorded in this study contrasts with the finding made by Murphy, Hallinger and Peterson's (1985) study about supervising and evaluating principals in effective districts, which found that the supervision of principal during school visits by circuit managers was primarily oral and

visual. In that study, the circuit manager did not use standard forms to record impressions and judgements, and only a few reported that they wrote to principals following supervising visit. The use of standard forms or tools may assist school principal understand the basic things which they should expect during school visit. However, these tools should be flexible, they should be able report on unique findings. Secondly, having a flexible standard form or tool counter signed by the principal and circuit manager after a visit is an important record that will remain in the school. Such a record can be revisited should the need arise, for example, for accountability purposes.

Furthermore, whatever challenges circuit managers find in a school helped them to support curriculum delivery and to hold the SMT, especially the principal, accountable. School visits also gave circuit managers an opportunity to supervise the principal. During these visits circuit managers checked documents that relate to school management in general, like school policies, School Improvement Plans, signing of time books by staff, minutes of meetings, financial management records. They also focused on curriculum delivery documents like teachers' file learners' books, application of curriculum related policies and, most importantly, the system that is in place for curriculum management. This session may also include the whole of the SMT. The circuit managers also secured precious time with the principal as a leader after everything has been done, to talk confidentially about the issues that came out during the school visit. This gave the circuit manager and the principal the opportunity to talk openly and freely without the principal subordinates. The circuit manager could criticise poor work by the principal, the principal could also bare his or her soul to the circuit manager as his or her supervisor about the challenges he or she faces. Some of these challenges may be about the same members of the SMT.

Theoretically, issues related to Waters and Marzano's (2006) monitoring of goals for achievement arose directly during the school visit by the circuit managers. School visits provided a major opportunity for them to be instructional leaders. Given that, in South Africa, the curriculum and its goals are legislated for public schools, circuit managers used the legislated goals to monitor the extent in which the school is attaining such goals. Circuit managers could look at basic documents like Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) to see the level of curriculum coverage against work done in schools, the time book to see the level of attendance by teachers, and learner attendance registers to see learners' attendance, as well as other documents. By monitoring the curriculum in the manner discussed

in the foregoing discussion, circuit managers were able to monitor student achievement, evaluate the usage of the instructional evaluation programme and systems used to manage and evaluate instruction, the extent to which the school meets the curricular needs of all the student population and finally the reporting of student achievement to the SGB, which is one of the pillars of instruction leadership theory (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

7.2.4 Facilitating resource provision

One of the important roles of the instructional leader is to provide resources that are needed to supporting teaching and learning (Waters & Marzano, 2006). In this study it was found that circuit managers work with school leadership and relevant sub-directorates located in the district in trying to provide schools with resources that support teaching and learning. Their role in the provision of resources is limited to that of a facilitator, as they seemed not to have a direct control of this task. This is in contradiction to the provision of the *Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign* (*QLTC)* as indicated in the literature review chapter. This document mandates the circuit managers to take the lead in ensuring that all schools receive all relevant learning and teaching material on time (Department of Education, 2008).

Despite this, circuit managers' role as advisors and facilitators played an important role as they were familiar with the bureaucracy that might delay provision of these resources. They focused on ensuring that their schools received Learning and Support Material (LTSM) like stationery and textbooks before the beginning of the new school year. They also ensured that the LTSM the schools have, was effectively and efficiently utilised. One circuit manager said, *"I also look at schools' textbooks requisitions as per department allocation for norms and standards. I want to see if the schools have a retrieval policy for textbooks issued to learners and try to assist".* Circuit managers used their principals' meeting and monthly reports from principals to track the provision of resources to their schools. They also assisted in following up the provision of school infrastructure. For example, if some schools need toilets, they put pressure on the district officials to fast track such projects for their schools. They advised schools on which forms to complete and processes to follow when they need certain infrastructure from the district office as well as advised them on how to contest the allocations of these resources (see Chapter 5, Figure 4).

Circuit managers also played an important role in helping schools acquire their allocation of teachers. In doing this they advised school principals about how vacant posts can be filled,

signed documents and followed up the placement of those teachers in the schools. Many schools that these circuit managers supported were poor schools. Enrolment in some is dropping and in some is increasing. Circuit managers suffer because of the Post Provision Norm (PPN) that regulates the number of teachers that are allocated to the schools. Circuit managers also serve in forums that help place teachers who have been declared additional. They try to match the existing teacher posts with teachers that are declared additional in their schools due to the dropping number of learners and school closures.

According to context-responsive leadership theory, circuit managers must monitor the community's ability to and willingness to fund school initiatives (Bredeson *et al.,* 2018). Given that most of the schools managed by these circuit managers are no-fee-paying schools and that they depend on the allocation they receive from the Department of Education, which only pays for the basic needs, circuit managers encourage the schools to raise funds. The assumptions of context-responsive leadership theory further bestow circuit managers with the responsibility to identify initiatives for raising funds for the circuit (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). In this regard, circuit managers have been found to encourage schools to engage the business community and ask for support. The pursuit of resources, according to instructional leadership theory, should be done to support goals for achievement and instruction. As a way of achieving this, circuit managers must make sure that in their circuit they adopt an instructional and resources management system supporting the implementation of the circuit's instruction philosophy (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Here it is vitally important that circuit managers work with schools in challenging contexts, given the limited resources that they have. Waters and Marzano (2006) encourage circuit managers to look at their schools, the curriculum that they provide and the resources at their disposal. In this study, the circuit managers seem to focus more on finding resources for their schools, with minimum attention being paid to how the resources are used. This has been found to be linked to the reality of lack of the resources these schools have. Circuit managers do, however, spend a lot of time trying to attend to teacher allocation in their schools, and teachers are their most important resource.

7.2.5 Working with multiple stakeholders

According to Jenkins (2007), a circuit manager who does not give serious consideration to the community's reaction when making decisions, is a superintendent who is destined for a short term. This view is also echoed by Begley (2004), who further argues that any school administrator who attempts to lead and manage without reference to the broader environmental

context will quickly encounter difficulty. This study has found that circuit managers play an important role in creating suitable contexts for teaching by working with multiple stakeholders. The study has found that circuit managers work with a variety of stakeholders in their attempt to support teaching and learning in their circuits. Among the stakeholders that circuit managers worked with there are Amakhosi, Izinduna, councillors, health officials, social workers and the South African Police Service. This, according to Waters and Marzano (2008), shows that circuit managers are skilled collaborators and knowledgeable educators who look for assistance within the educational and business community to make schools work. All these stakeholders are engaged by circuit managers when their schools are dealing with the many challenges that schools face, including violence as result of faction fights.

According to the findings of a study by Bredeson *et al.* (2008), studies of context-responsive leadership reveal that differences in the type of community (small rural, suburban or small town) account for many of the differences in the actions and the expectations of community stakeholders. Geographic location and community type affect the demographics of each community as well as the professional and other labour pools available to the school district (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). This has been confirmed in this study because the engagement with local traditional leadership structures like Amakhosi and Izinduna by circuit managers of schools located in rural contexts was based on their assumption that these people command a lot of respect in the areas they lead. This finding has also been reported in the study conducted by Mbokazi (2015) about the role of traditional leaders in school governance. Mbokazi's (2015) study found that traditional leaders can influence major change in the attitudes of the people they lead, in the interest of education. Therefore, their involvement in education can motivate parents and learners to focus on education.

Furthermore, circuit managers in rural contexts have been found to be working hard to develop a close personal relationship and trust with traditional leaders. One circuit manager went to the extent of asking an Inkosi (Chief) to have education matters in his Tribal Authority meeting agenda as a standing item and having a person co-opted in the SGBs to represent the Inkosi. This relationship seemed to help these circuit managers' schools deal with community irritations that interfere with school safety and security. For example, there are some local people who like to take advantage of teachers as they are not from the area and some community members steal school property. The intervention of these leaders seems to have an impact and helps schools ensure the safety and security of teachers and school property. This

role of traditional leaders as providers of safety and security to the schools has also been previously confirmed by the findings of a study conducted by Mbokazi and Bhengu **(**2008) about the influence of traditional leaders on schooling. Mbokazi and Bhengu (2008) found that traditional leaders play a positive role in promoting school safety and security. It was also noted that circuit manager with schools located in townships did not enjoy such a relationship with their councillors.

Another stakeholder that is important in the circuit managers' role of creating a conducive teaching and learning environment is teacher unions. This study found that circuit managers hold regular bilateral meetings with unions to discuss pertinent issues. This seems to help circuit managers to be able to ensure that there is no unnecessary disturbance in their schools, as issues that may cause problems are discussed and solutions found. Circuit managers were also clear that they also work a lot with unions during the process of employment of school principals. The majority of circuit managers indicated that their relationship with unions at times can be very difficult and only one circuit manager indicated having a very good working relationship with unions. Circuit managers work with unions when conflicts emerge in schools involving unions as the representatives of teachers. Context-responsive leadership theory suggests that leaders must foster relationships and communicate with various stakeholders (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). In line with this theory, circuit managers in this study have been found to be appreciative of the role stakeholders can play in advancing teaching and learning, no matter how small that role can be. This is evidenced by circuit managers' continued interaction with teacher unions despite the difficult relations that they may have with them.

7.2.6 Working beyond the 'call of duty'

Circuit managers have been found to be working beyond the call of duty when playing their role as instructional leaders. This finding has been reported in Copeland's (2013) study, which found that circuit managers who work with schools in rural context wear many hats or roles. One such role is learner motivation. When visiting schools, circuit managers demand to see some learners, especially the Grade 12 learners. Circuit managers reported that some of the learners found in their schools, given the socio-economic challenges found in their contexts, are not motivated. This can be attributed to the fact that individual characteristics such as intelligence, cognitive styles, and personality play an important role in learning and instruction as does the context of learning (Abdurrahman & Garbba, 2014). Circuit managers try to motivate these learners to focus on their studies by providing motivation talks.

Such motivation is also not reserved for learners only; even teachers receive it. One circuit manager indicated that whenever he visits schools he will motivate teachers. The first thing he does is to praise teachers. He praises teachers for the work they are doing under the very difficult conditions. He praises them even when he sees a small achievement, because he wants these teachers to remain in these schools. These circuit managers try to motivate teachers, for example, even when they find that the work of a teacher is not at the level it is required to be in terms of relevant policies. They find a way of making the point for the need to improve, while motivating the teacher because they know the difficult circumstances teachers face that may make it difficult for him to achieve. The actions of circuit managers in this instance seem to heed a call made by Jacob and Ludwig (2009), when they warn that adopting accountability or market-oriented reforms in high poverty-stricken schools will punish educators for factors beyond their control, and potentially drive the most able teachers toward schools serving less-disadvantaged students. Given the challenge of getting skilled teachers (in particular, Maths and Science teachers) to teach in these areas, circuit managers tread very carefully and try to motivate teachers to stay in these schools. It is therefore not surprising that some circuit managers are cognisant of this reality and adapt their approach to teachers accordingly.

The work of motivating teachers seemed to create a very good perception among teachers of the circuit managers' commitment to instructional leadership, especially understanding the difficult conditions they work under. Teachers' perception of the instructional role of a circuit manager has emerged as a significant element this study. In the literature review chapter, it is argued that teachers' perception of the role of the circuit manager as the instructional leader is divided. For example, Obilande's (1992) study indicates that the work relationship between teachers and circuit managers is characterised by lack of trust and open communication. The study by Polat and Uğurlu (2008) found that there are low teacher expectations of the circuit manager as an instructional leader. On the other hand, evidence from Petersen, Sayre and Kelly (2007) is that teachers perceive the superintendent as responsible for resources that impact on classroom instruction and capacity and as models for professionalism focused on student achievement, changing teachers' assumptions and beliefs and practices through professional development. Crankshaw's (2011) study revealed teachers' willingness to work constructively with superintendents who demonstrate constructive leadership practices. The finding of this study are that circuit managers are prepared to go beyond the call of duty to create and maintain a good perception of themselves as supporters of teaching and learning. By having teachers believing in the circuit managers as supporters of teaching and learning, circuit managers will

have achieved a lot by having people who directly impact on teaching in the classroom believing in them.

Circuit managers also directly work with learners when enforcing discipline. This is also unusual because, at the school level, the SGB is tasked to deal with serious violations of the school code of conduct. Faction fights tend to draw the attention of senior departmental officials in instances where they impact education. Some of these faction fights can take place during matric examinations. It is common to see newspaper articles showing the MEC of Education talking about how they are dealing with the impact of these faction fights and gangsterism in the province where this circuit managers work. The MEC, as political head of the department, will ask for information from his Head of Department, however the two most important persons that will provide information are the school principal and the circuit manager**.** The circuit manager works hand in hand with the principal to ensure that the provisions of the laws that pertain to the issue of school safety have been adhered to by the school. This they need to establish before the senior official and the politicians (MEC) arrive at the school, in instances of violent incidents reported on the media.

Furthermore, circuit managers have been found to take it upon themselves to ensure that student leaders in secondary schools are properly capacitated. The secondary schools are mandated by SASA to have the RCLs and to have its leadership capacitated. This they do by working with a teacher who is tasked by the school to work with these student leaders. The circuit managers guide these on how to develop these young leaders. Circuit managers also have been found to be meeting these learners once a year for purposes of development.

Circuit managers have also been found to be helping schools by donating money to buy uniforms for the learners in some of their schools. Some of the schools these circuit managers support have afternoon classes to help improve learner attainment in matric. Learners that have one set of school uniform find it hard to attend these classes. Circuit managers step in and make donations to help some of these learners. These donations assist learners to be able to attend afternoon classes and also avoid absenting themselves the following day owing to having no clean set of uniform because afternoon classes finish too late for them to wash the only uniform they have. The impact of giving school uniforms has been found by Evens, Kremer and Ngatia's (2008) study to have a positive impact on absenteeism. According to this study (Evens *et al.,* 2008), conducted in Kenya, giving a school uniform significantly reduced school absenteeism by 38%. Effects are much larger for poorer students who did not previously own

a uniform: a 64% reduction in school absenteeism was recorded. Further preliminary data suggests that there are positive impacts of uniform distribution on test scores.

7.3 Contextual realities that impact the work of circuit managers

This section presents and discusses the factors that are found in the context that impact on the work of circuit managers. These factors are interrelated they include factors that emerge directly and indirectly as the result of the challenges found in these circuits. These factors are socio-economic status, poor parental support and valuation of education, clash between culture and education, disconnection between the context and policy, geographical location of schools, poor leadership, poorly co-ordinated multi-interventions and working relation between circuit and upper structures.

7.3.1 Socio-economic status of the community

The study has found that one of the major problems that impact circuit managers' work is the socio-economic status of the community the circuit is located. Circuit managers' work has been found to be impacted by the socio-economic challenges of the community they served, and these are characterised by high levels of poverty that seems to be very pervasive. In this study, it has been found that these socio-economic challenges present themselves in the form of high poverty, high unemployment, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse and teenage pregnancy. It has been found that these factors negatively impact the work of circuit managers. As explained by Chapman and Harris (2004), schools in challenging contexts are most often located in communities of extreme poverty and deprivation. As a consequence, they have to deal with problems that are a by-product of the socio-economic context in which they are located. As a result of this, Du Plessis (2014) adds that homes in challenging contexts are often ill-equipped to meet the educational needs of children and often lack facilities like electricity.

Circuit manager who have schools in the rural areas are the one who are very vocal about the impact of socio-economic factors impacting on teaching and learning in their schools. This suggests that socio-economic factors are more prevalent in rural circuits. This finding resonates with Moulton's (2001) study, which found that it is more difficult to provide good quality education to children in rural areas than to those in urban areas. In most urban areas, even in the poorest countries, education is in high demand, and the main problem facing schools is that they are overcrowded and lack sufficient amounts of furnishings, equipment, and instructional materials (Moulton, 2002). In rural contexts, there is a high incidence of

household poverty in most countries. Children who attend school often suffer from ailments of poverty, such as poor health, and are unable to afford the costs of school, including pencils, lunch, shoes, and often uniforms (Moulton, 2001). Moulton (2001) further adds that many families see little immediate value in their children in sitting behind desks, learning reading and writing and other skills for which there is no use in the village.

Given these socio-economic challenges, circuit managers unanimously agreed that learner academic attainment is not encouraging; as a result, their schools are prone to be declared underperforming. This view is shared by Jacob and Ludwig (2009), who state that the real problem rests with the social context in which schools operate, namely, the family, neighbourhood, and peer environments that make it difficult for low-income children to take advantage of educational opportunities. When the academic performance of these learners, especially matric results, come out badly, the circuit managers must also account for the kind of support they have been providing to these schools. Being identified as an underperforming school is a challenge on its own for the school principals, because they must develop an academic improvement plan. According to the South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996, Section 16A(a)1, principals of a public school identified by the Head of Department in terms of Section 58B (underperforming) must annually, at the beginning of the year, prepare a plan setting out how academic performance at the school will be improved (Department of Education, 1996). This places the circuit manager as an instructional leader at the centre of assisting his or her schools to end the indignity of being an underperforming school.

In their attempt to deal with this challenge, circuit managers improve the number of visits to these schools declared under-performing schools (Chapter 5, Section 5.7; Figure 7). They visit these schools often and try to attend to management and leadership issues that may impact on teaching and learning. However, circuit managers are aware that their schools' underperformance is not only due to management and leadership challenges. They know that socio-economic factors also play a role. Given this challenge, circuit managers try educating their school principals about programmes that they must use that deal with such problems. They encourage principals to get involved in war rooms, and to ask organisations that deal with drug abuse to come and help principals with strategies of dealing with such issues.

7.3.2 Lack of parental support and valuation of education

Another challenge that circuit managers have to deal with from their schools is poor support of schooling by the parents. According to Manilal (2014), parent involvement includes several different forms of participation in education and with the schools. Parents can support their children's schooling by attending school functions and responding to school obligations (parent-teacher conferences, for example). They can become more involved in helping their children improve their schoolwork – providing encouragement, arranging for appropriate study time and space, modelling desired behaviour (such as reading for pleasure), monitoring homework, and actively tutoring their children at home.

Several research studies indicate that the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement was positive for learner attainment, regardless of the definition of parental involvement or measure of achievement (Maluleka, 2014). Sacker, Schoon, and Bartley (2002) found that parental involvement is influenced by material deprivation and parental aspiration. The poorer the people are, the more difficult it is to participate and support a child's educational development (Sacker *et al.,* 2002). In another study conducted in the South African context by Shezi (2012), it was revealed that socio-economic issues such as unemployment, poverty, HIV/AIDS pandemic, poor communication between the schools and parents, educators who seem to be unwelcoming to parental involvement, low level of education of parents and reluctance of some parents to involve themselves in school affairs were the main barriers to effective parental involvement.

In a study about parental involvement in education comparing a privileged and an underprivileged school (Manilal, 2014), results showed that there was a diversity of factors that hamper parental involvement in education, such as the working conditions of parents, being a single parent, the absence of parents, socio-economic factors and poor school leadership. More importantly, this study shows that, despite it being at a low level, parents in both privileged and underprivileged schools do display involvement and the factors that enable and constrain their involvement must be taken into account. Parental involvement thus cannot be considered a universal context, as each context varies (Manilal, 2014). In this study, poor parental involvement presents itself when teachers, school principals and circuit managers invite parents of learners who are not doing well to discuss the academic performance of the child, as well as parents of learners with serious misconduct offences like engaging in gangsterism, drug abuse, and violence. In this study it has been found that schools try different methods to attract parents

to the school. They even make parents come to school to collect learners' report cards. However, despite these attempts, parents seem not to be interested as the reports remain uncollected. The parents in these communities are either too busy or not interested. Circuit managers in these schools have an immediate task of improving learners' academic performance. Poor parental involvement has a negative effect on the circuit mangers' role of supporting teaching and learning as it undermines this task. Given the power of parental involvement in child education and particular learners' academic improvement, as demonstrated by literature in the foregoing discussion, it is apparent that circuit managers working with their school principal are greatly impacted by poor parent involvement. However, the findings of Shezi's (2012) study were that schools were, to a large degree, successful in promoting parental involvement in the affairs of the school, despite some obstacles that persisted. Schools in challenging contexts seemed to be the one with persistent obstacles and they affect circuit managers' attempts to support teaching and learning.

7.3.3 Violence caused by gangsterism and faction fights

Violence caused by gangsterism and faction fights was found to take a lot of circuit managers' time. These circuit managers seemed to go up and down, trying to close down flames caused by these two problems. Rural circuits suffer from faction fights while township circuits deal with gangsterism. Violence associated with faction fights draws the attention of media, senior Department of Education and government officials and politicians. The faction fights and violence can at times start when Grade 12 examinations are to begin, as indicated in this foregoing discussion. Given the seriousness of these examinations, circuit managers must always be on top of the situation with many people breathing over their shoulders. Firstly, they must try to defuse the situation. If they are not successful in dealing quickly with a particular situation, they are supposed to make arrangement for learners who are at schools that are affected to write their examination.

Circuit managers with schools in townships battle with gangsterism, alcohol and drug abuse. While these problems start outside the school they are also brought by learners into the schools. This put a lot of pressure on the schools, which are themselves under-resourced and lack the competency to deal with these challenges. Principals of schools, when they are faced with these problems and think they have done what they can do, given the resources and the skills they have at their disposal, call on the circuit managers to intervene. At times they do not even have

to call on the circuit managers, but circuit managers call first on the principals when incidents of gangsterism are reported in the media.

According to Lamkin (2006), writing from an American context, the current conditions that prevail in public schools, such as increased accountability for academic achievement, increased demand for parent and community participation and increased media attention have created visible and escalating challenges for superintendents. South Africa is well known for its free media, active civil society and other structures that pay attention to education matters. It is common to see non-governmental organisation taking government to court for its inability to provide quality education through proper schools' infrastructure provision, sound policy direction and learners' safety. Circuit managers do not want to be made scapegoats for problems that are very complicated and are not directly an education issue. Such incidents tend to shift the focus of even the most committed circuit managers from matters that directly impact teaching and learning in the classroom. Circuit managers' actions seemed to in concordance with the views that emerge from literature on the risks posed by violence in schools. For example, according to Arciaga, Sakamoto and Jones (2010), gangsterism brings violence and disruption to schools, which is a major concern of parents, students, educators, political leaders and others in the community. Failure to adequately address the gang problem can lead to increased risk of victimisation in the school settings for both student and staff (Arciaga *et al.,* 2010), hence it becomes crucial for circuit managers to address.

7.3.4 The clash between culture and education

The importance of cohesion between the school and the home is well articulated by Hanley and Noblit (2009) who point out that by the time student enter pre-school, they have learned to walk, talk, and think as individuals and to understand their group's cultural norms. They learn all these things from home. It is therefore important that home and school teaching should intersect. However, this study has found that the work of circuit managers is greatly influenced by the collision between culture and schooling needs. This challenge seemed to be prevalent in rural schools as these communities are very conservative (Langa, 2013). For an example, circuit managers complained about the general culture of raising children in some of the communities they serve. This cultural practice seemed to be incompatible with studying at a secondary level. In some of the communities, circuit managers reported that boys seemed to be encouraged to have girl friends or even get married at a young age. The boys have their separate rondavel rooms and parents have their rondavel rooms too. These arrangement makes parenting

and even basic issues of supervising homework by parents impossible. Parents cannot monitor the time their school going teenagers go to sleep and with whom they go to sleep. These issues make teaching these learners difficult. When these learners fail, the principal with his circuit manager is held accountable.

The clash between local culture and provision of education in these schools, especially in rural areas, is further complicated by teachers who are not from these areas. The teachers come to these schools with different cultural dispositions influenced by their education. This cultural disposition seemed to be biased against local culture, and in favour of the modern way of life. While teaching, these teachers seem to paint a good picture about city life as being an indicator of success. This issue raises the importance of success and of having a common understanding of what success is and how it can be attained. While success can be contested and viewed differently in different contexts, success, in this study, is viewed according to Hanley and Noblit's (2009) perspective, which suggest that it is more than just academic achievement and includes other significant accomplishments such as discovering academic identity, understanding behavioural expectations, and acquiring the ability to solve difficult problems. It is therefore clear that the understanding of success by the teachers who work in these contexts is important for them to improve learner attainment. This understanding of what success should be is deeply imbedded on the culture of the community and each child. It is for this reason that teaching without first identifying and recognising the stories of each individual limits learning. This is because culture is self-identity, and new concepts and ideas cannot occur without an understanding of self, including one's personal worldview and how each person fits into the bigger picture (Hanley & Noblit, 2009). Hanley and Noblit (2009) in their meta-analysis further demonstrate that students will achieve success at significantly higher levels when the school, the community, and their own parents come together as allies. In other words, while schools and community may define success differently, such differences should be narrowed so that schools can be able to provide community-supported education. While schools receive government pre-determined curricula, schools and community have a responsibility to work together in ensuring that the delivery of such a curriculum is sensitive to values help by the community.

Furthermore, the actions of teachers suggest that when learners get educated, they must leave the rural area and go and work in big cities. As indicated, the themes presented here are interdependent. This issue also has an impact on parental involvement as parents in some

communities will not support an education that suggests that their children should leave them. According to Mayer, Trommsdorff, Kagitcibasi and Mishra (2012), in communities where modernisation processes have not had a strong impact, especially the case in many non-Western rural areas with a low socio-economic development, children have the responsibility to help the family economically and to care for their parents in old age. Strong material and emotional interdependencies exist in this family model, and personal autonomy is not highly valued. In other words, parents will feel that this education that is provided by these schools interferes with their long-standing cultures and tradition and as such it should not be supported.

In Section 6.2.3 of Chapter 6, it is indicated that ceremony of raising of a doek, *icece* and not allowing women to wear pants are common in these areas. Circuit managers, in their quest to support teaching and learning and to improve matric results, work tirelessly with school principals, district officials and other stakeholders to organise holiday classes. It is in these classes where expect teachers are brought to help learners. All their efforts seem to come to nothing as learners prefer to attend cultural activities rather than classes during weekends and holidays. In other words, learners choose to follow their cultural practice at the expense of improving personal development through education. This has been reported in Molefe's (1996) study about rural development in South Africa. Molefe (1996) found that one of the obstacles to rural development was that people feel obliged to follow culture and traditions even if they work against development.

Culture also have been found to have a personal effect on the work of circuit managers. Female circuit manager who had schools in previously Indian and African townships reported some elements of gender and female stereotyping. This suggested female circuit managers have to work harder to prove themselves as competent to get support of the community. This is how one stated this: *"…because some of them will look at your gender and colour of your skin and say I cannot be led by this kind of person".* Such cultural perception seems to make the work of female circuit managers difficult, because community support is very important during their community engagement work. The issue of women having to endure unfavourable gender stereotyping as a result of cultural norms that still view men as better leaders than women has been reported before. In the literature review, (Section 2.8), it is argued that, according to Shava and Sibanda (2015), women in education leadership find that culture, as reflected in a set of beliefs, norms, values and procedures in institutions and the local communities, negatively affects the execution of women leadership. Greyling and Steyn (2015) concur, and, in their

study of women aspiring for leadership position in education, found that gender discrimination and socio-cultural considerations emerged as key obstacles.

However, the finding made here contradicts that made by Henkle (2017). In his study, conducted in North American contexts, of exceptional superintendent leadership in ethnically and economically diverse school districts, he found that viewing students' culture as an asset essential to the instructional programme was identified by all three superintendents who participated in the study. In his study, Henkle (2017) argues that each superintendent must recognise and prioritise the importance of activating connections to students' home culture and embedding culture intentionally in the instructional programme. However, while this may be a case in other contexts, in South African contexts circuit managers play a limited role in the content and material used in schools.

7.3.5 Disconnection between contexts and policy

According to the Wallace Foundation (2006), various policies regulate what is available for leaders to allocate, how those resources can be used, and how their use must be accounted for. Leaders at all levels of the education system are constrained by the policies governing how public education and school districts, in particular, can generate revenues (Wallace Foundation, 2006). This study has found that circuit managers are constrained by the disconnect between policies used to allocate resources to schools and the context. This policy constraint has a negative impact on the instructional leadership role of a circuit manager, especially that of being a resource provider. Schools serviced by these circuit managers have unique challenges of human resources, physical resources and basic school infrastructure. The human resource, especially provision of teachers, is adversely affected by learner migration in these schools. Circuit managers in some circuits deal with learner emigration that takes place because the schools are poor resourced, or they simply want to go to better developed places. The migration of learners, especially from rural schools to urban or township schools, is a major challenge for circuit mangers. Migration has been found to have multiple impacts because the allocation of resources to schools is determined by the number of learners in the school. Dropping numbers of learners in the school impacts the allocation of resources, especially teachers. A drastic drop in the number of learners can result in the school being made a multi-grade school. Once a school is declared multi-grade, it also means circuit managers must have a programme to professionally develop the skills of the few teachers that remain at a school in dealing with

multi-grading classes. The academic results in that school may also not be as good as they should be.

According to Gustafsson (2016), what is commonly referred to as the 'post-provisioning norms' (PPN) is the national policy determining how many educator-posts each school is entitled to for the purposes of Grades 1 to 12 schooling. Essentially, the policy stipulates that a province should on an annual basis determine how many educators posts it can afford, and that it should then calculate school-level post entitlements using weightings that are based largely on enrolments by grade and subjects taken by Grade 10 to Grade 12 learners (Gustafsson, 2016). This policy seemed to be causing a problem for circuit managers as it is unable to deal appropriately with staffing matters in different contexts. Because of this policy's inability to accommodate contextual challenges faced by schools supported by these circuit managers, circuit managers have the responsibility of dealing with the mushrooming of multi-grade classes, school closures in rural context and big classes in township context and managing of surplus educators. Staffing issues are the inherent challenges associated with PPN in these schools, which in turn become the problem for circuit managers in their attempt to support teaching and learning.

In the interest of providing a balanced view, the Department of Basic Education policy makers have tried to re-calibrate this policy with the aim of making it relevant to different settings. Hence the 2005 policy differs from the 2002 policy mainly in terms of the introduction of pro-poor weights, the overall supply of appropriately qualified teachers, the ease with which teachers are moved from one school to another, addressing excessive class sizes, and incentives to teach in hard-to-teach schools (Gustafsson, 2016).Despite this attempt, circuit managers and their schools seemed not to find relief from the amendments of this policy. This, according to Gustafsson (2016), is not mainly one of policy design, though there are some aspects of the norms that require revisiting. Gustafsson (2016) further argues that the key challenge regarding PPN is implementation and, therefore, better technical capacity to implement the norms and, secondly, the solution is in having better ability to deal with the politics of teachers not wishing to move from schools with shrinking enrolments.

The failure of PPN at either design or implementation phase seems to hit schools in challenging contexts, as they are the ones who depend on the teachers provided by state. These schools cannot charge school fees and use the money to pay for teachers over and above that the ones provided by the state. This seems to undermine the role of circuit managers of supporting

teaching and learning in these schools. Their counterparts in rich schools can afford to hire SGB-paid teachers. This policy, according to Langa (2013), was meant to promote equity, but it is not successful in doing so as it is skewed against schools located in challenging contexts.

Circuit managers' work is also regulated by policies that prescribe their job descriptions**.** The study has found that circuit managers who have schools in rural contexts find their job description limiting their educational support role, given the contextual challenges found there. These circuit managers argue that, when it comes to provision of resources and school infrastructure, their job description is very limiting. In contrast, the circuit manager with schools in townships indicated their satisfaction with their job description and referred to it as that of a general practitioner. This may be the case for circuit managers of township schools, who seem to have schools that have somewhat better infrastructure and resources compared to those of rural school circuit managers. Township school circuit managers also have the more positive stress of dealing with rising learner populations due to the migration from rural to urban areas and have a better resourced district office. However, this is not the case for rural schools. These schools have major infrastructural and staffing challenges, which they have to negotiate with the officials from the district, provincial or even national offices. Their district office directorates are also stretched, given the vast amount of land they service and backlog in infrastructure, as well as wastage as some schools are closing, leaving needed infrastructure unused. Circuit managers find themselves not playing any meaningful role as the district sub-directorate are the one who are in control of resources that impact on teaching and learning. Circuit managers were also very honest to say that, when they visit schools, they feel so frustrated and hamstrung to such that they just listen and mourn with the school principals as they have little to do to support the school regarding needed resources.

Circuit managers do not seem happy about this role; hence they are frustrated. Skhakhane made this point when he stated that: *"Frustration emanates from the fact that you go to schools, expected give support yet some of the things that I have mentioned above as challenges are not controlled by me. I am not in control of infrastructure, provision electricity, model used for allocating teachers to the schools the so called PPN*." Policy issues seem to be biased against the most deprived context, which is the rural circuit. The job description of circuit managers seems to favour those in the urban and township schools. Given the urgency that some of their schools need basic school infrastructure like toilets, assisting schools to complete forms and

waiting for district officials to decide whether their schools will be assisted frustrated circuit managers in rural schools.

7.3.6 Geographical location of schools and poor road infrastructure

Some of the schools serviced by the circuit managers who participated in this study are located in areas that have poor road infrastructure. Schools that are supported by circuit managers in rural areas are worse and are scattered across a large area. Moving from one school to another takes a lot of time. The roads are in a bad condition and, when it is raining, some circuit managers are forced to cancel their planned visits. Some circuit managers use gravel roads and are unable to access their schools, even when it has been raining. They have to contend with a long time on the road, as driving on the gravel roads takes longer than on a tarred road. Even for circuit managers who have township schools, travelling to the circuit office in the morning where they are supposed to report and then travelling to schools and later going back to the office to sign out is not an easy task. It is time consuming and energy draining, as it entails driving in congested and small township roads. Such challenges make supporting teaching and learning difficult for circuit managers. Big distances between schools also result in lack of professional contact and support for schools in rural areas (SACE, 2010). These challenges also bring into question some of the roles played by circuit managers in supporting teaching and learning, as discussed above. For example, given these challenges, circuit managers find it difficult to undertake school visits as much as they want, especially during the rainy season. Hence their planning is always disturbed and, as indicated, the itinerary that they submit to their senior is always not implemented as initially drawn.

Geographical location also interferes with circuit managers' attempt to recruit quality staff. According to a report about teacher supply and demand commissioned by the South African Council of Educators (SACE) (2010) there are some geographical areas and certain schools that pose serious staff recruitment and retention challenges. The defining factor about these geographic areas and schools is that they present difficult working and living conditions for teachers. This report also names the distance from the school as one of reasons educators are exiting the profession. Gustafsson's (2016) study indicated that, contrary to what is often believed, the relationship between under-staffing and the remoteness of schools is rather weak. Contrary to Gustafsson's study, my study has found that circuit managers' role of supporting teaching is affected by both challenges of recruiting and retaining quality teachers, as the South African Council of Educators (2010) has also found. Through the study, I posit that remoteness

does not per se undermine staffing it, however, has an impact on the quality of and the sustainability of recruited staff.

7.3.7 Lack of effective school leadership

This study found that circuit managers experience shortages of good school leaders and are unable to keep them. Given that principal turnover is very high, this create leadership instability, which also impacts on the quality of leadership**.** According to Branch, Hanushek and Rivkin (2012), school leadership changes are particularly harmful to high poverty schools, low achieving schools and schools with inexperienced leaders. Wills' (2015) study, conducted in the USA, adds another dimension to this foregoing discussion as it found that principals are unequally distributed across schools, with less qualified and less experienced principals disproportionately represented in the poorest parts of the schooling system. Along the same lines, Horng (2005) also found that principals prefer to work in easier-to-serve schools with favourable working conditions, which tend to be schools with fewer poor and low-achieving students. Acknowledging that different contexts may present different challenges, context-responsive leadership theory suggests that circuit managers should support the development of leadership and build the capacity of schools to deal with various internal and external forces (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). This however is a challenge for these circuit managers because they have little control over the employment conditions of the school principal.

This study has found that the leadership challenges of school principals impact on the circuit managers' role of supporting teaching and learning. Unlike in other countries, where principals undergo training before applying for the principal position, in South Africa there are no such requirements. In South Africa, according to the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM), the requirements for one to be appointed to the principal position include a three or four year post matric teacher qualification, seven years' experience and good management and leadership skills (Department of Education, 1996b). This implies that a teacher who has seven years' experience and can claim to have good management and leadership skills, even if he or she has no management experience at HOD level (the lowest formal school leadership position), can be appointed a school principal. The circuit managers' challenge is also compounded by the fact that very few people aspire to serve in their schools as principals. People apply for positions located in these schools as a way of entering the system. Once they are employed by the department, they work very hard to find ways of finding work in better

located schools. They use these schools as a ladder for them to acquire experience and know how.

Secondly, it is easier to get a principal post in the rural schools than in the township. Circuit managers invest a lot of time in developing principals to address this leadership challenges as discussed. All their hard work would come to nothing were the principals they have invested in to leave before she or he has implemented what she or he has been trained to do. Circuit managers need to have stable leadership that is well capacitated to work with, to support teaching and learning in their schools. Furthermore, principals leave the profession because, over and above the local challenges they face in their school, there are new accountabilities that they are faced with that makes their job stressful. Leadership in these contexts is not confined to principalship; it is also found in the classroom. Teachers also leave these schools because of challenges and pressure associated with underperformance in some of these schools. Teachers tend to move to better performing schools (Gustafsson, 2016).

The issue of weak school leadership has been reported in a study conducted by Mestry and Singh (2007), which reports that many practising principals lack basic leadership and management training prior to and after their entry into principalship. Given this challenge and the poor principal turnover in the schools supported by these circuit managers, circuit managers reported having very few experienced principals with strong leadership abilities. Because of this problem, they always spend a lot of time and energy in building the leadership capacity of their school principals.

7.3.8 Lack of co-ordination in the implementation of multi-interventions and lack of effective working relation between the circuit and upper structure

This study has also found that circuit managers who work in challenging contexts and their schools are overwhelmed by teams of experts who come from different upper structures to provide both support and accountability. These teams of expects visit schools with the aim of assisting the schools to improve learners' attainment. Such visits may be welcomed as part of the school improvement and accountability systems, and it is inevitable that, from time to time, schools will be subjected to interventions from upper structures, especially those schools that underperforming (Chapman & Harris, 2004). However, the wide range of external interventions compete for time, energy, and resources (Langa, 2013)**.** Chapman and Harris (2004) further warn that the demands of numerous initiatives can prove to be counter-

productive in seeing school improvement, particular in schools that have additional problems of social disadvantage. When such external interventions are brought to schools, they do not only affect the schools, they also affect the circuit manager of those schools. Circuit managers are also given numerous administrative tasks associated with interventions. These visits, while they are intended to bring improvement, tend to interfere and disrupt the plan the circuit manager has with his/her schools. Secondly these teams bring with them their own programmes designed somewhere without the participation of the circuit managers and local players and they demand that the circuit managers and their schools must implement them. In many instances these programmes may not succeed because local people may see them as imposed plans.

This study has also found that there is a lack of co-ordination between these teams. This lack of co-ordination becomes apparent when different teams visit a circuit and they all want to see the same category of teachers. This is a challenge for circuit managers because when upper structures visit their schools, they should be the ones who co-ordinate the visits with the schools (Department of Education, 2003). In doing this task, circuit managers must provide a guided tour and support to visiting officials. These teams do not communicate among themselves and the circuit managers find themselves caught in the middle. Circuit managers also lamented the lack of understanding of local dynamics in these teams, as they tend to call many teachers at once not knowing that some schools are teaching multi-grade classroom. Circuit managers know how to plan for workshops and meeting in a manner that does not disrupt schooling. Such visits and programmes seem to be characterised by political symbolism (Jansen, 2000), because any attempt to improve teaching and learning in these circuits and schools needs collaborative engagement (Fullan, 2004). As indicated in Chapter 1, studies done by Jansen (1996); Christie and Potterton (1998); Chisholm (2004); and Fullan (2004) indicate that such measures do not work in the long run. Fullan (2004), as cited in Chapter 1, indicates that one of the attributes that contributes to the unsustainability of these programmes is the "lack of deep ownership", as the success of these programme hinges on local stakeholder's engagement.

This study has also found that the relationship between the circuit managers and some of the officials, especially those from upper structures is, at times, not cordial. This emerged when these officials will tell the circuit managers to forget about whatever they were doing to support their schools and adopt their own programmes. Such interactions do not seem to be done in a collegial manner, but they are characterised by a superiority complex. This is also practised by

junior non-professional district officials when liaising with these circuit managers. They do not show due respect for circuit managers as these officials come from upper structures.

It has emerged in this foregoing discussion that circuit managers have problems with setting a vision and clear goals for the circuit. Having a clearly focused vision, according to context-responsive leadership theory, helps circuit managers shape the contexts of their professional work (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). It further helps push back against the forces of narrow special interest, irrelevant political diversions and economic setbacks, thereby shaping a positive and clear context and giving others a direction and support (Bredesen *et al.,* 2008). Given the situation painted by circuit managers about the role of the upper structures, if they had their own strong vision and goals, such interferences would be not much of a threat and source of trouble. Bredesen *et al.* (2008) states that context-responsive leadership is best expressed when circuit managers have the capacity to push back against the challenges presented by variations in external political forces and local politics. 'Push back 'here means refusing to be positioned as passive victims of political contingencies. This is very important, as it should be circuit managers who are leading the process of supporting their schools in ensuring learner attainment, given the knowledge and understanding of the context under which their schools function. Circuit managers should take upon themselves to shape the political realities and environment in which they work (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008).

7.3.9 Political challenges brought by unions and SGBs

The study has found that circuit managers' relationship with SGBs and teacher unions can sometimes be a hindrance to the circuit managers' role of supporting teaching and learning. This hindrance stems from the conflict that characterises these relationships. SGBs are tasked with the enormous responsibility of governing the school. It is therefore clear that, if circuit managers want to improve teaching and learning in schools, they have to work with SGBs. This study has found that circuit managers are at times confronted and expected to spend time dealing with conflict between SGB members. This conflict is mainly between the principal and the parent component. This conflict is further escalated to be between the circuit managers and the parent component of the SGB when the managers, in their intervention, rule that the principal is right and the SGB parent component is wrong. This conflict is at times about the roles and responsibilities of the SGB. For example, one circuit manager reported that, in one of his schools he was called to intervene between the principal and the SGB members, who wanted to use the school allocation from the Norms and Standards for School Funding to buy

a cow, something which is not permitted by the departmental policies. This became a major source of conflict when the concerned circuit manager ruled in favour of the principal. The allegation of misuse of school finances by the principal also emerged as one of the sources of conflict.

This finding is not surprising, as has been reported in previously conducted studies about the relationship between circuit managers and board or school governing bodies, as indicated in Chapter 2. These studies found that the relationship between circuit managers and the SGB is at times subject to conflict (Castallo, 2003; Glass, 2010). This conflict is caused by misconception of roles and responsibilities (Castallo, 2003), a shift in balance of power due to dynamics in boards and superintendents' relation (Castallo, 2003; Glass, 2000; Montenegro, 2008), lack of clear role demarcation between school boards and circuit managers, which results in overlapping roles (Glass, 2000) and management of school finances (Montenegro, 2008).

Context-responsive leadership, as a way of avoiding such challenge with SGBs, demands that the SGBs are provided with the information required to develop and to make realistic and informed decisions (Bredeson *et al.* 2008). Furthermore, there is a need to identify and communicate the impact of changes in legislation and funding (Bredeson *et al.* 2008). In other words, the professional development of SGB members, where roles and responsibilities are discussed, is important. This view also resonates with those of Montenegro (2008), who suggests discussing policy roles of school boards with school board members, having team building activities and providing training for the boards.

As indicated in Chapter 2, Bhengu, Naicker and Mthiyane (2014) state that unions have a negative effect on education as they pursue narrow self-interests on behalf of their members. This study has found teacher unions to be interfering with the circuit managers' role of supporting teaching and learning. Some teacher union officials have been found to resist school visits conducted by circuit managers. Teacher unions still view circuit managers as symbols of oppression. This view has been reported in Jansen's (2004) study (see Chapter 2). This resistance has made circuit managers emphasise that, when they visit schools, they only want to support curriculum delivery. In doing this, circuit managers try to distance themselves from the negative role played by circuit managers during the apartheid period. The Department of Education has also tried to remove the stigma associated with this position by giving it a new title.

In this theme the political role of circuit manager, as discussed in Chapter 2, emerges clearly. Circuit managers assume a political role to secure cooperation from various social groups, with the goal of making outside conditions favourable (Cuban, 1990). Context-responsive leaders encourage the establishment of trust and meaningful relationships with others both inside and outside the organisation (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). In this theme, circuit managers are acting politically and in a context-responsive leadership manner, when they navigate the challenges that they have by pushing back against the forces of narrow special interests, irrelevant political diversions and economic setbacks, thereby shaping a positive and clear context that give others direction (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). It is therefore clear that circuit managers find it very difficult to train some SGBs. The illiteracy of some of the SGB members was a challenge for some circuit managers in this regard. Given that many departmental policies are available in English, preparing documents and presenting SGB in the vernacular only can be a challenge, let alone the plethora of policies SGBs need to understand.

7.4 Leadership approaches adopted by circuit managers

This section presents the leadership approaches used by circuit managers to deal with the massive challenges they face when supporting teaching and learning. These approaches are: being professional and creating, trusting relationship with school principals, ensuring open lines of communication with school principals, understanding and embracing community culture and values, using stakeholders to find context-based solutions and drawing from knowledge and skills acquired through post graduate studies and experience.

7.4.1 Professional, trusting relationship with school principals based on risk taking

According to Wilson's (2010) study, treating individuals with fairness, dignity and respect and fostering an atmosphere characterised by professionalism, mutual respect, trust, and cooperation, help individuals within the school district to respect and appreciate each other's contributions (Wilson, 2010). Circuit managers in this study have been found to value professional co-operative relationships with school principals based on mutual trust and risk taking in the interest of effective teaching and learning. Their professional conduct has been found to be underpinned by the manner in which they relate to and work with their school principals. They try to develop a trusting relationship with them. This relationship is based on mutual trust. "*The principal must trust the circuit manager"* (Ntanzi). These relationships that circuit managers have been found to be inculcating are reciprocated by the strong co-operation

of school principals. Ngubo stated that "*My experience is that principals are very cooperative."* This finding extends that of Forner, Bierlein-Palmer and Reeves (2012), about the leadership practices of effective rural superintendents. This found that a close working relationship between school principals and superintendent provides the leverage needed to address problems. According to Forner *et al.*'s (2012) study, the result of the special relationship is displayed as the managers' willingness to support their principals by granting them operational autonomy in their efforts to improve student academic achievement.

Furthermore, Tschannen-Moran (2009) argues that education departments employ the elements of a bureaucratic structure to organise the complex task of educating large and diverse groups of students, elements such as a hierarchy of authority, a division of labour, policies, rules, and regulations. Although such a structure is useful, there is a danger that leaders will overemphasize these elements and so adopt a bureaucratic orientation at the expense of cultivating professionalism in schools (Tschannen-Moran, 2009).This study has also found that a trusting relationship between circuit managers and school principals has been found to propel circuit managers to take risks by not adhering to departmental policies. For example, some of the schools in challenging contexts find it difficult to manage school finances according to prescribed policies. This is caused by SGBs that are dysfunctional and by poor levels of education among parent governors (Mthiyane, 2006). These challenges make principals spend school money without proper procedures being followed. These principals do so, so that they can provide certain service in the interest of effective teaching and learning. When faced with such incidents, circuit managers are very patient, participatory and open, resisting the temptation to adopting a bureaucratic orientation, with its implicit distrust (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). They try to understand the circumstances that result in such occurrence. This emerged when circuit managers indicated their reluctance to evoke formal disciplinary processes as provided for in the Employment of Educators Act no.76 of 1998 Section 17 and 18, which stipulates the measures for dealing with misconduct and serious misconduct (Department of Education, 1996).

When resisting the temptations to adhere to bureaucratic structures, circuit managers cease to follow departmental policies and thus take risks. This finding has been reported in other studies about principals who work in deprived contexts (Mkhize 2017; Bhengu & Myende 2016). For example, in Bhengu and Myende's (2016) study conducted in the South African rural context about leadership for coping and adapting to policy change in deprived contexts, all the

principals agreed that, to cope and adapt in the changing environment, they were obliged to take some decisions that were responsive to the context, but that contradicted government policy.

According to the instructional leadership theory advocated by Waters and Marzano (2006), circuit managers must exercise a level of defined autonomy when dealing with school principals. In this study it is found that circuit managers' leadership is professional, co-operative and based on mutual trust. The professional, cooperative trusting has also been found to propel circuit manager to take risks in the interest of effective teaching and learning. Furthermore, the finding here seems to be consistent with context-responsive leadership theory as advocated by Bredeson *et al.* (2008). Context-responsive leadership theory states that circuit managers must understand, take action and shape the contexts of their work by establishing trust and meaningful relationships (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). This theory is also underpinned by a notion that leadership and followership are inseparable elements of the fluid conversation in community of practice among leaders and others in challenging education systems. This element is clearly demonstrated by the actions taken by circuit managers who put their jobs on the line and take calculated risks in the interest of teaching and learning.

7.4.2 Ensuring open lines of communication with school principals

As indicated in the literature review (see Section 2.5) one of the duties of circuit managers, according to *Collective Agreement No. 1 of 2008*, is communication. This Collective Agreement mandates circuit managers to establish clear channels of communication with schools and other stakeholders (Education Labour Relations Council, 2008). Circuit managers have been found to value their communication with school principals. They want principals who communicate with them. They do not like principals who sits in their schools and do not say anything, especially when they not coping. *"I encourage principals to communicate with me. When things are not happening, I want to know why and how we can help"* (Ngubo). The communication between circuit managers and their principals seemed to help circuit managers to understand if the teaching and learning is going well and, if not, why.

Raath's (2012) study found that principals were convinced that communication strategies such as regular interaction, the increased visibility of the circuit manager as well as timeous feedback to schools have a big role in improving the role of circuit managers (see Section 2.3.1). Circuit managers have been found to use both conventional and technologically advanced methods of

communication to communicate with their school principals. The monthly principals' and special meetings are conventional methods of communication employed by circuit manager to communicate with school principals. Kowalski (2005), as indicated in Section 2.3.1, argues that circuit managers must utilise communication technology because it can increase productivity through increased processing, speed, greater memory capacity, miniaturization, decreased costs and increased ease of use. Circuit managers have been found to use newer technology to communicate with their school principals; *"I communicate via emails, SMS's, WhatsApp, and through telephone calls."* This finding contradicts those made by Nyembe-Kganye (2005) and Raath (2012). Nyembe-Kganye reported that circuit managers were unable to use the new forms of communications such as e-mail, websites and electronic bulletins, while Raath (2012) found that there is poor communication between circuit managers and school principals (Section 2.3.1).

Given the challenge of lack of basic infrastructure like electricity, ADSL (fast internet line) and land line telephone services in some of the schools, circuit managers are compelled to rely on the principals' personal laptops and smart phones for electronic communication. These technological communications systems also come with some limitations in some of the contexts. For example, in some areas, especially rural areas, cellular phone reception can be very poor. This leads to delays in communication between circuit managers and school principals.

7.4.3 Understanding and embracing community culture and values

Community characteristics and geographical location is another important element of context-responsive leadership theory (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). According to this theory, circuit managers must advance teaching and learning by identifying and preparing for demographic trends and geographical influences (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). In this study, two circuit managers were found to understand the community culture and value systems where their schools are situated. These circuit managers have been found to identify with the culture of the community. Their Zulu cultural disposition and appreciation have made it easy for them identify with some of their school rural communities. Zulu people are the majority in the areas where this study was conducted, especially in the rural areas. This approach helped these circuit managers when they need to dispel some of the cultures and traditions held by community that do not seem to contribute to effective teaching and learning. For example, one circuit manager indicated how he was able to convince parents to allow their girl children to wear tracksuit pants. This circuit

manager was able to do this by indicating to the parents that he knew Zulu culture. "*I always say you cannot beat me in terms of knowledge about Zulu culture"* (Skhakhane). However, it was time for parents to consider that the world was changing. He made an example of their girl children who may go and work in companies where wearing a skirt may compromise their children's dignity, for example, working in companies where workers walk on overhead steel structure that may expose one underpants if wearing a skirt. By indicating to parents that he knew Zulu culture very well, a western-educated person may have a positive impact on the way parents relate to circuit managers. For example, it may indicate to parents that he respects them, hence they might as well take his or her advice.

Understanding community values as well embracing diversity was an important approach for Skhakhane to ensure that he can get the support of the community. This support is critical in ensuring that she is able to drive issue of quality teaching and learning in her schools. This is what she had to say: "*You have to understand the community its values and embrace diversity so if you know your story then it will make things easier for you to be acceptable into schools and the governing bodies*." It is clear that leadership approaches used by circuit managers, that entail understanding and embracing local culture and values, assist them in gaining the ear and support of the community. It is also clear that circuit managers appreciate that without the support of the community they serve they do not stand a chance in ensuring that teaching and learning happen in their schools.

As earlier indicated in this foregoing discussion, issues of the culture of local contexts are very deep. The understanding that is needed for it to impact on the community in real terms needs to be appreciated by all stakeholders, including teachers and senior departmental officials. The role of circuit managers in the South African context is limited. They are unlike their American counterparts, who play a role in curriculum planning and the material that is used to deliver that curriculum. Furthermore, circuit managers alone do not plan and implement the vacation classes that have been found in this study to be heavily compromised in some contexts, where learners choose to go to cultural activities rather than to schools. However, despite these issues that are beyond their control, they need to leverage their cultural understanding of the community they serve to advance their role of supporting teaching and learning. The approach employed by these two circuit managers seems to be consistent with context leadership responsive leadership theory, which suggests that circuit managers must identify and be sensitive to organisational, traditions, norms, symbols, communication styles, relationships, processes and capacity for

change, adapting their leadership approach to the unique organisational culture and seeking opportunities to build relationships and develop trust (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008).

7.4.4 Using stakeholders to find context-based solutions

Heifetz (2006) states that educational leadership has evolved to the point where collaborative activity between the superintendent and others in the school district is expected and is often more effective. Commenting on the same issue, Wilson (2010) adds that school superintendents need to manage the political aspect of their job to identify constituents who affect the education of the students and get them engaged in helping to reach educational objectives. This study has found that circuit managers draw on both internal and external stakeholders to find solutions to problems faced by their schools. Given that many of the challenges that circuit managers deal with are outside the classroom, the people who experience this problem and who can best be part of the solution are the community members.

Stakeholders' involvement seems to assist circuit managers to exercise context-based leadership when dealing with the different challenges found in their schools. When they are invited by school principals and SGBs to intervene in disputes in schools, they are very careful in making sure that they seek a context-based solution. They do not cut and paste solutions that worked in other schools. They understand that no two schools are the same. Their approach to seek context-based solution is underpinned by trial and error. This view was echoed by Raymond who stated that: *"You have to go back and forth, try this and that*." Circuit managers do not find immediate success, instead they try different approaches that may take time for the results to be seen. Circuit managers' approach to finding context-based solutions is also based on having an open mind and not on preconceived ideas about the school.

Working with stakeholders also seems to compel circuit managers to want to have a clear understanding of the situation on the ground. They want to know who is who among the stakeholders. When they visit the schools, they want to spend as much time as possible and immerse themselves in the context as this make them to be in a position to really understand what is happening. Raymond stated that: "*When you visit schools, you don't want to rush, you want to go there and soak in what is happening*." They understand that they cannot be effective on their own as their local contextual reality will always contain a mélange of enabling and inhibiting factors including local school boards, members of the legislative assemblies and union leaders, and other interested parties who will think alongside or in opposition to them

(Grogan, 2000). This is important because, while they may be prepared to work with different stakeholders to find context-responsive solutions, they will be accountable when decisions that are to the detriment of quality teaching and learning are taken. I therefore argue that, in situations like this, where local stakeholders play a role in finding solutions to the challenge, the circuit manager's wisdom in guiding the process is very important. This manner of taking decisions will also help the circuit manager because it will contribute to a sense of ownership of the solution by stakeholders. According to context-responsive leadership theory, one of the most consistent contexts shaping the behaviour of successful school leaders was built through personal relationships and trust among stakeholders (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008).

7.4.5 Drawing from knowledge and skills acquired through post graduate studies and experience.

This study finds that post graduate qualifications seemed to give circuit manager confidence, skills, and the open mind needed to navigate the challenges posed by the context they work in. Their post graduate qualifications help them when preparing and presenting staff development. They are able to dig deeper when dealing with issues and always look for new ways of dealing with challenges. This how Raymond explained it: "*Yes, they have in many ways. On a general level, research broadens your outlook and it opens up your mind to approach situations from more than one perspective*." Similar to the situation regarding principals, in the South African context, unlike in some developed countries where there is a university programme to train people to be circuit managers, the minimum qualification to becoming a circuit manager is a junior degree (Department of Education, 1996) and there is no requirement for any education management qualification. In comparison, in developed countries like the USA, there may be a requirement for a master's degree and, in some cases, PhD.

This study has found that, while circuit managers who were part of this study had post graduate qualifications, they still yearn for professional development. Circuit managers are at times mandated to investigate cases of teachers' serious misconduct. This they must do without being provided with training. This was confirmed by one circuit manager who stated, *"I am expected to investigate cases of serious misconduct as well, but I don't have a labour background."* When confronted with such challenges, circuit managers draw on their experience and research skills acquired from their postgraduate studies to get information to deal with such tasks they are expected to discharge. Circuit managers also wish to have professional development that will capacitate them about how to better support schools that

are located in challenging contexts. This finding is consistent with finding made by Gober (2012) in his study conducted in the USA about the preparation of the 21st Century circuit manager. In this study, Gober (2012) found that any circuit manager preparation or on-site development programme should use a hybrid approach, drawing on rigorous theoretical insights grounded in real world practice. He went in to state that, since superintendents typically spend a good deal of their time solving challenging problems, their preparation needs to provide opportunities to develop their leadership skills and solve real world problems in an environment where they can take risks.

7.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the findings of this study. In the first section of the chapter the role played by circuit manager in supporting teaching and learning has been presented. The second section presented the contextual challenges faced by circuit managers when supporting teaching and learning. The last section presented the leadership approaches that help circuit managers navigate their challenging contexts. Literature and the theoretical framework have been used in this study to understand and make sense of the findings that emerged from data analysis. The next chapter will synthesise the findings, theorise about leadership for supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts and theorise whether the context matters. The chapter will further provide recommendations for circuit managers and further research.

CHAPTER 8
CIRCUIT MANAGERS LEADERSHIP FOR SUPPORTING TEACHING AND LEARNING: DOES THE CONTEXT MATTER?

8.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 presented the findings of the study that emerged from the presentation of data. This chapter provides the conclusion to the study. The purposes of this chapter are threefold. Firstly, the chapter summarises the thesis by looking at the focus of each chapter. Secondly, the chapter provides the synthesis of the findings by restating each research question and explaining how it has been answered. After this part, I theorise what is meant by leadership for supporting teaching and learning and further theorise about such leadership, in relationship to the context within which it is applied. In other words, I present the nature of leadership for supporting teaching and learning and thereafter I respond to the question of whether the context matters in that leadership. Moving from theorisation, I present recommendations for theory and practice and for further research.

8.2 Summary of the study

This study argued that ensuring that effective teaching and learning takes place in schools is the goal of any educational structure, argued that circuit managers play an important role within education system and the main purpose for their existence is to ensure that there is teaching and learning for improved quality of education in schools. While this is the case, the study presented the positon that, in some contexts, the work of circuit managers is not easy due to the challenges in those contexts. From this view this study has explored how circuit managers play their leadership roles in supporting teaching and learning in these challenging contexts. The current study is constituted by eight chapters, with each chapter dedicated to a certain purpose.

In Chapter 1, I provided arguments around the importance of teaching and learning, how local literature has not prioritised the study of the role of circuit management in supporting teaching and learning, and how a challenging context makes the role of circuit managers to be unlike that of circuit managers in other contexts. In a nutshell, this chapter provided an introduction and background to the study where the role of circuit managers and the context was problematised.

In the second chapter, I interrogated local and international scholarship on supporting teaching and learning. I presented a background to the position of circuit manager from both international and local perspectives. This helped me to understand how the position of circuit managers has evolved, especially in South Africa; and how this may still have an impact on the role of the current circuit managers. The chapter also discussed the different roles played by circuit managers. In discussing these roles, gaps in related literature that I reviewed on *what is the leadership role of circuit managers in challenging contexts clearly emerges.* The research done on the contextual role of circuit managers is also discussed. However, this research only looks at contexts as being urban or rural. In this study, context can be understood in terms of the prevailing conditions in a particular space.

In the third chapter I presented the theoretical framework guiding this study. The instructional leadership and the context-responsive leadership theories are presented in this chapter as the two theories that form the framework for the analytical lens in this study. The instructional leadership theory has assisted me to understand the role of circuit managers as instructional leaders, while the context-responsive leadership theory has guided the study in analysing the confluence between leadership and context.

Chapter 4 of this study presented the research design and the methodology followed in conducting the study. In this study I was guided in my thinking by the interpretivist research paradigm that influenced the choice of the phenomenology as the research design. This chapter also presented how the business of research has evolved. For example, the participants were sampled using convenience and purposive sampling as these provided me with the opportunity to seek participants who are information rich. Documentary review and semi-structured interviews were used to generate data, which was analysed using Phenomenology data analysis method. The interviews were recorded using an MP3 digital voice recorder and transcribed into the word document within a period of 24 hours. Issues of trustworthiness were attended to, using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 of the study presented the data as it emerged from the field. These two chapters used themes to present data that emerged from a systematic coding data. These themes were based on and guided by the research questions. Chapter 5 presented data that is related to the role of circuit managers, whereas chapter six presented data that dealt with the influence of

contexts. Doing this helped me to systematically approach the data and organise the volume of data that I generated from the interviews and review of documents. Furthermore, this approach allowed for the presentation of detailed evidence on the issues studied. Additionally, Chapter 7 presented the findings that emerged from the data chapters (Chapters 5 and 6). Again, these findings were presented using and being guided by the research questions. The final chapter, Chapter 8, presents the conclusions from the study by summarising the study, theorising leadership for circuit managers and theorising about the confluence between leadership for supporting teaching and learning and the context.

8.3 Synthesising the findings

In this section, I synthesise the findings. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how the research questions have been answered in this study. As stated in the introduction, I restate my research questions and then provide a synthesised response to these questions from my findings' chapters.

8.3.1 What role do circuit managers play in supporting teaching and learning in a challenging context?

Circuit managers, as instructional leaders, try to play the role of supporting the basic functionality of their schools. Schools that these circuit managers work with have many contextual challenges (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3) that affect their functionality. As a way of kick-starting and improving school functionality, circuit managers used planning. This they do by helping schools with detailed planning for the whole year. As indicated in Chapter 7, Section 7.3.7, some of the schools supervised by these circuit managers face leadership challenges at the level of school management. To ensure that the school's basic functionality is attained in their schools, circuit managers seem to prioritise these plans. By having these plans done, circuit managers believe that they will provide a good foundation for ensuring schools' basic functionality. This is also a clear indication of the level of faith circuit managers have in their principal's leadership and management skills, which is that they cannot develop plans for their schools unaided. This indicates that, without these plans, schools will not have any form of a guide that will inform how teaching and learning will evolve in schools. Hence such planning contributes to the schools' basic functionality.

However, these plans are compromised when they are not grounded on the vision, mission and goals, as discussed in Section 7.2.1. The work of the circuit managers is characterised by lack of a collaboratively set vision, mission and goal; all circuit managers who participated in this study, except one, worked without a circuit vision and collaboratively set goals. This reality has been attributed to the challenging nature of involving stakeholders in the development of the vision and goals. As a result of this situation, circuit managers are compelled to be autocratic, to use their own wisdom and dictate what should be the goals of the circuit.

Circuit managers also play a role in monitoring curriculum delivery through school visits. School visits are the most important strategy used by circuit managers as they provide first-hand information about the functionality of the school. Many activities are undertaken during the school visit done by circuit managers (see Section 7.2.3). From these school visits, circuit managers are able to establish the progress the school is making in the provision of quality teaching and learning and in achieving the goals set by the circuit manager alone. These visits also open an important opportunity for accountability**.** However, this process does not unfold smoothly, as circuit managers struggle to visit all the schools per term as required. They spend most of their time chasing the underperforming secondary schools and other non-teaching and learning issues ("putting out fires").

Another role that circuit managers perform is that of supporting schools' resources needs. As is evident from Chapter 7, Section 7.2.4., many tasks are performed by circuit managers in this regard to assist their school to acquire the necessary resources. These tasks however do not directly influence schools' access to these resources. Their task is limited to ensuring that schools make requests to the district directorate that deals with resources, according to required procedures, and they will follow up on these. They try to manipulate the bureaucratic systems in favour of their schools. This also encourages school to work with the private sector to get more resources. This is one of the frustrating tasks for the circuit managers as the success of teaching and learning hinges on the availability of resources, yet their role in the provision of such resources is very limited.

As part of their role as instructional leaders, circuit managers provide professional development to different categories of staff. Teachers, school clerks and school principals are provided with professional development opportunities by circuit managers. The professional development provided by circuit managers, as described in Chapter 7, Section 7.2.2, is designed to improve the capacity of staff. School principals are the ones who benefit the most from the professional

development provided by circuit managers because of the leadership challenges that they have identified amongst them (see Section 7.3.7). The focus of circuit managers' professional development suggests that they understand that the success of the schools to a great extent depends on the leadership by the principals.

Over and above providing professional development to the different categories of school staff, circuit managers also provide training to members of the SGBs. The training of SGB members is done differently by different Circuit managers (Section 7.2.2.4). Some prefer to provide further training over and above that provided by the Governance Sub-Directorate. What is important in this section is the advantage that comes with the training of SGB members by circuit managers. Circuit managers who directly capacitate their SGB members are provided with an opportunity to create a relationship with them. This relationship may come in handy when political challenges emerge. More importantly, it provides circuit managers with an opportunity to set the tone for what his or her expectations are for all her or his SGB members. These workshops can also be used to discuss the issues that relate to goals of the circuit.

Circuit managers also work with schools to ensure that student leaders are well capacitated for them to be able to fulfil their responsibilities. This they do, as articulated in Section 7.2.6, by trying to ensure that each school has an educator who is tasked with working with the Representative Council for Learners (RCL). They also work with this educator in each secondary school in co-ordinating training for the learners' leaders. Circuit managers also try to motivate learners to take their education seriously. Circuit managers know that learners in secondary school involve themselves in many things that negatively impact their education. Teachers can teach and do all sorts of things, but, if learners are not focused, teaching and learning will not be successful. Circuit managers try to make learners focus on education.

Circuit managers work with different stakeholders on behalf of their schools. They promote collaboration between schools and different stakeholders. Amakhosi, Izinduna, councillors, business and non-government organisation are among the group of stakeholders that circuit managers work with. They also encourage schools to engage different stakeholders. The plethora of socio-economic issues and scarcity of resources and skills make working with stakeholders important. It helps school principals not to rely on the limited resources of the government. For example, working with stakeholders like traditional leadership, especially in rural areas, as described in Section 7.2.5, helps schools with issues of safety and security. Given the respect traditional leaders command in their areas, being seen and working with them in

the community can be positive for the principal and can legitimise the presence of the principal and teachers in the eyes of the community, as most are not from the areas their schools are located.

8.3.2 What are the challenges that affect circuit managers' role of supporting teaching and learning?

The work of Circuit managers, as reported in Chapter 7, is affected by a plethora of related socio-economic issues. These issues include high levels of poverty in the community. Poverty has a ripple effect as it viewed as the cause of other social ills like drug abuse, child-headed homes, absent parents and poor parental participation in child education. Poverty affects circuit managers' work; they are unable to focus on issues that directly impact teaching and learning because they have to constantly find ways to help schools deal with socio-economic issues (Section 6.2.1). The socio-economic challenges found in these contexts make it difficult to hold schools accountable, as teachers and school principals evoke these challenges as a major hindrance. By spending a lot of time discussing the socio-economic issues, the circuit managers lose their focus on issues of teaching and learning.

One of the most difficult challenges that circuit managers must deal with is school violence. School violence, as circuit managers explain in Section 7.3.3, can be characterised into faction fights and gangsterism. Circuit managers in rural settings are dealing with faction fights whereas those in township deal with gang wars. Violence in schools impacts the work of circuit managers as it diverts their attention and focus from instructional issues. In their attempts to secure an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning, circuit managers drop everything and attend to incidents of school violence. This is a difficult task for circuit managers, because the violence starts in the community and they do not have the mandate to deal with community violence. Given that there is a lot at stake for them if the violence continues, circuit managers try to work with relevant stakeholders like Amakhosi and Izinduna, police services and councillors. As a way of preventing learners from embarking on violence, circuit managers try to work with schools to ensure that the policies that deal with school safety and code of conduct for learners are in place and are enforced. However, despite these attempts, school violence seems to be pervasive. It puts great lot of pressure on managers' work because it draws the attention of senior departmental officials and politicians as it is widely published in the media.

The circuit managers'work is affected by tradition and culture. Tradition and culture in schools located in rural contexts were found to be in conflict with learners' schooling. For instance, one example, as described in Section 7.3.3, is the cultural ceremonies that take place during critical times of the schooling programme like the extra-classes and winter-classes for matric students. Cultural and traditional activities that take place in the community seemed to clash with important schooling activities. The work that the circuit managers do together with different partners in preparing for these classes comes to nothing as few learners attend these classes, as demonstrated by attendance registers**.** The clash between culture and tradition is also evident in parents' assumptions about their learners. For example, parents in some of the areas believe that their learners should stay in the area and look after them when they are old. They complain at teachers who motivate learners by telling them to study and become lawyers or doctors and leave for the big cities. Such views make parents shun school and not to support their learners' education. In some communities, young girls and boys are encouraged to get married at a very early age as they see no value in staying in school. These challenges make school principals and circuit managers very frustrated. Not having parents who fully support their children's education affects every attempt by the school to support teaching and learning. Female circuit managers also face challenges of acceptance. In some communities, leadership positions are believed to be for men. When a woman is presented as a leader (as a circuit manager) some people do not take her seriously. Given this challenge, women circuit managers must work very hard to earn the trust of the community.

This study reports that the work of circuit managers is also affected by geographical location and poor road infrastructure. Three circuit managers in this study have schools spread across vast areas. The geographical location of schools poses many problems for circuit managers and interferes with their attempts to support teaching and learning (Section 7.3.6). Travelling to these schools becomes a problem for these circuit managers. Furthermore, these factors also affect the circuit managers' attempts to staff schools with teachers. Teachers seem to shun schools located in these conditions. This problem also influences the schools' ability to attract and keep school leaders. This also affects circuit managers' attempts to grow their own timber; these schools are training grounds for leadership, but that leadership moves to other well-situated schools. Circuit managers try to train their staff, especially principals, but once they acquire experience, they leave to better resourced schools and school with less challenges.

Another challenge that affects circuit managers' attempts to support teaching and learning is the disconnect between the context and the policy. Policies like the PPN and the Norms and Standard for School Infrastructure make the job of the circuit managers of supporting teaching and learning difficult. These policies limit the role of the circuit manager of being a resource provider who provides resources according to the needs on the ground. The PPN, for example, is not flexible enough for the circuit manager to be able to provide enough teachers to their schools for effective teaching and learning. While these policies are applicable to all schools in South Africa and they have built-in elements that seek to deal with the legacy of apartheid, these seem not to be enough. Schools in these contexts are unable to raise additional funds to provide more staff and resources, unlike their counterparts in other schools.

The circuit managers in these schools also have to deal with programmes imposed by upper structures. Some of the schools supported by these circuit managers have a long history of underperforming and of providing sub-standard education. In their attempt to arrest the situation, departmental officials from the district, provincial and national offices bring many different programmes aimed at improving learner attainment in these contexts. In this process, circuit managers are overlooked as local players, in the programme brought by other upper structures. Senior officials flex their muscles and undermine the work done by circuit managers. As a result of these programmes, schools are at times disturbed by meetings, workshops and programmes brought by these upper structures. These structures also lack the understanding of local dynamics. This situation makes circuit managers to be very frustrated and demotivated because these programmes use a top-down approach. There is no consultation with the local players. The circuit managers are told by these officials to put their programme aside as they have failed to make learners pass. As indicated in Section 7.3.8, circuit managers also have their programme, the imposition of these programme means theirs must take a back seat.

Politics seems to be another challenge that impacts on circuit managers' work. This challenge was seen to emerge in their interaction with teacher unions and school governing bodies. All circuit managers expressed that they have sour relations with unions, except one circuit manager who indicated having a good working relationship with teacher unions. The findings also make it clear that teacher unions still view the circuit managers in a negative light (see Section 7.3.9). The confrontation between unions and circuit manager emerges when circuit managers visit schools to monitor and support curriculum delivery. This entails checking each

and every teacher's work at the school. Union in some circuits try to stop circuit managers from doing this task. Such acts could be viewed as resisting accountability and defending union members who may not be doing their work accordingly.

The relationship between circuit managers and some SGB parent components is at times not good (Section 7.3.9). Given the low levels of education that some of the parent governors possess, they struggle with certain tasks that they have to undertake as governors. The lack of understanding of rules and procedures results in constant conflict about how school funds should be used. For example, parents at times would want money from the school's Norms and Standards allocation, to buy a cow to open the school. In some communities, slaughtering a cow has a major significance of drawing together the community, which may make the community look at the school as part of it. However, for poor schools who are no-fee paying schools, this practice is not permitted, because the use of money is stipulated by the Norms and Standards for Funding policy, which clearly states how school funds should be used, and buying a cow is not supported by this policy. These funds are only to be used strictly for education related matters.

Also, the parent components are easily influenced by unions when it comes to the appointment of school principals. The circuit manager, as an instructional leader, has a responsibility to ensure that good leaders are appointed to lead their schools. The circuit managers' job of appointing good school leaders is impeded by a compromised SGB. When an unfit principal is appointed, it also becomes the responsibility of the circuit manager to capacitate him or her. The SGBs and the unions have different interests, thus it is very worrying for the circuit manager when unions and the parent components of SGBs work together, as this may indicate something very wrong happening.

Circuit managers play a variety of roles in their endeavour to support teaching and learning in their schools, albeit to a limited extent. Drawing from the findings of this study, I argue that the different roles played by circuit managers are often reactive and are geared towards ensuring that there is some form of teaching and learning happening in their schools. For example, the evidence as provided by the itinerary (Section 6.2.3) indicates that they always attend to unplanned matters that are not directly related to teaching and learning, hence their itinerary always changes. This therefore confirms that their planned activities can never implemented properly, if at all. The next section looks at influence of contextual challenges.

8.3.3 How do contextual challenges influence the leadership role of circuit managers?

In order to balance the need for supporting teaching and learning while facing the many challenges that school principals face in their schools, circuit managers work towards forging a professional, trusting relationship with school principals that also requires taking risks**.** The trusting relationship helps circuit managers to be able to appreciate when principals act outside of the policy and it is done in the interest of teaching and learning. Leadership of the school is the purview of the principal; therefore, they must be given some freedom to lead their schools based on their understanding of the context. The circuit manager must provide guidance and hold principals accountable for decisions taken this ensuring that such decisions are in the interest of teaching and learning.

Circuit managers maintain constant communication with school principals. The general expected communication between the circuit managers and their school principal seemed to happen seamlessly (Section 7.4.2). These include monthly principal meetings and planned workshops to develop school principals. However, I argue that the most important communication is the unplanned processes that arise out of the need to communicate urgent and important information. What seems to compel circuit managers to maintain constant communication with the school principals is that these schools have many incidents that need the immediate intervention of the circuit manager. Such incidents include faction fights and gangsterism.

These incidents, when they happen, collapse all schooling in the areas. Circuit managers demanded that principals alert them as soon as possible when such incidents occur. The quicker the circuit managers are alerted by principals, the more time they have to prepare the ground should upper structures want answers about the incident as they are published in media or they want to visit the school. The circuit managers also use modern communication systems like WhatsApp, email and Short Message Service (SMS) when communicating with school principals. Communication using these methods is made possible by the principals' smart phones, because their schools do not have these facilities.

Some circuit managers tried to embrace the local culture and value systems of the community they serve. The circuit managers who try to embrace the local culture seemed to receive support from the community (Section 7.4.3). This support has been found to be important as circuit managers work closely with different stakeholders. In these contexts, they have also been found

to be working directly with the Amakhosi, Izinduna and SGBs. At times some circuit managers have been found to work directly with parents, in such occasions as parent meetings discussing instances of school closures or when dealing with faction fights. This approach of embracing or showing that, as circuit managers, they understand the local culture has been found to have a disarming effect on parents. This is clearly demonstrated by the findings (Section 7.4.3). Disarming the parents provides the circuit managers with an opportunity to explain and to convince them to embrace new ideas and adapt their culture. Such a task is easier when it is done by a person who demonstrates that he or she respects the culture and more importantly that he or she subscribes to the same culture too.

Seeking context-based solutions is one of the approaches used by these circuit managers when supporting teaching and learning in their schools. They resist the temptation to impose readymade solutions on their school principals. This is very hard, given that all of them except one were principals of schools themselves. Secondly, they have post graduate education, which may make them feel more knowledgeable. When dealing with challenges or problems, they try not to be guided by the preconceived knowledge they may have. They want solutions to evolve from the ground. This view is underpinned by their assumption that there are no two schools that are the same. Each school has its own dynamics that need to be understood before a decision is taken. More details about this can be found in Section 7.4.4.

Drawing from the skills acquired through studies helped circuit managers lead and support their schools better. The knowledge and skills acquired through post graduate education help their leadership. For example, one circuit manager who holds a PhD stated that his studies have provided him with the ability to think more deeply and being more innovative through searching for new ways of doing things. The challenges that circuit managers deal with demand that they should be able to find information and solution themselves. These circuit managers use their research skills and scholarship that relate to school leadership to find solutions to their problems.

Their post graduate studies came in handy because circuit managers in South Africa do not have to undergo any training or any course that will prepare them for their job. This study also reveals that, even though some circuit managers are depended on their qualifications to help provide them with skills and mental fortitude to navigate their role of supporting teaching and learning in schools located in challenging contexts, they still yearn for on the job training that will provide them with further skills and knowledge about being a circuit manager in

challenging contexts. Having postgraduate education also helped the circuit managers to have confidence and belief that they can make a difference. This has been demonstrated by the findings of this study that these circuit managers have the confidence to stand up in meetings and talk because they know what they are talking about and the people whom they talk to know the capacity of the person that they are dealing with. Such views will go a long way in helping circuit managers deal with some of the challenges found in their contexts. For example, as clearly argued in this foregoing discussion that and presented in the literature review chapter, that teacher unions can be selfish and act in a manner that seeks to advance their objectives at the expense of teaching and learning. Knowing that they are dealing with a well-educated circuit manager has an impact on the way unions work with the circuit manager. Therefore, it is clear from the findings that circuit managers' post graduate qualifications play an important role of augmenting their ability to mediate between what is expected of them as instructional leaders and the context.

8.4 Learning from the findings of the study: Leadership and the context

This section theorises leadership in challenging contexts. It starts by discussing the nature of supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts and concludes by answering the question: does context matter?

8.4.1 The nature of leadership for supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts

Revealed in this study is that leadership for supporting teaching and learning as executed by circuit managers in a challenging context is complex and almost impossible. The complexity is caused by a number of different but interconnected factors. One of these factors is the need for teachers and material resources. The policies that guide provision of these resources is based on a one size fits all approach, although there is an attempt to take into consideration different contexts. These considerations however do not seem to go far enough. The need to balance the school's requirement for these resources and the ever-increasing challenges of migration that are unpredictable and cause havoc with the number of learners on which the current policy of providing resources is based. This issue clearly demonstrates the complex and fluid nature of the work of circuit managers.

Given this reality, the nature of leadership for supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts draws from a variety of styles. In other words, this means leadership for supporting teaching and learning in a challenging context is not fixed on a specific style. One such style of leadership is autocratic leadership. Circuit managers used this style when they deal with issues that they do not have the time and resources to consult subordinates about. For example, five out six circuit managers who participated in this study took it upon themselves to determine what should be the vision and goals of their circuits, given the immense challenges that goes with collaborating and setting them. Leadership for supporting teaching and learning in these contexts is characterised by the leaders stamping their authority on matters that the leaders know are non-negotiable and when they have no time to hold discussion about them. They need to be guided by their individual wisdom, drawn from their knowledge, experience and the contextual factors. One such matters is their obsession with planning, as it has emerged in this study that circuit managers and school principals spend a lot of time planning for the coming year.

Circuit managers also act autonomously when they allowed school principals to lead schools and take decisions based on what they think works in their context rather than on what policies of the department prescribes. Given this contextual reality, circuit managers provided principals with a certain level of autonomy to lead schools, drawing from what works in their contexts. I wish to emphasise that this autonomy entails taking calculated risks, thus circuit managers distinguish amongst those issues where such level of autonomy can be granted. For example, circuit managers take away autonomy from principals when dealing with sensitive issues like school violence, because incidents of school violence tend to attract a lot of attention as they widely published by media.

Another lesson learnt from the findings of this study is that servant leadership underpins instructional leadership in challenging contexts. In discharging their responsibilities, the circuit managers as leaders dirtied their hands, went beyond the normal call of duty and did menial jobs. They also go out of their way to motivate learners to focus on their studies. They helped co-ordinate extra-classes for their schools, they monitored attendance and they met with parents of learners. All these responsibilities are generally reserved for school principals. Furthermore, is been learnt from the findings of this study that the nature of instructional leadership in challenging contexts is characterised by the values of Ubuntu. Values of Ubuntu emerge when circuit managers buy and donate money for learners to buy school uniform for learners, so they

can be able to attend afternoon classes. Such actions of circuit managers suggest that the high levels of poverty that they see in their schools evoke the spirit of human solidarity among them, as espoused by Ubuntu. The schools they work with are characterised by a plethora of socio-economic challenges.

The nature of leadership for supporting teaching and learning in schools that are in challenging contexts is underpinned by its emphasis on professional development for all categories of staff. There were different strategies used by different circuit managers for different purposes. For example, there are circuit managers who use PLC (clusters) to develop their teachers. Using this structure, where peers meet to develop each other, helps the subordinates to discuss issues that affect them as peers without fear of their seniors being in the room. During these workshops, teachers are able to contextualise all these polices under which their work is based and to share ideas on subject content knowledge and, more importantly, strategies that work taking into consideration the massive challenges they face. The principals seem to be the category of staff that benefit the most from this professional development. The professional development activities provided to these principals by circuit managers are characterised by discussing the different circulars from the department, with the circuit manager the only major source of information. However, in other circuits there was also the evidence of circuit managers' professional development responding to existing contextual challenges on the ground. For example, inviting NGOs to talk to principals about drug abuse showed that some circuit managers take cognisance of the contextual developmental needs of the school principals and they appreciate that not only they are the sources of knowledge and wisdom.

Leadership for supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts is anchored on the support of multiple stakeholders. This support is not automatically attained but is premised on the leadership style the leader uses. The leader who adjusts his or leadership style to local culture seems successful. For example, two of the circuit managers who have schools in rural areas showed signs of being very cautious when dealing with parents and more importantly with traditional leadership. The findings of this study reveal that appreciation and respect of local culture help circuit managers to receive the ear of the ever so suspicious community members. Being conversant with local culture opens the doors for circuit managers to form personal relationships with traditional leadership based on trust and to gradually influence the community in dealing with traditions and cultures that hinder teaching and learning. This also

does not necessarily mean the leader accepts everything the stakeholders want or say, it however means he or she knows when to hold back and when to push back.

The lesson learnt here extends to the knowledge that emerged in previous studies. For example, in the literature review (Section 2.9), it is reported by Mthembu (2014) that circuit managers are performing their instructional leadership role by providing a positive and supportive environment for students and staff, maintaining the district's vision and setting goals that are focused on high levels of student expectation, are visible and accessible to staff and student, on staff empowerment and on modelling instructional leadership. Drawing from the findings of this study, it is clear that circuit managers who have schools located in challenging contexts do a lot more than what their counterparts in less challenging contexts do. Their contexts make their jobs very difficult, which make them struggle in doing what could be viewed as a basic task. For example, developing a vision and goals is a challenge to some of these circuit managers. Despite this, they try to come up with something that will be a circuit guide to what needs to be pursued.

8.4.2 The context: Does it matter?

This study sought to understand the role circuit managers play in supporting teaching and learning in schools located in challenging contexts. From the onset, context has been treated as very important in this study. From the findings of this study, it is clear that circuit managers try to perform many tasks to fulfil their role as instructional leaders. The tasks that they try to do as instructional leaders are greatly influenced by major contextual challenges. In this section of this study, I want to draw mainly on context-responsive theory and cite some of the claims that underpins this theory, in answering the question as to whether the context matters.

Firstly, as stated in the theoretical frameworks chapter, for Bredeson, Klar and Johansson (2008), context-responsive leadership is practical wisdom in action. It reveals a complex mix of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions appropriately deployed by effective leaders as they engage in fluid conversations with the dynamic situational variables. This study has demonstrated that circuit managers' leadership choices are clearly embedded in their contextual realities. The circuit managers in this study deal with very fluid and unpredictable situations. They respond to issues as they arise from the ground and how they make sense to them. These issues are so fluid that even policy initiatives of the state became redundant. The trusting relationship between principals and their circuit managers allows the support by circuit

managers to the schools located in challenging contexts to be based on what the schools need rather than what the policy suggests.

Furthermore, context-responsive leadership is expressed through action, the way the leader behaves, not by any one predisposed style consisting of decontextualised qualities or leader actions (Bredeson *et al.,* 2008). Accordingly, the leadership of circuit managers is not exercised in a decontextualised manner. The contexts that these circuit managers work under are not static but evolve continually and demand multiple leadership approaches. The findings of this study are that circuit managers' adaptation of their leadership style is intended to deal with the different contextual challenges they face. These contextual challenges need to be addressed by the leader's ability to understand them. This compels circuit managers to continually adapt their leadership style. This is demonstrated by the circuit managers who try to understand local culture as a way of unlocking local stakeholders' support for education.

Also, important here is that knowledge of the context is more important than the knowledge the leader may have about education leadership and management. The leader who clearly understands the different variables and players in his context stands a better chance of being successful. Such knowledge assists the leader to be able to understand the context and thus respond effectively. It therefore clear that leadership that does not take contextual realities into account is not likely to succeed, hence this study argues that context matters. The findings are further that, as instructional leaders, circuit managers, guided by their commitment to instructional leadership, must be able to study contexts and use their wisdom to come with mediated solutions to fulfil their instructional leadership role. The individual wisdom of circuit managers in this interaction determines the ways they respond. The way the leader responds seems to adapt what needs to be done to the contextual realities as found on the ground. Thus, the leader becomes the mediator. Such actions seem to support the view that circuit managers' instructional leadership in challenging contexts involves mediation.

Supporting teaching and learning is mediated by the leadership approaches the leader assumes in challenging contexts. An example would be taking calculated risks in the interest of teaching and learning, which entails affording more autonomy to the principals to be innovative, ensuring professional conduct and risk taking based on mutual trust between the leader and the follower.

8.5 Recommendations

This section presents the recommendations, which are based on my theorisation above. The presentation first addresses recommendations for the practice of leading teaching and learning and secondly for further research.

8.5.1 Recommendations for practice

The following recommendation is based on the finding that circuit managers are overwhelmed by socio-economic challenges in their schools, in their work to support teaching and learning in schools. They however find it very difficult as they must deal with many socio-economic challenges that distract their focus from supporting teaching and learning. There is a need for schools to be allocated social workers who will be placed in the office of each circuit manager to service schools in each circuit. Furthermore, senior managers of the Department of Social Development and Welfare should liaise with circuit managers in each circuit to establish the level of support needed by the social workers.

Both personal and physical resources are a major headache for circuit managers. The pressure to get enough staff for schools has a negative impact on the support that circuit managers provide to schools. Principals and teachers do not want to work in these schools. Circuit managers need powers to staff their schools over and above the normal PPN if it will be in the best interest of teaching and learning in the school. Guidelines should be developed as to how this can be done. The goals should be to provide enough staff that will enable quality teaching and learning.

It is important to empower circuit manager to head-hunt leaders for their schools and make them sign contracts indicating the minimum number of years they will spend in the school. They must also be made part of the teams that deals with the allocation of resources as their inputs and knowledge of the contexts are important.

Working with stakeholders has emerged as an important role that circuit managers play to support teaching and learning. It is recommended that circuit managers intensify their working relationship with all stakeholders like Amakhosi, Izinduna, councillors, NGO, unions and the general community. Circuit managers must directly engage business to support their schools. Getting funding from business requires skill. Some school principals may not have the ability to write convincing proposals for their schools.

8.5.2 Recommendations for further research

The study was conducted in one district of KwaZulu-Natal and, due to limited funding, only six participants were utilised. I therefore recommend that another study on the same topic should be conducted on a larger scale. That study can also include the perspectives of principals. This study's findings indicate that circuit manager struggle with the poor leadership abilities of school principals. Principals are not coping with the tasks associated with principalship and, over and above that, they are overwhelmed by massive challenges that they must deal with. The following recommendations then apply:

Further research needs to be undertaken about the need for a management qualification to be made compulsory for all persons applying for principalship. Research should establish the kind of curriculum that should constitute such a compulsory qualification. I recommended that such research should also look at issues that affect leadership in challenging contexts to make them part of the curriculum.

8.6 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the conclusions and recommendations of this study. It started by presenting a synthesis of the thesis. This was followed by re-stating of the research questions. The re-stating of the research questions was done to assist me in establishing if the research has answered the questions sufficiently. This was followed by theorising of instructional leadership guided by the question 'does context matter?' The chapter concluded by making recommendations based on the findings that emerged.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER TO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ASKING FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

PO Box 53036
Yellowwood Park
4011
05 February 2016

Attention: The Superintendent-General (Dr NSP Sishi)
Department of Education
Province of KwaZulu-Natal
Private Bag X9137
Pietermaritzburg
3201

Dear Sir

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

My name is Sithenjwa Hopewell Ncwane, a PhD student in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to conduct research as part of my degree fulfilment. I am doing a study about the leadership role of circuit managers. The title of the study is **Supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts: A phenomenology about the leadership role of circuit managers.** I therefore kindly seek permission to conduct research in six circuit offices under your jurisdiction.

This study aims to explore how circuit managers support teaching and learning in schools that are in challenging contexts. It will use semi-structured interviews with circuit managers and review document relevant to this study. All interviews will be conducted at times that will not disturb teaching and learning.

Confidentiality will be ensured by using pseudonyms instead of actual names. Participants will be purposively and conveniently selected and will be contacted well in advance for interviews. Participation will be voluntary and participants will be free to withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime they so wish without incurring any penalties.

You may contact my supervisors, the UKZN Research Office or me should you have any queries or questions.

Supervisors:
Prof. TT Bhengu Tel. 031-260 3534
Dr P Myende Tel. 031 260 2054

E-mail:bhengutt@ukzn.ac.zaE-mail: Myende p@ukzn.ac.za

UKZN Research Office
Ms. Phumelele Ximba
HSSREC-Ethics
Tel: 031 2603587
E.mail: Ximbap@ukzn.zc.za

My contact detail

Mr SH Ncwane
Cell:0729467172
Tel: 0314628813
E.mail:

Ncwane@telkomsa.net

Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely
Mr S.H. Ncwane

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Nomangisi Ngubane Tel: 033 392 1004 Ref.:2/4/8/713

Mr SH Ncwane
PO Box 53036
Yellowwood Park
4100

Dear Mr Ncwane

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"SUPPORTING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN CHALLENGING CONTEXTS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY LEADERSHIP ROLE OF CIRCUIT MANAGERS"**, 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 16 February 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.

(Please see list Attached)

Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD
Head of Department: Education
Date: 16 February 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
EMAIL ADDRESS: kehologile.connie@kzndoe.gov.za / Nomangisi.Ngubane@kzndoe.gov.za
CALL CENTRE: 0860 596 363; Fax: 033 392 1203 WEBSITE: WWW.kzneducation.gov.za

APPENDIX C: DECLARATION FORM:

DECLARATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

I…… (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:	**YES**	**NO**
Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion		
Video-record my interview / focus group discussion		
Use of my photographs for research purposes		
Use of documents		

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT DATE

…… ----------

You may contact my supervisors, the UKZN Research Office or me should you have any queries or questions.

Supervisors

Dr. TT Bhengu Dr. P Myende
Tel. 031-260 3534 Tel. 031 260 2054
E-mail:bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za E-mail: Myende p@ukzn.ac.za

UKZN Research Office **My contact detail**

Ms. Phumelele Ximba Mr SH Ncwane
HSSREC-EthicsCell:0729467172
Tel: 031 2603587 Tel: 0314628813
E.mail: Ximbap@ukzn.zc.za

E.mail:ncwane@telkomsa.net

APPENDIX D: LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION FROM DISTRICT DIRECTORS TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE DISTRICT

PO Box 53036
Yellowwood Park
4011
05 February 2016

Attention: The District Director
Department of Education

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

My name is Sithenjwa Hopewell Ncwane, a PhD student in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to conduct research as part of my degree fulfilment.I am doing a study about the leadership role of circuit managers. The title of the study is **Supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts: A phenomenology about the leadership role of circuit managers.** I therefore kindly seek permission to conduct research in six circuit offices under your jurisdiction.

This study aims to explore how circuit managers support teaching and learning in schools that are in challenging contexts. It will use semi-structured interviews with circuit managers and review document relevant to this study. All interviews will be conducted at times that will not disturb teaching and learning.

Confidentiality will be ensured by using pseudonyms instead of actual names. Participants will be purposively and conveniently selected and will be contacted well in advance for interviews. Participation will be voluntary and participants will be free to withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime they so wish without incurring any penalties.

You may contact my supervisors, the UKZN Research Office or me should you have any queries or questions.

Supervisors:
Prof. TT Bhengu and Dr P Myende

Tel. 031-260 3534Tel. 031 260 2054
E-mail:bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za E-mail: Myende p@ukzn.ac.za

UKZN Research Office

Ms. Phumelele Ximba
HSSREC-Ethics
Tel: 031 2603587
E.mail: Ximbap@ukzn.zc.za
E.mail: Ncwane@telkomsa.net

My contact detail

Mr SH Ncwane
Cell:0729467172
Tel: 0314628813

Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely
Mr S.H. Ncwane

Appendix E: Letter requesting permission from the circuit managers to participate in the research

PO Box 53036

Yellowwood Park

4011

08 February 2016

Dear Madam/Sir

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH

My name is Sithenjwa Hopewell Ncwane, a PhD student in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to conduct research as part of my degree fulfilment.I am doing a study about the leadership role of circuit managers. The title of the study is **Supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts: A phenomenology about the leadership role of circuit managers.** I would like you to participate in this study because I believe you can provide valuable insight about the phenomenon under study thus extending the boundaries of our knowledge about this concept.

This study aims to explore how circuit managers support teaching and learning in schools that are in challenging contexts. It will use semi-structured interviews with circuit managers and review document relevant to this study. All interviews will be conducted at times that will not disturb teaching and learning.

Your identity will be protected in accordance with the code of ethics of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Permission to do research will be requested from the District and Head offices. You will be free to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences.

You may contact my supervisors, the UKZN Research Office or me should you have any queries or questions.

Supervisors:

Prof. TT Bhengu and Dr P Myende

Tel. 031-260 3534 Tel. 031 260 2054

E-mail:bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za E-mail:myendep@ukzn.ac.za

UKZN Research OfficeMy contact detail

Ms. Phumelele Ximba Mr S.H. Ncwane

HSSREC-Ethics031 4628813

Tel: 031 2603587Cell: 0729467172

E.mail: Ximbap@ukzn.zc.za Email:ncwane@telkomsa.net

Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Mr S.H. Ncwane

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE

A. BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. GENDER

FEMALE		MALE	

2. AGE

-30-40		41-50		51-60+	

3. QUALIFICATION

DIPLOMA	DEGREE	HONOURS	MASTERS	PhD

4. YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

1-3		4-5		6-9		10+

QUESTIONS

As indicated in Chapter 4, phenomenology researchers do not necessarily have to prepare an interview guide, if they do it is served as mere guide. This also just a guide, with main question to start discussion. Follow up and probing questions will be based on what answers participants give

B. PERSONAL

- What can you tell me about yourself and about your career development up to this position?

C. THE CONTEXT

- Tell me the location of your schools.

D.CHALLENGES

- Tell me about the challenges that are found where your schools are located that make supporting teaching and learning difficult.

E. SUPPORTING TEACHING LEARNING ROLES IN CHALLENGING CONTEXTS.

- What do you do as a circuit manager to support teaching and learning your schools?
- How does contextual challenge affect your work?

F. LEADERSHIP

- Tell me about what you understand to be your leadership role as circuit manager?
- How does the challenges influence your leadership approach if any?

G. CONCLUSION

- Is there anything that you would like to tell me about your experience as the circuit manager supporting teaching learning in challenging contexts?

Thank you.

APPENDIX G: DOCUMENT REVIEW GUIDE

All the document that will be found in circuit managers' offices that will help shed the light on the role they play in supporting teaching and learning will be reviewed. This document will be used to corroborate data generated through interviews. The documents that will be reviewed will be between the periods January 2013 to December 2015. This will include:

1. Written sources such as minutes of the meetings circuit managers hold with principals and other stakeholders.
2. Year plans, tools circuit managers use during school visits,
3. Circuit managers itinerary and itinerary deviation.
4. Circuit Improvement plans and other plans circuit managers have.

APPENDIX H: TURNITIN REPORT

Supporting teaching and learning in challenging contexts: A phenomenological study of circuit manager's instructional leadership role

ORIGINALITY REPORT

13%	12%	3%	7%
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