

**Examining the Understanding and Enactment of Instructional Leadership  
among the School Management Team in a Rural Secondary School in the  
Limpopo Province: A Qualitative Study**

by

Selaelo Sylvia Maifala

A Thesis Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Leadership, Management and Policy

School of Education: College of Humanities

University of KwaZulu-Natal,

Durban, South Africa

Supervisor: Prof Relebohile Moletsane

May 2024

## **Declaration of Authenticity**

I, **Selaelo Sylvia Maifala** declare that: The research reported in this thesis (Examining the understanding and enactment of instructional leadership among the School Management Team in a Rural Secondary School in the Limpopo Province: A Qualitative Study) except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.

- i. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- ii. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or any other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
- iii. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
  - a. their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced;
  - b. Where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks, and correctly referenced.
- iv. Where I have reproduced a publication of which I am an author, co-author or editor, I have indicated in detail which part of the publication was written by myself alone and have fully referenced such publications.
- v. This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the References section.

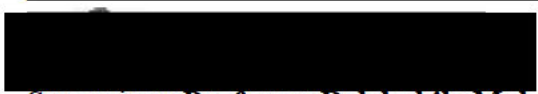
**Signed: \_** 

**Researcher: Selaelo Sylvia Maifala**

## **Supervisor's statement**

This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

---

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of the supervisor.

Supervisor: **Professor Relebohile Moletsane**

# Ethical Clearance



29 November 2019

Ms Selaele Sylva Mafala (215082282)  
School Of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Mafala,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00000814/2019

**Project title:** Examining the understanding and enactment of instructional leadership among the School Management Team in a Rural Secondary School in the Limpopo Province: A Qualitative Study

## Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 15 November 2019 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) 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.**

This approval is valid for one year from 29 November 2019.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Urmilia Bob  
University Dean of Research

/dd

---

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)  
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000  
Website: <http://research.ukzn.co.za/research-ethics/>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

## Dedication

I dedicate this work to the cherished memories of three people who showered me with love from the day I was born and, in many ways, contributed to my educational journey. First, to my great aunt (Bo Mmamogomo **Mary Moseki**) whose bravery, as my mother puts it, I have inherited. Additionally, my dedication extends to two of her sons, Malome **Lesiba Simon Mokgobanama** and Malome **Happy Moseki**. While there are many examples of their contributions to my life and education, a few stand out. These include Bo Mmamogolo Mary's unwavering support in providing me with a school uniform when I had initially been turned away from starting school for not having uniform. When I started the enrolment process at Wits university for my bachelor's degree, Malome Lesiba generously hosted me in his home and saw to it that I was registered and accommodated. Lastly, when I was a child, Malome Happy was the person I looked up to. He always said I was intelligent, affirming me and fostering a sense of self-belief that I continue to carry to this day. This is their achievement too!

## Acknowledgements

This journey, while rewarding, was long and demanded a great deal of strength and determination. Many times, when I felt my strength depleting and questioned my ability to succeed in this endeavour, I had many great people supporting and encouraging me. I would like to thank the following people for helping me to continue to put one foot after the other until completion.

My supervisor **Professor Relebohile Moletsane**, thank you for your guidance and sharing your expertise with me throughout this journey. I have always admired your expertise as an academic and I feel privileged to have learned so much from the years of working with you. There are many skills which I take away from working under your guidance including shaping how I think as an emerging researcher.

My mother **Makgato “Ntina” Maifala** and grandmother **Mmakosha “Bomma” Maifala**, the two of you have been there at every one of my educational journeys. You have supported me in various ways, prayed for me and encouraged me to persevere when I wanted to throw in the towel, thank you. I love and appreciate you for it.

My younger sister **Pele Maifala**, thank you for being such an incredible listener and an example of strength. Many times when I was struggling with this thesis and needed to vent, you availed yourself to listen, and our conversations always renewed my strength. You remain my biggest inspiration, thank you for the person that you are.

My husband **Freddy “Dimo” Mariri**, you know about the highs and lows of my journey more than most and I believe the lows would have been harder to deal with without you. At the beginning of it, you were only a friend and had no obligation to be so supportive, yet you were. Earlier in the journey, you were my second set of eyes in transcribing the field recordings. When I needed to translate the language from Sepedi to English and wanted to do justice to the verbatim words of the participants, your knowledge came in handy. Towards the end, you became my anchor, listening and encouraging me. Thank you for being an awesome human being.

My Masters degree supervisor **Professor Phumlani Myende**, thank you for staying on beyond your call of duty as my supervisor and availing yourself to answer my endless questions. You exemplify the isiZulu Proverb which says “*Indlela ibuzwa kwabaphambili*” (directions are sought from those who are ahead in the journey).

My friends **Dr Mamokete Modiba “Major”** and **Dr Hazvinei Tsitsi Tamuka Moyo**, the two of you have been generous with your knowledge and I see you as my other “*baphambili*” (those ahead) whom I got directions from. Major, thank you for encouraging me and calming me down when I needed it. Tsitsi, thank you for always answering my research related questions and being a great friend.

My friend **Mpho Mmethi “my person”**, one of the many great things that came out of this journey was that it made it possible for me to meet you. You have been such a light, thank you for your friendship and always encouraging me.

My friends **Kate and Emmanuel Osagie**, I do not know exactly what it was that you guys saw in me that made you believe in me so much, but I thank you for it. Even before I started this PhD journey, the two of you jokingly called me “professor”. I may not be there yet, but I am one step closer, thank you for your faith in me and your prayers.

My daughter **Hlamalani** and my niece **Kamogelo**, the two of you did not always understand why we spent some weekends indoors when I was busy with this thesis. However, you were always ready with a cup of tea when I needed it. I hope that one day when you are older, you will look at this experience positively, thank you for being such loving children.

Lastly, to the participants of this study, thank you for welcoming me into your school and sharing your experiences with me.

## **Abstract**

The study reported in this thesis aimed to examine the understandings and practices of instructional leadership the School Management Team (SMT) at one rural school I named Crocodile High School located in Moletsi in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. The study was premised on the understanding that if schools such as Crocodile High School are to overcome the multitude of challenges they experience, the SMT must play a vital instructional leadership role. Thus, the study sought to understand how SMT members understood their instructional leadership roles and enacted them, and how rurality, impacted on their understandings and practices of instructional leadership.

The study was located in the interpretive paradigm and adopted qualitative research methodology. The SMT members in the school made up the primary study participants, with a group of six teachers making up the secondary participants. To generate data I used in-depth semi-structured interviews with each of the seven members of the SMT, a focus group discussion with the group, and week-long observations of each SMT member. I also carried out a focus group discussion with the six teachers to understand their perspectives on the SMT's instructional leadership roles. To analyse the data, I used the inductive content analysis approach in which the analysis of data comes from a detailed reading and breaking down of raw data into categories, patterns and themes to explain it.

The findings suggest that in many ways, members of the SMT do not have an adequate understanding of their instructional leadership role. This negatively impacts their ability to provide effective instructional leadership needed in the school. Moreover, the findings revealed that rurality had a negative impact on the SMT members' understandings and enactment of their instructional leadership roles. They tended to focus on the lack of resources and failed to mobilise the school and community to develop or access available assets to benefit teaching and learning. Further, negative influences also came from teacher unions in the form of teacher strikes, leading to negative relationships between the SMT and teachers in the schools. However, some members were able to build rapport with teachers, and thus created a positive environment for teaching and learning. These findings have implications for professional development initiatives that target the SMT in the rural context and focuses on their understanding and enactment of instructional leadership roles. Such programmes could motivate the SMT and other participants to seek

continuous professional development opportunities in order to improve their leadership. Lastly, the findings also point towards the need for teacher unions to play their part to improve their influence in schools, including on teacher professionalism and effectiveness.

## **List of Abbreviations**

4IR	Forth Industrial Revolution
ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
NNSSF	Amended National Norms and Standards for School Fund
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease of 2019
CTPD	Continuous Teacher Professional Development
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DH	Departmental Head
FET	Further Education and Training
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GET	General Education and Training
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management Systems
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Materials
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NSC	National Senior Certificate
PAM	Personnel Administrative Measures
PIMRS	Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SASA	South African Schools Act

SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
TPD	Teacher Professional Development
USA	United States of America

# Table of Contents

Declaration of Authenticity .....	i
Supervisor’s statement.....	ii
Ethical Clearance .....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Abstract.....	vii
List of Abbreviations .....	ix
Table of Contents.....	xi
Appendices .....	xv
List of Tables and Figures .....	xvi
<b>CHAPTER ONE.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2. Rural Schools and 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Skills in the Face of Covid-19 .....	4
1.3 Why a Focus on Instructional Leadership and the Role of School Management Teams .....	7
1.3.1 The South African Policy Framework.....	8
1.3.2 The Role of the School Management Team .....	9
1.3.3 The Influence of Rurality on Instructional Leadership Practices of the School Management Team .....	11
1.4 Problem Statement.....	14
1.5 Focus and Purpose of the Study.....	15
1.6 Overview of the Analytical Framework .....	17
1.7 Overview of the Research Design and Methodology .....	18
1.8 Ethical Considerations .....	22
1.9 Significance of the Study .....	23
1.10 Overview of the Thesis.....	23
<b>CHAPTER TWO.....</b>	<b>27</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	27
2.2 An Overview of School Leadership Theories .....	28
<b>2.2.1 Transformational Leadership.....</b>	<b>28</b>

2.2.2 Distributed Leadership .....	33
2.2.3 Instructional Leadership .....	38
<b>2.2.3.1 Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) Model of Instructional Leadership .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>2.2.3.2 Murphy’s Model of Instructional Leadership .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>2.2.3.3 Weber’s (1996) Model of Instructional Leadership .....</b>	<b>55</b>
2.2.4 Critiques of Instructional Leadership Models .....	57
2.2.5 From Instructional Leadership to Leadership for Learning .....	58
2.3 Towards an Analytical Framework .....	65
2.3.1 Defining and Communicating Goals .....	68
2.3.2 Leading Teaching and Learning .....	69
2.3.3 Creating a Nurturing and Supportive Environment .....	70
2.3.4 Partnering with Parents, Local Community and Other Stakeholders .....	71
2.3.5 Promoting and Supporting Teacher Professional Development .....	72
2.3.6 Protecting Instructional Time and Modelling High Expectations .....	74
2.4 Chapter Summary .....	75
CHAPTER THREE .....	76
3.1 Introduction.....	76
3.2 From Educational Leadership and Management to Instructional Leadership.....	77
3.3 Instructional Leadership in Resource-Constrained Contexts .....	80
3.3.1 Instructional Leadership in Resource-Constrained Schools in the USA .....	82
3.3.2 Instructional Leadership in Schools Serving Indigenous Populations in Canada .....	83
3.3.3 Instructional Leadership in Schools Serving Indigenous Communities in Australia.....	87
3.3.4 Instructional Leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa.....	92
3.3.5 Instructional Leadership in South African Schools .....	96
<b>3.3.5.1 Instructional Leadership in Township Schools.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>3.3.5.2 Instructional Leadership in South African Rural Schools .....</b>	<b>102</b>
3.4 Discussion.....	106
3.5 Chapter Summary .....	108
CHAPTER FOUR .....	109
4.1 Introduction.....	109
4.2 Location of the Study.....	110
4.3 Research Participants.....	114

4.4 Research Paradigm and Design .....	115
4.4.1 Qualitative Methodology .....	116
4.4.2 Case Study Design .....	117
4.4.3 Data Generation Methods .....	118
<b>4.4.3.1 In-depth interviews .....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>4.4.3.2 Focus Group Discussions .....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>4.4.3.3 Observations .....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>4.4.3.4 Field Notes and Reflection .....</b>	<b>126</b>
4.4.4 Data Analysis .....	127
4.5 Trustworthiness and Rigour .....	131
4.6 Locating Myself in the Study .....	134
4.7 Ethical Considerations .....	136
4.8 Limitations of the study .....	140
4.9 Chapter Summary .....	141
CHAPTER FIVE .....	142
5.1 Introduction .....	142
5.2 The Context of Rurality .....	145
5.3 The Influence of Rurality on Instructional leadership .....	146
5.3.1 Resource Scarcity .....	147
5.3.2 Parental Involvement .....	150
5.4 Role Understandings of the SMT .....	153
5.4.1 Leading Curriculum and Policy Development and Implementation .....	154
<b>5.4.1.1 Ensuring Access to Policy Documents .....</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>5.4.1.2 Supporting Teachers in Aligning their Lesson Plans to the National Policy .....</b>	<b>157</b>
5.4.2 Supporting and Monitoring Teaching and Learning .....	160
<b>5.4.2.1 Provision of Learning and Teaching Support Materials .....</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>5.4.2.2 School Walkabouts .....</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>5.4.2.3 Classroom Observations .....</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>5.4.2.4 Evaluating and Reviewing Learning and Teaching Support Materials .....</b>	<b>172</b>
5.4.3 Supporting Teaching and Teacher Professional Development .....	176
<b>5.4.3.1 Supporting and Leading TPD and Learning .....</b>	<b>176</b>
<b>5.4.3.2 Negotiating the Influence of Teacher Unions .....</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>5.4.3.3 Identifying and Collaborating with Stakeholders .....</b>	<b>182</b>

5.5 Discussion.....	186
5.6 Chapter Summary .....	190
CHAPTER SIX.....	192
6.1 Introduction.....	192
6.2 From Role Understanding to Role Performance .....	193
6.2.1 Maintaining Order and Protecting Instructional Time.....	195
6.2.2 Reviewing and Evaluating Learning and Teaching Support Materials .....	200
6.2.3 Providing Learning and Teaching Support Materials.....	205
6.2.4 Teacher Professional Development and Support.....	209
6.2.5 Engaging Stakeholders .....	213
6.2.6 Building Rapport with Teachers.....	218
6.2.7 Planning and Coordinating Grade 12 Enrichment Classes .....	223
6.2.8 Negotiating the Influence of Teacher Unions.....	226
6.3 Discussion.....	228
6.4. Chapter Summary .....	230
CHAPTER SEVEN .....	232
7.1 Introduction.....	232
7.2 Review of the Study.....	233
7.3 Reflections on the Analytical Framework .....	243
7.3.1 Explaining Instructional Leadership at Crocodile High School .....	245
7.4. Reflections on the Methodology.....	249
7.5 Personal and Professional Reflections.....	255
7.6 Discussion.....	256
7.7 Contributions of the Study.....	262
7.8 Implications from the Findings.....	262
7.8.1 Implications for Policy and Practice.....	263
7.8.2 Implications for Teacher Unions .....	265
7.8.3 Implications for Future Research .....	266
7.9 Conclusion .....	266
References	

## **Appendices**

1. Appendix A: Application to conduct a research study in the Limpopo province.
2. Appendix B: Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research (SMT)
3. Appendix C: Permission to Conduct Research Study in the Limpopo Province
4. Appendix D: Letter to the School Governing Body
5. Appendix E: Letter to the Principal
6. Appendix F: Information sheet and consent to participate in research (Teachers)
7. Appendix G: Permission to conduct research at the school
8. Appendix H: Interview schedule for in-depth interviews
9. Appendix I: Observation schedule
10. Appendix K: Focus Group Discussion schedule: Teachers

## **List of Tables and Figures**

Table 2.1 Hallinger and Murphy's Model of Instructional Leadership

Table 4.1 Summary of Data Generation Methods and Data Sources

Table 5.1: SMT Members and Their Positions in the School

Figure 2.1 Distributed Leadership: A Sequential Framing

Figure 2.2: Features of Effective Instructional Leadership in a Rural School

Figure 2.3: Features of Effective Instructional Leadership in a Rural School

Figure 5.1 SMT Members' Understandings of Their Roles as Instructional Leaders

Figure 6.1 Thematic Map of Instructional Leadership Role Performances of the SMT

Figure 7.1 What Might Explain Effective Instructional Leadership in a Rural School?

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The study reported in this thesis was motivated by my own educational journey and by those who, like me, began their schooling in rural South Africa. My schooling journey in the rural village of Moletsi (also spelt Moletjie) began at the dawn of democracy in South Africa in 1994. My mother had wished for me to start school in 1993 when my age group did. However, when I was taken to the then only primary school in the village, I was turned away for not having a proper school uniform. Two weeks later when money had been raised for the uniform, my mother was told that there was no space available for that academic year. So, I went back to preschool. In 1994, when a second primary school was opened in the village, I became part of the first cohort of learners. For the first two years, the school was hosted in what was once teachers' quarters and started with a single class with one teacher and a principal. When the high school in the village moved to a new building two years later, our school inherited its vacant premises and grew from there. For my high school education, I went to the only high school in the same village. It was only when I became a teacher and later, a student in the education leadership programme that I started to reflect on my experiences as a learner in my high school. My reflections led me to wonder whether the School Management Team (SMT) in my high school had an adequate and shared understanding of their instructional leadership roles. For example, as I discuss below, in my Grade 10 year, a life changing experience occurred.

In South African schools, learners in Grade 10 have to make decisions about the academic stream they want in their Matric years (Grades 10, 11, & 12) My school offered three streams: The Sciences, Business, Commerce and Management Studies and the Humanities. Looking back, I can see how I was given the wrong advice and/or allowed to make the wrong choice. As a 15-year-old facing peer pressure, I decided to follow the Science stream. However, in Grade 11 I ended up failing every Mathematics test assigned while also struggling to catch up in Physics and Chemistry. When the year ended, I failed the grade and was retained for the following year. However, I was still allowed to stay in the Science stream and to take my final Grade 12 examinations as a Sciences learner. In retrospect, I believe that my teachers and the school failed to guide me appropriately in my choice of subjects. Moreover, upon reflection, the SMT, as instructional leaders, could have done a better job in guiding teachers and learners in the streaming process. Instead, both the SMT and teachers failed to identify my strengths and weaknesses and to guide me to make the right decision for my abilities rather than allow peer pressure to influence my decision-making. I often wonder whether how the principal and his management team understood their instructional leadership roles in this decision-making process and in other aspects of the curriculum in the school. Would they have made different decisions about my choices and those of other learners with better a understanding of their instructional leadership roles in the school?

One may argue that my experience as a learner occurred over 15 years ago, and things may have changed significantly since then. However, available research suggests that schools in the rural areas in South Africa are in a sad state of affairs. For instance, an earlier study by Heystek (2007) suggested that South African principals functioned more as managers than leaders. More recently, a study I conducted in the area of Moletsi (Maifala, 2017), explored the leadership practices of

school principals in the rural context in relation to leading 21<sup>st</sup> century schools. The study found many practices and challenges that made it difficult for them to lead effectively. In particular, the findings revealed inadequate understandings of the principals' instructional leadership roles.

Recent studies have also found that despite government interventions aimed at changing leadership practices in schools, including the Department of Basic Education' (DBE) Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership (ACE: SL) programme, SMT members in the rural schools remain managerial (Naidoo, 2019; Taole, 2013). While these findings point to challenges pertaining to leadership, the issues facing schools in the rural context in South Africa are much more complex. For instance, that rural schools are bombarded with a multitude of challenges such as lack of qualified teachers, inadequate infrastructure and instructional technologies, and lack of basic resources such as water, electricity and sanitation, is well-researched (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Ebersohn & Ferreira, 2012; Runhare, Ouda, Vele & Mudzielwana, 2021). This leaves learners in these schools lagging behind peers in better resourced urban and sub-urban areas (Myende & Maifala, 2020; Seobi & Wood, 2016). Today, many of these challenges continue to pose a threat to quality teaching and learning in the rural context of South Africa (Myende & Maifala, 2020; Mothibeli, 2017; Tigere & Netshitangani, 2022). As Balfour et al. (2011) argue, despite various interventions by the government to bridge the gaps in education between rural and urban areas, improvements remain miniscule.

This thesis argues that the quality of teaching and learning will only improve if the SMT have an adequate understanding of their instructional leadership roles and if their instructional leadership

practices improve accordingly. A significant body of local and international literature has certainly shown that when school leaders are effective in their instructional leadership roles, they influence teaching and learning positively (Alberts, 2016; Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2020). However, while it is known that instructional leadership is important, what remains silent is literature that explores how SMT members collectively understand and enact their instructional leadership roles. Linked to this, is the lack of knowledge on how rurality influences the collective understanding and enactment of instructional leadership by SMT members. As such, this thesis contributes to shedding light on elements that promote and hinder effective instructional leadership in this context and others like it. This knowledge development has the potential to contribute to policy decision-making and practice. Thus, the study reported in this thesis sought to investigate the understanding and enactment of instructional leadership among the SMT members in the selected rural area in Limpopo. Further, the study also sought to investigate how if at all, rurality influences these understandings and practices of SMT members.

## **1.2. Rural Schools and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills in the Face of Covid-19**

As the world gets smaller in the face of globalisation, growth in science and technology and the much talked about Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), rural schools struggle to keep up with the needed changes and resources. As Fullan (2001) suggests, only the organisations that can adapt to the perpetual challenges of the century will thrive in the 21st century. This assertion has gained credence in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. As governments in many countries around the world scrambled to find ways to curb infections, national lockdowns were declared in a historic move globally that, according to UNESCO (2020), left nearly one billion school-going children out of traditional classrooms. In the light of this pandemic, schools had to quickly find

alternative means of continuing to offer education remotely (Moyo & Maifala, 2022) and technology-centred instruction fast became an indispensable resource. For example, in countries such as Qatar in the Persian Gulf<sup>1</sup>, when the government shut down schools on the 9th of March 2020 (State of Qatar Government Communications Office, 2020), some schools in the country such as one studied by Moyo and Maifala (2022), had the technological backing to transition to online instruction within weeks.

In South Africa, when the national lockdown was imposed on the 26th of March, private schools such as the Curro Group of Schools (Business Tech, 2020) and the highly resourced public schools in higher-income areas moved online (Ramrathan, 2020) in what appeared to be seamless efforts. In addition to the schools having the resources to support this move, as Ramrathan (2020) observes, their success is, in part, due to having middle-class parents and easy access to technologies that support online learning. However, for schools in rural communities, this is not the case. Instead, the inequalities between different socio-economic groups and geographical settings that have plagued the South African education system since Apartheid and that have existed before the global pandemic, were illuminated. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) has acknowledged that the road to equality in education has been a tough one and remains incomplete:

Since the negotiated transition to democracy in 1994, the African National Congress, who had led the resistance to the former regime, has been the ruling party. The enormous task of reform and transformation has not been easy and, despite considerable progress, large

---

<sup>1</sup> I had been teaching in the region for about three years when COVID-19 started.

inequalities with respect to income, land ownership and education that reflect historical patterns persist nearly 20 years later (DBE, 2013, p.4)

This is despite the evidence which suggests that the government attempted, through various initiatives, to make it possible for all the learners to access education through remote learning. For example, the national broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation and private owned broadcaster Digital Satellite Television collaborated with the DBE to offer live lessons. These were offered specifically for Grade 12 learners and broadcast on various Television channels and radio stations (Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020). Further, leading network providers in the country were contracted to provide zero rated applications and educational websites that could be accessed freely (Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020). Despite these efforts, indications are that the learners in the rural schools were left behind.

Although it would be grossly misleading to suggest that only rural schools are negatively impacted by the education crisis currently sweeping through South Africa, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the unique challenges that have existed in these institutions. Due to pre-existing factors such as poverty and lack of infrastructure, the pandemic has further contributed to the severity of poor service delivery, including in education. For example, research by Dube (2020) found that learners in rural schools experience problems such as lack of technological devices, unreliable network coverage and closure of internet cafes. Therefore, making websites zero-rated with the hope that all would have access ignores these adversities common in rural contexts. While Dube's study did not address questions related to learners' access to television channels and radio stations, and the possibility of learning from these, the findings cannot be ignored as they show the continuing disenfranchisement of the learners in rural areas. As such, rurality continues to

severely disadvantage schools and learners in rural communities. This study, therefore, sought to understand how the School Management Teams in a rural school grapples with the continuing inequalities to steer teaching and learning towards positive learning outcomes for all.

### **1.3 Why a Focus on Instructional Leadership and the Role of School Management Teams**

Instructional leadership in schools involves prioritising teaching and learning where the school leadership is directly engaged in curriculum and instruction (Finley, 2014; Hallinger, 2018; Murphy et al., 2007). The literature on teaching and learning and school leadership indicates that in many ways, leadership has a significant influence on student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Robinson et al., 2008). When instruction takes precedence, instructional leaders can, for example, allocate resources to instruction with the aim of enhancing learner performance (Jenkins, 2009). This ability to prioritise resources cannot be taken for granted in the 21st century as education is highly driven by science and technology and other high-cost teaching and learning enhancing resources (Bybee & Fuchs, 2006). Therefore, if school leaders are to use this influence to benefit learning in schools, they need to understand their roles as instructional leaders.

Informed by available literature, this thesis is premised on the understanding that instructional leadership is not the role of the principal only (Hallinger, 2005; Harris & Spillane, 2008; Marks & Printy; 2003). Rather, it involves a collaborative effort that should be visible in the practices of the SMT as a whole. From this perspective, to improve performance and effectiveness in rural schools, it is imperative to investigate how members of the SMT understand their roles and influence on

the successes and failures of their school. Thus, the study reported in the thesis aimed to investigate the ways in which the SMT as a collective, understand their role as instructional leaders, and how this may impact teaching and learning and improve educational outcomes. My hope was that a study on the SMT's understanding and enactment of their instructional leadership roles and practices in a rural school would deepen the understanding of how these practices support or harm instruction.

### **1.3.1 The South African Policy Framework**

According to the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document (DBE, 2016) in terms of the Employment of the Educators Act (Department of Education ((DoE), 1999) and amendments, the SMT in South African schools is comprised of the school principal, deputy (or deputies depending on the size of the school) and Departmental Heads (DHs). The PAM clearly stipulates the roles of every school-based teacher and additional roles based on the rank of the teacher within the school. These include teaching, curriculum supporting activities, administration, liaising with stakeholders and communication (DBE, 2016). In addition to these general roles, there are others which differ according to hierarchy, putting the principal at the top, followed by deputy principal, DHs and, at the bottom, the subject/classroom teacher. For example, in addition to the roles described above, the PAM further specifies that the principal has additional duties that include overseeing the execution of learning processes and supplementary activities, administering professional leadership, guiding, supervising and offering professional advice to staff, discussing and writing or countersigning reports on teaching, guiding other non-teaching employees, and ensuring the quality of teaching and learning.

Secondly, the Deputy Principal's foremost responsibility in the school is to assist the principal. Specifically, the Deputy Principal's duties include oversight of the curriculum and instruction (such as the selection of study materials, organizing the work of subject committees and timetabling) as well as guiding and supervising the work and performance of staff. Finally, the leadership roles of the DHs include making the recommendations to the principal for teacher assignment of work within the department and participating in teacher observations and appraisals. Taken together, these roles are directly concerned with instruction and learner performance, thereby placing the principal, the deputy principal and DHs in the role of instructional leaders. However, the policy is silent on what the collective roles of the SMT in schools are. This study, therefore, aimed to contribute towards addressing this gap.

### **1.3.2 The Role of the School Management Team**

Studies on the roles of the SMT individual members in successful schools show a positive connection between effective leadership and school success. For instance, regarding the DH, Bambi (2013) states that because the education system in South Africa is constantly changing policies in the pursuit of best practices, the role of the DHs is vital as they have direct contact with teachers and learners and are thus at the forefront of educational change. Similarly, Osterman (2009) defines DHs as the “servants of decisions, the assistants of authority and the glue that holds organisations together.” (p.5). Further, a study by Chikoko et al. (2015) on successful schools in trying contexts found that the principals delegate some important roles such as class visits and teacher evaluations to DHs, where they observe teaching and give teachers feedback. Therefore, it is evident that the DH's role as an instructional leader is well defined within the academic

literature. The literature on the principal as an instructional leader is also ample. For example, Glanz et al. (2017) assert that recent historical roles of the principal teachers in the USA were that of ordering supplies and arranging bus schedules; however, in order to satisfy the modern-day educational demands, the principal teachers have taken on more instructional roles such as supporting the implementation of the curriculum. Printy et al. (2009) argue that focusing on the principal alone as an instructional leader is unrealistic. They assert that schools would be more effective if the principal teachers worked with the teachers and DHs to provide a more holistic support system for the school. Further, Neumerski (2013) posits that understanding the daily leadership roles of instructional leaders remains elusive because the research focuses on different role players (teachers, middle management and the principal) separately as if they work in isolation. For the scholar, in reality; “[s]chools do not operate in compartmentalized ways; leaders do not work in isolation. Leaders—even when they do not work well together—coexist in schools and often share responsibilities for instructional improvement” (Neumerski, 2013; p.312). From this perspective, all the members of the SMT ought to take on more instructional leadership in the school.

Studies that have focused on the collective roles of the SMT, such as the one by Alberts (2016) on Inclusive Education, revealed that successful implementation depended on, among other things, the attitudes and actions of the SMT members. In a separate study on how SMT members understand their roles and duties as outlined in the PAM document, Maja (2016) found that while some members understood the policy, others had inadequate knowledge or access to it in their schools. As such, some were confused about their roles as well as the roles of their subordinates and superiors in the school. For example, one principal felt that the working relationships between

him and the other SMT members were hierarchical because the DHs reported to the deputy and the deputy reported to him. The result of this type of confusion and lack of cohesion may inhibit effective collaboration, collective problem-solving and strategic planning, thereby negatively impacting on the school effectiveness. As Fullan (2001) asserts, to tackle organisational challenges in a constantly changing world, the “collective capacity” (p.136) of teams is more effective than the individuals working parallel to one another. Similarly, Preedy et al. (2012) assert that when SMTs collaborate, they combine their different skillsets and talents which leads to better problem-solving and decision-making, thus serving the organisation better. Informed by this understanding, the study reported in this thesis aimed to understand how the members of the SMT in one rural school understood their collective instructional leadership role.

### **1.3.3 The Influence of Rurality on Instructional Leadership Practices of the School Management Team**

The challenges of working in schools in the rural context and other resource-constrained contexts, whether direct or indirect, have a tremendous impact on the instructional leadership roles of the SMT. These obstacles have been well documented in research (see Balfour, Mitchell, & Moletsane, 2008; du Plessis, 2014; Msila, 2010; Moletsane, 2012; Myende & Maifala, 2020). These challenges are in many ways complex and intertwined. Among them are lack of infrastructure, scarcity of basic resources, high HIV and AIDS rates, and poor service delivery (Moletsane, Juan, Prinsloo, Reddy, 2015). Furthermore, although not exclusive to rural areas, rampant employment and poverty, like many social ills in South Africa, are negatively skewed by rurality, and are therefore more prevalent in these areas than in others (Gibbens & Schoeman,

2020). These challenges impact rural schools negatively, most of which, in terms of the National Norms and Standards for School Fund (NNSSF) (Republic of South Africa (RSA, 2012) are exempt from collecting school fees from largely unemployed parents and guardians. Being unable to supplement the government subsidy due to the inability of most parents to contribute, these are unable to supplement the government subsidy to cover the additional issues challenges unique to rural institutions. To illustrate, as Ananga (2011) asserts, there are complex indirect costs to schooling that cannot be addressed by sparing communities from paying fees. It is poverty after all, that makes it difficult for parents to purchase textbooks, uniform and other school supplies (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019), and the support from the DBE is simply inadequate to subsidise these related costs (du Plessis, 2014; Maifala, 2017).

As discussed above, other challenges facing schools in the rural context of the Limpopo province include crime (Myende & Maifala, 2020), a shortage of teachers, and/or a shortage of qualified teachers (Masinire, 2015; du Plessis, 2014; Bush & Glover, 2016), and scarcity of teaching and learning support materials (LTSM). The direct effect of this on SMTs is that they must teach heavier loads, leaving them with less time for leadership roles Maifala (2017). In addition, there is also the challenge of overcrowding (Muthusamy, 2015; Marias, 2016). This challenge is attributable to, among other things, the challenge of lack of teachers and lack of adequate classrooms. The implications of overcrowding on teaching and learning and subsequently SMT roles include; classroom management; learner achievement; limited ability for teachers to explore a variety of teaching methods and time management (Marias, 2016; Zenda, 2020). These challenges have implications for the instructional leadership role of the SMT in the school. Specifically, to be effective in their instructional leadership role(s), the SMT must deal with the

multiple contextual, institutional and educational factors threatening their ability to effectively enact their roles in the schools. As instructional leaders who coordinate and lead the curriculum, monitor learner achievement and hold teachers accountable, the SMT, unless well-trained, supported, and committed will not effectively to enact their instructional leadership roles.

In my Masters study (Maifala, 2017), the findings suggested that at times, these obstacles meant that SMT members must choose one instructional leadership role over another. For example, some principals had to choose the role of providing resources over that of protecting instructional time. This includes one principal sending learners home during school hours to collect textbook money their parents had failed to contribute. By so doing, the principals failed to protect instructional time, an important role of instructional leadership (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). While it can be argued that the inability to protect instructional time is related to lack of awareness rather than contextual challenges, resourced schools may not send learners home to get money for textbooks because the parent population are able to pay without being reminded or forced to do so.

Considering these challenges which evidently affect how the SMT in this school perform their roles, as instructional leaders in a rural school, to be effective in their individual and collective roles and practices, they need to be innovative and resourceful. Yet, studies that focus on instructional leadership practices of SMTs in rural schools generally, and in Limpopo province are few. In addition, these studies have also not tackled the questions this study sought to shed light on, including a focus on the SMTs' understandings and enactment of their instructional leadership and how rurality influences these understandings and enactment.

## 1.4 Problem Statement

One of the biggest challenges facing education in rural communities continues to be the inequalities described in the sections above; including, among others, the lack of qualified teachers, teaching and learning technologies, infrastructure, and lack of parent involvement (du Plessis & Mestry 2019; Myende & Maifala, 2020). The implications of these inequalities are often noticeable in benchmark assessments such the National Senior Certificate (NSC) Examinations in which learners in better resourced schools (usually outside rural areas) far outperform those in poorly resourced schools (often concentrated in rural communities) (Hlalele, 2012; Myende & Maifala, 2020; Seobi & Wood, 2016). To illustrate, Myende (2015) studied the Grade 12 Umalusi results in KwaZulu Natal in the years 2011, 2012 and 2013 and found that matric candidates in Quintile 5<sup>2</sup> schools ranked among the best performers while the lowest were in Quintile 1 schools. The quintile categorisation system of the Amended National Norms and Standards for School Fund (NNSSF) (Republic of South Africa (RSA, 2012) ranks schools from most resourced (Quintile 5) to least resourced (Quintile 1). Myende's findings suggest that the best performing learners are largely from the most resourced schools while their counterparts in the least resourced schools fall behind.

This study argues that if the quality of teaching and learning and learning outcomes for children in the rural context of South Africa are to improve, the provision of instructional leadership in

---

<sup>2</sup> The quintile system is aimed at categorizing schools according to their needs in order to best allocate resources. Quintile one to three schools are the poorest and classified as non-fee paying schools (RSA, 2012)) and receive more funding from the government than schools in Quintile 4 and 5.

schools must not only be effective, but must also be creative or resourceful. There is substantial literature from South Africa and other parts of the world showing that for schools in challenging contexts to succeed, effective and innovative instructional leadership on the part of the SMT is a prerequisite (Habi, 2022; Riley & Webster, 2016; Trimmer et al., 2021). However, available literature in South Africa has often singled out members of the SMT (e.g., Departmental Heads, or Principals) to study individually rather than focusing on them as a collective. Similar to the criticism in international literature (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008), such studies largely focus on principals. In addition, while the challenges of rurality are well known, there is a gap in understanding how these challenges influence the way SMT members collectively understand and enact their instructional leadership roles.

Evidently, if South Africa is to fully tackle the poor educational outcomes and other challenges facing schools in rural areas, more research on school leadership, particularly instructional leadership, is vital. Such research must focus not only on the principal but must examine the practices of the SMT as a collective. Such evidence will help document the various instructional leadership practices of the SMT in rural schools, including what works or does not work, what needs to be strengthened, what resources are needed and where they might be harnessed for teaching and learning to improve.

### **1.5 Focus and Purpose of the Study**

As discussed above, my interest in this study was influenced, first, by my own experiences of schooling in a rural context, and second, by the findings of the study I conducted for my Master of Education dissertation (Maifala, 2017). The study focused on the leadership practices assumed

by the principals in five rural schools in the Limpopo province. Its findings revealed that on the one hand, the principals' understanding of their roles were, to some extent, at par with policy expectations. On the other hand, most principals showed a limited understanding of instructional leadership; for example, they failed to protect instructional time in the school either through policies or modelling. Further, due to the challenges that the schools experienced, such as lack of resources and security, the principals were not always able to prioritise instruction in their leadership practices. Thus, in the study reported in this thesis, I wanted to go back to the rural community where my educational journey began and the place that I still call home today. This time, I wanted to understand how the members of the SMT in one rural school in my community understood and enacted their collective instructional leadership role. Further, I examined whether and how they understood and negotiated the influence of rurality on their instructional leadership in the school.

This inquiry was premised on the understanding that effective instructional leadership actions of the SMT are paramount in improving the quality of teaching and learning in any school. In particular, in rural schools, which are largely resource constrained, the collective role of the SMT as instructional leaders is pertinent. Thus, the aim of the study was to understand how the SMT members in this rural school in the Limpopo province understood and enacted their roles as instructional leaders. Further, the study sought to understand the influence of rurality on instructional leadership in the school. Specifically, to understand the phenomenon, the inquiry was guided by two critical questions:

- 1. How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school understand and perform their instructional leadership roles?*
- 2. How does rurality influence the School Management Team's understandings and practices of their instructional leadership roles?*

Addressing these questions will shed on the challenges and triumphs of SMTs working in the rural context and may have significant implications for policy and practice.

## **1.6 Overview of the Analytical Framework**

In seeking to develop a framework to generate data and analyse the findings, I began with a literature review of instructional leadership models. The review yielded a conceptual framework dominated by the works of Hallinger and Murphy (1985) and Murphy (1990)'s models of instructional leadership. Specifically, Hallinger and Murphy (1985)'s three-dimension model has been used in hundreds of studies in various contexts internationally (Hallinger, 2011). However, in this thesis, the three dimensions of instructional leadership: defining the school goals, leading the instructional programme and promoting the school climate, did not adequately explain the research phenomenon in this study. One of the reasons is that, as the literature review (reviewed in Chapter Three) revealed, in rural contexts and other poorly resourced contexts, the role played by the community and parents is significant to that of the school. Informed by this perspective, Murphy (1990) adds a fourth dimension on the role of parents, learners and the community in the betterment of the school. While this fourth dimension would go a long way in explaining effective instructional leadership, I wanted to understand whether and how the SMT had any one theory or set of theories on which they relied to effectively lead instruction in this rural school. To do this, I

selected three theories that have been dominant in South African literature in recent years: distributed leadership, transformational leadership and leadership for learning.

Taking into consideration the challenges of rurality outlined in this chapter, the analytical framework is made up of six key features that characterise effective instructional leadership in a rural school in the South African context. To be effective, instructional leadership must involve: 1) Defining and communicating goals; 2) Leading Teaching and Learning; 3) Creating a nurturing and supportive environment; 4) Partnering with parents, the local community, and other stakeholders; 5) Promoting and supporting Teacher Professional Development and 6) Protecting instructional time and modelling high expectations (The analytical framework is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two).

### **1.7 Overview of the Research Design and Methodology**

The setting for the study was a rural secondary school in village of Moletsi in the Limpopo Province, led by Kgoshi Kgabo Moloto III, is vast and spans across multiple municipalities. The village in which the study was conducted is about 25 kilometres from Polokwane, Limpopo's capital. Recently, the villagers have been receiving water, delivered by a truck, from the municipality once a week. Due to high rates of unemployment, learners do not have the basic necessities required for education. Schools in the villages range from Quintile 1-3 under the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSF) (RSA, 2012). The school in which

the study was conducted falls under Quintile 3<sup>3</sup> of the NNSSF. Because schools in this quintile are prohibited from charging school fees, theoretically, they receive more funding from the government than those in more resourced quintiles. In the last recorded allocation per learner in 2021, for example, schools in a Quintile 1 to 3 received an amount of R 1 536 per learner per year in government assistance while those in Quintiles 4 and 5 received R770 and R266 respectively (Republic of South Africa, 2022). However, the latter are allowed to charge more fees from their parent base and are often in a better position to provide far superior resources for teaching and learning than the lower quintiles.

The inquiry analysed in this thesis is located within the interpretive paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm is premised on the understanding that the participants are the actors in their own social structures. Therefore, focusing on their individual understandings and interpretations of their world is the key factor in deepening our insights into the research phenomenon (O'Reilly, 2009). Cohen et al. (2007) assert that when human behaviour is studied, there is no single truth or reality which would explain why and how people do what they do. Instead, there are multiple truths and realities for individuals and groups.

Informed by this paradigm, the study analysed in this thesis employed a qualitative case study methodology to answer the research questions. Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to

---

<sup>3</sup> Quintile three schools lie in the middle of the quintile system which means that they are neither the poorest nor the least poor. The schools are considered poor enough to receive the same amount of funding as schools in quintile 1 and 2 in addition to also being exempted from paying school fees like the two lower groups.

answer the why and how questions that are better explored and explained through words than numbers (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Yin, 2004). For example, in this study, I wanted to investigate how and why members of the SMT understood their instructional leadership role in the school and how rurality influenced their work in the institution.

Data was generated using three methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews, observation and focus group discussions. These methods allowed a deep understanding of the phenomenon and triangulated the findings, thus also enhancing trustworthiness. To answer the three research questions, I first conducted in-depth one-on-one interviews with each of the seven SMT members in the school using a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix H). This allowed the participants to think, reflect and share their understanding and experiences as SMT members of a school in a rural area. Second, I held focus group discussions (FGDs) with the SMT members and teachers to further discuss the issues that they raised in the individual interviews and to respond to the research questions.

The first FGD with the SMT members allowed me to further understand their collective perspectives on their roles and the influence of rurality on their work. This allowed various perspectives about the phenomenon and provided more insights into the phenomenon, some of which were debated and contested (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The second FGD was conducted with a group of six teachers in order to understand their experiences of the SMT's instructional leadership practices and support (see Appendix K). Third FGD was conducted to gain a further insight into the phenomenon and to answer both research questions for five consecutive days each,

I observed each of the members of the SMT as they performed their duties. This allowed me to corroborate what the participants' professed to be their practices in the interviews and FGDs as well as witnessing the effects of rurality for myself.

The inductive content analysis approach was used to analyse the generated data. As explained by Thomas (2006) this approach is one in which the analysis of data comes from detailed reading and breaking down of raw data into categories, patterns and themes in order to explain it. In addition, I also had the knowledge that in qualitative research the data analysis process should not be left until all the data has been generated but rather the two should occur concurrently as patterns start to emerge (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). I found that following this process of concurrent generation and analysis made the process more convenient as I was not overwhelmed, and I believe that it led to a better interpretation of the raw data. I ensured that I transcribed the data from the interviews and FGDs soon after it was generated and started carefully reading through it and picking out patterns and themes and putting them into different columns based on similarities and differences as well as outliers.

I had considered employing the services of a transcriber to save time, but I later decided that because the participants and I code-switched between our native Sepedi language and English, it was better to do the transcription myself to avoid mistakes. I found that this decision did not only ensure the accuracy of the verbatim words of the participants, but it also helped immensely in the forming of themes. Similarly, observations were also analysed using an inductive content analysis process and occurred while I was still in the field. I used the themes developed from the analysis

to construct the findings that address the two research questions posed in the study (the research design and methodology is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four).

## **1.8 Ethical Considerations**

Webster et al. (2014) maintain that ethics should be at the heart of every research inquiry from the beginning to the end. To this end, before undertaking the field work for this study, certain ethical considerations were identified and addressed in order to protect the values, dignity and privacy of the participants. In compliance with the university's Research Ethics Committee requirements, the first step was to apply for ethics clearance for the study (Protocol Reference number: HSSREC/00000814/2019). Once this was granted, the next step was to approach the Limpopo Department of Basic Education to ask for permission to conduct the research study in the school. The school management, through the principals of the school, were approached, first for permission to carry out the study in the school and, second, to seek the principal's involvement in the research study. Upon their agreement, I approached the SMT members and teachers to seek their consent for participation in the study. Knowing that one of the main ethical considerations in social research involves informed consent, the participants were informed in writing, about the nature of the study, their participation in it and how their confidentiality would be protected. I delivered the informed consent letters in person to allow prospective participants to ask questions in a face-to-face interaction with me. Informed consent was thus granted by all those who participated in the study. Further, the participants were also informed of the volunteer status of their participating in addition to having the prerogative to retreat their participation regardless of stage in the research should they so wish.

Furthermore, in the writing of this thesis, to protect the privacy of the participants and their school, I use pseudonyms throughout the chapters. Because the study was conducted in one relatively small rural school, it is possible that people in the community may be able to identify it and the participants and that the school community may be able to identify who the participants were. To mitigate this, the findings are analysed thematically to avoid ascribing particular views to individuals. I reflect on some ethical issues which emerged during my research in more detail in Chapters Four and Seven.

### **1.9 Significance of the Study**

Addressing the research questions asked in this inquiry illuminates the challenges and successes of SMT members working in the rural context of the Limpopo Province. Further, while the intention of this study was not to generalise its findings to other contexts, it contributes to the literature of instructional leadership in South African rural schools and other similar contexts. A better understanding of the challenges that SMTs in rural schools encounter as instructional leaders and the strategies they adopt to address, could potentially inform future policy decision-making and leadership practices in this and similar contexts.

### **1.10 Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. Chapter One serves to introduce the study and its focus as well as to outline its important foundational elements. It begins by detailing my personal and professional motivations for conducting a study of this nature. This is followed by a brief discussion of important concepts this study tackles, including instructional leadership, the South African education policy framework, rurality and its challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the roles of

the SMT. The problem statement, focus of the study and research questions are then discussed. Then, the chapter presents an overview of the analytical framework, the research design and methodology the ethical considerations and the significance of the study.

Chapter Two presents the analytical framework used to explain the phenomenon studied in this inquiry. The chapter begins with a review of three theories of school leadership have dominated research since the 1980s, transformational leadership, distributed leadership and instructional leadership. It then focuses on instructional leadership models, specifically Hallinger and Murphy 's (1985) model of instructional leadership. Together these form the analytical framework developed to analyse the SMTs understandings and enactment of their instructional leadership practices in the rural school selected in this study.

Chapter Three reviews empirical literature related to the research questions posed in this inquiry. I begin with a brief introduction of the history of education leadership and management in research in order to frame the history of instructional leadership. This is followed by a detailed review of international and South African literature on effective instructional leadership in resource-constraints contexts. From international contexts, the chapter draws from indigenous societies in Canada, Australia and New Zealand in addition to reviewing inner-city, low-resourced schools in the United States of America (USA). I also review literature from Sub-Saharan African contexts. For South Africa, I review literature focusing on poorly resourced contexts, including rural and township schools.

Chapter Four focuses on the research design and methodology used in the study. This study was underpinned by the interpretive paradigm which holds the assumption that reality is subjective, thus what is important in research is seeking to understand the perspectives of the participants rather than seeking generalisable truths. Informed by this, the study used a qualitative research design which employed the case study approach to answer the research questions and in line with this, to generate data, used in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and observations. Finally, data analysis methods are then discussed. The chapter also discusses the ethical considerations of the research as well as trustworthiness and rigour. The chapter ends with some considerations of the limitations of the design of this PhD study.

Chapter Five is the first of two data presentation and analysis chapters. It focuses specifically on presenting the findings to the first research question: *How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school understand their instructional leadership roles and how does rurality influence their understanding?* The chapter draws its findings from in-depth interviews with SMT members and focus group discussions with the SMT as a collective.

Chapter Six is the last data presentation and analysis chapter and draws from observations of SMT members as well as focus group discussion with teacher participants. It focuses on the SMTs on the question: *How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school perform their instructional leadership role and how does rurality influence their performance thereof?*

The last chapter of the study, Chapter Seven, concludes the thesis. It begins with a summary of the main findings of the study and reflects on important methodological and theoretical decisions I made throughout this journey. The chapter also discusses the main findings contributions and the significance of this study before concluding with implications of the study findings. The next chapter presents the Analytical Framework for this inquiry.

## CHAPTER TWO

### UNDERSTANDING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE: TOWARDS AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter One, this thesis is premised on my understanding that if South Africa is to fully tackle the poor educational outcomes, including high failure and dropout rates in rural and other poorly resourced schools, it is vital to understand the role that school leadership, particularly instructional leadership might play in addressing these challenges. Thus, research that examines the role understandings and practices of the School Management Team (SMT) (usually made up of the principal, the deputy principal(s), and heads of various departments), in a school as a collective is needed. The study analysed in this thesis explored how members of the SMT in one rural school in the Limpopo Province, South Africa understood and enacted their collective instructional leadership roles and the influence of their rural context on their understandings and performance of their roles. Guided by this objective, the study asked these two questions:

- 1. How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school understand and perform their instructional leadership roles?*
- 2. How does rurality influence the School Management Team's understandings and practices of their instructional leadership roles?*

In Chapter One I introduced the study by detailing the problem statement and rationale and discussed the focus and research questions. I also gave a brief overview of the research design

used in the study as well as the research methodology. The purpose of this chapter is to develop the analytical framework underpinning the analysis of findings in this study. First, I present an overview of two dominant models of school leadership: Transformational and distributed leadership, and critiques thereof. Second, informed by the notion that a focus on and support for school leadership, particularly instructional leadership, is vital to addressing poor educational outcomes in South Africa's schooling system, the chapter presents a detailed discussion of three key models of instructional leadership and critiques thereof. These are Hallinger and Murphy's (1985); Murphy' (1990) and Weber's (1996) models of instructional leadership. Third, this is followed by a brief discussion of the leadership for learning model, which emerged as a critique and enhancement of the earlier instructional leadership models. The chapter ends with a presentation of the conceptual framework developed to understand how members of the SMT in one rural school understood and enacted their collective instructional leadership roles and the influence of rurality on their understandings and performance of their roles.

## **2.2 An Overview of School Leadership Theories**

Three theories of school leadership have dominated research since the 1980s. These are transformational leadership, distributed leadership and instructional leadership.

### **2.2.1 Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is defined as a people-oriented form of leadership in which the leader seeks to transform how members of the organisation think about their roles, the organisation and how to solve problems and perform their tasks to improve organisational effectiveness (Khumalo, 2019; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Shava et al., 2021). Primarily, transformational leaders are

perceived to inspire their members to take ownership of organisational goals and collaborate in a supportive environment to reach success (Andriani et al., 2018; Leithwood et al., 2004; Ross & Gray, 2006).

First introduced by Burns (1978) and intended as a political leadership model (Hallinger, 2007; Marzano et al., 2005). Burns (1978) argued that transformational leadership is characterised by the leader and followers of an organisation breaking away from personal interests and focusing on organisational goals. Transformational leadership emerged as a radical response to traditional or authoritarian leadership practices and introduced a more democratic, inspirational type of leadership model (Conger, 1991; Hallinger, 2003). This model of leadership was initially documented in education leadership research in the 1980s through the work of Bass (1985) during the effective school movement in which scholars and practitioners were focusing on the role of school leaders in making schools more effective (Krishnan, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

Scholars that have proposed models of transformational leadership include Bass (1998) who identified four dimensions of leadership influence which are: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. Others such as Sleegers et al., (2002) identify six similar dimensions which are: Vision building, fostering the acceptance of group goals, individualised consideration, creating high expectations and modelling important values and practice. Despite these differences in the models, literature suggests that over the years, the theory remains focused on the leader working to inspire others and bringing the best out of them to achieve organisational goals (Bass, 1998; Greiman et al., 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2007;

Leithwood et al., 1999). Further, this scholarship indicates that a transformational leader can build a vision for their school and lead followers through intellectual stimulation and teacher professional development (TPD) to achieve the goals. Proponents of this theory argue that the transformative part of the model is seen when professional learning communities are created (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hargreaves, 2000) and teaching methods and strategies change for the better, thus improving teaching and learning. Moreover, the transformational leader works to create a supportive environment in which the individual needs of teachers and their perspectives are considered. The transformational leader also inspires members of the organisation and fosters a collective identity in which the objectives of the organisation are viewed by all members of the organisation as their own. In addition, they also have high expectations for everyone in the organisation while also modelling appropriate behaviours and actions.

Studies that have used this theory of school leadership on the international front include Kouni et al. (2018) in the context of Greece who used a mixed methods approach to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership practices of the principal as perceived by teachers and teacher job satisfaction. The findings indicate that teachers who perceived their principals to have traits of transformational leadership experienced more job satisfaction. Similarly, a quantitative inquiry conducted by Li and Liu (2022) in the context of China used questionnaires to investigate the influences of transformational leadership on teacher leadership, teacher efficacy and student achievement. Their findings revealed that transformational leadership had a positive influence on teacher leadership and self-efficacy while teacher leadership also enhanced teacher self-efficacy. In addition, their findings also indicated that teacher leadership had a positive effect on student learning and achievement.

In South Africa, Moreeng and Tshelane (2014) argue that transformational leadership, particularly in its ability to encourage teacher leadership, could be the most suitable for teachers working in the rural context due to the poor working conditions and scarcity of resources they work in. In their 2014 study that sought to investigate transformational leadership in curriculum implementation in rural schools and teacher autonomy in leading curriculum, they conducted focus group discussions with history teachers in eight high schools. The findings showed that most teachers perceived the role of curriculum leadership as that of the SMT rather than their own. This could be linked to the reality that as the findings also showed, the SMT in participating schools had a rigid approach to leading curriculum and did not foster teacher leadership. This indicates that the SMT in those schools failed in their transformational leadership roles of inspiring a professional learning community where teachers can be included in decisions and take ownership of curriculum development rather than viewing it as the role of the SMT (Moreeng & Tshelane, 2014).

In another study, Khumalo (2019) used a quantitative approach to investigate the influence of transformational leadership in fostering teacher commitment in one district in the Limpopo province. One hundred and fifty teachers were randomly sampled to participate and 95 responded to the questionnaire. The results from the study revealed that principals who encouraged teachers to implement new curricular, encouraged participation in extra-curricular activities and shunned absenteeism, motivated teachers and increased their commitment to organisational goals. The author argued that transformational leaders lead to improved commitment, thus promoting sustainable development of teachers.

While many scholars have lauded transformational leadership as key to effective teaching and learning, others have identified some weaknesses, particularly in poorly resourced contexts or those or that do not encourage democratic practices. For example, in the United Arab Emirates, Litz and Scott (2017) who carried out a mixed methods study to explore transformational leadership behaviours of principals in that context, found some limitations with current understandings of the theory. The authors carried out in-depth interviews with teachers and principals of different schools in the country in addition to carrying out questionnaires with both participating groups to understand how the participants perceive the transformational leadership of principals. The findings revealed divergent views between teachers and principals regarding principals' transformational leadership. While principals thought of themselves as having transformational practices, teachers disagreed. Additionally, their findings suggested that while in some ways principals had practices of transformational leadership, to a large extent, transactional leadership styles with a top-down approach were more prevalent in that country than transformational leadership. The authors attributed this to the culture which they assert does not always encourage followers to approach leaders with their ideas. Litz and Scott (2017) therefore argued that this was a limitation of transformational leadership in non-western cultures such as the United Arab Emirates. As such, they posited that to work, the theory would have to be adapted to suit the culture and context of that country.

Others have also argued that while there is evidence backing the benefits of transformational leadership such as job satisfaction and teacher motivation, there is not enough evidence to link transformational leadership to student achievement (Li & Liu, 2022; Shatzer et al., 2014). For example, Allen et al. (2015) sought to examine the perception of teachers regarding the correlation

between transformational leadership and learner achievement. The authors found that while the principal's transformational leadership was important in creating a positive school climate, it could not be directly attributed to students' achievements.

Considering the arguments made for and critiques of this theory of school leadership and the phenomenon being studied in this thesis, transformational leadership only offers a partial analysis of the factors that influence the SMT's understandings and enactment of their collective instructional leadership roles. As I argued in Chapter One, one of the main issues facing rural schools in South Africa is the lack of resources, both human and material. Therefore, school leadership must constantly grapple with how to overcome these challenges. To address this, scholars have argued for distributed leadership in the school.

## **2.2.2 Distributed Leadership**

Distributed leadership emerged in the 1990s in response to the perceived loopholes of earlier models. As indicated, transformational leadership has been criticised for focusing on the leader alone and neglecting the roles played by teachers (Harris, 2004; Patterson et al., 2021; Spillane et al., 2004). As Liu et al. (2021) affirm:

The idea of the principal being a “superman” in school has gradually lost its prominence as a result of the accountability movement, which augments the complexity of roles and responsibilities of a school principal. Researchers argue it is beyond the capacity of a single leader to successfully deal with all issues within schools (p.434).

Distributed leadership is defined as collective decision-making and processes among stakeholders such as the principal, DHs and teachers in which, regardless of one's formal role, stakeholders are part of important decisions and take up leadership roles (Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2004; Torres, 2019). This way, what is prioritised is collaboration at different levels in the organisation as a way of achieving organisational goals, rather than having leaders make decisions alone while subordinates follow. As Harris and Spillane (2008) assert, “[a] distributed perspective on leadership acknowledges the work of all individuals who contribute to leadership practice, whether or not they are formally designated or defined as leaders” (p.31).

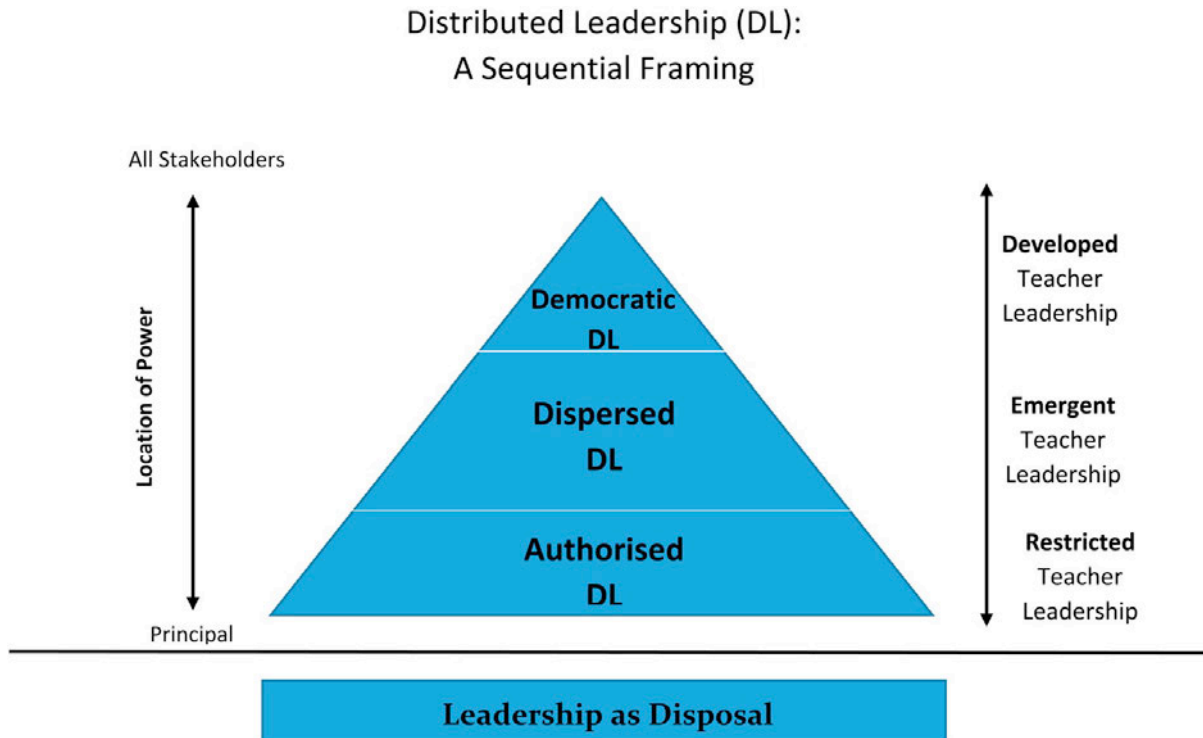
From a distributed leadership perspective, teachers and school leaders such as Departmental Heads (DHs) work together to make decisions about instructional matters (Marks & Printy, 2003) such as vision setting for the department and school. Thus, the interplay of various members in decisions is more important than only focusing on actions (Harris & Spillane, 2008). Consequently, in distributed leadership, the distribution is not limited to giving teachers the autonomy to be leaders in their classrooms but also relies on the continued effort towards a mutual understanding of what it is that the organisation aspires to achieve, and how. Mayrowetz (2008) and Robinson (2009) argue that it is through the interactions of distributed leadership that hierarchy is dismantled, and democracy achieved in the organisation, thus allowing the goals to be achieved.

Using distributed leadership as their analytical lens, in their study, Leithwood and Mascall (2008) investigated the influence of leadership on student learning and their educational outcomes. The authors sampled more than 2500 teachers in over 90 schools to participate in surveys and collected

student achievement data from the schools' websites to measure this relationship. Their findings revealed that in schools where leadership was distributed to teachers and other stakeholders, learners achieved better results in language and mathematics than in schools without traits of distributed leadership. Similarly, a recent qualitative study by Patterson et al. (2021) sought to understand the influence of distributed leadership on instructional reform efforts in an underperforming school in the USA. The study was conducted during a mandatory reform that the school, as part of the district's intervention in underperforming schools, was mandated to take part in. This included monthly professional development workshops with an external consultant organised by the district. The authors conducted in-depth interviews with school leaders including the principal, the deputy and two instructional coaches and focus group discussions with teachers as well as classroom observations. Their findings suggested that distributed leadership had a positive effect on the instructional reform which led to a turnaround in the learning outcomes in the school.

In the South African context, Grant (2017) posits that with decades of popularity and empirical backing elsewhere, distributed leadership is considered “the new kid on the block” (p.461) with normative and representational power in post-apartheid leadership perspectives. In her earlier study, Grant (2010) proposed that in the context of South Africa, distributed leadership takes on three characteristics: authorised distributed leadership, dispersed distributed leadership and democratic distributed leadership. Figure 2.1 below illustrates.

**Figure 2.1: *Distributed Leadership: A Sequential Framing***



(Source: Grant, 2017, p.465)

As the pyramid model illustrates, Grant (2017) posits that in most schools in the South African context, at the bottom of the pyramid lies the most power and *authoritarian or authorised distributed leadership* power (with the principal) and *teacher leadership* tends to be restricted. In these schools, because the principal holds a position that is associated with the ability to distribute power, it is positively perceived and those who agree to take on these leadership roles are respected for it. Hence, that *authorised distributed leadership* is the most common form in most South African schools (see also Grant, 2010). This might explain why most schools, especially where teacher autonomy, creativity, collaboration and leadership are needed, are largely dysfunctional. These include rural schools such as Crocodile High School which, as discussed in this thesis, have limited resources, need teachers who have the autonomy to use what is locally available to improve

teaching and learning. From her model of distributed leadership, Grant (2017) posits that the higher you go on the pyramid, the more *dispersed* the power and *dispersed distributed leadership* becomes, and the schools with form of leadership become fewer. Finally, at the top of the pyramid sits the most dispersed power, and *democratic distributed leadership*. Of particular relevance to the study analysed in this thesis, is that this form of distributed leadership is radical as its goal is not “political neutrality” (p.470). Rather, it seeks to have members of the organisation discussing important social issues that relate to leadership, power and organisational cohesion and effectiveness. These include discussing social change and justice, privilege, inclusion and exclusion to solve local problems and lead to effectiveness. For example, in a rural context such as Crocodile High School, the setting for my study, issues such gender, ethnicity, class, rurality, age and related factors might play a significant role in privileging some and excluding others in terms of employment, leadership and promotions in the school. As Grant (2017), argues, these authentic conversations about power and privilege could lead to supportive cultures that enable teachers to be more involved in leadership roles in a manner that is more supportive and sustainable. Yet, according to her this is the least common form of distributed leadership in South Africa schools, including rural schools such Crocodile High School, the school where the analysed in this thesis was located.

Similarly, Sibanda (2017) argues that despite government efforts to introduce distributed leadership in post-Apartheid South African schools, the legacy of Apartheid continues to affect schools today and challenge the success of this model of school leadership in schools. For example, as the author argues, former white schools in urban areas continue to benefit from better infrastructure, resources and qualified teachers while rural and township schools, occupied largely

by the majority of Black students and teachers, continue to have challenges in these areas. This makes it difficult to successfully implement distributed leadership in these schools.

As a theory, in this study, distributed leadership helps me describe and explain how the SMT in this rural school might understand and enact their instructional leadership role, and how rurality and the various factors related to it might influence how they support teachers in their teaching and learners in their learning. In particular, I wanted to understand whether and how they involved teachers in making decisions about the curriculum and classroom pedagogy and in the context of limited resources, what available materials they might access to make their teaching more effective. Importantly, as my research aim indicates, I wanted to understand how they understood and enacted their instructional leadership. Hence, I turned to a long-standing model of instructional leadership discussed in the section below.

### **2.2.3 Instructional Leadership**

As discussed in Chapter One, this thesis argues that for schools in the rural context of South Africa to overcome their challenges and thrive, effective leadership that prioritises teaching and learning is necessary. Many scholars have argued for instructional leadership as a model in schools. Scholars define instructional leadership or “learning-centred leadership” (Murphy et al., 2015, p.3) as school leadership that prioritises teaching and learning above all other roles and intentionally aligns duties and decisions in the school to favour quality instruction and enhances learning outcomes (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Bush, 2015; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Moss & Brookhart, 2019).

The idea of instructional leadership first appeared in the literature in the 1960s (Mestry et al., 2013; Murphy et al., 2015) and according to Hallinger (2011) is attributed to Edwin Bridges (Bridges, 1967). However, it did not gain popularity until the effective school movement which began in the late 1970s and gained momentum in the 1980s (Hallinger 2011). During this period, school improvement research led to a consensus that if schools are to be effective, they need effective leaders (e.g., Duke, 1987; Hallinger and Murphy, 1985, 1986; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). As opposed to prior school leadership theories, the theories that emerged in the 1980s (instructional leadership and transformational leadership) were the first to explicitly outline the roles that school principals should perform to influence teaching and learning positively. (Hallinger, 2007).

It was also in the 1980s that some of the first "coherent models" (Hallinger, 2003, p.331) of instructional leadership were developed. This was in response to the literature suggesting that school principals devoted very little time to instructional matters in the school as they spent most of their time on managerial duties (Murphy et al., 2015). Moreover, studies carried out at the time on the roles of district officials assigned to coordinate and supervise the roles of school principals devoted little to no attention to the principal's instructional roles (Murphy et al., 2015). This led to varied understandings of instructional leadership, and varied enactment of the role in various schools and contexts (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). This prompted scholars to argue to improve teaching and learning in schools, research that focused on the roles of school leaders and their instructional leadership was necessary (Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Murphy et al., 2015; Rosenholtz, 1985).

The central tenet of instructional leadership is the idea that if schools are going to succeed in their goals, school leaders ought to prioritise teaching and learning. By prioritising teaching and learning, school leaders spend less time in the office and focus on teacher professional development (TPD), coordination of instruction, and defining and articulating school goals to get the best out of teachers and learners (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Liu & Hallinger, 2018). After its initial popularity in the 1980s, the model degenerated in popularity in the 1990s as policymakers and practitioners favoured transformational leadership (Hallinger, 2005). However, in the new millennium policymakers and practitioners realised that school leaders needed to revert to instructional leadership to respond to new complexities. These include advancements in technology and globalisation which had implications for schooling (Fullan, 2001). Over time, instructional leadership became a leading model for understanding school leadership (Murphy et al., 2015; Nguyen et al., 2017) and is regarded as “one of the most enduring constructs in the shifting typology of leadership models” (Bush, 2015, p.487).

Three instructional leadership models that have dominated the scholarship have been advanced by: Hallinger and Murphy (1985); Murphy (1990) and Weber (1996) respectively.

### **2.2.3.1 Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) Model of Instructional Leadership**

The field of instructional leadership can be traced back to foundational work by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), who when prompted by a lack of research focusing on effective instructional leadership roles of school leaders at the time and an absence of instructional leadership models, carried out a study to fill the gap. The purpose of their inquiry was to examine and describe the

instructional leadership behaviours of 10 primary school principals in one school district in the United States of America (USA). Before carrying out the study, the authors developed a conceptual framework outlining three dimensions of instructional leadership: 1) defining the school mission, 2) managing the instructional program and 3) promoting the school climate. The first and second dimensions had two distinctive job functions while the third had a total of nine functions (This would be updated in 1987 to drop one function in the third dimension). In addition to the conceptual framework, at the request of the district superintendent, the authors also developed an appraisal tool to measure principal instructional leadership effectiveness, the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS). The findings from Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) study revealed that despite previous studies, most of the principals paid close attention to the roles of managing the curriculum and supervising and monitoring instruction. However, their findings also suggested that most school principals did not perceive students as the main benefactor of their instructional leadership, thus they did not make any effort to build rapport with students or communicate goals to them. Conversely, the principals who scored exceptionally on the PIMRS were those who valued having contact with learners. The authors concluded that further research was necessary to understand effective instructional leadership behaviours. From their study, the authors identified three dimensions of instructional leadership: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and developing the school learning climate. Table 2.2 below summarises the three dimensions of the framework and connected job functions.

**Table 2.2: Hallinger and Murphy's Model of Instructional Leadership**

<b>Defining the School Mission</b>	<b>Managing the Instructional Program</b>	<b>Developing the School Learning Climate</b>
Framing School Goals  Communicating School Goals	Coordinates the Curriculum  Supervising and Evaluating Instruction  Monitoring Student Progress	Protecting Instructional Time Promoting Professional Development Maintaining High Visibility Providing Incentives for Teachers Providing Incentives for Students

Source: Hallinger and Murphy (1985, p.221, updated in 1987)

***a) Defining the School Mission***

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) assert that defining the school's goals and writing them down as a mission and vision is vital to the school leader's effectiveness as an instructional leader. This role consists of two job functions which are framing the school goals and communicating the school goals. Similarly, Rosenholtz (1985) posits that the inability or inadequacy to frame and communicate goals leads to a phenomenon the author calls "loose coupling" (p.359) in which role players in the organisation pull in different directions. To frame the goals, school leaders must use the wider school vision which must focus on learning outcomes, to break it down into several, smaller steps and actions to achieve the vision (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Goals are important because they take on a more practical role than the mission and vision, in addition to directing everyday duties and decisions. As such, Hallinger and Heck (2002) argue that goals can be used to hold people accountable as well as decide how successes are appraised. Thus, for Hallinger and Murphy (1985), these goals should be framed in collaboration with all stakeholders. This is because it is only through understanding what the goals of the organisation are, that intentions and

actions can be linked to them (Skaalvik, 2020). Further, teachers know their learners best, thus involving them in goal setting is important as it ensures that the goals target the needs of learners and resources are allocated properly to achieve such objectives (Bademo & Tefera, 2016; Brezicha et al., 2020; Daniels et al., 2019). Therefore, it is in the best interest of the school that instructional leaders collaborate with stakeholders, particularly teachers, rather than working in isolation.

The next step involves framing goals. Specifically, to set goals, the school must scrutinise its past and present successes and downfalls, and from this analysis, determine how learner achievement can be improved (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Other scholars have called this process data mining and have argued that it ensures that the weaknesses and strengths in teaching and assessment methods are understood and addressed to improve future student outcomes (Romero & Ventura, 2020; Schildkamp, 2019). Framing the school goals allows stakeholders to make decisions about which resources are important to acquire and where they should be allocated to achieve the goals of the organisation (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). For instance, as discussed above, a school that engages in data analysis to influence decisions could, upon analysis, realise that most learners who failed mathematics did not have textbooks at home. With these findings, the school could increase the number of mathematics textbooks.

Once the goals are framed, they have to be communicated to all stakeholders. According to Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model, if the goals of the organisation are going to be achieved, those within the organisation must know them and understand what each role player's part is in achieving these goals. The authors suggest the use of both formal methods (staff meetings, TPD

workshops, school policies and staff bulletins) and informal strategies (e.g., reinforcing the goals with teachers and learners in conversations of communication to ensure continuity and greater understanding). In addition to policy documents and bulletins embedding the goals, stakeholders should have easy access to the vision and mission as well as goals through visual aids around the school (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Often, policy documents are so voluminous and formal that learners and parents may not find them easily accessible. However, if the vision and mission along with goals are highlighted on walls in classrooms and passages, all stakeholders can easily read them and internalise them. Involving learners must not be limited to informing them about what the goals are but must also include empowering them to understand them well enough to each other about them in class discussions, debates, assemblies, etcetera.

One critique of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model is that it neglects the school leader's role in modelling appropriate behaviours in the school. As Hitt and Tucker (2016) argue, relying on communicating goals in writing and meetings while displaying different behaviours can be detrimental to organisational goals. For example, while the leader needs to set goals and work with the school to achieve them, it is also vital that they lead through their actions. For example, an instructional leader who communicates to the school verbally about the importance of high standards but comes to school late, is often absent or does not celebrate the successes of learners, will undermine the goals (see for example, Bush, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2020).

## **b) Supervising and Evaluating Instruction**

Great visions and goals alone, as outlined in the first dimension, are not sufficient in leading schools to improve teaching and learning outcomes. It is through the ability to identify the best teaching and learning strategies and practices and working to implement them, that the mission and vision of the school can be realised. In the second dimension of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership model, through directing and supervising the learning processes, the school leader has a more direct involvement with classroom activities. This includes tasks such as supervising and evaluating teachers, keeping track of student progress and coordinating the curriculum. Furthermore, according to Hallinger and Murphy (1985), the instructional leader is involved in curriculum coordination, a task that involves working with teachers to plan the curriculum in ways that connect instruction and assessment and create a link from one school grade to the next. This can be achieved through coordinated planning between and among teachers of the same subject in different grades. Specific South African context, this could be teachers in the General Education and Training (GET) phase of schooling (Grades R-9) working with teachers in Further Education and Training (FET) (Grades 10-12), particularly in the transition from Grade 9 to 10 to ensure that there are no gaps between what is taught in each phase and expectations in the next phase. Planned this way, instruction has a connection to assessment tasks and meets the standards of the school and national expectations. Thus, effective instructional leadership could help to master the curriculum, including assessment tasks that benchmark them with their counterparts in other schools nationally and internationally. This then means that the role of coordinating the curriculum would be continuous rather than ending when teachers are believed to have understood their implementation roles.

Internationally, classroom supervision that seeks to support and empower the teacher rather than simply evaluate teaching has been found to have a key role in improving teaching and learning in schools internationally (Cohen et al., 2020; de Lima & Silva, 2018; Veloo et al., 2013). Thus, supervising and evaluating instruction must be prioritised to ensure that the objectives of the school and what is being taught are in alignment and yield the best outcomes. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) emphasise that the steps of supervising and evaluating instruction include classroom observations and proper teacher feedback and support. Firestone and Donaldson (2019) assert that in addition to serving the purpose of providing teachers with valuable feedback, post-observation sessions could lead to opening and two-way communication between teachers and school leaders about ways in which instruction can be improved.

The third and final job function in the second dimension is that of monitoring student progress. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) argue that instructional leaders cannot be effective in their instructional leadership roles without monitoring and using learner data to improve teacher practice, inform curriculum development and improve learning outcomes. Fundamentally, the goal of every school is quality teaching and learning which is measurable through learner progress. As such, being deliberate about collecting and analysing data on learner successes and challenges to improve learning is essential. The role of the instructional leader in this job function includes making sure that test results for different subjects and grades are interpreted and made available for teachers to allow them to use such results to improve their teaching. In addition, instructional leaders also have the task of holding meetings with different departments, grade levels and individual teachers to discuss test results and set targets based on the test results.

Monitoring teaching and learning goes hand in hand with increased positive interactions with teachers and learners, particularly during classroom observations but also in and around the school. This is because as Kabeta et al. (2015) assert, it provides additional strategies for gathering data about successes and challenges in the teaching and learning situation. This visibility allows instructional leaders to observe teaching practices, hold teachers accountable and set high standards for improving teaching and learning (Leithwood et al., 2020).

### ***c) Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate***

The third dimension of the model involves creating and nurturing a positive school climate as an instructional leadership role. In this role, the school leader is tasked with creating an environment that is nurturing to the needs of teachers and learners to ensure that the goals of the school are met (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The authors define the school climate as “norms and attitudes” (p.223) of the school. This can include the perceptions teachers and learners hold about their school, which guide their interactions with each other and with teaching and learning. Therefore, the climate or culture of the school is made up of a set of beliefs and understandings of the school and its expectations that govern teacher and learner behaviour and practices.

A positive school climate is important for effective teaching and learning in several ways. First, as Wang and Degol (2016) argue, the school environment determines the type of rapport teachers have with their learners, thus influencing student learning. For example, in environments where there is no mutual respect between teachers and learners, behavioural problems are more prevalent, leaving teachers in distress and leading them to spend significant amounts of time on learner

discipline than on teaching (Sun & Shek, 2012). Other scholars have also suggested a link between a positive school climate to teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Leithwood et al., 2020; Malinen & Savolainen, 2016; Winnaar, 2021).

The first role in this dimension is that of protecting instructional time. The topmost mandate of every school is quality teaching and learning (Naidoo & Petersen, 2015; Zengele, 2013). However, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) argue that in a schooling environment, there are often demands on teachers that require them to leave the classroom. In addition, learners arriving late for school or class also impact time spent on the task of teaching and learning, thus negatively affecting instructional time and student learning. As such, to enhance student learning, instructional leaders must ensure that the time allocated for teaching and learning is protected from unnecessary disruptions (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

A crucial factor that Hallinger and Murphy (1985) did not consider in this framework is that of ensuring that quality instruction takes place, the focus appears to only be on the quantity of time spent in class. Conversely, Romero and Barbera (2011) and Wedel (2021) argue that safeguarding the quantity of time is only beneficial when it is accompanied by quality teaching. In other words, how teachers make use of the time allocated for teaching is as important as how much time is spent in the classroom. Thus, it is evident that the role of instructional leaders does not end with ensuring that teachers and learners are in class. Instead, it becomes important for instructional leaders to perform roles such as supervision and evaluation of instruction and monitoring student progress to ensure that instructional time is used properly. This job function is followed by that of promoting

teacher professional development (TPD). Hallinger and Murphy (1985) aver that to build a positive learning climate, effective instructional leaders must care about and cultivate TPD. Supporting teachers' growth ensures that the teaching and learning goals are met and the greater vision of the school is realised. In practice, the authors affirm that instructional leaders must foster TPD by working with teachers to organise workshops in the school to improve teaching and learning. In addition, an effective instructional leader identifies opportunities outside the school that teachers can be a part of and makes them aware of these opportunities (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

Recently, scholars who have written on the instructional leader's role in promoting TPD have also suggested instructional leaders should build working relationships with the school community and other organisations such as universities to assist in such programmes (Basma & Savage, 2023; Grissom et al., 2021; Sang et al., 2021). This scholarship suggests that effective instructional leaders should not only assess the needs of teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) not but should also tailor TPD opportunities to the goals of the school (Tondeur et al., 2016). This necessitates supplementing such programmes with school-based TPD programmes.

The third dimension of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model identifies providing incentives for teaching as another function of an instructional leader in a school. The model posits that to maintain a positive teaching and learning climate and motivate teachers to work hard, it is important for instructional leaders to recognise their successes and celebrate them (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). While the authors assert that money can serve as an important incentive, they argue that in schools where principals do not control teacher pay or have the means, other forms

of gratitude such as praise, recognition in front of their peers and special honours are also important incentives for teachers. Later research has also shown that there are many other incentives that instructional leaders can use to motivate teachers. These include inclusion in decisions (Dou et al., 2017; Leithwood et al., 2020), a positive work environment and opportunities for professional development (Howes et al., 2015).

In addition to incentivising teachers, according to Hallinger and Murphy (1985), effective instructional leaders recognise the importance of celebrating and positively reinforcing learner success as a way of improving both the climate of the school and the quality of education. The authors posit that learners become more motivated to work hard when they are recognised in front of their peers for accomplishments. While their model focuses on rewards for excellent academic performance, it is important to note that one of the biggest problems affecting the learning environment in the South African context is poor discipline. It leads to dissatisfaction among teachers, disruptions during teaching and learning time, and can make the environment hostile (Sun & Shek, 2012; Wang & Degol, 2016). Other common behavioural obstacles to the quality of teaching and learning that relate directly to learners include absenteeism, truancy, drug abuse, overcrowding and lack of resources including uniform (Maifala, 2017; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013; Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021). While drug abuse and lack of proper uniform in some South African schools may not be resolved with incentives, other behavioural issues could certainly be modified. There is some evidence from research suggesting that in addition to rewarding academic success, positive behaviour can be encouraged through incentives (Beaty-O’Ferrall et al., 2010; Partin et al., 2009). Both monetary and non-monetary learner incentives are powerful in improving the school learning environment. As Hallinger and Murphy (1985) suggest, simple, inexpensive

incentives can go a long way in motivating learners, particularly in low-income areas such as the school being studied in this inquiry. Rewards may include certificates for good behaviour as well as paid field trips once a quarter or yearly. I have observed learners behave better in class and attend more lessons when they collect stamps, which meant they would go on a field trip at the end of the term. The use of praise is also known to be an effective incentive in encouraging well-behaved learners to maintain their behaviour while also motivating those with bad behaviour to improve (Cavanaugh, 2013; Royer et al., 2018). Therefore, in addition to having behaviour policies that hold learners accountable for disruptive behaviour, instructional leaders should work with teachers to find ways to inspire positive behaviour through rewards.

Lastly, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) assert that to build a positive learning environment, the instructional leader must show high visibility around the school. This job function involves intentional efforts by school leaders to interact with learners and teachers in meaningful ways that enhance teaching and learning. According to them, being visible around the school allows the principals to evaluate teachers formally and informally, provide important feedback, identify teaching and learning needs, and provide incentives through praise and recognition among other benefits. As Kabeta et al. (2015) assert, the performance of many of the instructional leader's functions is dependent on their "availability and visibility" (p.1880). In the same study, the authors used Hallinger and Murphy's PIMRS scale to qualitatively explore instructional leadership and its influence on teaching and learning in Zambia. They interviewed teachers and school leaders to gain their perspectives. Their findings showed that while principals rated themselves high on being visible around the school, teacher perceptions revealed the opposite. Moreover, the authors found that in schools where principals did not show visibility, learning outcomes were negatively

affected as roles such as teacher evaluations and providing incentives were not performed. These findings suggest that to be efficient in performing tasks in the three dimensions of this model of instructional leadership, instructional leaders must spend less time in the office on administrative work and prioritise the role of supporting instruction through visibility. While this model was developed nearly four decades ago, scholars of instructional leadership have continued to outline similar dimensions of instructional leadership. For instance, Nguyen et al. (2017) affirm that effective instructional leadership follows the same three dimensions of defining the school mission, leading the instructional programme and creating a conducive teaching and learning environment.

Regarded as the most backed by empirical evidence and having been studied in more than 200 studies and over 22 contexts (Hallinger, 2011), this model remains the most popular for scholars studying instructional leadership. It has been used extensively internationally and in South Africa. For example, Chabalala and Naidoo (2021) employed this model of instructional leadership to investigate teachers' and DHs' experiences of their principals' instructional leadership in leading curriculum implementation. Two schools were sampled to participate in the qualitative inquiry and two teachers and DHs, who fit the criteria of having more than five years of experience were sampled from each of the participating schools. The findings of the inquiry revealed that the participants experienced their principals as having some effective instructional leadership practices that promote curriculum implementation such as defining the goals of the organisation and communicating them. However, their findings also suggested that the principals in the two schools relied on the DBE to provide opportunities for professional development, thus indicating that they do not fully understand this instructional leadership role.

Others include a qualitative inquiry by Shava et al. (2021) who sought to explore the influence of integrating instructional and transformational leadership on improving teaching and learning in South Africa. The authors purposely sampled six principals from rural schools to participate in in-depth interviews. The criteria the schools had to meet was evidence of using transformational and instructional leadership to turn around the schools from underperforming. The authors relied on information from the schooling district to identify schools they considered to have met this criterion. The findings suggested that the participating principals had elements of both instructional leadership and transformational leadership in their practices such as goal setting, individual consideration, building a conducive environment and others which led to effectiveness. The authors therefore concluded that integrating these theories of school leadership could enhance leadership effectiveness and improve student learning.

#### **2.2.3.2 Murphy's Model of Instructional Leadership**

Building on Hallinger and Murphy's model, Murphy's (1990) model of instructional leadership adds a fourth dimension: developing a supportive work environment. While in the earlier model, the third dimension does have elements of developing a supporting environment such as through incentives and protecting instructional time, Murphy's (1990) model considers roles that were not included in the earlier model and these form part of his fourth dimension. Those five job functions are 1) working with parents and the school community, 2) creating opportunities for meaningful learner involvement, 3) promoting teacher collaboration, 4) creating a safe learning environment and 5) acquiring important resources necessary for quality teaching and learning (in Abdullah & Kassim, (2011) and Naicker et al. (2013).

While Murphy's (1990) model adds crucial elements to the role of instructional leaders, there is currently not much literature available on this model. However, other scholars have also in later years connected the role of the instructional leader to the ability to collaborate with parents and the school community to benefit the school (Hallinger, 2011; Myende & Chikoko, 2014; Myende & Hlalele, 2018). In addition, others have also pointed to the importance of instructional leaders being able to acquire resources and allocate them properly for the goals of the organisation to be achieved (Bademo & Tefera, 2016; Daniels et al., 2019). As I asserted in section 2.2.1.1. (A), involving learners meaningfully in the school ensures that they are in full understanding of the goals of the school and will bring them on board in achieving such goals.

There are limited empirical studies which particularly utilise this model in the literature. Exceptions include a mixed method inquiry by Abdullah and Kassim (2011) in the context of Malaysia who used a combination of Hallinger and Murphy (1985) and Murphy's (1990) models to explore instructional leadership attitudes of school principals towards organisational change. Their quantitative findings revealed that principals in the study showed elevated levels of instructional leadership in all four dimensions while the qualitative findings also indicated that instructional leaders who scored well in the quantitative findings on their levels of instructional leadership, showed a positive attitude towards change. This indicates that instructional leadership practices are important in preparing school leaders to deal with change.

### **2.2.3.3 Weber's (1996) Model of Instructional Leadership**

Unlike Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) and Murphy's (1990) models, which have three and four dimensions and several job functions each, Weber (1996) developed a model with five domains, each with a single role without complementary job functions. They are: 1) defining the school mission, 2) managing the instructional programme and 3) developing the school learning climate. In addition, two additional domains were included: 4) observing and improving instruction and 5) assessing the instructional programme (Bhengu et al., 2014; Naicker et al., 2013). Not much literature is available on Weber's (1996) model of instructional leadership (at the time of writing this thesis), which limits one's understanding of the model to interpretations made by other scholars. However, available literature suggests that the fourth domain, observing and improving instruction is similar to Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) second dimension in which the school leader manages the instructional program through job functions that include monitoring student learning and supervising instruction. Similarly, Weber's (1996) final domain, assessing the instructional programme, refers to monitoring student progress by making test results available and analysing them with teachers to ensure that new targets are set and instruction improved is taken up in the other two models of instructional leadership as well.

Weber's (1996) model has not enjoyed much scholarly attention in South Africa. Some exceptions include studies such as Naicker et al. (2013) who employed this model for their study on instructional leadership practices in challenging contexts. This was based on their understanding that the model promotes shared instructional leadership. The findings from the study revealed that instructional leadership practices have a positive influence on school effectiveness. These findings support the argument in this thesis that effective instructional leadership practices are important to

improving school effectiveness and student learning. Similar to my argument in this study that instructional leadership is more than the role of the principal alone, Naicker et al. (2013) also found that effective schools in challenging contexts had leaders who shared instructional leadership and built positive relationships with teachers and other stakeholders to assist in the management of the school.

Bhengru et al. (2014) also used the model to understand factors that prevent school leaders from turning their instructional leadership training into practice. The authors carried out a qualitative inquiry in which school principals participated in in-depth interviews. The authors found that although school leaders had gone through the Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership (ACE: SL) programme of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) aimed at equipping school leaders with skills to enhance effectiveness, the challenges of their schools, including rurality, heavy workload, teacher union resistance and lack of support from the DBE made it difficult for them to translate their learning into their practices.

The findings from these studies indicate that Weber's (1996) model is useful in studying shared instructional leadership such as in the roles of the SMT as in this study. However, as I have argued, the model has not been used in enough studies to understand its efficacy in analysing instructional leadership in schools, particularly in rural schools in the South African context.

## **2.2.4 Critiques of Instructional Leadership Models**

While most scholars of instructional leadership have utilised the various instructional leadership models discussed above in empirical studies, they are not without their share of criticism. For example, the most resounding critique has been that they tend to be too leader-centric and neglect the roles played by middle managers (for example, Heads of Departments), teachers and other stakeholders in the leadership of the school (Marks & Printy, 2003; Townsend et al., 2013). For example, Marks and Printy (2003) argue that the models do not take into consideration the expertise of teachers and exclude them from leadership. The authors argued that there was no place for leader-centric instructional leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, terming it "archaic" and depended on "docile followers" (p.373) to thrive. Further, they posit that in schools with independent and competent teachers, these models of school leadership would be ineffective. As such, they proposed shared instructional leadership. Within this model, school leaders empower teachers through inclusion in decisions and promoting professional development while teachers are more involved in leadership roles within the school. Similarly, Townsend et al. (2013) caution against what they understand to be a tendency in school leadership studies to single out the role of the school leader as influential to student learning. Notably, "[h]owever, there still seems to be a "romance" with the idea of the power of leadership that leads us to believe that the leadership role is more important to student achievement than anything else." (p.21). Instead, they propose that the roles of other stakeholders such as teachers, learners and parents should be considered in discussions of leadership of teaching and learning.

The critiques of instructional leadership discussed in this section suggest that because classroom teachers work more closely with learners and know them and their needs better, SMT members

cannot achieve effectiveness without involving teachers in decisions. For instance, an SMT member who decides on professional development programmes suitable for the school without the input of teachers runs the risk of introducing programmes that do not meet the needs of teachers and the school. Scholars of school leadership have also argued for other models of leadership such as transformational leadership and distributed leadership (discussed below) as alternatives to instructional leadership.

### **2.2.5 From Instructional Leadership to Leadership for Learning**

After years of popularity of the instructional leadership model as well as criticism, its two key proponents (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), conceded that the model had some shortcomings in addressing the needs of schools in the 21st century and separately developed a new leadership model, Leadership for Learning (LfL) (Hallinger, 2011; Murphy et al., 2007). Published in 2007, Murphy and colleagues proposed an eight-dimension LfL model with roles that include: a vision for learning, instructional program, curricular program, assessment program, communities of learning, resource acquisition and use, organisational culture and advocacy. Figure 2.2 below summarises the LfL model proposed by Murphy et al (2007):

**Figure 2.2: A Summary of the Leadership for Learning Model proposed by Murphy et al. (2007)**



As Figure 2.2 shows, the first four dimensions of the model involve the school leader's role in developing a vision for the school and being directly involved in instruction, curriculum and assessment and monitoring and supervising teaching and learning. The fifth dimension of communities of learning is concerned with the professional development of teachers, creating an environment that has high expectations for professional learning in which teachers are committed to their development. In addition, the school leader shares or distributes leadership by involving teachers, parents, learners and the school community in the running of all the affairs of the school, including teaching and learning. This way, unlike instructional leadership, in this model, LfL is aimed at distributing leadership among all stakeholders in the school. Furthermore, the sixth dimension in LfL points to the acquisition and use of resources as an important role of the school

leader in ensuring that the goals of the organisation are met. This is significant, particularly for schools that are struggling with limited resources. Negotiating such resources with stakeholders and communities is key to supporting teachers' work and ensuring effective teaching and learning. In the seventh dimension, the model identifies creating an organisational culture that nurtures teaching and learning and emphasises academic excellence, as a key role of school leaders. This is because creating a conducive environment for teaching and learning leads to better student-teacher rapport (Wang & Degol, 2016) and greater teacher motivation and self-efficacy (Leithwood et al., 2020; Winnaar, 2021), thus leading to the achievement of the organisation. The last dimension in this model focuses on the context of the school and the school leader's role in advocating for learners and their families to ensure that all learners thrive despite environments that could negatively affect their learning. It is also in this dimension that the school leader focuses on the involvement of parents and the wider school community as a way of improving the social and academic learning of students.

A second leadership for learning model reviewed in this chapter was proposed by Hallinger (2011). In Hallinger's three-dimension model of LfL, in the first dimension, the school leader's values, beliefs and experiences are reflected in how they interact with the environment they lead. For example, Gurr et al. (2006) conducted a study in two Australian states to develop a model for successful school leadership in fourteen effective schools based on reputation and student achievement over several years. Their qualitative inquiry included interviewing principals and other key stakeholders in the schools such as teachers, learners, parents and school governing body members on the school successes while also emphasising the principal's contribution to such successes. Their findings revealed that across the fourteen schools, principals had beliefs and

values that nurtured teaching and learning and led to successes. This includes the belief that all learners were capable of learning and other similar beliefs. In addition, the findings revealed that working in a context in which the parents and the school community were supportive, was a mediating factor to the success of the schools.

In the second dimension, the leader leads the school in developing school vision and building capacity among role players. As I have argued in this thesis, there is considerable evidence from the literature that school leaders who are directly involved in the teaching and learning activities such as leading the curriculum, developing a mission and empowering teachers through TPD, are vital to the success of the school (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020; Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Moss & Brookhart, 2019).

In the third dimension, Hallinger (2011) argues that the school leaders do not lead in isolation, as the dimension considers the environment in which the leader functions. This includes the staff, the community, the opportunities and challenges within the school context and other components that have an impact on leadership. Hallinger affirms that these influences, internal and external, are mediating factors to the leader's success in the school. This is because these factors affect the vision and goals led by the leader, the processes they put in place for learning and how they build capacity within the school.

The fourth dimension relates to the school leader's ability to involve others within the school in decisions and processes, thus sharing the leadership, while the fourth is concerned with how the principal distributes or shares power with others in the school. As discussed above, for the principal

to work alone is not sufficient for the school to thrive. Rather, other members of the organisation have to be part of leading activities in the school. As Harris (2011) asserts, that “while this shift, in part, reflects some disillusionment with individual conceptions of leadership often characterised as the “great man” theory, it does not imply that principals are redundant” (p.8). Therefore, the school leader is still responsible for ensuring that other teachers and learners in the school are involved in making decisions and implementing them within their respective roles.

Some studies that have used Hallinger (2011)’s LfL model as a framework to study education leadership include Myende et. al. (2022), who investigated how rurality influenced the roles of circuit managers in areas of multiple deprivation such as rural areas in South Africa. Circuit managers in South Africa are office-based educators who are stationed in schooling district offices and support teaching and learning in schools (Myende et al., 2022). The findings from the study revealed that in many ways, rurality negatively impacted the circuit managers' role as leaders of teaching and learning. This was due to factors such as lack of resources and parental involvement which made it difficult for officials to implement intervention programmes.

Similar to the findings from Gurr et al. (2006) discussed above which show that a supportive school culture leads to school effectiveness, a systematic review study by Perumal and Moyo (2019) on female school principals in disadvantaged contexts of Zimbabwe also found that context influences school leadership and effectiveness. The authors sought to investigate the challenges, needs and opportunities experienced by female principals and how they may have to adapt their leadership to suit the context. Their findings indicated that patriarchal beliefs about gender roles such as believing that men should hold leadership positions, affected how the female principals were

treated by the school communities and how much support they received in leading their schools. In addition, the authors found poverty in school communities and lack of resources in the schools were some of the challenges school principals experienced in the disadvantaged contexts which meant some learners were malnourished while paying school fees and having the correct uniform was also a problem. Perumal and Moyo (2019) also found that because of the cultural beliefs about women in leadership and the other contextual challenges, the female principals adopted a distributed leadership approach, seeking to involve parents and collaborate with other stakeholders within the school community.

Some scholars have contended that there are no significant differences between instructional leadership models and LfL, arguing that it is more an adaptation of the former than a departure in thinking (Boyce & Boer, 2018; Imig et al., 2019; MacBeath, 2019; Townsend et al., 2013). For this reason, Wieczorek and Lear (2018, para.1) refer to LfL as a new “integrated instructional leadership” model. For example, Boyce and Bower (2018) argue that:

In comparing the integrated model of instructional leadership supported by this meta-narrative review to contemporary conceptualizations of school leadership, we notice a significant overlap between the integrated model and the leadership for learning framework (p.9).

However, the authors acknowledge that LfL extends the instructional leadership model in that it includes a focus on the hiring of employees and the general support of staff support while instructional leadership focuses largely on teacher support. Furthermore, Townsend et al. (2013) suggest that LfL adds resource acquisition as vital to the school leader's roles.

Another limitation of LfL is that there remains no agreed-upon definition of the concept while some definitions create ambiguity (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; Daniels et al., 2019; Gurr, 2019). For example, writing in favour of LfL, MacBeath (2019) recognises the ambiguity created by the concepts of instructional leadership and LfL, affirming that "Instructional leadership (IL) and leadership for learning (LfL), it had been argued, are synonymous, a simple matter of terminology." (p.50). However, MacBeath (2019) also argues that it is in changing how "learning" and "leading" terminology are understood, that the differences between instructional leadership and LfL can begin to emerge. Similarly, Daniels et al. (2019) assert that despite gaining attention in the literature, LfL remains without a "solid definition" (p.7). I find credibility in this criticism, as, in his model, Hallinger (2011) focuses on the beliefs of the leader, their context, instruction and collaboration while MacBeath and Dempster's (2009)' model emphasises the moral purpose of the leader above other roles.

These differences in the understanding and conceptualisation of LfL could lead to diverse interpretations by researchers, thus making it difficult to build sustained scholarship focusing on this model of school leadership. As such, LfL in this study is understood in terms of Hallinger's (2011) definition as including instructional, transformational and distributed leadership. However, LfL adds some important dimensions to instructions, including shared/distributed leadership with teachers and other stakeholders. In a rural school struggling with limited resources, among other challenges, working in collaboration with teachers to solve classroom issues is key to learning outcomes. In this study, I wanted to understand how the SMTs used their instructional leadership to harness teachers' knowledge of the classroom and learners' strengths and weaknesses to plan effective lessons and assessment tasks. I also wanted to understand whether and how they used

their instructional roles to channelled resources available in and around the school to support teaching and learning, including both human and material resources.

### **2.3 Towards an Analytical Framework**

The study analysed in this thesis aimed to examine how members of the School Management Team (SMT) in one rural school in the Limpopo Province understood and enacted their collective instructional leadership roles. In addition, the influence of their rural context on their understandings and performance of their roles. Guided by this aim, I located the study within the broad field of instructional leadership, arguably pioneered by the scholarship of Phillip Hallinger and Joseph Murphy (1985). Informed by this scholarship, my analysis in this thesis is premised on the understanding that the effective instructional leadership of the SMT in this rural school is likely influenced by how the team understands and in turn, influenced by contextual and other factors, enact their instructional leadership roles.

The literature reviewed in this chapter on various theories and models of school leadership, including instructional leadership, suggests that effective school leadership is necessary for schools to succeed. In addition, the literature suggests that there are various elements from the different theories that could be drawn to understand effective school leadership in the rural context. This is aligned with Harris and Jones's (2015) argument that no theory or model of school leadership is comprehensive enough to work in every context. As such, before I commenced with my data generation, the conceptual framework I developed on instructional leadership informed largely by the work of Hallinger and Murphy (1985) was particularly helpful.

In addition, I wanted to understand how other scholars who had come before me had researched the area of instructional leadership and examined the kinds of theoretical lenses they had to inform their inquiry and the assumptions that informed them. My review included, among others, leadership for learning, transformational leadership and distributed leadership. As Imenda (2014) cautions, researchers should not be bound by one theory when it may not fully cover the research problem they seek to investigate. Instead, various relevant theories can be brought together to better explain this phenomenon. To heed this caution, in this study, in the integrated analytical framework discussed below, I combine the conceptual framework from the instructional leadership models, including the LfL, and two leadership theories: transformational leadership theory and distributed leadership theory to describe and explain how the SMT in one rural school understand and enact their instructional leadership and what factors, related to rurality, influence them as they perform their work in the school.

As argued in this thesis, for schools in the rural context of South Africa to overcome their contextual challenges and thrive, effective leadership that focuses on teaching and learning is necessary. The contextual challenges (as discussed in Chapter One) include a scarcity of resources and infrastructure, lack of qualified teachers and external socio-economic issues of the communities which affect the running of schools in such communities such as high unemployment and child-headed families (du Plessis, 2014; Hlalele, 2012; Maifala, 2017; Moletsane, 2012; Myende & Maifala, 2020). To analyse the data, I generated in this thesis I ask myself the question: What might effective instructional leadership in a rural school look like?

Informed by the literature I review above, I use the analytical framework discussed below as a lens to describe and explain how the SMT in one rural school understood and enacted their instructional leadership and what factors, related to rurality, influenced them as they performed their work in the school. In essence, the analytical explains features of effective instructional leadership in a rural school context. Figure 2.3 below captures the analytical framework:

**Figure 2.3: Features of Effective Instructional Leadership in a Rural School**



Taking into consideration the challenges of rurality outlined in Chapter One and informed by the theoretical (and empirical) literature I have reviewed so far in this thesis, the analytical frame is made up of six key features that characterise effective instructional leadership in a rural school in a South African context. To be effective, instructional leadership must involve: 1) Defining and communicating goals; 2) Leading Teaching and Learning; 3) Creating a nurturing and supportive

environment; 4) Partnering with parents, local community and other stakeholders; 5) Promoting and supporting Teacher Professional Development and 6) Protecting instructional time and modelling high expectations.

### **2.3.1 Defining and Communicating Goals**

In this thesis, informed by the literature, first, I have come to understand effective instructional leadership as leadership that prioritises quality teaching and learning through defining and communicating institutional goals. The challenges of schools in rurality, which I discussed in Chapter One, make it a requirement that leaders should be intentional about the goals of their schools and communicate them clearly to ensure that role players succeed. However, it is not enough for the principal or together with the SMT to decide on goals and merely communicate them to teachers and other stakeholders. Guided by distributed leadership, the principal along with the SMT has the role of ensuring that other stakeholders (teachers, parents, community members, learners, etc.) take on a leadership role of being part of the processes and decisions regarding the definition and communication of these goals. In defining the goals, different stakeholders can support one another in achieving the same goal rather than pulling in the direction of what they individually consider important (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Rozelholtz, 1985). Moreover, informed by transformational leadership, the inclusion of teachers in decisions such as goal setting motivates teachers to full ownership of the decisions made as well as ensuring job satisfaction (Khumalo, 2019; Li & Liu, 2022). Guided by instructional leadership theory, once the goals are defined, it is also important that they are communicated through visibility around the school to ensure that current stakeholders are reminded to work with them in mind while serving to inform new stakeholders (Hallinger, 2018).

### **2.3.2 Leading Teaching and Learning**

Informed by instructional leadership theory, once the goals have been set, the instructional leaders must prioritise leading teaching and learning to ensure the quality of instruction and achievement of set goals. Practices involved in this role include classroom observations in which instructional leaders ascertain that teaching standards align with organisational goals (Nguyen et al., 2017). Through observations, instructional leaders are also able to identify shortfalls in teaching and learning strategies which can serve as a guide in developing a TPD programme to improve practice (Cohen et al., 2020; de Lima & Silva, 2018; Veloo et al., 2013). Guided by distributed leadership and transformational leadership theories, instructional leaders can create an environment where teachers are not only observed by SMT members but can distribute the leadership to teachers in which colleagues on the same post-level conduct peer observations and provide feedback to each other. As asserted by Carroll and O'Loughlin (2014), by allowing reflective discussions between colleagues, peer observations can support teacher learning and improve instruction.

In addition, the role of leading teaching and learning involves data mining in which, informed by distributed leadership, the SMT works with teachers to study student performance records and identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and assessment methods to improve outcomes (Romero & Ventura, 2020). This practice relates to the previous practice of using classroom observations to inform TPD as the shortfalls identified in the data mining processes should also be used to determine TPD needs and other support.

### **2.3.3 Creating a Nurturing and Supportive Environment**

Third, informed by both instructional and transformational leadership theories, effective instructional leaders in the context of rurality must create a nurturing and supportive environment for all members of the organisation. This includes identifying the conditions which teachers and learners need to optimise their performance of their duties. As such, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) argue that the hard work of teachers and learners should be awarded through rewards. This way, those performing their best are motivated to continue while also motivating those not currently meeting expectations. In the rural context where monetary rewards may not be possible, SMT members must once again lean on the collaboration of parents and the community to harness resources that can be used as rewards. Other rewards that I have identified in the literature review include recognition, praise and certificates (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Royer et al., 2018). In addition, Hallinger (2018) asserts that creating a culture of mutual trust and respect between teachers and the SMT can act as a reward for teachers. Moreover, in the rural context where the learner ratios in classrooms are high and teachers often struggle with discipline (Maifala, 2017), creating a nurturing environment should include finding solutions to discipline problems within the school. In this role, guided by distributed leadership, SMT members must work with teachers, parents and even learners to determine the threats to order in the school and develop strategies to deal with such problems.

Lastly, Hallinger (2018) argues that a vital part of creating a nurturing environment is through high visibility in which instructional leaders become part of daily activities in the school rather than being office-bound at all times. This could include formal interactions such as through assembly or award giving ceremonies as well as being part of extra-curricular activities and finding other

ways to interact with learners and teachers during the day. This way, as Hallinger (2018) posits, instructional leaders can celebrate the successes in learning, identify areas for improvement and build group morale while also building rapport with teachers and learners, thus creating a nurturing environment for everyone in the school.

### **2.3.4 Partnering with Parents, Local Community and Other Stakeholders**

Informed by instructional leadership theory, Murphy (1990) posits that a vital instructional leadership role is the acquisition and allocation of resources that support teaching and learning. However, the challenges of rurality as discussed, make it difficult for SMT members to acquire sufficient resources on their own. As such, drawing from Hallinger's (2011) LfL model, instructional leaders must recognise that their context influences how they lead, and some external factors are mediatory to the successes and failures of the school. Therefore, schools must embrace the community and working with them, harness the various resources that different stakeholders have to benefit both the school and the community. For example, in areas with community libraries, schools should form partnerships with local authorities to gain access to those libraries to improve teaching and learning. Other community members such as businesses may be able to provide donations of Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) such as computers or assist in providing transportation as well as other resources that the school deems important to achieving their goals and improving learning outcomes.

In addition to working with the community to improve resources, where possible, parents and the community should be involved in the improvement of curriculum and learning outcomes. It is

essential that in the rural context where learner underachievement is commonplace, schools espouse indigenous knowledge systems in the curriculum such as by including storytelling in the teaching of indigenous languages. This way, parents, whose knowledge is often underappreciated (Hlalele, 2019) and are at times viewed by schools as not valuing education or being too uneducated to get involved (du Plessis, 2014), can be invited to be meaningful participants. In my observation as someone who grew up in the rural context, there is often a gap created between the teachers and parents in which parents view themselves as not being able to engage with teachers or assist in instructional matters because they do not have the education while teachers also fear that uneducated parents have nothing to contribute towards instruction. This leads to the two entities failing to coexist in harmony because of this distance between them. However, I also know that the storytelling of folktales remains an intricate part of life in many rural communities. This could be harnessed to support teaching and learning and improve relations between the school and the home. As Hlalele (2019) posits, sustainable learning and development in rural communities of South Africa requires the bringing together of Western curricular (which is the current convention in the South African education system) and indigenous knowledge systems.

### **2.3.5 Promoting and Supporting Teacher Professional Development**

Fifth, aligned with instructional and transformational leadership, in this research, I understand effective instructional leadership for rural schools as involving support for TPD and professional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hallinger, 2018; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2017; Philipsen, Tondeur, Pareja Roblin, Vanslambrouck & Zhu, 2019). As I stated in Chapter One, learners in the rural context largely perform poorly in national benchmark examinations, failing to compete with counterparts in other areas of the country (Hlalele, 2012; Myende, 2014).

As such, to deal with this challenge, instructional leaders need to focus on developing their teachers through TPD. Strategies for supporting TPD include identifying learning needs among teachers and supporting their learning through internal workshops and lesson demonstrations and other avenues such as encouraging teachers to attend external workshops (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2016).

In addition, guided by distributed leadership, promoting and supporting TPD requires teacher leadership to succeed in the rural context. This is because as established, resources are scarce and the involvement of the DBE is not always satisfactory (Myende & Maifala, 2020). Therefore, external development opportunities may not be sufficient or relevant to what the school identified as areas needing improvement. As such, it requires leaning on experienced teachers and using their experiences to mentor novice teachers (Leithwood et al., 2006). In addition, other forms of relationships could be formed outside of mentoring. For instance, collaborative peer learning among teachers could involve pairing an experienced teacher with a novice to learn from each other. Experienced teachers may learn from the novice strategies of using technology in the classroom (which many experienced teachers in rurality struggle with) while the novice could learn the strategies for managing a large classroom size. This way, the professional learning community guided by transformational leadership, is achieved and teaching and learning enhanced.

### **2.3.6 Protecting Instructional Time and Modelling High Expectations**

Informed by instructional leadership theory, I see instructional leadership as involving instructional leaders who work hard to ensure that all teachers are in their classrooms teaching and learners in their classroom learning at all times every day (Hallinger, 2018; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). As argued in Chapter One, in the context of South Africa, loss of instructional time that is beyond the control of the instructional leaders includes union meetings and protest action by teachers. For instance, according to Wills (2014), in 2007, South African teachers went on strike for 11 days on average. While these strikes are beyond the control of the school management and instructional leaders, they can be mitigated by limiting within the school, interruptions that the SMT has control over. By ensuring that learners are in class learning and using lesson observations and other means of supervision and monitoring, instructional leaders can protect both the quality and quantity of instructional time. This is especially necessary in this context where learner underperformance is already a challenge.

Informed by transformational leadership, SMT members must be role models of behaviour, leading the way to others in their organisation of the best behaviours that align with organisational goals (Litz & Scott, 2017). In the rural context where the problems include high absenteeism by teachers, lack of teacher motivation and underperformance (Mashaba & Maile, 2018), instructional leaders must uphold high expectations for themselves and others to overcome these challenges. This includes taking pride in one's work to inspire others, being respectful to all stakeholders, being punctual to model punctuality to teachers and learners as well as taking part in activities that positively align with the goals of the school. In this study, I wanted to understand how the SMT worked with teachers to protect instructional time and model high expectations of each other.

## 2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter aimed to review dominant theories in school leadership literature and develop a framework to use as a lens to answer the research questions. I began with a review and critique thereof of the three most influential theories, transformational, instructional and distributed leadership. For instructional leadership which I drew largely from, I reviewed three popular models which are, Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Murphy (1990) and Weber (1996). Then, I reviewed one of the newest models of school leadership, leadership for learning (LfL) and its critiques. From these reviews and critiques, an analytical framework emerged. While I argue in favour of instructional leadership for effective schools in the rural context of South Africa, my position is that the challenges of rurality call for leadership that are influenced by more than one theory of school leadership. From this perspective and the literature reviewed, an analytical framework emerged informed largely by instructional leadership while also drawing from other theories. Six features of effective instructional leadership which emerged are 1) Defining and communicating goals; 2) Leading Teaching and Learning; 3) Creating a nurturing and supportive environment; 4) Partnering with parents, local community and other stakeholders; 5) Promoting and Supporting Teacher Professional Development and 6) Protecting instructional time and modelling high expectations.

The next chapter details the research design and methodology employed in this study to answer the research questions.

## CHAPTER THREE

# INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN RURAL CONTEXTS: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 3.1 Introduction

As presented in Chapter One, the host of challenges experienced in rural communities and schools in South Africa, make it difficult for learners in those schools to compete with peers in better-resourced schools. Linked to this, research has shown that instructional leaders have a direct involvement with teaching and learning and that the effectiveness of their roles is vital to student learning (Hallinger, 2018; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Guided by this understanding, the aim of the inquiry reported in this thesis was to explore how members of the School Management Team (SMT) in a rural school in the Limpopo Province in South Africa understood and enacted their instructional leadership roles. The study sought to answer two research questions:

- 1) *How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school understand and perform their instructional leadership roles?*
- 2) *How does rurality influence the School Management Team's understandings and practices of their instructional leadership roles?*

In Chapter One I introduced the study and set out a path for the rest of the thesis. In Chapter Two I reviewed popular school leadership theories, instructional leadership, distributed leadership, transformational leadership, and Leadership for Learning (LfL).

Informed by the tenets of these theories and models, building on the importance of instructional leadership in schools in the context of rurality, an analytical framework that is true to the realities of schools in the rural context of South Africa emerged. The framework argues that for instructional leaders to be effective, taking into consideration the many challenges that they face in leading schools in rurality, SMT's instructional leadership must be characterised by six key features: 1) Defining and Communicating Goals; 2) Leading Teaching and Learning; 3) Creating a Nurturing and Supportive Environment; 4) Partnering with Parents, the Local Community, and Other Stakeholders; 5) Promoting and Supporting Teacher Professional Development and 6) Protecting Instructional Time and Modelling High Expectations (see Chapter Two). In this Chapter, I review relevant empirical literature on instructional leadership in rural and other resource-constrained contexts internationally.

### **3.2 From Educational Leadership and Management to Instructional Leadership**

The field of education leadership and management in research dates back to the 1960s in the United States of America (USA) when education reform scholars took a keen interest in the role of principals in making schools effective (Gurr, 2019; Mace-Matluck, 1987; Oplatka, 2017; Shava et al., 2021). Over the years, research has continued to suggest that school leaders play an important role in school effectiveness and student learning (Boyce & Browsers, 2017; Hallinger, 2005; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Horng & Loeb, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2020; Rosenholtz, 1985; Sammons, 1995) and to influence education policies and systems (Bush, 2007; Harris & Jones, 2015). However, understandings of what makes an effective school leader and what leadership roles are important has evolved significantly over time. Nguyen et al. (2017) posit that the role of the principal in the

1960s was that of a "bureaucratic executive" (p. 3) with a top-down management approach and decision-making (Lunenburg & Irby, 2014). Gurr (2019) on the other hand, argues that education administration research of the 1960s held an "unsophisticated view" (p.83) about school leadership. These include largely considering it the role of a manager in addition to also believing that the principal had the sole responsibility of ensuring school success. Moreover, the role of the principal in the literature emerging at that time and practice was largely managerial rather than of a leader. For instance, the Wallace Foundation (2013) asserts that: "*Traditionally, the principal resembled the middle manager suggested in William Whyte's 1950's classic, The Organization Man – an overseer of buses, boilers and books*" (p.6).

Central to the management roles of school principals was managing behaviours and tasks with the belief that if those were managed well, the role players would achieve organisational goals (Bush 2007). Leithwood et al. (2006) argue that the difference between management and leadership is that leadership is concerned with school improvement through direction and influence, while management is largely concerned with keeping things stable within the organisation. Similarly, Bush (2007) contends that leadership is the influence of role players through directing their activities and objectives to fulfil organisational goals. This he argues, sets leadership apart from the managerial role of managing behaviours and actions. It was in the late 1970s and early 1980s that the literature from education management and leadership studies shifted focus to view the school principal as a leader rather than as a manager (see Murphy et al., 2015). Harris et al. (2003) argue that it was from a greater interest in the field of education leadership and management that a broader understanding of what makes schools work emerged. The 1980s, which are considered the conception of the effective school movement (Lezotte, 2001; Hallinger, 2003; Murphy et al.,

2015), was also the time in which leadership models started to take shape with models such as transformational leadership and instructional leadership.

Gumus et al. (2018) suggest that while these models became popular in the 1980s, they emerged as themes found in studies conducted in the 1960s and 1970s which led to the understanding that if school leaders are to be effective, they needed to have more focus on teaching and learning and become leaders rather than managers. Transformational leadership is attributed to James Burns (1978) whose book entitled "Leadership" was focused on general leadership rather than educational leadership. Later work by scholars such as Bass (1985) adapted the model to fit education leadership. However, it was in the 1990s with the work of scholars such as Kenneth Leithwood and his colleagues that the school leadership model gained popularity (Hallinger, 2003). Upon its adaptation to school leadership literature, transformational leadership was considered a radical step away from traditional leadership practices that were characterised by dictating to subordinates to a more democratic, inspirational type of leadership (Conger, 1991; Hallinger, 2003).

As indicated in Chapter Two, the driving ideology behind transformational leadership is the understanding that school leaders can inspire others within the organisation to achieve organisational goals through collaboration and professional development among other aspects (Leithwood et al., 2004; Li & Liu, 2022; Printy et al., 2009). The other popular model of school leadership from that time, instructional leadership, also emerged out of the need at the time to challenge the managerial perceptions of the role of school principals (Gurr, 2019; Lunenburg &

Irby, 2014). However, as indicated, in the 1980s, instructional leadership conceptual frameworks and studies focused on the school principal, often neglecting the roles of middle managers (Fullan, 2001; Muijs & Harris, 2003). This led to the emergence of distributed leadership models in the 1990s, forcing scholars to rethink their understanding of instructional leadership. Since then, as established in Chapter Two, many models of school leadership, including those of instructional leadership, have been proposed. Harris and Jones (2015) suggest that at no time in the history of education leadership and management research has one model of school leadership been suitable for all contexts. Furthermore, as argued in this study, given the multitude of challenges faced by school leaders in rural schools in South Africa; to be effective, school leaders are encouraged to work as instructional leaders, prioritising teaching and learning.

### **3.3 Instructional Leadership in Resource-Constrained Contexts**

While poverty in South Africa disproportionately affects rural and township communities, in other countries high levels of poverty that stem from communities and affect schools are often found in diverse areas including outside of rural areas. For example, in the context of the USA, there are high levels of poverty reported in urban, inner cities communities (Kneebone, 2014; Lung-Amam et al., 2022). As such, the schools in these communities experience challenges which include a lack of resources, low academic achievement, and overcrowding (Gehrke, 2005; Huisman et al., 2010).

In countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada in which, as is the case in South Africa, settlers and Indigenous people have coexisted for centuries, poverty is often concentrated in Indigenous communities (Cooke et al., 2007; Cornell, 2005). Furthermore, most of the populations in these communities live in remote areas. In Australia, for example, although Indigenous people make up a small minority at less than three percent of the population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016), they represent a large majority of people living in remote and very remote areas (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015). On the contrary, the majority of other groups in that country are concentrated in cities. These trends are similar in New Zealand where despite most of the country's population living in urban areas, Indigenous populations made up the majority of those living in rural and remote areas (Statistics New Zealand, 2018).

In Canada, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2019) estimates that over sixty percent of the Indigenous population lives in rural or remote areas. Some of the challenges experienced by such communities in the three countries include marginalisation (Andrae et al., 2017; Biddle, 2014) lack of quality education (Mendelson, 2008; Schwab, 2012), poor health and comorbidities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015; McLachlan et al., 2013; Naylor et al., 2010) and high rates of poverty (Adelson, 2005; Robin et al., 2022). Scholars who have written on these countries collectively and singularly agree that because of these obstacles, learners in these communities have often experienced low academic achievement and dropout rates at significantly higher rates than their non-Indigenous counterparts (Harper & Thompson, 2017; Jorgensen & Niesche, 2011). The findings from studies in such contexts point to a significant positive correlation between instructional leadership and effectiveness and learner achievement. Examples are discussed in the sections below.

### **3.3.1 Instructional Leadership in Resource-Constrained Schools in the USA**

Research in the USA has suggested that the multifaceted challenges faced by urban schools (e.g., in the New York City school district) were attributable to "[c]omplex and dysfunctional bureaucracies, lack of human and material resources, and diverse learner populations" (Durden 2008, p.4). Based on these challenges, scholars such as Durden have concluded that "[g]ood leaders" (2008, p.7) are vital if such schools are to emerge out of those challenges and learners are to thrive. To illustrate, several studies have shown a strong link between challenging contexts and leadership practices that favour instructional leadership. For example, a study by Klar and Brewer (2013) aimed to investigate effective leadership in high-needs schools in the southeast of the USA. To generate data, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews with school principals, parents, teachers and non-teaching staff of three schools. Their findings pointed towards instructional leadership functions such as setting goals, teacher development and managing the instructional program, as leading to the schools overcoming the challenges in their schools and attaining effectiveness. Similarly, a study by Cohen (2015) sought to explore leadership practices of high-performing schools in high-poverty areas in the state of Maryland. The author included various contexts including inner city schools and used a mixed-method design with 25 principals. The findings suggest that of the 25 principals who participated in the study, those who were effective and led high-performing schools prioritised teacher professional development (TPD) in addition to other instructional leadership practices (Cohen, 2015).

A third study was conducted by Leahy and Shore (2019) to understand leadership practices that led some high-poverty charter schools overcoming their previous underperformance and flourishing. The authors describe charter schools as autonomous public schools that have the freedom to be innovative. To collect data, the authors sampled two high-poverty charter schools which when they gained their charter school status 25 years prior, had been underperforming but over time and with effective leadership, had been turned around. Through purposive sampling, two principals were selected to participate in the study. The criteria that they had to meet included leading schools in impoverished metropolitan areas, having been with the school when it first became a charter school (one in 1993 and the other in 1999) and having the school identified as successful through school rankings in that state as well as steady growth in learner performance over the years. The findings revealed that principals in these high-poverty charter schools, principals identified instructional leadership roles such as establishing and communicating a clear vision, distributing leadership to teachers and working with other stakeholders, as important to their successes as school leaders. The findings from these studies in high-poverty, inner city schools in the USA indicate that instructional leadership practices are vital to educational improvements in resource-constrained contexts in that country.

### **3.3.2 Instructional Leadership in Schools Serving Indigenous Populations in Canada**

The initiation of Indigenous communities to Western education in Canada began violently in the 1800s with children being removed from their parents to be educated in boarding schools whose mission was colonisation and Christian indoctrination (Battiste & Henderson, 2018). According to

Neu (2000), such children were often sexually and physically abused and at times placed in boarding facilities too far away from their homes. Further, the author states that some of the children would not be permitted to go home during holidays and would be boarded with settler families to work, rather than being allowed to visit their homes. The consequences of generations of forced assimilation have led to psychological trauma in many Indigenous communities which Haskell and Randall (2009), attribute to a vicious cycle of social and psychological dysfunction in those communities today. For instance, on the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools (as the project was called), Jung (2009) writes:

[T]he children and other family members of Residential School survivors suffer the continuing effects of their parents' experience in the schools. They also suffer because parents have been unable to transmit their language, culture, and moral framework to their children. It is to some extent the children of residential school survivors who have inherited the real long-term impact of the schools—the loss of culture and language, substance abuse, and family violence (p.10).

The effects of this legacy on schooling and the roles of instructional leaders include learners and their communities having a negative attitude towards Western education, thus making it difficult for school leaders to forge partnerships with those communities (Crooks et al., 2015; Neeganagwedgin, 2011). Moreover, many researchers agree that for Indigenous communities, the education system in Canada remains Eurocentric in nature (Battiste & Henderson, 2018; Neeganagwedgin, 2011). In addition, Indigenous children's education does not receive adequate funding or attention, thus continuing the marginalisation, even though the last residential schools were closed in the 1990s (MacIver, 2012).

In 2008, Blakesley argued that research on school leadership in Indigenous communities in Canada was severely under-researched. Blakesley (2008)'s assertion seems to remain true as there were not many studies that I could identify on school leadership in Indigenous communities in that country. However, the few available studies point to instructional leadership as vital to school effectiveness in this challenging context. For example, an inquiry carried out by Preston et al. (2018) sought to understand the practices of principals in schools serving Indigenous communities. The authors generated data through semi-structured interviews with 17 principals working in schools serving Indigenous communities in three provinces in Canada. The findings suggested that to achieve effectiveness in their schools, principals employed instructional leadership practices which included high visibility around the school and communication of objectives to stakeholders. Principals in these schools viewed informal interactions with learners through sports and other activities as important to their leadership. In addition, principals also valued involving parents and the school community through meetings and fostering school and community partnerships. These practices were found to be pivotal in how the schools gained support from the school communities and succeeded (Preston et al., 2018).

Other studies conducted on Indigenous learners, teachers and parents in different provinces in Canada point to two crucial elements that influence learner success: parent involvement and curriculum and instruction that are culturally appropriate and relevant. For example, a study by MacIver (2012) aimed to understand factors that influence Indigenous learners to complete high school and found that cultural relevance was a major factor for many learners. The author conducted qualitative interviews with ten adolescents who had previously dropped out of school but had re-enrolled at the time of the study. The participants were receiving holistic programming

designed to teach them social skills for a period of a year to two years before being reunited with their families and communities. In the study, MacIver (2012) found six themes which Indigenous learners regarded as important if they were to stay in school. These included curriculum and instruction that was influenced by their culture and teaching that they enjoyed. Thus, MacIver (2012) concluded that there was a need for schools catering for Indigenous learners to “develop a culturally affirming learning environment which profiles Aboriginal cultural values, curricula, and activities” (MacIver, 2012, p.158). Because instructional leaders prioritise instruction and lead the instructional programme, their roles are vital in making decisions about the type of school curriculum developed to fit the unique needs of the school community. This scholarship indicates the necessity of instructional leadership in such a context.

Similarly, in another study which aimed to understand factors that influence Indigenous learners’ success in school, Whitley (2014) conducted focus group discussions with ten elementary school learners who identified as Indigenous from two schools. The learners cited their interactions with the curriculum and instruction as a major influencing factor in their successes and failures. Further, the learners valued curricula and instruction relevant to their interests and culture. For example, one learner expressed dismay at having to learn French as a second language rather than his native language in school. The findings from teacher interviews in the same study also pointed to a curriculum that was culturally relevant as an important factor in learner success. Some teachers highlighted including the history and literature and other elements of the learners’ culture as important in enhancing their sense of identity and influencing how they do in school. The findings from these studies point to the importance of engaging culturally relevant curricular as an

instructional leadership strategy to keep Indigenous learners in school and improve their chances of success.

### **3.3.3 Instructional Leadership in Schools Serving Indigenous Communities in Australia**

In Australia, the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners is well documented (Ford, 2013; Riley & Webster, 2016; Trimmer et al., 2021). For instance, Ford's (2013) research focused on comparing National Minimum Standards (NMS) benchmark records in reading, writing and Mathematics for two groups in Year 3 and Year 9 in 2009. The study used records from New South Wales (NSW) and the Northern Territory (NT) and found significant gaps in the three subjects. The findings showed that in NT where many Indigenous learners lived in remote areas, the gap was even wider. For example, in NT Year 3 non-Indigenous students meeting the NMS for reading were at 89.9% while Indigenous students were at 39.9%, showing a 50 points difference. In addition, the findings also indicated that by Year 9, the gap was even wider in both NSW and NT, in NT there was a 58-point difference in reading. Ford (2013) thus concluded that:

“[T]he longer an Indigenous student remains at school there is an increasing likelihood of doing worse in terms of educational achievement compared to non-Indigenous students” (p.92).

However, unlike challenges in other contexts reviewed in this chapter which often include poverty in the communities which affect the availability of resources in schools, schools serving Indigenous populations in Australia often have an abundance of resources (Gurr et al., 2014).

Instead, the challenges experienced by Indigenous communities in the pursuit of quality education include marginalisation in education policies and decision-making as well as a focus on deficit discourses when seeking to understand the causes of low academic achievement by Indigenous children (Hogarth, 2018; Sarra et al., 2018; Shay, 2016). For instance, Shay (2016) asserts that:

Schools as institutions in Australia continue to uphold a national identity that ignores the brutality and dispossession of Indigenous peoples and constructs white Australians as the social norm. Some overt support of this statement is reflected in the data that demonstrates the under-representation of Indigenous principals, teachers, support staff or politicians who influence education policy. (p.281).

Sarra et al. (2018) argue that students who are compelled to assimilate into the dominant culture in schools through policies that do not recognise their cultures, languages and traditions, lead to students understanding themselves as outsiders to that system, thus explaining the bleak learning and achievement outcomes in schools serving such communities. The authors also attribute this lack of understanding of Indigenous people's cultures to parents who, through past experiences, also see no value in the education provided in schools. As such, it makes it difficult for schools to collaborate with such parents (Sarra et al., 2018). This is similar to the context of South Africa in which, in the post-Apartheid education system, learners from previously marginalised groups are physically included in former white schools but instead of fully integrating their cultures, are largely expected to assimilate (Adonis & Silinda, 2021; Lumby & Heystek, 2012). Moreover, Hlalele (2019) argues that Indigenous knowledge systems are not appreciated in the South African education system and schools, therefore parents from those marginalised groups whose knowledge could benefit the school, is not utilised.

Scholars in the field of education management and leadership in Australia have taken an interest in understanding the connection between effective school leadership and improving attitudes to schooling and learning outcomes of Indigenous children. For instance, a study by Riley and Webster (2016) found that instructional leadership practices as well as collaborations with parents and community members were impactful in improving relations between families and schools, thus positively influencing student learning. Their inquiry aimed to understand the role that principals played in leading school reading programmes and how collaborating with community leaders in the Indigenous communities facilitated improved outcomes in learning. One school that had previously participated in a government programme titled '*Principals as Literacy Leaders with Indigenous Communities*' (PALLIC), was purposely sampled to participate and the principal and a community leader were used as units of analysis. As part of the PALLIC project, the school principals had to identify a community leader with whom to collaborate. The same community leader participated in the study. The findings suggested that the principal was intentional about working with the community leader to understand the Indigenous culture and the challenges and opportunities in the community in order to improve reading. This included understanding what cultural aspects to include in curricula and what to include in TPD so that teachers who were largely outsiders, had a better understanding of the community as well as developing plans for parental involvement among other initiatives. As indicated, the roles of promoting TPD and focusing on the curriculum to ensure that learners got the best out of it were important aspects of instructional leadership.

In addition, an inquiry conducted by Gurr et al. (2014) sought to understand leadership practices in two schools in different but challenging contexts. One was a small, Indigenous community

school in a remote area, while the second was a group of three schools formed as a project aimed at amalgamating and improving seven underperforming schools serving disadvantaged communities in the province of Victoria. For the second group, while each of the three campuses had a principal, there was also an executive principal for the three schools. Data generation with the first school was conducted through interviews with the principal while in the second group the campus principals, the executive principal and two other members of the SMT, were interviewed. The findings from this comparative inquiry suggest that while the context in which a leader functions determines what they can achieve in their leadership roles, some leadership practices are vital in improving teaching and learning in disadvantaged schools regardless of context. For instance, the inquiry found aspects of instructional leadership such as leading teaching and learning and the curriculum, promoting TPD and building a culture of high expectations formed an important part of the strategy by the leaders in turning their schools around. Thus, while only one of the two schools represents Indigenous communities, this study is evidence that instructional leadership is instrumental in school leaders' effectiveness in improving schools in Indigenous communities.

These findings are supported by the findings from Sarra et al. (2018) who sought to investigate the role that setting high expectations and building a supportive school culture would have in improving the academic performance of Indigenous learners in Australian schools. First, the researchers used an action research design to involve teachers in a programme aimed at developing their abilities to deal with challenging school contexts. Second, interviews were conducted with a sampled group of teachers from the action research. While the sample or sampling criteria is not included in the article, teacher perspectives indicated that improving their school cultures, an

important aspect of instructional leadership could be a crucial factor in improving learning outcomes of Indigenous learners. Factors that teachers regarded as important in changing the culture of the school included building trusting relationships with their students, changing the deficit discourse in which teachers view Indigenous learners and building collaboration between the school and the community. Thus, while this research study focused on teacher perspectives, with the literature reviewed in this thesis suggesting that school leaders play a key role in creating a positive learning climate and culture in their schools, these findings suggest that for Indigenous schools to overcome their challenges, effective instructional leadership is vital.

Lastly, a systemic review of the literature by Trimmer et al. (2021) sought to explore the role of school and community leadership on learner achievement in Indigenous populations throughout Australia. The findings revealed that school leaders had an important role to play in the success of Indigenous learners. Specifically, the authors found that principals who valued TPD and led the curriculum efficiently and ensured it was relevant to the cultural identities of the learners, made an impact on student learning. In addition, as other studies have shown, the ability to forge working relationships with communities was also found to be an important factor in that study. Thus, similar to findings from studies from Indigenous communities in Canada, the findings from these studies indicate that, in the context of Australia, instructional leadership and community involvement are important in mitigating the educational challenges experienced by Indigenous learners in schools.

### **3.3.4 Instructional Leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa have also found instructional leadership to improve teaching and learning in challenging contexts. In Ghana, for example, a study by Abonyi and Sofo (2021) which used Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model of instructional leadership as a framework, found a combination of effective and ineffective instructional leadership practices among school leaders who participated in the study. The authors used qualitative methodology and sampled seven schools in one rural district. Principals and deputy principals in each of the seven schools participated in the study through semi-structured interviews. The findings suggested that in the first dimension of the framework, defining and communicating the school mission, school leaders were effective in setting school goals and directing teachers' and learners' actions towards achieving such goals. In addition, the authors found that school leaders in each participating school had various measures in place to safeguard instructional time. The study also found that in the role of evaluating and supervising instruction, while school leaders evaluated lesson plans, they did not provide teachers with effective feedback that would lead to instructional improvement. Their evaluations only served a compliance role rather than an instructional leadership role. Moreover, in the role of monitoring student progress, Abonyi and Sofo's (2021) findings indicate that upon analysis of student performance, school leaders reported warning and threatening learners as a way of motivating them to improve learning rather than devising strategies to address underperformance. These findings suggest that one's understandings of their roles is influential to their ability to function in those roles. This is because while the school leaders in these schools strived for effectiveness, their shortcomings came in their lack of understanding of some of their instructional leadership roles. For instance, as Abonyi and Sofo (2021) argued, the school leaders could have sought to identify the problems that led to learner under-performance and work with

the teachers to develop solutions rather than punish learners. Linked to this, in Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) third dimension of instructional leadership, effective instructional leaders incentivise teachers and learners as a way of motivating and encouraging excellence. Both the teachers and instructional leaders in these schools seem to have sidestepped this dimension of leadership, leading to poor educational outcomes.

In another study in the same country, Gyamerah (2021) also used Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) framework of instructional leadership to explore the instructional leadership practices which enhance student learning. In this qualitative inquiry, the author sampled three schools, two from urban districts and a third in a rural district, to participate, with the logic that urban district schools generally outperform rural districts. The author hoped that the instructional leadership practices from urban schools could be used to improve practices in rural, underperforming schools. A total of 12 participants from the three schools, comprising principals, teachers and district officials, participated in the study through semi-structured interviews. In addition, Gyamerah (2021) employed the document analysis technique to review documents such as school improvement plans to understand school goals which support student learning. Among the findings, Gyamerah (2021) found that in schools with effective instructional leadership practices such as the promotion of TPD and setting clear goals, learner achievement was high while the opposite was true in schools which did not have these instructional leadership practices, the findings suggest that in contexts similar to the context in this study, instructional leadership is essential for schools to succeed.

Similarly, in Lesotho a study by Habi (2022), which aimed to investigate school leaders' understandings of their leadership in high-performing schools, found a positive correlation between instructional leadership and school effectiveness. The author used qualitative methodology to generate data from four high-performing rural primary schools. From each school, the participants included the principal and three teachers who participated through semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that the principals prioritised various important elements of instructional leadership such as guidance of teachers and providing direction and mentoring. Moreover, the principals also valued the involvement of stakeholders in the leadership of the school, an aspect of instructional leadership which, as I have argued in this study, is vital in the rural context.

In another study carried out in Lesotho, Shelile and Hlalele (2014) sought to examine the obstacles to continuous teacher professional development (CTPD). Ten primary school teachers and one assistant district inspector were sampled to participate, and data were generated using semi-structured, individual interviews and focus group discussions with the teachers. The findings indicated that while teacher challenges were not restricted to their immediate school environment or the roles of school leaders, the lack of effective instructional leadership was one of those challenges that teachers faced. The study also found that school leaders did not create a conducive environment for teachers to share lessons from their workshops with colleagues within the schools. Instead, school leaders would often deny teachers opportunities to collaborate on what they had learned in such workshops. These findings imply that despite teachers' best efforts to improve their skills, limitations will exist if school leaders are not supportive. This indicates that for teachers to be empowered and benefit from CTPD initiatives, school leaders must take on the instructional

leadership role of promoting and supporting such efforts. In the rural context of South Africa where teachers receive only a few opportunities for professional development from the Department of Basic Education (DBE), it is particularly vital that school leaders actively support and encourage internal TPD efforts (Roux & Sakala, 2020).

In Zimbabwe, Sengai (2021) carried out a study to investigate the instructional leadership roles of departmental heads (DHs) in the implementation of the History syllabi. Using the qualitative research design, Sengai (2021) purposely sampled five secondary schools within one district. The principal, History DH and one other teacher from each school participated in semi-structured interviews. The study found that the principals practised shared instructional leadership, in which the DHs were empowered to carry out roles such as observing teachers, setting targets for their departments and tracking student progress and other instructional leadership roles. As a result, the schools benefited from effective instructional leaders who were able to implement the curriculum effectively. As argued throughout this thesis, these findings also show that the collective roles of the SMT make for stronger instructional leadership. Therefore, it is important that principals recognise that to succeed in their roles as instructional leaders and positively influence teaching and learning, they cannot work in isolation. Rather, they need to collaborate with teachers and other instructional leaders.

In another study, also conducted in Zimbabwe, Sandada and Makamani (2016) aimed to quantitatively examine the influences of instructional leadership on school performance. The authors used a scale developed by Robinson et al. (2008) to design a questionnaire to which 83

teachers responded. The questionnaire items included the following instructional leadership roles: supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating and managing the curriculum, providing advice and support, promoting school improvement and TPD, visibility and achievement orientation. The findings indicated that teachers regarded instructional leadership practices to lead to effectiveness within their schools. These findings are significant because they show that in contexts similar to rural areas in South Africa, as it is the case in this study, teachers see value in the SMT performing their instructional leadership roles effectively. Because the SMT's roles influence how teachers perceive and perform their duties, in order to have a positive influence on teaching and learning, the SMTs must prioritise instructional leadership.

### **3.3.5 Instructional Leadership in South African Schools**

While I have argued that rurality and its challenges disproportionately disfavour learners in rural communities and leave them unable to compete with peers in other contexts, schools in other resource-constrained contexts such as townships and informal settlements often experience similar challenges.

#### **3.3.5.1 Instructional Leadership in Township Schools**

Townships in South Africa are underdeveloped, densely populated, urban areas outside cities. Some of the historical townships such as Soweto (the biggest township in South Africa) in the City of Johannesburg Municipality and Tembisa in Ekurhuleni Municipality, were established as part of segregation planning during Apartheid and designed for labourers to be close to cities (Booyens,

2010). Despite the Department of Housing (Republic of South Africa, 2004) plans to redress the problems faced by inhabitants of townships through various programmes, townships in South Africa continue to experience high unemployment rates, crime, poverty and other social ills (Chikoko et al., 2015; Mbambo & Agbola, 2020). These challenges are also mirrored in schools located in such communities. For instance, Song (2017) indicates that “[t]oday, schools in townships remain highly racially homogeneous and receive fewer resources compared to schools in more developed urban areas, which are primarily attended by white and more affluent students” (p.912).

Schools in these areas lack such vital teaching and learning resources as laboratories, libraries as well as adequately and appropriately trained teachers while parental involvement is also inadequate (Mestry, 2018). The absence of these vital learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) and support structures makes the working conditions poor for teachers and limits what they can achieve (Thaba-Nkadimene, 2020). For instance, they may not be able to teach learners to conduct scientific experiments or use various library resources to conduct research or enhance reading skills. A significant body of literature has shown that lack of important LTSM has a negative influence on teaching and learning and learner achievement (Kutu et al., 2020; Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019; Mtsi & Maphosa, 2016). In addition, because of inadequate parental involvement, schools work without enough support to deal with other challenges emanating from the context (Maifala, 2017). For example, while the literature suggests that harnessing resources from the community is important in schools in resource-constrained contexts (Bhengu & Svosve, 2019; Myende & Maifala, 2020), the successes of such endeavours require the involvement of parents as the people who understand the resources in their communities better.

A study by Maponya (2015), conducted in poorly resourced township schools in Tshwane found that lack of infrastructure hinders instructional leadership roles. The mixed methods design study had two data generation phases which began with purposively sampling 60 primary school principals working in one district of Tshwane to participate in questionnaires about their instructional leadership practices. The first phase also included inviting all fifteen Institutional Development and Support Officials (IDSOs) to participate in questionnaires. In the second phase, using data from the first 60 principal respondents, Maponya (2015) selected five principals from schools classified as underperforming and five classified as high-performing schools to participate in in-depth interviews. In addition, five IDSOs were sampled from the 15 using a systematic sampling method. The findings suggested that principals perceive the poor infrastructure and limited resources in their schools to hinder their instructional leadership roles of creating a conducive teaching and learning environment. This was the case even in high-performing schools in which the participants felt the lack of libraries, laboratories and sports facilities and equipment hindered some of their progress.

Scholarship on the role of school leadership in the improvement of schools in such circumstances suggests a positive relationship between effective instructional leadership and improved learning outcomes. For instance, Chikoko et al. (2015) conducted a study seeking to understand the leadership practices that lead to effective schools in five township schools in Umlazi, outside the city of Durban. The authors started by sampling one school principal to participate based on identifying that the school's Grade 12 examination results had been excellent repeatedly for five consecutive years. Then, to identify the other four schools, they used snowball sampling in which each participating principal informed them of another school with similar performance in the same

area. The schools had similar socioeconomic challenges such as high unemployment among parents and poverty in the school communities. While all five were fee-paying schools, the annual school fees were minimal, ranging from R250 to R500 (13.16 to 26.31 United States Dollars in September 2023).

The findings revealed effective instructional leadership roles among the SMT such as commitment to TPD, conducting classroom visits and providing teachers with valuable feedback. In addition, SMT members also valued collaboration as principals entrusted DHs, as subject specialists, to conduct the classroom visits while also holding them accountable to ensure that they did not slack in their roles. Furthermore, the findings also suggested that another vital instructional leadership role practised in these schools was high visibility of the principals in which, instead of being office-bound, principals were actively involved in various formal and informal interactions with teachers and learners. This is because the authors noted that while most principals in South African schools are often accused of not spending enough time in the school (as they attend meetings in districts and carry out other management tasks), these principals spent a significant length of time in the school. The principals understood this role as having a positive influence on teachers and learners. Moreover, the findings from the study also suggested that school-community partnerships contributed to the success of the school as the principals collaborated with organisations such as universities and religious organisations to mitigate the challenges of limited resources in the schools.

Similarly, in the context of Soweto, Mbokazi (2015) conducted a study to explore leadership factors that make some high schools in that township effective despite their challenges. The researcher used purposive sampling to select three high-performing schools in Soweto, measured by consistently performing in the highest 10 percent in the Grade 12 national examinations among other high schools in the township. The participants in each school were made up of SMT members and data was generated through semi-structured interviews.

The findings revealed various instructional leadership practices including setting clear goals, TPD, high expectations and prioritising the management of teaching and learning. The participants attributed these instructional leadership roles to the successes of their schools. As such, Mbokazi (2015) concluded that effective instructional leadership was vital to school success in resource-constrained contexts such as townships. The lack of proper instructional leadership in schools in township contexts has also been found to lead to ineffectiveness in teaching and learning. For instance, Tsakeni et al. (2020) conducted a study in two township schools in Soshanguve outside the City of Tshwane, to understand how school leaders in two schools with differing instructional leadership practices make sense of their instructional leadership roles. The authors relied on district officials to identify a school with effective instructional leadership and another with ineffective instructional leadership. Using their management tools, district officials identified schools in the two categories and two were sampled to take part in the research study. The participants were made up of SMT members in each school as well as two teachers, making up ten participants in total. The study found that in the school understood to have effective instructional leadership, teachers had a more positive attitude to TPD initiatives while teachers in the ineffective school had a negative perception of such efforts and did not regard them as useful to their teaching. In addition,

SMT participants in the ineffective schools also described teacher absenteeism and failure to teach lessons as some of the challenges in their schools. Conversely, the effective school emphasised enhancing time spent on learning as part of their instructional leadership roles in the school. Other differences between the schools included the lack of classroom visits by SMT members in the ineffective school while in the other school, classroom visits were regarded as important to the practices of the SMT. These polarised realities of two schools with a similar socioeconomic status and serving similar communities are indicative that although context can negatively affect instructional leadership, the determination of school leaders and their understanding of their instructional leadership roles, are instrumental to the success of schools in such contexts.

In another inquiry seeking to understand the role of the SMT's instructional leadership on learner achievement in Grade 12 examinations, Mestry (2018) compared instructional leadership between high-performing affluent schools and low-performing township schools in the Ekurhuleni Municipality in Gauteng province. Using the national Grade 12 results, Mestry (2018) sampled three underperforming schools (under 50% pass rate) and three high-performing schools (over 90% pass rate) and had principals, deputy principals and one DH in each of the six schools participate in semi-structured interviews. The study found that in underperforming schools, instructional leadership roles were neglected in favour of managerial tasks. In addition, the findings suggested that members of the SMT in low-performing schools were not adequately involved in curriculum matters including conducting classroom visits and providing teachers with important feedback. While in the effective schools, the instructional leadership roles were included in the daily practices of the SMT. Thus, Mestry (2018) concluded that effective instructional leadership had a causal effect on achievement levels in Grade 12 final examinations.

These findings of studies conducted in townships in various municipalities in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces indicate that in resource-constrained contexts such as townships throughout South Africa, effective instructional leadership practices are important in leading schools to overcome their challenges.

### **3.3.5.2 Instructional Leadership in South African Rural Schools**

Teaching and leading schools in rural contexts in South Africa presents challenges that have been well documented in research (see, for example, du Plessis, 2014; Myende & Maifala, 2020). As Balfour et al. (2008) state, the challenges of rurality in South Africa include those stemming from households and the community. For example, rural communities suffer from poor infrastructure, scarcity of basic resources, high HIV and AIDS rates and poor service delivery (Mestry & du Plessis, 2019; Moletsane, et al., 2015). These, in turn, affect schools directly or indirectly. In schools, the challenges include lack of resources required for 21st-century schools, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate support from the DBE and lack of security which leaves schools vulnerable to criminal activities (du Plessis, 2014; Maifala, 2017). These challenges make it difficult for SMTs to perform their roles as instructional leaders (See Chapter One).

Despite these challenges, scholarship on effective school leadership in the rural context indicates that instructional leadership practices can lead to improved learning outcomes. For instance, a study by Shava and Ndebele (2016) which aimed to understand how leadership influenced learner

achievement in high-performing rural schools, suggested that effective instructional leadership practices were fundamental to success in such schools. Using purposive sampling, the authors used information from district officials and Grade 12 national examination results over a five-year period to select six schools in one district to participate. Within these schools, a principal and two teachers participated in semi-structured interviews to get their perspectives on how principals influenced teaching and learning positively. The findings suggested various elements of instructional leadership by principals, including creating a supportive and conducive climate for teachers and learners, promoting teacher development, observing lessons, providing feedback and providing teachers with appropriate LTSM. Suggesting therefore that instructional leadership practices support student learning and achievement.

In their study, Mkhize and Bhengu, (2015) sought to investigate the leadership practices of school leaders in successful rural schools in the KwaZulu Natal province. The study focused on a single case and included the principal, one DH and a teacher as units of analysis. The interviews conducted with each participant revealed that the instructional leadership practices of the principal included defining and communicating the vision effectively to stakeholders, being committed to building high standards of teaching and learning and fostering TPD. In addition, effective instructional leaders led the allocation of resources and communicated the importance of proper allocation, protected instructional time, monitored assessment and ensured that assessment data was used to improve instruction and learning.

Similar studies conducted in the Limpopo Province, where the study reported in this thesis was conducted, while few, have also suggested that effective instructional leadership can positively influence student learning. For example, in a study on factors that influence effective leadership in the rural context, du Plessis (2017) found that effective principals in five rural schools in the Lephalale district exhibited various instructional leadership traits. The author sampled five schools in the district based on the criteria of improved learner achievement in Grade 12 national results over a period of five years. Each of the five principals participated in in-depth interviews in addition to an interview with one teacher and a member of the school governing body (SGB) in each school. The characteristics of instructional leadership found in these schools included providing teacher incentives, supporting professional development, coordinating curriculum with teachers, communicating openly and using learner assessment data to inform future practice and decisions.

While proper instructional leadership has been shown to improve teaching and learning, ineffective leadership has been shown to inhibit school effectiveness. For instance, a study conducted in the Limpopo province by Mohale et al. (2020) which aimed to investigate the perceptions of school leaders in building a culture of excellence in schools found various dysfunctional practices that hindered the curriculum implementation. In the ineffective schools, the leadership practices included not having a clear mission and vision for the school and a lack of the right tools to carry out class observations. Mohale et al. (2020) concluded that one of the factors which could be attributed to poor academic performance in the four schools could be lack of instructional leadership.

Mathunyane (2013) carried out a study on the instructional leadership behaviours of principals in the Limpopo province. Using purposive sampling, the researcher selected two school principals to participate in the study. Data was generated through in-depth interviews with each of the principals, observations and document analysis. The findings from the inquiry revealed various practices in the schools which were reported as chaotic, such as classroom observations that created confusion and resentment between teachers and principals as schedules and intentions were not properly discussed. Further, the findings suggested that the principal did not clearly communicate the mission and vision of the school which led to stakeholders not understanding those well. In addition, the author also found that SMT members did not agree or had divergent views about who was responsible for providing TPD opportunities for teachers.

The discussion above suggests that, similar to other contexts, South African scholarship on instructional leadership indicates that effective instructional leadership is essential to effective teaching and learning in the country's schools. However, in rural schools, the challenges of rurality make effective instructional leadership difficult. However, available literature is silent on how instructional leaders, in particular the SMT in rural schools understand and enact their roles, and how rurality influences their understandings and enactment of their roles. The study analysed in this thesis aimed to contribute to addressing this research gap.

### 3.4 Discussion

The literature on instructional leadership in different parts of the world, as reviewed in this chapter, demonstrates that instructional leadership is central to school effectiveness in this part of the 21st century. For example, in North America, the findings from studies focusing on resource-constrained schools in the USA revealed that school leaders who overcame the challenges of their schools and led their schools to thrive prioritised leading teaching and learning (Cohen, 2015; Klar & Brewer, 2013). While in Canada findings from schools in Indigenous communities showed that learners who had dropped out of school preferred curricula that were relevant to their traditions and what was held as important in their communities (Whitley, 2014). This indicates that instructional leaders who prioritised leading the curriculum implementation and considered learning needs of the communities they serve, could be one of the solutions to the high dropout rates in such communities. Also in the Canadian Indigenous context, other research pointed to instructional leadership practices such as high visibility and interactions with learners and their parents as enhancing school learning outcomes (Preston et al., 2018). In Australian Indigenous populations, the findings from the literature review confirm that instructional leadership is vital for school successes in resource-constrained contexts. The instructional leadership practices which lead to school success in the Australian context included leading TPD programmes to train teachers on the cultures of the Indigenous children they teach, leading the curriculum and adapting it to have relevance to the cultures of Indigenous children as well as building strong school-community ties.

In Sub-Saharan African contexts such as Ghana, Zimbabwe and Lesotho, successful schools were also found to have leaders that prioritise instructional leadership roles such as setting a clear direction and promoting TPD (Gyamerah, 2021; Habi, 2022; Sandada & Makamani, 2016). This review also showed that in schools where the instructional leadership was not strong, it can have negative consequences for teaching and learning. This includes studies such as Shelile and Hlalele (2014) in Lesotho and Abonyi and Sofo (2021) in Ghana which suggest that when school leaders do not have a clear understanding of their instructional leadership roles such as providing incentives for learning and promoting TPD, teaching and learning is negatively affected. Furthermore, evidence from the South African schools in resource-constrained contexts such as in townships and rural areas suggests that for such schools to overcome their contextual obstacles, effective instructional leadership is pivotal. This includes instructional leadership practices like defining the school missions, promoting TPD and incentivising teachers.

While the literature reviewed in this thesis is not exhaustive, it is illustrative of the trends in scholarship on instructional leadership in resource-constrained contexts internationally. What remains unknown from these trends in the literature is the collective role understanding and the role enactment among the school's instructional leadership team, in this case, the school management team (SMT) members (the principals, deputy principal(s), and Heads of Departments). Specifically, how members of the SMT in a rural school understand and enact their instructional leadership roles and how rurality influences their understanding and performance remains understudied. By addressing this gap, this inquiry will add to a better understanding of effective instructional leadership in South African rural schools and contribute information for the

design of training and support programmes for SMTs working in rural and similar contexts in South Africa and similar contexts.

### **3.5 Chapter Summary**

I began this chapter by outlining the history of education leadership and management research which began in the 1960s and how it evolved in addition to also discussing the gap that instructional leadership as a model of school leadership sought to address. Moreover, this chapter reviewed the literature on effective instructional leadership in challenging contexts in different parts of the world, including the USA, Canada, Australia and some African contexts. In addition, I reviewed literature on school effectiveness and effective instructional leadership practices in resource-constrained contexts of South Africa, including rural and township contexts. From this review of the literature, I have identified a gap on how school management teams working in rural school contexts understand and enact their instructional leadership roles. Further, what is also missing from the literature is the influence of rurality on such understandings and practices. Thus, this study hopes to contribute towards addressing this gap and developing a better understanding of the instructional leadership roles of SMTs that would help in designing effective training and support programmes and hopefully improve teaching and learning and learner outcomes in rural schools.

The next chapter focuses on the research design and methodology used to generate data in this study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

As discussed in previous chapters, the research questions driving this study were: 1) *How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school understand and perform their instructional leadership roles?* And 2) *How does rurality influence the School Management Team's understandings and practices of their instructional leadership roles?* Chapter Two reviewed local and international literature on instructional leadership. The objective of this chapter is to describe, discuss and reflect on the research design and methodology used in the study. The chapter begins with a description of the location of the study. It then discusses the philosophical assumptions held about the nature of the phenomenon being studied and discusses the methodological decisions that I made regarding data generation, analysis and measures for ensuring trustworthiness of the findings. This is followed by a a discussion on the interpretive paradigm in which the study is located and explaining the decision. The next section describes and reflects on the research design, the methods of data generation and analysis and measures of ensuring trustworthiness of the findings. I end the chapter with a reflection on the ethical considerations that emerged during and after the research process, and the limitations of the study, and the strategies I adopted to address them.

## **4.2 Location of the Study**

The school in which the study was conducted, Crocodile High School (pseudonym), is situated in a village in the Polokwane Local Municipality area of Moletsi (or Moletjie). The village in which the school is located lies about 25 kilometres southeast of the capital city of Limpopo, Polokwane. Most of the inhabitants of Moletsi are poor as many are unemployed and live below the food poverty line, earning an average of five hundred and sixty-one rand (R561) per person per month from the Child Support Grant (Statistics South Africa, 2019). Some families rely on various government social grants for pensioners to survive. Because illiteracy and lack of education are also problems for many inhabitants, employment and/or income generation opportunities are limited. Of those who are employed, many work as gardeners and domestic workers in town and the nearby township of Seshego. Others work on the nearby farms where some are paid less than the National Minimum Wage of R21, 69 per hour. This not only results in poverty, but it has also led to high levels of migration to urban areas in pursuit of employment opportunities. The migration patterns are such that it is mostly the youth and middle-aged inhabitants migrating while those of school going age and the elderly stay behind. This means that young children are raised by grandparents, many of whom have little or no education.

To further illustrate the poverty of many in these villagers, a considerable number have also been beneficiaries of free housing under the Reconstruction Development Program (RDP) of the National Development of Human Settlements, (RSA,1997) while others remain hopeful to receive such assistance. Other challenges include lack of transport infrastructure, including functional roads, and water and sanitation. For example, most villagers use pit toilets and have no access to clean water in their homes. Their water sources differ from village to village; in some, there are

shared water pipes which supply water at central points within a village. In villages without consistent supply of water, the municipality provides rationed water per family water once a week which the villagers have to collect from a central location. Despite these challenges and considering the location of the village in which the study was conducted and the resources available in proximity, this village fares better compared to many in its vicinity. This is because it is centrally located and within walking distance from the homestead of the Chief of Moletsi, Kgoshi Kgabo Moloto III. This also puts the village close to the tarred road and public transport. In addition, there is also a clinic and a satellite police station less than three kilometres away from the school. Having a clinic nearby in Moletsi is regarded highly as clinics are few and far between and many villages share the services of one clinic. Conversely, even though this village may reap some benefits from the highlighted advantages, there is no evidence that these have made their lives significantly better than the inhabitants of other villages in Moletsi. Instead, people have the same struggles with water, sanitation, lack of proper housing, unemployment, and others.

Some of the influences of the rurality include the fact that many parents are unable to contribute school fees as Crocodile High School is classified as a Quintile three school in terms of the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSFF)(RSA, 2012) (the quintile system is explained in detail in Chapter 1 of this study). Being right in the middle of the quintile system, the school is not regarded as the poorest in terms of the physical infrastructure and other resources, including those which are available in the school community. However, it means that it is also not the most resourced and falls short when compared with quintiles 4 and 5 schools. In accordance with the NNSFF (RSA, 2012) it is a non-fee-paying school and receives the same amount of funding from the government as the schools in Quintiles 1 and 2. However, despite the government

allocating more funding to schools in lower quintile categories, the amount per year is less than the monthly school fees per child in some Quintiles 4 and 5 schools. Thus, government funding, while necessary for alleviating the burden of paying school fees by parents, does not lead to equality as envisaged. Secondly, because of the high rates of unemployment and dependency on government assistance, parents are unable to provide the additional resources, including books, electronic devices and other resources required in the schools to supplement the government subsidy.

Another major challenge that affects the functioning of schools in the areas of Moletsi is inadequate parent involvement (Maifala, 2017). This is attributed to a variety of factors which include parents migrating for employment (as discussed above). This migration often causes parents to leave older children to care for younger siblings or leaving them in the care of uneducated grandparents, which contributes to their reluctance or inability to contribute to their children's learning.

As a school, Crocodile High School caters for learners from Grade 8 to Grade 12 levels. During the initial field work conducted in December 2019, there were 1183 learners distributed in 21 classrooms. The school employed 41 teachers, including the 7 members of the SMT. The biggest challenge evident in these figures was lack of adequate classrooms. If divided evenly, this would mean 56 learners per classroom (an average teacher: learner ratio of 1:56). These challenges meant that classrooms were cramped and made it difficult for teachers to provide quality instruction, manage learner behaviour, assess properly and give feedback among others. Members of the SMT

also found the lack of adequate classrooms and high learner ratio a challenge in how they perform their duties as instructional leaders. To accommodate these challenges, teachers resorted to easing or lowering expectations on how they conducted assessment and learner feedback.

In terms of infrastructure, the school had no library during my period of data generation. There was a book storage room which carried both current and out-dated textbooks. There was also a room reserved to be used as a computer laboratory, but which did not have any computers and was repurposed as a second staffroom. Unlike other schools in the area, Crocodile High School had two flushing toilets in the administration block which were used by staff. However, the learners used pit toilets which were located in a far corner of the school yard. Lack of sanitation, especially clean toilets has been identified as a key factor in discouraging newly qualified teachers from taking up positions in rural areas (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Khumalo & Mji, 2014; Marais, 2016).

In late 2020 when I conducted the second half of the field work, the class sizes and teacher populations were not significantly different. What had changed was that the provincial DBE had provided five mobile classrooms which were used to accommodate Grade 12 learners in the context of COVID-19 safety protocols. However, these classrooms were provided without furniture. This meant that the problem of overcrowding was not resolved, as furniture was moved from some classrooms to be used in the mobile classrooms, leaving the former empty. However, because this was during the time when the DBE had resolved for learners in government schools to attend school on alternate days to allow for social distancing, overcrowding could not be immediately observed. Grade 12 learners attended school as usual and made use of the mobile

classrooms while the lower grades had enough classrooms available on the days that they were at school. The four classrooms whose furniture was used in the mobile classrooms served other purposes in the school. These purposes included the staffroom for four members of the SMT (DHs) who previously used the general staffroom; the storage for feeding scheme items; and the work room for the teaching assistants. Because of these changes, the challenges caused by lack of classrooms in teaching and learning as well as instructional leadership that participants expressed in 2019 during their interviews, seemed to have been temporarily alleviated in the context of COVID-19 protocols in schools. This meant that while I was able to observe the activities of the SMT during the weeks when I was in the school, I also had to make peace with not being able to witness an important part of what the participants lamented as an obstacle in their leadership activities. Thus, I rely on the interviews as well as the literature from studies conducted in similar contexts to make inferences about the influence of lack of adequate classrooms and infrastructure on instruction in the school.

### **4.3 Research Participants**

The participants in the study comprised two groups. The main group of participants were the SMT members, namely the principal, two deputy principals and four Departmental Heads (DHs). Four of the members of the SMT were male while three were female. Studies show that a deeper understanding of how school leaders understand and perform their duties can be reached through studying teacher perceptions (see Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Finley, 2014). Informed by this research, I decided to include teachers as the secondary participants in the study. Thus, the second group of participants in the study comprised six teachers. The teacher cohort consisted of four males and

two females. The criterion for selecting the teachers was that they be employees of the school. I approached teachers after a staff meeting in which the principal had introduced me and explained the purpose of my visit and that I might need their assistance. Some of the teachers that I approached declined participation while six agreed to take part in the study. I did not look for teaching experience or the number of years in the school or other criteria in selecting them. For me, what was important was that they were currently working under the supervision and support of the members of the SMT at Crocodile High School. Their involvement in this study served to deepen my understanding of the phenomenon, particularly as it relates to how, from the perspectives of teachers, the SMT members enact their instructional leadership roles.

#### **4.4 Research Paradigm and Design**

Egbert and Sanden (2013) suggest that paradigms in research are the stance that the researcher chooses in which knowledge of the phenomenon is revealed. These stem from three basic assumptions which are; ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontology begins with asking the question, “*What is the nature of reality?*” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.83). Therefore one also asks, is reality subjective or objective? It is how one views this reality, that will lead them to a position (Scotland, 2012), influencing how data is generated and handled.

In this study, knowing that the phenomenon being studied was about human experiences that cannot be quantified, my ontological position was that there is subjectivity to understanding human experiences. For this reason, the study was located within the interpretivist paradigm. O’Reilly (2009) suggests that the interpretivist paradigm is premised on the understanding that participants

are actors in their own social structures therefore focusing on them and their understanding and interpretation of their world is imperative to developing deep insights about the phenomenon. According to O'Reilly (2009), research located within the interpretive paradigm does not pay particular attention to external circumstances and what happens to the participants that is beyond their control. Rather, their views before, during and after the occurrence are the key factors to developing insights into the phenomenon. Similarly, Cooper and White (2012) argue that the interpretive paradigm aims to challenge and abandon the idea of seeking generalisable truths in every situation and, instead, aim for a contextual understanding of individual cases and use them to answer research questions. Thus, informed by the interpretive paradigm, the study sought to understand how members of the SMT working in a rural school in the Limpopo province understand and enact their instructional leadership duties in context.

#### **4.4.1 Qualitative Methodology**

Epistemology on the other hand is as Crotty (2003, p.3) posits, "*a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know*". In this study, to understand their reality, I was interested in the perspectives (words) and actions of the participants as bounded by their context. Linked to this, methodology refers to decisions made about the approaches that should be used to generate data to inform knowledge. It is therefore the research assumptions held in a particular study that inform the decision to explore the questions of inquiry qualitatively or quantitatively as well as the approaches and tools used (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007).

Knowing that there is no single truth in lived experiences and that the participants were the main actors in this inquiry, the epistemological question that I asked myself was: How can I as the researcher access and understand how the participants see themselves in the phenomenon? I decided that this knowledge could best be accessed through the perspectives of the participants seen through their words and actions. Hence, I adopted a qualitative approach to research. Hoepfl (1997) asserts that while qualitative research is important in understanding a phenomenon that may not be well studied or known, it can also be used to gain deeper insights into the areas that are already known. For example, the exploratory study that I conducted for my Master's degree (Maifala, 2017) which examined the leadership practices adopted by the principals in rural schools in the Limpopo province, uncovered such challenges as drug abuse by learners, crime and lack of security in those schools. These and many other challenges make it difficult for them to succeed as instructional leaders. Therefore, in this study, the qualitative approach was used to gain a deeper understanding of how, in dealing with their challenges, SMT members understand and enact their roles as instructional leaders in their school. In addition, the power of qualitative research lies in using various methods to gain an in-depth understanding of behaviours, perceptions and practices of participants in their natural setting as they go about their daily lives or duties (McMillan & Schumacher 2010; Ormston et al., 2014; Richards & Morse, 2012). For these reasons, a case study design was adopted.

#### **4.4.2 Case Study Design**

The decision to use a case study design was made with the understanding that in-depth studies of cases allow for questions such as “why” and “how” that cannot be quantified, to be answered (Yin, 2004). As discussed in previous sections, there was a desire in this inquiry to understand how

participants see themselves, the phenomenon and how they function in it. The case study design enabled a detailed and intense study of a single case restricted by its context (Bryman, 2016). This is what Yin (2009) refers to as “bonded by context”. This means that a particular phenomenon is investigated within certain boundaries that may not be generalisable or similar to any other. For this reason, in the section above I provide a detailed description of the research setting and context. From this perspective, in this study I wanted to understand instructional leadership within one rural school. I had to take into account that these school leaders’ function within a particular context and, therefore, the questions asked could not be generic or suitable for studying school leaders in a different context of South Africa or in another country. Informed by this, I decided to focus on a single case. This decision was informed by my desire to gain an in-depth qualitative understanding of the phenomenon from the perspectives of those who live it, members of the SMT and teachers in the school.

#### **4.4.3 Data Generation Methods**

To generate data to address the critical research questions in this study, I used three research methods: one-on-one in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and observations. In addition, I kept a research journal and field notes in which I documented and reflected on my data generation and what I was learning. Table 4.1 below outlines the data generation methods used to address the two research questions:

**Table 4.1 Summary of Data Generation Methods and Data Sources**

Research Questions	Method	Participants	Data Sources
<i>1. How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school understand and perform their instructional leadership roles?</i>	One-on-one interviews	SMT members	Interview transcripts
	Focus group discussions	SMT members & Teachers	Transcripts
	Observations	SMT members	Detailed field notes from observations.
<i>2. How does rurality influence the School Management Team's understandings and practices of their instructional leadership roles?</i>	One-on-one interviews	SMT members	Interview transcript
	Focus group discussions	SMT members & Teachers	Transcripts
	Observations	SMT members	Detailed field notes from observations

#### **4.4.3.1 In-depth interviews**

To answer the research questions, first, I used one on one, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with each of the seven members of the SMT. Using in-depth interviews was useful in this study because, as Opie (2004) asserts, they ask participants critical questions that allow them time to think, reflect and talk about their experiences. These types of interviews differ in the amount of freedom that the research affords the participants during the interview. They can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The structured interview is known for its rigidity in sticking to the predetermined questions without deviating while the unstructured interview is on the opposite side of the spectrum by being relaxed and allowing the participant to dictate the direction of the interview (Fossey et al., 2002). One problem with unstructured interviews is that asking a participant one question and expecting them to take the

lead may be confusing and uninspiring for some, thus lacking depth and leading to unanswered questions (Gill et al., 2008).

In this inquiry, I believed that there should be enough structure to channel the participants towards answering questions that were useful in understanding the phenomenon. I also deemed it important to allow the participants enough flexibility to open up and discuss anything relating to their duties and practices as leaders of their school. For these reasons, I selected semi-structured interviews. Edwards and Holland (2013) state that effective qualitative interviews rely on a guide containing topics to be covered as well as reminders of important aspects to be probed. For them, structured interviews may restrict answers and subsequently limit our understanding of the phenomenon. Informed by this understanding, I went into the interviews with eight predetermined questions on school leadership, rurality and its challenges, instructional leadership and the duties of the SMT which served as a guide in the interview (see Appendix H). Where necessary, to have a deeper understanding of individual perspectives, I asked additional probing questions to the answers that emerged from the guiding questions. The interviews were scheduled for forty-five to sixty minutes for each of the SMT members. However, some participants spoke more than others while others required more probing and were not inclined to speak in great detail. As such, some of the interviews were shorter than anticipated with the shortest being 30 minutes long. The others lasted 45 minutes on average and none was over the allocated time of 60 minutes. In addition to the initial interviews conducted in the school, follow up interviews (post initial coding) were conducted over the phone with some participants that I felt I needed to follow up with.

#### **4.4.3.2 Focus Group Discussions**

In addition to the one-on-one interviews, I conducted two focus group discussions (FGDs) with the participants. First, I conducted an FGD with all SMT members in order to understand their individual and collective thinking about their roles as instructional leaders, how they enact them and the influences of rurality (See Appendix J). The findings of that FGD served to supplement data generated from the other data sources to explore how members of the SMT understand and perform their instructional leadership roles in addition to also shedding light on the influences of rurality on instructional leadership understandings of the SMT.

The second FGD was conducted with six teachers who were teaching in different departments within the school (See Appendix K). An important decision that I had to make was regarding the number of participants to have in the teacher FGD. This is because, unlike the SMT group in which I knew all the seven members would need to be involved, I had no predetermined number of teachers needed. Finch et al. (2014) suggest that while the exact number of participants in an FGD is dependent on variables such as sensitivity of the issue being studied or age group, a typical focus group is usually between six to eight members. Morgan (1988) (cited in Cohen et. al., 2007) suggests having between four to twelve people in a group, while Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) suggest overrecruiting participants as a way of anticipating last minute dropouts. Considering these perspectives, I hoped to get between 5 to 8 teacher participants. I then approached more than ten teachers with information rich potential and six of them agreed to participate. The six made up the final group which participated in the FGD. The purpose of the FGD with teachers was to add to my understanding of the phenomenon from the perspectives of those who work under the leadership of the SMT. Further, with the knowledge that rurality influences how teachers teach, it

was important to understand what their experiences had been working in the conditions of the school. Therefore, teachers' perspectives played an important role in adding to the credibility of the findings and answering both research questions.

FGDs in qualitative research serve as a great tool in facilitating interactions of information-rich participants, thus allowing the understanding of shared experiences (Delamont, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Gill et al., 2008). Compared to one-on-one interviews where participants would share what they remember or their perspectives on the experience, FGDs allow different perspectives to be heard, shared and debated, thus providing more insight into the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Further, participants may, through listening to others in the group be evoked to share more as they explain their perspectives to each other and or the researcher. It is for this reason that I considered this type of data generation vital in not only understanding SMTs but teachers' perceptions of their SMT's instructional leadership practices as well. A concern with FGDs which I was aware of going into the field is that tape-recorded data may be difficult to transcribe and code as the researcher may have difficulty discerning who is speaking (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). I found that the best way to avoid this was transcribing soon after I had conducted each group discussion in order to attain accuracy. While the benefits of FGDs in this inquiry far outweigh the drawbacks, the limitations of this data generation technique could jeopardise more than one aspect of trustworthiness of the study. Guba (1981) proposed four criteria for addressing trustworthiness in qualitative research. These are discussed in detail in the section addressing trustworthiness in this chapter.

#### **4.4.3.3 Observations**

As Vogt et al. (2012) state, to effectively answer some research questions, “seeing is believing”. Thus, to supplement the data obtained from the above methods, I shadowed the members of the SMT as they went about their tasks in the school using an observation schedule that I developed for the purpose (See Appendix I). Aside from the credibility of the findings, observations, as a method of data generation, allows the researcher to witness relevant practices and behaviours that participants may overlook when interviewed or simply decide to exclude from interviews and discussions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

I observed each participant (SMT member) for a period of five consecutive school days and took detailed field notes from each observation. I also planned to observe some participants for more than five days if the data generated in the five days were not sufficient. As it turned out, because of the openness of each of the seven participants in the study, I was able to observe enough about their practices in one week to make conclusions about the questions of the inquiry. Each day I arrived at school at the beginning of the day and left at the end of the school day. This allowed me to see all their practices and interactions for the week.

To be effective in my observations and to answer the research questions, I had to have a clear plan of what I intended to observe and what was not important to observe for the purpose of this study. For example, most of the SMT members in the school have a teaching load. However, going to their lessons with them and observing their teaching was outside the scope of my study and would not help me in answering the questions. Therefore, I was not a part of any lessons that the

participants were teaching, although the time spent teaching was recorded in my field notes. Thus, in my schedule of observation, I planned to observe the following key instructional leadership practices of the SMT:

- On a day-to-day basis, how does this member of the SMT spend their time in the school?
- Which aspects of their daily routines are directly linked to teaching and learning?
- What is the nature of their interaction with teachers?
- What is the nature of their interactions with learners?
- In what ways are these interactions linked to teaching and learning?

The final decision I made about the observations was the type of observer that I wanted to be to get as accurate an observation as possible. This meant deciding on the level of interaction I would allow myself to have with the participants while observing them. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state, with the observation method, it is hard to believe that an onsite observer can be completely detached and their relationship with the setting and participants may have zero influence on their understanding of the phenomenon being studied. It is with this understanding that I went into the field with an acknowledgement that my role as a researcher in this inquiry, could not be completely separated from the setting and the participants being observed.

As I shadowed the participants in their roles as the SMT of their school, we had discussions and conversations, sometimes about what was observed as it relates to my study, other times about the weather and things that had little to do with the study. The ability to forge these relationships allowed the participants a level of comfort and trust with having me there. This made it easier for

our interactions to be generative. However, I was also intentional not to be obstructive by taking them from the work that I was meant to be observing. Therefore, the conversations were kept to a minimum. I found that, similar to the observations conducted in my Master's degree research, being passively involved (through engaging in conversation and asking questions) as opposed to completely removing myself from what I was observing allowed me to ask questions about the things that I observed happening and that were useful in answering research questions.

The advantage that I had with this method of data generation was that I was partly an insider to the school and to the community. For example, I spoke the same language as the participants; and the participants were aware that my own schooling was in very similar schools as Crocodile High School. For these reasons, I was not a complete stranger and the participants easily warmed up to me and embraced me as one of their own. This made it easy for me to follow them around and ask questions when it became necessary during the observations. However, I was also an outsider in that I was not part of the school community. I had been gone from the community for some time, for example, to attend university in Johannesburg and was then living and teaching in the Middle East. This may be why I was excluded from some events that I would have liked to observe as part of this research. One incident that stood out for me was an emergency SMT meeting that I had hoped to observe but was not granted permission to do so. I had been part of a general staff meeting in which teachers complained about their teaching load and class allocations. At the end of that meeting, the principal and one of his deputies decided to call an emergency meeting to revise the timetable to deal with the concerns. When I asked to be a part of that meeting, I was informed that it would be a short meeting and there would be nothing much to observe. Regardless of this exclusion from that meeting, my opinion was that the general openness of the participants

throughout the observation period as well as using other methods of data generation allowed for the trustworthiness of the findings.

#### **4.4.3.4 Field Notes and Reflection**

In addition to using an observation plan to maximise the efficiency of this data generation method, I took field notes rigorously. Timmermans and Tavory (2012) suggests that one should never simply rely on memory when it comes to observations but should be very intentional with recording what is happening. In this inquiry, taking careful notes did not mean simply noting down things happening. It also meant detailed notes of what was observed rather than writing summaries.

As Beebe (2014) notes:

Field notes based on careful, detailed observations as opposed to vague summaries can often help the observer avoid imputing false meaning to people's actions. (p.73).

I therefore left no room to later wonder what I had meant when I wrote something down in my notebook. Janesick (2016) also suggests that part of effective field note taking includes notes that the researchers write to themselves; they are not only what is observed but rather what the researcher thinks about in the process. This, she suggests, can include things such as noting that one will need more time to observe the participant or that a specific relationship needs to be looked into closely. In addition to taking notes of what I heard and saw in my observation, I also made

reflections on what I was observing; this helped me to better make sense of it later. It was through this detailed note taking and reflective observation that I was also able to write down patterns and themes as I observed different participants.

#### **4.4.4 Data Analysis**

As McMillan and Schumacher (2010) emphasise, qualitative data analysis is not a process left for when the researcher exits the field but should start in the field as patterns start to emerge. Data generated from the three methods were analysed using the inductive content analysis approach. Thomas (2006) defines this approach as one in which the analysis of data comes from detailed reading and breaking down of raw data into categories, patterns and themes in order to explain it. Thomas (2006) maintains that, unlike deductive data analysis, the purpose of inductive content analysis is not to test an assumption about a phenomenon but rather to understand and conclude based on the generated data. As already discussed, the purpose of this research study was to understand the phenomenon of being an SMT member in a rural school in South Africa. Even though the literature was thoroughly consulted prior to conducting the research and some of the challenges faced by schools in the rural area understood, no assumptions were made about how these SMT members understood or enacted their roles. therefore, there was no working theory that I set out to prove or disprove. My aim was to understand the phenomenon from the perspectives of those who lived it. Thus, I used inductive data analysis, which involves breaking down and explaining the words, feelings and perceptions of the participants about their reality. Because qualitative data is generated rather than collected, my role as a researcher was vital in this process. It was important that I paid due diligence to this process to ensure that no important information was neglected. I made sure to transcribe all the recordings from the seven individual interviews,

the FGDs with SMT members and the FGDs with teachers myself rather than using the services of a transcriber. I wanted to have a full picture as I was sorting out the data. The transcription of each in-depth interview took about three hours and I found that there was a lot of code switching between Sepedi and English. This made the process even longer. This is because, as a native Sepedi speaker and for the trustworthiness of the findings, it was important for me to think carefully about what the participants meant when they spoke in Sepedi (sometimes even using proverbs and idioms) to ensure that no meaning was lost. It was essential that both literal and figurative language used was translated accurately. One example relates to when I asked a participant about the mission and vision of the school and he answered in Sepedi that “Ke tseya nako go di etela”. With the understanding that translating the words of the participants into another language verbatim means as close to what was said as possible, my initial translation was the direct translation from Sepedi to English which was “I take time to revisit them.” However, being a native speaker of Sepedi, I understood that what he meant was that he does not revisit the mission and vision statements often or that it is after a long time that he visits them rather than that he devotes time to revisit them. I therefore realised that direct translations were sometimes problematic; they can lead to misinterpretation of the data. While such confusion did not occur often in the transcription, this experience taught me early in the transcription to think the words of the participants through to do them justice.

The transcription of data from FGDs took even longer. The SMT members FGD was easier because I had interviewed them individually before and I knew which members were male and which were female. Thus, I could identify who was speaking at different points. The FGD with teachers, although transcribed on the day that data was generated, proved challenging because of

the dynamics of multiple people whose voices were unfamiliar. For the trustworthiness of the findings, it was important that I attributed the correct words to their speakers at each time as their perceptions told a cohesive story of their experiences working with the SMT. To mitigate this challenge, I found that deciding to stop transcribing and listening to the entire recording first and focusing on decoding the voices and naming the voices as “female 1, female 2, male 1” and so forth was helpful. When I listened the second time to write, it was easy to know when it was male 3 speaking and not male 1 and so on.

During the transcription of both interviews and FGDs, I was also able to highlight the key ideas and write notes of patterns that started emerging and started making meaning. Once I completed the transcription process, I was able to use the transcripts and notes to break down data into patterns, categories and themes. This became my preliminary analysis before the observations were conducted and analysed. As discussed in earlier sections, data generation for observations was conducted nearly a year after the first fieldwork session due to COVID-19 restrictions in 2020.

Before I started the observations in the schools, I thoroughly read the transcripts again alongside the initial themes and found that while there were no significant differences, some meanings that I had not picked up the first time around emerged. I then started conducting observations using the schedule I had developed. I used an inductive content analysis to analyse the generated data from the observations as it emerged. This means that as I was observing the participants, not only was I writing what they were doing but I was also making notes to make meaning from their leadership practices and what the challenges of rurality meant on their roles. I was also able to compare the

themes from the interviews and FGDs and themes emerging from observations. Some of what was said in the interviews was corroborated in what I observed in practice. I picked these nuances up while still in the field and thus was able to identify new themes and greater meaning and understanding of the research questions. Analysing the observations while still in the field also meant that at the end of each week of observing one participant, I was able to tell whether adequate data had been generated or whether I needed to request for more observational time from the participants. After five days of observations and having spent weeks in the school, I was confident that the data that I generated from observing each participant was adequate to reveal the leadership practices of the SMT and the effect of rurality on their leadership roles, thus answering the research questions.

Once I exited the field, I completed the analysis of the observation data and then compared it with the analysis of the interviews and FGDs as a way of making meaning. This way I was able to find what was similar and different between what participants said they did in interviews and what I observed them doing in practice during the observations. There were also practices and challenges and other factors which were not mentioned in interviews but were evident in the observations. To discuss the findings and to make some inferences about the phenomenon, I employed Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership model which is used as a framework in this study. This allowed me to analyse the practices of the SMT against what Hallinger and Murphy posit to be the practices of effective instructional leaders.

## 4.5 Trustworthiness and Rigour

Rigour in qualitative research refers to thoroughness and attention to detail in the entire research process from literature review to data generation and analysis. The aim is to ensure that what is presented as the study findings is the true depiction of the story (Biggs & Buchler, 2007). To achieve rigour in this inquiry, first, I took time to consult and understand the literature on instructional leadership in the context rurality in South Africa and schools in the rural context of South Africa. This was so that I had a good understanding of the problem, my position in it as a researcher, and thus could identify which questions to ask so as rigorously research the phenomenon. In addition, the rigour of this research was ensured through extensively taking field notes during the entire field work process as a way of ensuring that no important information or part of the puzzle was left out of the story narrated in the findings.

Achieving trustworthiness was also regarded as important. In order to achieve trustworthiness of the findings, I followed three of the four constructs criteria for assessing trustworthiness pioneered by Guba (1981). The four constructs are credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. This study did not rely on transferability to ensure trustworthiness. Transferability is defined as the ability for the findings to be generalised to similar contexts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). While the ability to generalise the findings is important in empirical inquiries, in this qualitative study that was not the priority. As already stated, the study was underpinned by the theoretical perspective that there is no single truth and that even people who went through the same experience will have different feelings and emotions and understandings of what transpired. Merriam (1998) backs this rationale in contending that generalising within the interpretive paradigm is not possible because of the acceptance that perception and feelings lead to multiple

realities and truths. As a result, there is no desire in this study to ensure trustworthiness through transferability. As Flyvbjerg (2006) asserts, a “purely descriptive, phenomenological case study without any attempt to generalize can certainly be of value in this process and has often helped cut a path toward scientific innovation.” (p.10) In this study it was more important to understand this individual case being studied rather than its ability to be transferable. It is an acceptance alternative that research can add to a body of knowledge about a phenomenon without being generalised to other contexts.

Credibility, dependability and conformability were used as the criteria for ensuring trustworthiness in this study. First, the credibility of the findings lies in the differences or closeness between what the study intends to find and what was measured during the data generation and analysis stages (Guba, 1981). In this study, I relied on the three principles suggested by Patton (1999) for ensuring credibility. First, I relied on my reputation and credibility as a person. As discussed above, Moletsi is my home. I believe this led to the school having trust in me and my intentions in the school. This made it easy for me to spend time in the school to conduct the research. In particular, when I spent seven weeks in the school conducting observations, there was a sense that the SMT members and other stakeholders in the school were at ease with my presence. This was helpful as it allowed me access into some meetings and made it possible for me to ask questions when I was observing activities and practices in the school. Second, to ensure credibility in this study I relied on triangulation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010), in which I used more than one rigorous technique of generating and presenting data. These included semi-structured, in-depth interviews with SMT members, a FGD with SMT members, a FGD with a group of six teachers working in the school as well as observations of each of the SMT members. Third, I relied on my appreciation and respect

for qualitative research that is naturalistic and the processes that come with it. This means that I understood that there is no single truth or reality that one should anticipate (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) I was not there to confirm or disprove a specific predetermined hypothesis but rather, I wanted to understand the phenomenon from the experience of those who have lived it (Yin, 2004).

Second, dependability can be defined as the ability for a study to be repeated using the same methods, in the same context and using the similar participants and achieving similar results (Shenton, 2004). The ability to repeat the study and achieve comparable results shows that the study is consistent and that appropriate research processes would have been followed to achieve the findings (Cohen et al, 2007). Shenton avers that it can be achieved through being detailed in documenting the research processes. In this way, should other researchers wish to repeat the study in the future, there will be a clear approach for them to follow. Shenton (2004) asserts that having a detailed research process can also serve as a “prototype model” (p.71) for future research. In this study, dependability was achieved through detailing all the decisions which were made in the study before entering the field, during the data generation and steps taken upon exiting the field and analysing the data to arrive at the findings. In addition, a thick description of the findings is presented in the findings chapters and the words of the participants are used (verbatim), often along with the analysis in order to allow other researchers to understand the phenomenon in a way that would allow accurate duplication.

Third, confirmability of study findings is achieved when a researcher can demonstrate that the findings are a true reflection of the experiences of the participants and the phenomenon rather than the biases of the researcher (Polit & Beck, 2013; Shenton, 2004). In this study, two methods were used to promote confirmability in this study. The verbatim words of the participants are used as much as possible in the findings chapters to support the analysis. In addition, through triangulating the data generation methods, I was able to confirm that what is documented as the findings as revealed in the different data sources, is a fair reflection of the experiences of the participants.

#### **4.6 Locating Myself in the Study**

I have come to recognise that the role of the researcher in qualitative data generation is a vital one because they serve as the main instrument in the generation and interpretation of data (Chenail, 2011). Unlike in quantitative methods where objectivity is expected and can be agreed upon, as a qualitative researcher, I align myself with the understand that researcher positionality and the values, biases and expertise we bring to the research situation may influence the research process and product (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003). In an interview, for example, it is the researcher who listens and, based on their understanding of what the participant is saying, they probe in a particular direction. Thus, the type of data that emerges is, to a certain extent, dependent on the researcher. Their understanding of what the data is saying leads to the interpretation and the findings. For this reason, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) avow that researcher biases may affect the types of questions asked and even affect the data analysis stage in which some pieces of important data may be disregarded. Because of the potential threats to the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings, it is imperative that a researcher is aware of their biases, expertise, influences and powers and reflect openly about these and from their reflections, find ways to generate and interpret data

that do not jeopardise the credibility of the findings. To mitigate this, in this study, continuous reflexivity was essential. I had to take a close look at my experiences as an emerging researcher in school leadership and the context of rurality and how these might influence how I listen to the participants' perspectives. This reflection began with acknowledging that as a PhD student, I was an emerging researcher with a single publication on school leadership. Thus, as suggested by Poggenpoel and Myburgh, (2003), I allocated a significant amount of time to preparing before entering the field and designing the various instruments that were used to generate data. I also tried to be thorough in the analysis and interpretation of data. For example, once I had developed patterns and themes from the data, I ensured that I went back to reread the raw data to see whether I would have the same interpretations. In this way I aimed to ensure that my inexperience in generating and handling qualitative data did not affect the trustworthiness of the findings in this study.

I examined my close connection to the context that I was investigating or my hometown, and the biases and blindspots I might have as a researcher. As discussed in Chapter One, my interest in rural education and instructional leadership in this particular context is largely personal. I went to primary and secondary schools in a village not too far from Crocodile High School, the research for my study. My research for my Master's degree was also conducted in five secondary schools located in Moletsi. Shockingly, upon arriving at this school decades after my own schooling, I soon learned that conditions had hardly changed, and that the learners were still learning in similar conditions that I had to endure.

As an insider-outsider, how do I do rigorous research in my own backyard? It is possible to go into the field believing that I knew a lot about the context and that I would only ask questions about things that I believed I was yet to learn. Would this, as Chenail (2011) cautions, threaten the trustworthiness of my findings? Yet, as an insider, how could I take this phenomenon as a truly new experience and disregard what I knew about the schools in the area? How would I be able to respect the fact that in qualitative research, the subjectivity of each person's experiences is important in understanding how the participants see themselves in their reality? I also learned from my Master's degree research that while the schools in similar contexts may have many similarities, no two schools are the same. These are some of the questions I kept in mind as went through my study and that helped to keep an open mind to allow the unique experiences of the participants to speak. In addition, using triangulation (more than one method of data generation) was important in countering any biases I may have had because it allowed me to compare the findings from different sources of data.

#### **4.7 Ethical Considerations**

As suggested by Webster et al. (2014), when conducting an empirical inquiry, it is important to develop good ethical practices to safeguard the dignity, values and privacy of the participants. These researchers maintain that ethics should be the heart of every research inquiry from the beginning to the end. To this end, in this study, I used several strategies. First, in compliance with the university's ethical committee requirements, the first step was to apply for ethical clearance to conduct the research from the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee

(HSSREC). Once ethical clearance was granted<sup>4</sup>, I applied for permission to conduct the research study in the Limpopo province DBE (see Appendix A). I then approached the principal with two letters explaining the intentions and nature of the inquiry; the first letter written to ask for the principal's permission and that of the SGB to conduct the research in the school (Appendix D) and a second letter requested his participation in the study (Appendix E). Once permission to conduct the study in the school was granted by the principal and the SGB (Appendix G), the next step was to approach different groups of participants and seek their informed consent to participate. This was important because one of the main ethical issues that researchers in social research should consider when undertaking any study is informed consent of the study participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Webster et al., 2014). Informed consent refers to the full disclosure of the research study including the intentions, the methods of generating data, the instruments, the types of questions that will be asked and everything about the study that involves the participants. Upon receiving the SGB's letter granting their permission (Appendix G), I then approached the SMT and explained the potential participants' intentions of my study and the nature of their participation (Appendix B).

The secondary participants in the study, the teachers who would form part of the focus group discussion were approached (Appendix F). They were made fully aware of the manner in which they would be involved in the inquiry. The SMT members, for example, would not be surprised by being told later that further to being interviewed individually they would also be interviewed

---

<sup>4</sup> Protocol HSSREC/00000814/2019

with their peers in a focus group or that they would be observed. Further, the voluntary basis of their participation in the study, as required in social research, was communicated. They went into the study knowing that if at any given point they became uncomfortable or unable to continue for whatever reason, they could withdraw from the study. This openness and full disclosure are what Cohen et al. (2007) suggest causes “a major ethical dilemma” (p.51) as a researcher tries to find equilibrium between their pursuit for the truth and trustworthiness of the findings and the need to safeguard the participants’ values and rights. I had to inform the principal that the teachers would participate in a focus group discussion in which the topic of discussion was the management of the school. I knew that this had the risk of the principal declining participation out of fear of being under scrutiny. Moreover, full disclosure could have also meant that other SMT members could have declined participation upon realizing that the study was about how they understand and perform their duties as leaders of their schools. However, I did have to honour this ethical consideration, thereby creating an ethical dilemma. What this would have meant in a study that requires the participation of all SMT members in a school is that I could have had some members agree while other disagreed. Through communicating with the principal openly and later with the SMT members, I found that my intentions were trusted and I had no problems moving forward. Conversely, the SMT were happy to participate in a research study that would enhance their understanding of practice and they took their roles on as participants with pride.

Another important ethical consideration in research is confidentiality and anonymity (Webster et al., 2014). As part of informed consent, the participants were also informed that their names, the names of the school and school community would be protected through using pseudonyms. Further, they were informed that the field notes as well as the taped recordings that were made

during the interviews would be used solely for the purpose of the research study and would be safeguarded against getting lost or being stolen. I ensured that I used pseudonyms from the very beginning and throughout the research process, in my analysis and in this thesis. This ensured that in the unlikely event that my notes landed in the wrong hands, there would be little to implicate the school or its employees.

A related ethical consideration was linked to the FGDs with the teachers. The concern was that teachers could have fears about confidentiality and thus not reveal their true feelings or experiences of working with the SMT. This is because, as Denzin and Lincoln (2011) aver, ensuring confidentiality in FGDs is problematic and thus participants may have reservations about speaking the truth. To mitigate this problem, the purpose of the research study was explained clearly and thoroughly to everyone involved in the study. This ensured that they understood that the study was not a witch-hunt to get anyone into trouble but, as is the nature of interpretive inquiries, their perspective of the phenomenon was what was important. Further, teachers were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding their participation including about the nature of the research and to raise concerns. The common concern expressed in the FGD was not confidentiality as it related to the other members in the group but rather the recording and where it could end up. The participants were once again referred to the informed consent and their concerns addressed through explaining how the recording would be stored and the use of pseudonyms in the thesis.

## 4.8 Limitations of the study

The study has some limitations which include the scale and time frame in which data was generated. In relates to the scale, only one secondary school participated in this study, thus the findings cannot be generalised to other contexts. The voices heard in this study regarding instructional leadership and the challenges of rurality at Crocodile High School in Moletsi only relate to the school as a case. However, the objective of the study was never to generalise but to gain a deep insight into this case. The findings shed light on how the SMT in this particular school functions and how members see themselves and the challenges in their roles and therefore, serve an important role of raising further questions that other researchers interested in the phenomenon in similar contexts may ask. The thick descriptions provided in this chapter are intended to benefit other researchers who may wish to explore the phenomenon in similar contexts.

The time frame for conducting the research study limits the findings in that the interviews and FGDs were conducted in December of 2019 while observations were made from September to November to 2020. This is because the COVID-19 pandemic meant I could not re-enter the field earlier in 2020 to complete what I had started in 2019. What it means to the study is that some participants' perceptions might have changed between when they were initially interviewed and the time when I was observing them. Due to time constraints and the fact that the pandemic was still on-going in September 2020, I considered redoing the interviews but eventually decided against it because the interviews would have required more time, and the COVID-19 protocols did not allow any face-to-face research in the schools.

I respected the fact that even though I had been granted access to the school and the SMT for observations, the pandemic was still on-going and COVID-19 protocols which could make interviews and FGDs difficult were still in place. However, because three methods of data generation were used, the credibility and rigour of the findings were ensured. In addition, when I compared what was said in interviews and what I observed, there was no indication that the time lapse may have led to the changes in the situation and how the participants experienced the phenomenon.

#### **4.9 Chapter Summary**

The objective of this chapter was to describe and to reflect on the research design and methodology that I used to address the research questions in this study. I began the chapter with the philosophical assumptions made in this study as well as justifying the use of qualitative research supported by the interpretive paradigm. Further, this chapter detailed the methods used in generating the data; they were interviews, focus group discussions as well as observations. In addition, the methods used to analyse the data before presenting it as the findings were discussed. Finally, the methods of ensuring trustworthiness and rigour of the findings as well as ethical considerations made in the research were explained.

The next two chapters present the findings from the study. Chapter Five presents the findings addressing how members of the SMT understand their instructional leadership roles and the influences of rurality on those understandings.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### UNDERSTANDINGS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLES: PERSPECTIVES FROM A RURAL SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM

#### 5.1 Introduction

As argued throughout this thesis, as instructional leaders in their schools, School Management Teams (SMTs) have a significant influence on teaching and learning (see also Chikoko et al., 2015; Daniëls et al., 2019; Leithwood et al., 2020). In South African schools located in rural communities where many socio-economic challenges exist, learners are left unable to compete with their counterparts in other contexts of the country. In this context, the supportive role of the School Management Team (SMT), particularly in terms of teaching and learning, is heightened. As discussed in Chapter Two, a significant amount of literature on how school leaders understand and perform their roles shows that such understandings play a key role in how school leaders perform their roles (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017; Urick & Bowers, 2014). Conversely, a poor understanding of one's role leads to ineffective leadership and school performance (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004). Thus, the study reported in this thesis aimed to understand how SMT members in one rural school in the Limpopo province understand and perform their instructional leadership roles in the face of their challenges. Guided by this broad aim, the inquiry sought to address the following two questions:

- 1. How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school understand and perform their instructional leadership roles?*
- 2. How does rurality influence the School Management Team's understandings and practices of their instructional leadership roles?*

The previous chapter details and reflects on the methodology and design used to address these research questions. The study, which I conducted at Crocodile High School in the Limpopo province of South Africa, was located within the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm recognises reality as subjective (O'Reilly, 2009) and focuses on how the people in the phenomenon experience it to make meaning rather than quantifiable truths. In line with this paradigm, a qualitative case study design was adopted and a single high school was sampled to participate. The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it allows researchers to use a variety of methods to gain insight into the perceptions, behaviour and practices within the phenomenon being studied (Ormston et al., 2014; Richards & Morse, 2012). Three methods of data generation were used. First, I conducted individual, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the seven members of the SMT. Table 5.1 presents a profile of the members of the SMT at Crocodile High School:

**Table 5.1: SMT Members and their Positions in the School**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Department/Subject Areas</b>
Mr Zebra	Principal	Overall Head of School
Mrs Eland	Deputy principal	GET Phase (Grade 8 & 9)
Mr Lion	Deputy Principal	FET Phase (Grade 10-12)
Mr Giraffe	DH	Sepedi Home Language and Human and Social Sciences
Mr Springbok	DH	Physical and Natural Sciences
Mrs Leopard	DH	Tourism and Business, Commerce and Management Studies
Mrs Elephant	DH	English First Additional Language and Technology

After the conclusion of my data generation in November 2020, I was informed that an eighth member of the SMT, a Departmental Head (DH), had been added to the team. His role was to carry out some of the responsibilities listed above and heading Agricultural and Nature Conservation which had been without a DH. This eighth member of the SMT was not included in this study.

Second, I conducted a focus group discussion (FGD) with the SMT members (Appendix J) to further gain insight into their individual understandings of their roles as well as understand their collective understandings of their roles and the influence of rurality. Third, to examine the practices of the SMT members beyond their self-reported accounts and how these were experienced by the teachers they were leading, I conducted an FGD with six teachers. These included Mrs Blue, Mrs Orange, Mrs Green, Mr Red, Mr Brown and Mr Yellow (Appendix K). To further understand how the members of the SMT perform their roles as leaders of instruction, I conducted observations of the SMT members for a week each (Appendix I).

Data analysis in the study was informed by instructional leadership theory, primarily by Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model of instructional leadership. In addition, I argued that instructional leadership that is true to the realities of schools in the rural context must also incorporate aspects of other relevant theories of school leadership. With this premise, I reviewed prominent theories of school leadership and developed an analytical framework to answer the research questions. My data generation and to a certain extent, my analysis, were guided by the analytical framework. To recap, the six dimensions developed in the analytical framework are: 1) Defining and communicating goals; 2) Leading Teaching and Learning; 3) Creating a nurturing and supportive

environment; 4) Partnering with parents, local community and other stakeholders; 5) Promoting and supporting Teacher Professional Development and 6) Protecting instructional time and modelling high expectations.

Data were analysed using the inductive content analysis approach. Data generated from the interviews and FGD were transcribed and read thoroughly and then organised into categories and patterns which I later developed into themes (Thomas, 2006). In this chapter, I present the findings related to the instructional leadership role understandings among the seven SMT members who participated in the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted in the study. Also drawn from in-depth interviews and FGD and presented in this chapter is the influence of rurality on the SMT members' understandings of their roles. Chapter Six on the other hand, focuses on the findings on the instructional leadership role performance of the SMT members and how their enactment of such roles is influenced by rurality.

## **5.2 Rurality as Context**

As argued in Chapter One, a key challenge facing education in rural communities is related to the inequalities that continue to plague the system in part due to the legacy of apartheid and the inefficiencies of the current dispensation. For example, chronic poverty and unemployment, poor infrastructure and poor service delivery in rural communities often mean that schools in these contexts are negatively impacted (du Plessis, 2017; Moletsane et al., 2015; Myende & Maifala, 2020). This is evidenced by, among others, a shortage of qualified teachers, a lack of teaching and learning resources including digital and other technologies, and poor parental involvement. Some of Crocodile High School challenges that SMT members attribute to rurality and that have a

negative impact on their instructional leadership roles include inadequate parental involvement and lack of resources, including Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and infrastructure. Growing technology innovations, as discussed in Chapter Two, have continued to influence life, work and the economy in this part of the century (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). The century demands individuals who are conversant with various Information ICT to participate in the economy (Kushwaha et al., 2017; Maifala, 2017), particularly in the face of the much talked about Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) (Oke & Fernandes, 2020; Susanto et al., 2020). Research on how these technology innovations influence teaching and learning shows that ICT has the potential to enhance learning outcomes in various subjects, including mathematics, science and reading (Ahlan et al., 2014; McGehee & Griffith, 2004). Tied to this research is also the understanding that effective schools of the 21st century successfully integrate ICT into the fabrics of their schools' practices (Lawrence & Tar, 2018). As such, instructional leaders have a pivotal role to play in ensuring that their schools successfully integrate ICT into teaching and learning. However, as was found in this study, the scarcity of these vital resources, had a negative impact on the SMT's roles as leaders of instruction.

### **5.3 The Influence of Rurality on Instructional leadership**

Several studies have been conducted on the influence of rurality on how school managers understand and perform their roles. For example, the study by Bhengu et al. (2014) which focused on the role of school principals found that those who worked in rural areas lamented the lack of parental and government support which made it difficult for them to function as instructional leaders (see Chapter Two for a full discussion of these). This study was premised on the assumption that instructional leaders in rural schools have to negotiate the poor resourcing in their

institutions while at the same time finding creative ways of managing the few resources that they have to support teaching and learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020). In this regard, the SMT members who participated in this study pointed to two factors related to rurality that impacted their instructional leadership roles negatively: 1) the scarcity of resources and 2) poor parental involvement.

### **5.3.1 Resource Scarcity**

The findings from this study indicate that like many schools in rural South Africa, Crocodile High School experienced a shortage of resources and infrastructure necessary for effective teaching and learning. For instance, in his in-depth interview, Mr Giraffe, DH of Sepedi Home Language and Human and Social Sciences indicated:

*We have a so-called computer lab but there is not even a single computer, it's just a wish or name. (Mr Giraffe -In-depth interview, December 2019).*

Linked to this, Mr Springbok who is the DH of Physical and Natural Sciences, observed that many learners in the school did not have smartphones or access internet connectivity. He elaborated:

*We are faced with the 4IR right now and when one works in a rural school that has been there for a long time and is led by people that have been there for a long time, one finds that the learners don't have resources such as the internet and stuff. As well as the issue of phones, I don't know how urban schools operate but nowadays it helps learners with surfing the internet so if learners had them, we would teach them to only use them for learning purposes and monitor them (Mr Springbok, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

In addition to the lack of teaching resources, Crocodile High School faced a lack of security and, therefore, experienced high rates of crime. For the SMT, this undermined their ability to provide and protect the few learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) that the school had. For example, in the in-depth interview with Mrs Eland, Deputy Principal, she lamented the inadequate support from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in protecting LTSM. For her and the other participants, this was evidenced by the fact that the school did not have any security personnel to protect its assets, particularly at night when it was most vulnerable. Mrs Eland explained that although there was a person from the village that guarded the gate during the day, he was not a trained security guard and did not work the night shift when security was most needed. She declared:

*We are surprised that the government brings these expensive computers and whatever we use, but they are not guarded (Mrs Eland- Deputy Principal, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

The principal complained:

*The government built a computer lab for us and gave us five computers but they were all stolen. So it is not a functional computer lab. Learners don't have access. (Mr Zebra-Principal, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

The findings suggest that crime, which strips the school of already scarce resources due to its rural location, has meant that SMT members, who understand the need to provide adequate LTSM, go to great lengths to protect these, even if it means sacrificing the purpose of having such resources. For instance, I discovered during my interview with Mr Springbok that even though the SMT lamented not having ICT, the school had twenty-six (26) tablet computers that had been donated

by a Non-Government Organisation (NGO). Ironically, while he indicated that if learners had smartphones, they would be taught how to use them in learning, the tablets were not used but were kept in storage for safekeeping. He explained:

*The tablets have no influence on teaching and learning because they are not used in the classroom but are used sometimes during after-school study periods. So learners can surf the internet during that time and you can see that it arouses interest in them so it's just sad that we can't use them during the lessons. In future, if we can allow the learners to use them regularly during study periods; it would help because we also have a library that does not have resources (Mr Springbok-DH of Physical and Natural Sciences, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

Despite admitting that keeping the tablets in storage meant that they were not used to support teaching and learning, Mr Springbok did not recognise or acknowledge the SMT's failure to find creative strategies for ensuring the use and safe keeping of these resources. The challenge could have been that these instructional leaders were unaware of the role that these resources could play in enhancing teaching and learning or were unskilled in using them and, therefore, could not support the teachers (and learners) in accessing and using them. While I did not pursue this issue further, my hope is that my questions about these resources alerted the members of the SMT to the opportunities that they were missing in not using the resources they had. Thus, poor resources, the lack of security and poor infrastructure meant that the SMT at Crocodile High School found it challenging to manage even the few resources that they had, with negative consequences for their roles as instructional leaders in the school.

### 5.3.2 Parental Involvement

A significant amount of literature has shown that the involvement of parents in the education of their children is pivotal for learners' success in school (Goodall, 2018; Jeynes, 2018; Lemmer, 2007). Among the benefits is the growing evidence that parental involvement affects the effectiveness of instructional leadership (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Moreover, as I argued in Chapter Two, in the rural context where the challenges are vast, it is important to have the support of key stakeholders which begins with parents (Alhosani et al., 2017; Ingram et al., 2007). Conversely, there is also sufficient evidence pointing to lack of participation by parents in rural communities of South Africa (Bhengu et al., 2014; du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

The participants in this study complained about poor parental involvement as a major contributing factor in their inability to perform their instructional leadership role in the school. For example, Mr Springbok, DH of Physical and Natural Sciences, stated:

*Most of the parents do not take education seriously, unlike parents in urban areas. They don't follow up on the work of their children.* (Mr Springbok, SMT FGD, December 2019).

Similarly, Mr Giraffe condemned what he perceived to be parents' lack of interest in their children's education:

*We invite them and some of the parents do not even know the class teachers of their children or the grade in which she or he is in. It is a pity for a parent to say I'm looking for so and so and you say in which grade, "I don't know" who is the class teacher "I don't know" I'm talking here about a biological parent* (Mr Giraffe – DH

of Sepedi Home Language and Human and Social Sciences, SMT FGD, December 2019)

This ignores the influence of rurality in which, in addition to poor transport facilities, long distances and poverty, many adults may find it challenging to travel to school to attend meetings. The low literacy levels among many adults in rural areas may also contribute to non-attendance of school meetings among the parents in the school (Bhengu et al., 2014; Msila, 2012). They may feel that they cannot offer useful input that would assist the SMT in their professional development and that of teachers. Mrs Elephant compared the parent population in rurality to that found in urban schools. She asserted:

*Even their (Urban schools) SGBs are composed of lawyers and doctors, while here it is our former learners. (Mrs Elephant- DH for English First Additional Language and Technology, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

Concerning the influence of poor parental involvement on instructional leadership roles, Mr Lion asserted:

*It involves us because we have to go and look for the parents...we were talking about parents' involvement. You may find that instead of coming to the school themselves, the parents want to send their neighbours. A neighbour cannot resolve one's cases (Mr Lion- Deputy Principal, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

This challenge could be linked to, among others, poor transportation in rural areas and employment challenges. For example, for those employed, missing work may not be an option due to the precarity of their jobs, poor transport facilities and other factors. Mr Giraffe observed:

*We are still lagging far behind that parents even send their neighbours or family friends to represent them here. Even when they come, they are never patient to sit down and discuss the performance or the activities of the school. Their interest is to collect a report* (Mr Giraffe- DH of Sepedi Home Language and Human and Social Sciences, SMT FGD, December 2019).

Mr Giraffe explained that the school provides letters to parents to present to employers after the meetings and the collection of report cards for their children. However, parents cited work commitments as the reason for not attending school meetings. I was reminded of my own educational experience in which it was common for neighbours and family friends to be sent to collect report cards because of my parents' work commitments. My own report cards were, on a number of occasions, collected by relatives and neighbours who were also fetching their children's reports. While in Mr Giraffe's and, perhaps the school's view, giving parents letters to present to employers should solve this problem, in reality, the issue is more complex than that. This is because, as discussed in Chapter One, many people in Moletsi are employed on nearby farms where they often earn less than the minimum wage. In addition to low pay, other violations of farm workers' rights, including job insecurity, are prevalent in the agricultural sector of South Africa (Devereux, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2011). This means that such letters may be rejected and workers may be fired or have to forgo their pay for that day. For rural households, this is something that they can hardly afford due to, among others, high rates of unemployment and poverty.

These findings suggest that to understand their instructional roles better, the SMT need to have adequate insight into the rural context in which the school is located and some of the challenges

that may face parents and prevent them from being involved in school activities. As Myende and Nhlumayo (2022) argue, “[r]ural parents may not necessarily be a problem” (p.6) but while schools recognise the importance of their involvement, they tend to fail to find or develop mechanisms facilitating their participation in schools. Instead, parents are accused of not caring about the education of their children and school personnel, including the SMT, give up on encouraging their collaboration.

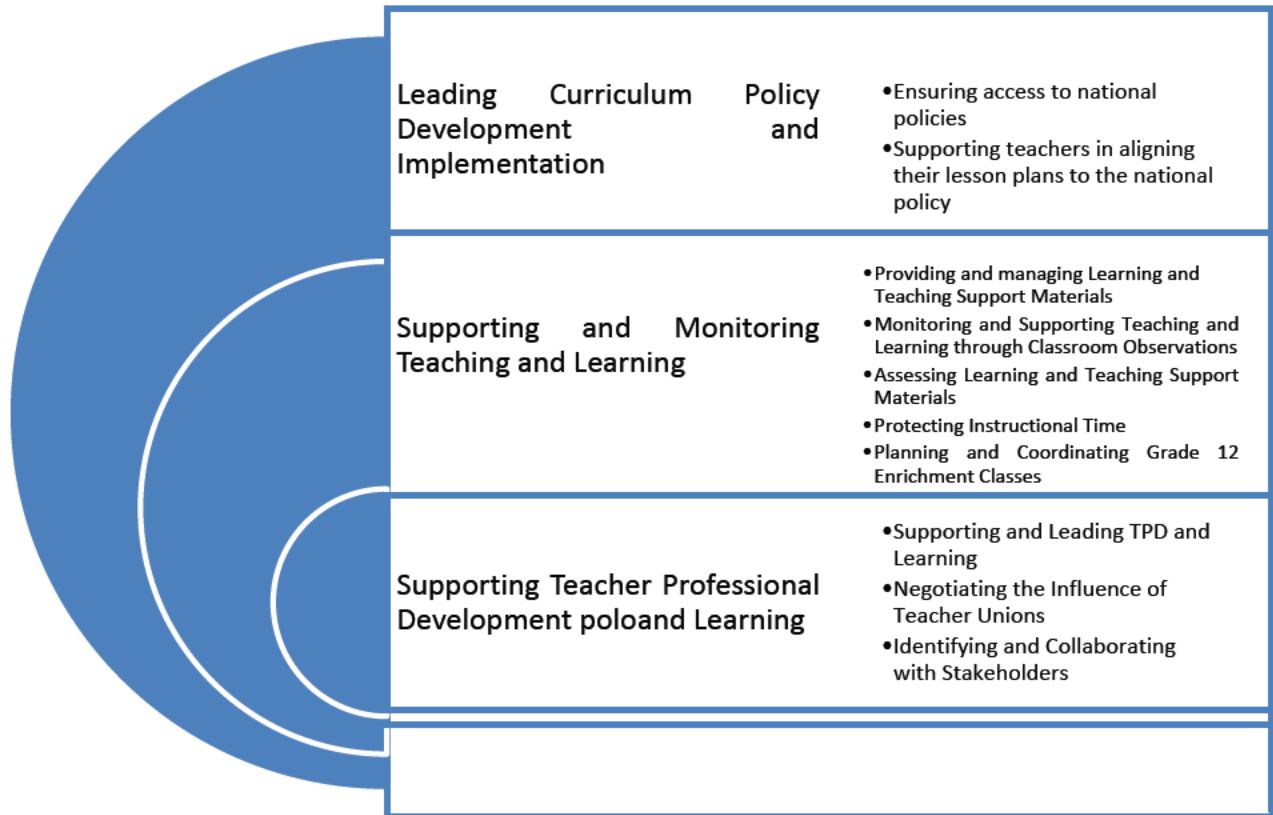
#### **5.4 SMT Role Understandings**

As indicated above, the study reported in this thesis addressed the question: *How do members of the SMT in a rural school understand and perform their instructional leadership roles?* School leadership literature has shown that when members of the SMT do not fully understand the expectations of their roles, their ability to lead effectively is affected (Mathunyane, 2013; Tapala et al., 2021). Further, to be an effective instructional leader requires not only an understanding of one’s individual role but also involves recognising how the SMT members understand and perform their role as a collective. This is because, as I have argued throughout this study, without a collective vision, stakeholders pull in different directions and harm the shared objectives of the school (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Mestry, 2018).

The findings from this study suggest that members of the SMT at Crocodile High School, the rural school in which this study was located, understood their role as involving three broad tasks: 1) leading curriculum and policy development and implementation, 2) supporting and monitoring

teaching and learning, and 3) supporting teaching and teacher professional development. Figure 5.1 summarises these themes:

**Figure 5.1: SMT Members' Understandings of Their Roles as Instructional Leaders**



#### **5.4.1 Leading Curriculum and Policy Development and Implementation**

Available scholarship presents leading curriculum and policy development and implementation as an important part of any effective instructional leader's practices (Carl, 2012; Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020). Effective instructional leaders collaborate with and lead teachers in the implementation of national policies and curricula and the development and implementation of school-level policies and programmes. This positively impacts teaching and learning in the school

(du Plessis, 2017; Hallinger, 2005). At Crocodile High School, members of the SMT who participated in the study perceived leading the curriculum and implementing policies of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) as a fundamental part of their instructional leadership roles. They saw themselves as the bridge between the teachers and what the government envisages in its policies and curriculum. The participants suggested that this role included providing teachers with new and up-to-date documents relating to the curriculum and supporting them in aligning their lesson plans to the national policy.

#### **5.4.1.1 Ensuring Access to Policy Documents**

The participants in this study reported that their curriculum leadership role involved ensuring that teachers had access to national and provincial policy documents related to the curriculum. For example, Mrs Leopard<sup>5</sup>, a DH stated:

*The role of the DH is to ensure that teaching and learning take place and support teachers by giving them the documents needed in the classroom. To see that they teach according to those policies, we have a curriculum called CAPS and we have CAPS documents which provide guidance on how to teach in the classroom. (Mrs Leopard-HoD of Tourism and Business, Commerce and Management Studies, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

Mrs Leopard was referring to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) which form part of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grade R-12 (DBE, 2011). The Department

---

<sup>5</sup> I use Pseudonyms throughout this thesis to protect the identities of the participants and the school.

of Basic Education (DBE) (2011) states that the purpose of CAPS is to clarify how teachers should implement the NCS and it was introduced, in part, because of teachers' struggle with the implementation of the previous curricula of Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R to 9 and the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades 10 to 12. Thus, while the NCS aimed to combine the two preceding curricula into one, CAPS aimed to make the curriculum and assessment in each subject more straightforward for teachers to implement.

The FGD with SMT members also revealed similar understandings as the participants spoke about their collective roles as being centred on leading the curriculum and policies of the DBE. For example, Mr Zebra stated:

*The SMT ... ensure that teachers have access to things like pace setter, work schedule, subject policies and assessment programs which are organised by the SMT so that teaching and learning will go on in the classroom (Mr Zebra-Principal, SMT FGD, December 2019).*

The pacesetter which Mr Zebra refers to is a provincial document which breaks down the CAPS annual plans into weekly work schedules indicating what should be taught each week. In the same way, Mrs Leopard asserted:

*Another thing is the programme of assessment. Teachers need to have it as it shows the tasks for the whole year and they must give it to learners who will have that information and can even share it with their parents at home and be prepared. (Mrs Leopard- DH of Tourism and Business, Commerce and Management Studies, SMT FGD, December 2019).*

This suggests that Mrs Leopard understands this role to be important not only for teachers but also for learners and their parents to have access to this information in order to prepare for assessment. The findings, therefore, suggest that members of the SMT understand the provision of curriculum policy or framework documents and ensuring that teachers are teaching according to them as a vital part of their instructional leadership roles. However, while ensuring that teachers have valuable documents is important, there is no indication that the SMT link this with providing training opportunities for teachers to ensure that they understand how to implement these policies. As I will argue later in this chapter, this understanding of the role of the SMT reflects a managerial approach rather than an instructional leadership approach to their work.

#### **5.4.1.2 Supporting Teachers in Aligning their Lesson Plans to the National Policy**

Linked to the above role is the second one which the participants in this study identified as supporting teachers in their effort to align their lesson plans to the national policy. For instance, Mr Springbok stated:

*Basically, I'm focused on the curriculum. I make sure that the teachers are teaching content that corresponds with the pacesetter for that particular subject and term.... We also make sure that teachers have lesson plans before going to class and that there are preparations before lesson presentations. That in itself allows them to teach what is in line with the pacesetter. Another thing is that since we have access to information about the curriculum that is outside the school, once that information gets here, we take it to teachers because each and every year there's new information and teachers don't always have access to it. So, we act as the in-*

*between (Mr Springbok-DH of Physical and Natural Sciences, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

Similarly, Mr Zebra agreed that:

*The role of the principal is to stand in for the [Provincial] Head of Department in the school. As his representative, I must make sure that government policies are followed. (Mr Zebra- Principal, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

The above reveals a common understanding among members of the SMT that their instructional leadership roles included ascertaining that teaching was in line with government policies. Mr Giraffe also had the same understanding and when I probed to find out how he ensured that policies were implemented, he indicated that he studied teacher records and tallied up the number of activities taught in each subject he was heading. When discrepancies were found, he would make teachers account:

*We also have a tool called the work-output in which the teacher collects class activities, I check them to see that they comply with the policy and the work schedule. I fill in that tool. Every month, I check that we have six classwork tasks, and maybe 5 homework activities and we agreed on the number of activities and if you meet that policy then it is good. If you do not meet it, that is where I get involved to say, according to the learners' records you gave less work than what we agreed upon so what may be the reason? And then you must tell me and thereafter come up with a recovery plan. (Mr Giraffe - DH of Sepedi Home Language and Human and Social Sciences, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

Mr Giraffe's use of the plural pronoun "we" in the above statement suggests that this is not an individual tool that he designed for his department but one that is used by the SMT. Again, his view is that his role involves ensuring compliance with national policies and accountability rather than instructional support. These findings further indicate that there is great value placed on leading the implementation of the curriculum and accompanying policies. However, what remains absent from these perspectives is the role of the SMT in the professional development and support for teachers. I elaborate on this later in the chapter.

Mr Giraffe's statement suggests that teachers are not encouraged to deviate from government policies regardless of the validity of the reasons in their classrooms. As he stated, once teachers give reasons for not meeting expectations, they must develop a recovery plan. This may suggest that SMT members do not trust teachers to carry out their duties without being monitored and micromanaged, thereby not encouraging teacher autonomy and leadership. Tools such as pace setters and work schedules are intended to ensure that teachers do not teach less or assign less work than required. Managing the school this way, particularly in the rural context where underperformance of learners is already an issue (see Chapter One), may seem necessary. However, ascertaining that teachers have taught five hours of grammar a week and have given three assessments does not guarantee quality teaching and learning. Further, some scholars have argued that lack of resources and large numbers of learners in classes, as it is often experienced in rural schools, tend to impede teacher innovation (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Linked to this, having to deal with these administrative demands without the flexibility to try new strategies and alternative resources, could pose a further hindrance to teacher inventiveness (Hallam et al., 2015; Hargreaves, 2019) (I explore this further in Chapter Six). If, as these findings suggest, the SMT

consider teacher performance a problem in this school, they would have to find a solution that does not only involve compliance with administrative tools and policies but also promote TPD.

## **5.4.2 Supporting and Monitoring Teaching and Learning**

The second instructional leadership role that the SMT in this study identified involved supporting and monitoring teaching and learning in the school. This involved providing and managing teaching and learning resources, school walkabouts, lesson observations and checking LTSM for quality and alignment with the curriculum.

### **5.4.2.1 Provision of Learning and Teaching Support Materials**

This thesis argues that complexities such as lack of resources, that rural schools in South Africa face, make it difficult for them to be effective and for their learners to learn and compete with peers in other contexts (Hlalele, 2012). For example, lack of learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) such as textbooks and digital learning devices negatively impacts instruction and student achievement (Akungu, 2014; Maringe et al., 2015). Therefore, as part of supporting teaching and learning, school leaders are responsible for ensuring that resources are provided and managed effectively. Members of the SMT in this study regarded the provision and management of LTSM as an important part of their instructional leadership. For Mrs Elephant, for example, *“As a member of the SMT I am in charge of the library and I ensure that all teachers are allocated books at the beginning of the year”* (Mrs Elephant- HoD of English First Additional Language and Technology, in-depth interview, December 2019). This statement suggests that Mrs Elephant is

conscious of the shortage of resources in the school and the need to manage and preserve what is available carefully. She continued:

*I also make them sign when I give them books. For example, if one has 96 learners I give them forms to tally the books per subject so that at the end of the year we can look back and collect the books. To see how many of those books are back, which ones have been lost and which are torn. Then, learners who are unable to go to town to buy books for replacement pay a sum to the school which we use to replace them. (Mrs Elephant-DH of English First Additional Language and Technology, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

Mrs Elephant further explained that in some instances, learners would have paid the fine for lost books. However, upon assessment, she would realise that those were not books currently needed or used in the school. Thus, she was also in charge of advising the School Governing Body (SGB) on the best ways to use the money collected. Similarly, Mr Springbok viewed protecting the LTSM and ensuring their longevity as important in his work. In addition, he extended his role to include assessing the teachers' LTSM needs and using this information to inform resource procurement and allocation. He stated:

*As a DH (HoD) I'm able to go to teachers and discover what their challenges are and use that knowledge to see how we can improve things and we take that to the office. Maybe they will say this particular resource or that one in order to conduct practicals. As I've explained, as the DHs we act as a bridge between teachers and resources (Mr Springbok-DH of Physical and Natural Sciences, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

In the FGD, members of the SMT did not identify the provision and management of LTSM as one of their roles in the school. Looking back and informed by the understanding that FGDs serve to

inspire discussions about shared experiences rather than focus on what individuals remember or consider important, thus shedding more light on the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Delamont, 2012), I should have asked them to comment on this as a group. This would have enabled me to learn how they collectively understood resource management as an instructional leadership role. Nonetheless, the SMT understood the provision and management of LTSM as a fundamental instructional leadership role in the school, particularly for effective teaching and learning (Horng & Loeb, 2010; Murphy et al., 2007; Phakathi, 2015).

In addition, because instructional leaders work with the goals of the school in mind (Leithwood et al., 2020; Salleh, 2013), in prioritising the provision and management of LTSM, SMT members are in a good position to understand which LTSM are needed and make decisions on procurement priorities. Thus, the assertions made by the participants here reveal an understanding of an important role in instructional leadership, particularly in a resource-poor rural context. However, Mr Springbok and others tend to single out the roles of DHs for particular departments rather than the collective instructional role of the SMT for the whole school. This could be attributed to policy misalignment. For example, according to the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) DBE (2016), the principal, deputies, DHs, senior teachers and the rest of the teachers have different roles (See Chapter One). Further, there is currently no policy framework that outlines the collective role of the SMT. Therefore, while performing each role might benefit teaching and learning, this thesis argues that it is when the SMT's plan and work together in leading instruction that teaching and learning outcomes are optimised. That some members of the SMT viewed their roles as independent of others in the committee was concerning. This individualistic view of instructional leadership can have detrimental effects on the goals of the organisation (Fullan, 2001). As scholars

have argued, lack of collaboration among school leaders and the inability to distribute leadership, may lead to different types of the understanding of the mission and objectives of the organisation and in different members pulling in opposite directions (Robinson et al., 2008; Rosenholtz, 1985). This could, for example, result in inefficient resource allocation and uneven teaching support for teachers and poor learning outcomes.

In contrast, during the FGD, when asked about their influence on teaching and learning, members of the SMT seemed to recognise their collective roles. For instance, Mr Zebra asserted,

*As the SMT we work as a unit. That is why we are able to influence the school as a whole.*

(Mr Zebra, Principal- SMT FGD, December 2019)

Mr Giraffe elaborated:

*It (the collective influence of SMT on teaching and learning) is important because in our language we say “bokhutsetswa boa lakana” (loosely translating to: physical labour requires calling others to join in). So, it helps a lot because we cannot deviate from each other maybe in front of the staff or parents or learners because it will be ours, we will own that particular decision according to planning (Mr Giraffe –DH of Sepedi Home Language and Human and Social Sciences, SMT FGD- December 2019).*

This contradicts Mr Springbok’s earlier response and those of the other members of the SMT. It is, therefore, possible that while the SMT members understood the value of acting collectively to benefit teaching and learning, operationalising this was challenging for them. Their role performance is examined in Chapter Six.

#### 5.4.2.2 School Walkabouts

Conducting walkabouts in the school is regarded as an essential part of instructional leadership. This is because it is believed to provide high visibility for the SMT (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), increase interactions with teachers and learners, improve the school culture and build trust while also supporting teaching and learning activities (Alsaleh, 2019; Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). In addition, monitoring teaching and learning is an important instructional leadership role as it allows SMT members to assess how the curriculum is being implemented, what support is necessary and how they may be able to provide it (Hallinger, 2018; Horng & Loeb, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008).

School walkabouts also provide the SMT with opportunities for supporting and monitoring teaching and learning. In this study, participants in both the interviews and FGDs reported that they conducted walkabouts at different intervals during the school day as a way of monitoring teaching and learning, referring to it as “*monitoring by walking*” or “*management by walking*”.

For instance, Mr Lion commented:

*We have established a system that we call Monitoring by Walking. What do we mean when we say monitoring by walking? I mean you can see that now they are in classes, right? I will leave here with my file, and go check class by class, and if the teacher is not there, I have to know* (Mr Lion- Deputy Principal in-depth interview, December 2019).

Similarly, Mr Zebra stated that part of his role as a member of the SMT was to ensure that teachers go to class on time. When I probed further regarding how he ensured that this happens he stated:

*We do what we call management by walking. At the beginning of each period I walk around the school to ensure that teachers are in class. (Mr Zebra, Principal, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

In the same manner, Mrs Elephant voiced that part of her role was to protect instructional time through encouraging teachers to work hard and sometimes doing walkabouts when they least expect it in order to ensure that they work, thus protecting instructional time. She elaborated:

*We have subject meetings in which I look at my department and say, 'look at other departments, they are not going to outperform us. We are in charge of the school as English teachers because all learners do English, if we fail, we fail the school. So let's go to class and protect our time so that others can copy from us. But sometimes I scare them because I give myself five minutes to walk around the sections they teach and tick them off then I notice also that one is late by two or five minutes (Mrs Elephant-DH of English First Additional Language and Technology, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

The above extract suggests that Mrs Elephant regarded motivating teachers to work hard to ensure quality teaching and learning and student outcomes as an important part of her role. As the literature suggests, this type of motivation and linking the practices of the department to whole school goals is crucial in creating collective ownership of the broader organisational goals and motivating teachers to work hard to ensure that those objectives are met (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2020). In addition, Mrs Elephant has a tool such as a list of teachers in her department and their teaching timetables which she uses to monitor teacher lesson attendance and punctuality, Similarly, Mr Lion (as earlier quoted) stated that he took a file with him to conduct walkabouts, indicating that he also used this tool to keep track of teacher attendance.

Similarly, in the FGD, Mr Springbok mentioned a period register as one of the tools devised by the SMT to monitor teachers going to lessons. He explained:

*The period register is kept by the classroom (learners) and it to ensure that each of the days' periods is being attended by teachers. If there is no teacher in period two, the register will inform us that learners missed a particular lesson at that time (Mr Springbok-DH of Physical and Natural Sciences, SMT FGD, December 2019).*

While available literature supports the significance of conducting regular walkabouts as a strategy for improving teaching and learning, its use appears to stem from lack of trust and the need to micromanage teachers' work as professionals in this school. As argued above, when assessing LTSM, members of the SMT seemed propelled by the need to ensure that teacher practice was aligned with policy. Similarly, in their walkabouts, they seemed to be informed by the belief that teachers are not capable of going to class on time without being policed through such instruments as period registers. In addition to impeding innovation, this is likely to affect teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction negatively. Research has shown that teachers who are not trusted and given the autonomy to do their jobs, either in making decisions in the classroom or going to class on time are likely to be dissatisfied and lack self-efficacy with negative consequences for teaching and learning (Bandura, 1997; Hargreaves, 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Furthermore, using this model of monitoring teaching and learning does not guarantee that quality teaching and learning or, at the very least, teaching and learning of any nature is happening. However, this does not suggest that the SMT had no valid reasons or concerns for carrying out these walkabouts.

A real threat was observed in which some teachers did not seem to care about being on time for their classes or going to class at all (See Chapter Six for a detailed discussion).

Linked to the above, the SMT seemed to have a limited understanding of their collective instructional leadership role in relation to walkabouts. For example, while other members of the SMT indicated that performing walkabouts was a part of their role, Mr Giraffe understood this as the principal's role. He stated:

*Sometimes I even work like I'm the principal. For example, the principal is not here now but the school must run. At the end of the break, I must go to the staffroom and say 'colleagues, how are you? Are you all free?' Some will say yes and others will say 'I'm going'. No one can say, 'in what capacity? You are not the principal'. That would never happen. It is an offence to say that (Mr Giraffe- DH of Sepedi Home Language and Human and Social Sciences, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

While Mr Giraffe acknowledged that teachers would not defy his instructions as a member of the SMT, he also believed that in this role he would be acting like the principal and only when the principal was away. This suggests a lack of recognition of his role as a member of the SMT and how this forms part of the instructional role of the SMT as a collective. Thus, despite the benefits of the walkabouts, it is evident that the reasons for conducting them in this school were varied and reflected a lack of understanding of their importance as a collective instructional leadership strategy for the SMT.

### 5.4.2.3 Classroom Observations

The third strategy for monitoring and supporting teaching and learning identified by the members of the SMT in this study was classroom observations. In the above section, I argued that conducting school walkabouts may not be the most efficient way of ensuring quality teaching and learning. This is because there is no guarantee that teachers who are present in their classrooms are, in fact, teaching or that effective teaching and learning is taking place. Instead, abundant literature suggests that conducting classroom observations and providing teachers with necessary feedback and support enhances teacher effectiveness (see: Cohen et al., 2020; Hallinger, 2018; Veloo et al., 2013). In this study, the participants asserted that conducting class observations was an important role in their instructional leadership. For instance, Mrs Leopard stated:

*About the support that we give them, we could say we do class visits to check that they are following the right content or following policy. If a teacher is challenged by certain content, they have to inform us about those areas and we find another teacher within that department to help them* (Mrs Leopard-DH of Tourism and Business, Commerce and Management Studies, in-depth interview, December 2019).

By identifying teacher strengths and weaknesses and providing opportunities for mentoring or coaching by other teachers within their department, Mrs Leopard also promotes TPD and enhances teacher effectiveness. As Liu and Hallinger (2018) assert, TPD opportunities should evolve beyond workshops and courses to actively engage teachers through mentoring, joined planning and other opportunities. Her statement also supports the first theme of this chapter in which members of the SMT indicated that aligning their teaching with policies is important.

Other members of the SMT also identified conducting lesson observations as key to their roles, particularly to ensure that teachers implement the curriculum and policies properly. For example, Mr Springbok stated:

*We have a programme of class visits; teachers should have their own files that they keep and show us how their programme is structured for the week. We also look at their assessment. Obviously, after teaching they must give a sort of assessment that allows us to see what was taught and how learners understood that content. Their performance and feedback allow us to see the quality of their teaching (Mr Springbok, DH of Physical and Natural Sciences, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

Mr Springbok views checking the quality of what is taught and assessed as an important role. However, for most of the participants in this study, ensuring that the school curriculum is aligned to national policies, regardless of quality, seems to dominate their understanding of their instructional leadership roles in the school. Furthermore, the findings from the FGD with the SMT suggest that they viewed lesson observations as important for providing teachers with feedback and enhancing teacher professional development (TPD). For instance, Mr Zebra indicated that lesson observations, which they sometimes carried out as part of the Integrated Quality Monitoring System (IQMS), in terms of the Education Labour Relations Council (2003), were vital for TPD:

*Other strategies that develop teachers include a programme called IQMS. So, throughout the year we go to classes and at the end of the year there is a teacher assessment in which, as ma'am explained, we do class visits to see teacher strengths and weaknesses. And then those weaknesses are stated as personal growth plans*

*(PGPs). Therefore, once the teacher is aware of the PGPs, the following year there must be a programme of IQMS in which those weaknesses must be developed into strengths (Mr Zebra-Principal, SMT FGD, December 2019)*

The IQMS is a mandatory annual teacher appraisal, performance measurement and whole school evaluation system of the national Department of Basic Education (DBE). One of the requirements which includes teachers and is relevant here is that they must engage in self-evaluation and be evaluated by a peer and senior staff member such as members of the SMT. The evaluator then provides the teacher with a score and feedback on areas of development. While the IQMS can undoubtedly be a means for SMTs to evaluate teachers and to provide them with the necessary feedback and support, on its own it is not effective for improving teacher effectiveness. This is because the programme allows only one evaluation per year, making improvement opportunities easy to miss during the rest of the year. Other shortcomings of the IQMS include the fact that it combines evaluation instruments for performance management and appraisal, potentially leading to tensions between teachers and the SMT, particularly in the absence of collegiality and a school culture where classroom observations are shared and understood positively (De Clercq, 2008). In addition, Heystek (2015) argues that there is no evidence to suggest that IQMS motivates teachers to improve their performance.

Mrs Elephant also linked lesson observations to teacher professional development (TPD), stating that they provide an opportunity for SMT members to identify weaknesses and design workshops and lesson demonstration sessions for teachers. She elaborated:

*Let's say, for example with learner-centred learning; you can have a workshop and demonstrate as an SMT so that teachers understand. For example, as we said with class visits, I could call my immediate senior and a peer to come and I demonstrate how to assess group work, learner-centred instruction, and peer assessment so that next time when I visit them, they will know what to do (Mrs Elephant- DH of English First Additional Language and Technology, SMT FGD, December 2019).*

Coaching and creating opportunities to collaborate, as argued in this chapter, is an important aspect of TPD (Leithwood et al., 2020; Liu & Hallinger, 2018) and is significant for effective instructional leadership practice. As such, Mrs Elephant's understanding that teachers could be developed through demonstration lessons for particular content is an important instructional leadership role in a school. Similarly, for Mrs Leopard, when teachers struggle with teaching certain content, the SMT can identify this during observations and pair the teacher with another who does well in that content.

These findings suggest that at least two members of the SMT in this school recognise that lesson observations can be used to identify teaching and learning needs and provide feedback and TPD opportunities that may enhance teacher practice. However, most SMT members believed that classroom observations enforced policy implementation, seemingly without due regard for TPD needs and providing opportunities to meet those needs. This dominant understanding of instructional leadership among the members of the SMT may indicate lost opportunities for improving teaching and learning and the school may remain at the bottom of the performance scales in national assessments, with negative consequences for the learners.

#### 5.4.2.4 Evaluating and Reviewing Learning and Teaching Support Materials

Available empirical studies have long indicated that to enhance teaching practices and student learning, effective instructional leaders review and assess LTSM (Datnow & Hubbard, 2016; Romero & Ventura, 2020; Schildkamp, 2019). Assessing LTSM has been found to assist instructional leaders in understanding how teachers and learners are doing in relation to school and national standards, if and how learners are challenged beyond their current zone of understanding, how learning differences are addressed in the teaching and assessment practices and other essential data for school improvement.

In this study, the findings suggest that members of the SMT regarded the assessment of LTSM as a necessary instructional leadership role. For example, during interviews, participants indicated that to ensure the appropriateness of LTSM, various monitoring tools were employed to scrutinise teacher files. These teacher files carried essential documents such as lesson plans, learning activities, teaching tools, and curriculum and policy documents, among other significant documents. For instance, Mrs Elephant affirmed that it was vital for her to ensure that teachers in her department follow the government's Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) and the pacesetter for each subject. For her, lesson plans were also scrutinised to ensure the quality of what was being taught and that teachers followed policy and curriculum documents. When asked how she achieved this, she elaborated:

*We have tools. We don't just say we have a device. This tool, I have a programme that I give them... I say on Monday I'm doing this and that, you don't bring anything. On Wednesday no later than 10 O'clock please get lesson plans from social science and*

*technology. I have a tool, and those things must be there. I check that your lesson plan has everything. The things in the lesson are the aspects that policy states must be there. Otherwise tomorrow we'll be giving you no and no again* (Mrs Elephant-DH of English First Additional Language and Technology, in-depth interview, December 2019).

When asked to elaborate, Mrs Elephant stated that checking the policy within lesson plans included confirming that time allocated to specific content in the policy for a subject area was followed. This ensures that teachers do not simply teach what they prefer to teach but cover what is mandated and follow it up with an assessment. For example, she mentioned that in English, the policy stipulates that grammar teaching takes up one hour per week, which she would expect to see in the teacher's lesson plans. This suggests that what she refers to as checking for quality involves ensuring that the lesson plans are aligned to every element of the policy. As such, the knowledge that she is likely to gain from this exercise is that teachers have either included, for example, a warm-up activity at the beginning of the lesson, as stipulated by the policy rather than the quality of what is being taught. Similarly, Mrs Leopard described how she was able to ensure quality through checking teacher files. She declared:

*We have monitoring tools that we use and during these departmental meetings, we give teachers the tools and a template to follow in organising their lessons and then we use the same tool to moderate. And then if we find that they are not doing their lessons according to the tool that we use, they must go and rectify it accordingly.*  
(Mrs Leopard- DH of Tourism and Business, Commerce and Management Studies, in-depth interview, December 2019)

These findings suggest that members of the SMT understood quality assuring as involving checking that teachers follow templates for lesson plans and other policy stipulations. The effectiveness of such LTSM in enhancing teaching and learning remained peripheral, at least in their understandings of their instructional leadership role.

In addition to checking the LTSM and assessments, the SMT reported that to safeguard compliance with and the implementation of policies they also compared teacher resources with learners' books.

To illustrate, Mrs Leopard stated:

*We ensure by checking learners' books. On the first of every month, we take their books and check what they have been writing. And we confirm whether they are in line with the curriculum and the pacesetter. So our evidence is in the learners' books. We also check the CAPS document and whether it is being followed and if the teaching is of high quality (Mrs Leopard- DH of Tourism and Business, Commerce and Management Studies, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

Mr Lion had a similar reason for checking the LTSM:

*We take the learner's classwork book and put it here, put the ATP here, and check. What's missing will show. And that is when we can see that truly these topics have been taught. When the teacher says they're done, we take the classwork book because that is the evidence. We take the classwork book and check and then we know that we are good. Then we can approve that this teacher has completed the syllabus (Mr Lion-Deputy Principal, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

This suggests that for Mr Lion, and perhaps other members of the SMT, ensuring that teachers complete the syllabi takes priority over student learning. While completing the syllabi is important because it ensures that learners are ready for the national examinations, considering the challenges that rural schools such as Crocodile High School experience, it is unlikely to ensure that they succeed. The SMT seemed to value what can be measured quantitatively rather than the quality of lessons and identifying challenges in teaching and assessment and providing support for teachers.

Finally, the findings in this study suggest that the SMT in this school viewed ensuring that policies are implemented as the most important role as instructional leaders. For example, when asked what her most important role in the school was, Mrs Leopard asserted: *They are all important; I can't say one is more important than others. But the most important thing is curriculum management.* (Mrs Leopard- DH of Tourism and Business, Commerce and Management Studies, in-depth interview, December 2019). This is even though at the beginning of my interview with Mr Zebra, the principal, he distinguished between management and leadership in ways that are supported in the literature (Bush, 2007; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). He indicated:

*Management is about planning. When we plan and set timetables that help us to manage. Leadership is about influence. When you influence people to walk a certain way, you have a vision that if you lead them and they follow they will also want to achieve what you set out to achieve. For example, in leadership, we first of all have a particular time when we must arrive in the school and we must make sure that teachers are punctual.* (Mr Zebra-Principal, in-depth interview, December 2019).

However, my data generation did not yield any evidence of this understanding among the SMT members as individuals, including the principal or as a collective, nor any performance of their roles that was aligned with it. This has implications for the influence that the SMT may have on improving teaching and learning in the school.

### **5.4.3 Supporting Teaching and Teacher Professional Development**

The findings from this study suggest that the SMT members understood their instructional leadership as including supporting TPD, teaching and learning. In this regard, they identified four areas of work linked to this role: supporting and leading TPD and learning, protecting instructional time, negotiating the influence of teacher unions and identifying and collaborating with stakeholders.

#### **5.4.3.1 Supporting and Leading TPD and Learning**

Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is defined as various activities and engagements that teachers undergo in initial teacher training and followed by continuous opportunities for learning throughout their careers to develop and enhance their teaching practices (Alibakshi & Dehvari, 2015; Carl, 2012). These activities include meetings, workshops and other forms of training (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). In addition, they also include interaction-based methods such as mentoring, consultations, peer coaching and collaboration (Hargreaves, 2019; Matherson & Windle, 2017). A growing body of literature has suggested that efforts made by schools to provide these opportunities for teachers have an immense influence on teaching and learning and student achievement. This is because teachers who engage in continuous TPD are likely to stay abreast

with new developments in teaching and learning technologies, classroom management strategies, policy and curriculum and other instructional aspects, thus enhancing student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2016; Philipsen et al., 2019).

In this study, the in-depth interviews and FGD with members of the SMT indicated that the participants did not fully embrace promoting TPD and providing opportunities for teachers to learn as part of their instructional leadership role. While there was evidence that, in some ways, they did provide opportunities for teachers to develop, these steps were limited and not articulated or connected to their understandings of their instructional leadership role. For instance, in the in-depth interviews, members of the SMT discussed their roles in detail but none explicitly identified leading TPD and learning as an aspect of their work. While each of the seven members of the SMT discussed providing teachers with new and up-to-date information on policies and curricula (discussed in section 5.2.1.1), they did not seem to recognise this role as an opportunity for teachers to develop and learn. However, although providing teachers with policy documents does not amount to TPD that actively engages teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2017) like workshops, coaching and mentoring, it should not be ignored. As Hunzicker (2004) argues, “changing a teacher’s beliefs requires that new information be presented repeatedly over time, to the point that the person begins to feel disequilibrium between current beliefs and new information” (p.45). Thus, the practice allows teachers to understand and implement policies better when they are constantly aware of the changes. Given that participants did not identify TPD as part of their roles during my interviews with them, it became important to ask this question in the SMT FGD.

It was evident that in addition to not fully understanding some practices as significant for teacher learning, the SMT members also believed that TPD was the responsibility of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) or government. For instance, Mr Springbok stated:

*Some of the opportunities that we have include some bursaries from the government even though one must apply and then if it is approved one gets a bursary. (Mr Springbok- DH of Physical and Natural Sciences, SMT FGD, December 2019).*

Mr Springbok's understanding suggests that he was aware that government bursaries, as a form of TPD, were not guaranteed to all teachers. Further, this is also not a form of TPD that all teachers will be interested in. However, Mr Springbok also appeared helpless and unaware that other opportunities could be provided within the school that would support the daily work of teachers and enhance teaching and learning.

Adding to this perspective, Mr Lion pointed to workshops arranged by the DBE as some of the opportunities that the school provided for teachers to develop:

*Another thing is that the department (DBE) sometimes has curriculum workshops which teachers can attend. This includes things teachers did not do when they were in university so they have workshops on that so that they can teach the learners (Mr Lion- Deputy Principal, SMT FGD, December 2019).*

Further, some SMT members believed that the government's system of IQMS (discussed above) was a means for schools to promote TPD. As presented above, Mr Zebra suggested that because IQMS gives a performance score and a development plan for each teacher where necessary, it serves as a great tool for TPD.

Presenting a contrasting view in the SMT FGD, Mrs Elephant seemed to recognise the school's internal initiatives as serving a role in the promotion of TPD and learning:

*Sometimes there are workshops in the school in which you see that there is a part which teachers are not seeing as they should. As a member of the SMT, there can be workshops such as that in which I want to teach them to apply a particular thing they are struggling with in order for them to apply it with learners and in their lives. Let's say for example with learner-centered learning, one can have a workshop and demonstrate as an SMT so that teachers understand (Mrs Elephant- DH of English First Additional Language and Technology, SMT FGD, December 2019).*

Mrs Elephant's view is not surprising as she also connected lesson observations to coaching and TPD, while the other members viewed the role from a managerial perspective. However, it also singles her out as a member of the SMT with a seemingly more nuanced understanding of the instructional leadership roles.

The rest of the SMT generally perceived TPD as an external component which must be brought in by the government and consumed by teachers. While the current study did not focus on how the SMT perceived their own professional development, understanding their perspectives on TPD sheds some light on how they might view their own learning as instructional leaders and how such learning may influence the nature and quality of support that they provide to improve teaching and learning in the school.

#### **5.4.3.2 Negotiating the Influence of Teacher Unions**

In South Africa, in principle, teacher unions function as a bridge between teachers and the government, including bargaining on their behalf for better salaries, better working conditions (Mafisa, 2017) and professionalising teaching through involvement in policy making and implementation (Ramokgotswa, 2015). However, teacher unions have also become notorious for being disruptive to teaching and learning through teacher strikes and their resistance to SMTs in schools, thus making it difficult for them to perform their instructional leadership roles (Bhengu et al., 2014; Msila, 2014; Msila, 2021). As Bhengu et al. (2014) observe, teacher unions have a “devastating and acidic impact” (p.209) on how school leaders perform their roles and have been known to lead to teacher defiance and affect school effectiveness (Msila, 2021; Whittle, 2007; Zengele, 2013).

In this study, drawing from my interviews with the SMT in the school, the influence of teacher unions was seen as harmful to instructional leadership and instruction. The SMT cited lack of cooperation and refusal to perform tasks such as lesson planning among some teachers because of their perception that their unions would defend them. For example, in my interview with Mr Lion, he informed me that part of his leadership role in the school was to perform the walkabouts as a way of ensuring that teachers were in class (discussed in section 5.2.2.2). When I asked how successful this strategy was in solving the perceived problem of teachers not going to class on time, he indicated that the walkabouts were only successful with some teachers. According to him, teacher unions and politicians were to blame for this defiance because they influenced how teachers worked and behaved. He elaborated:

*You understand that here in South Africa, our biggest problem is, especially in terms of our education system, the politics and the politicians have used teachers a lot because teachers are many, they used them a lot to fight the former government too (Apartheid government). Even our unions, they are the ones that made it possible for... in fact what we are doing (monitoring teachers) we are trying to rectify and go back to what we used to do well, but because the unions influence teachers not to do this or that, they follow what they are told. The problem is that these things that they said they must not do are the things that we came here for. For example, you find unions telling teachers not to prepare. They say they can go and teach the kids but they must not prepare, then it means it is a contradiction (Mr Lion- Deputy Principal, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

Expressing his frustrations, Mr Lion stated that he was not able to monitor and enforce lesson preparations because of the influence of teacher unions.

*They are avoiding it (lesson preparation). We are unable to monitor it. Do you understand? When you try to monitor it... we have a lot of teachers who are union members, they do not want to work. They will go and consult and say the principal said we should prepare. (Mr Lion-Deputy Principal, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

The FGD and in-depth interviews with other members of the SMT did not reveal their sentiments about the influence of teacher unions on their instructional leadership roles. However, these findings are in line with my MEd study (Maifala, 2017) in which a participant lamented the negative influence of unions on teachers and stated that they made it difficult for principals to maintain order and discipline in schools. Msila's (2014) study which explored power relations between teacher unions and school management points to negative influences that harm teaching and learning. The study found that schools with strong union associations were managed differently from those with little to no presence of unions. This was because power relations were often blurred in the former schools, with unions dictating how schools should run. Msila argues

that power relations in schools with strong union associations could pose a danger to how school managers lead, and in turn, may negatively impact instruction. Thus, while teacher unions are there to protect teachers' rights and professional identities as well as to influence policy making, they can also create a perception of impunity among teachers and promote defiance and poor performance, with negative consequences for teaching and learning (I explore this further in Chapter Six).

### **5.4.3.3 Identifying and Collaborating with Stakeholders**

Identifying and building positive working relationships with different stakeholders as an instructional leadership role for enhancing teacher practice and improving student learning in schools is well supported in the literature research (Bryan et al., 2017; Teemant et al., 2021). The stakeholders include parents, relevant government structures such as the DBE, members of the school community with different expertise, organisations such as universities and other relevant parties. It is through working with these different stakeholders that their powers, skills and resources can be harnessed to benefit the school (Mestry, 2017a; Myende & Maifala, 2020).

The findings from this study reveal that members of the SMT understand the identification of and collaboration with different stakeholders as an important part of their instructional leadership role. While SMT members lamented the poor involvement of parents in their children's education (as discussed above), the participants also acknowledged the significance of collaborating with parents in various activities in the school, including assisting learners to choose the right subjects in Grade 10, this in preparation for their final national examinations in Grade 12. This was a pleasant

discovery for me as my own experience in Grade 10 did not assist me to choose the right subjects (see Chapter One), hence my interest in exploring how members of the SMT may understand their instructional leadership roles in this study. Participants also stated that parents were important stakeholders for maintaining discipline and order in the school. For instance, linking this to his role of supporting teachers, Mr Giraffe indicated that:

*Sometimes they meet challenges with learners who are not writing home activities or those who are not disciplined or maybe those who are absent. I make follow-ups, discipline the learners and call their parents so that this may not temper with their programme. (Mr Giraffe- DH of Sepedi Home Language and Human and Social Sciences, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

Identifying parents as key stakeholders in supporting teachers with classroom challenges, members of the SMT highlighted the positive impact that this has on learner behaviour (Bryan et al., 2017). In addition, Mrs Elephant indicated that it was important to collaborate with parents to deal with barriers to learning:

*A parent with a low-ability learner can be called so we explain to them that because learners are not gifted equally, your child is struggling in school and we would like for you to take them to such and such a place. We would like to ask that we call those who are qualified to diagnose the child to help so that the child can be taken to another school (Mrs Elephant- DH of English First Additional Language and Technology, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

The Policy on Screening Identification Assessment and Support (DBE, 2014) national framework for implementing Inclusive Education as envisaged in the Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education (Department of Education, 2001) highlights this collaboration. The policy

stipulates that teachers must work with parents, the School Based Support Team, the District Based Support Team and other relevant parties to screen and identify learners with barriers to learning and seek the necessary support at different levels. However, the policy is also clear that placing a child in a special needs school should be the last resort and only once it has been established can they require “high-level support” (DBE, 2014, p.14), which cannot be provided adequately in a mainstream classroom. Looking back, I should have asked Mrs Elephant to elaborate on her assertion to ascertain her understanding of this clause in the policy. Nonetheless, it is heartening that she recognised the important role that parents play in identifying and addressing learning challenges among learners.

In addition to parents, another stakeholder that the SMT reported actively involving was the Department of Basic Education (DBE). For instance, Mrs Leopard asserted that as a curriculum manager, she attended various workshops facilitated by curriculum advisors in order to ensure that she was up to date on the curriculum. Even though working with the DBE may be a compulsory role and not a choice for the SMT in the school, Mrs Leopard felt that it was an important collaboration as it ensured that teachers had access to essential information that impacted teaching and learning. Mr Springbok also recognised this collaboration as serving an important function in teachers’ ability to perform their duties. He stated:

*We access information through circulars which sometimes come in the form of emails, and remember that the school email cannot be accessed by everyone. So obviously it means we must circulate that information by putting it on the notice board and they sign to acknowledge that they have seen it and are aware. (Mr Springbok- DH of Physical and Natural Sciences, in-depth interview, December 2019).*

While working alongside the DBE is important for schools, accessing information on behalf of teachers via emails and communicating curricular changes might dilute the messages that teachers would get if they had direct communication with the policymakers. Thus, Mr Springbok seemed to be acting as a school administrator rather than an instructional leader.

In the FGD, members of the SMT regarded their collaboration with the DBE as the key factor to their ability to influence teaching and learning as instructional leaders. When I asked them about the school approach to curricular changes, for example, they indicated that the role of the DBE was vital as the department provided workshops where they would learn about the changes before bringing the changes to the school. Mr Zebra further stated:

*Fortunately, normally, they invite the departmental heads, or let me just say SMT, for a workshop so that they orientate them on how to manage curriculum or implement those tools. Thereafter, we come back to the working environment and implement what is expected from the department. And then, the department as well will not just leave it as it is. It will send some people to monitor and give support to make sure that those changes, the teachers, everyone is adapted to the changes (Mr Zebra- Principal, SMT FGD, December 2019).*

The findings suggest that participants identified parents and the DBE as the main stakeholders they collaborated with in their work. While these are important stakeholders, the SMT missed opportunities for exploring other potential partnerships with the community or outside organisations. For example, partnerships with local businesses, and traditional leadership structures in the villages, universities and other organisations, could benefit the school. This is particularly important in a rural context where resources are scarce and where harnessing the

expertise and resources of different stakeholders could help the schools to procure some of the resources they need (Bhengu & Svosve, 2019).

## **5.5 Discussion**

The findings reported in this chapter focus on the individual and collective role understandings among SMT members as instructional leaders in one school in the Limpopo province. The findings suggest a collective understanding among the SMT that the most important role in their leadership is ensuring that the national curriculum and associated policies are implemented properly. In addition, aligned to policy, there seems to be a rigid understanding that the syllabi must be completed at all costs and often at the expense of quality teaching and learning. This understanding also ignores teacher perspectives and contextual challenges or opportunities that may lead to innovation and improved outcomes. Literature on effective school leadership indicates that effective instructional leaders lead teacher curriculum development to fit the needs and opportunities of the context of the school, rather than rigidly following national curricula (Carl, 2012; du Plessis, 2017; Hallinger, 2005). As Leithwood et al., (2020) assert:

[T]he focus (of leaders who work with context in mind) should be on the precision with which school leaders adapt pedagogic strategies and curriculum considering their diagnosis of the learning needs and challenges of their students, in their context, in order to create evermore powerful learning experiences for them (p.6).

Linked to the above findings is the managerial style to instructional leadership that seems to permeate the SMT members' understandings of and approaches to their work. This includes their approaches to and reasons for school walkabouts, lesson observations and assessing LTSM, which do not seek to support teaching or to identify teaching and learning needs and provide support and

opportunities for improvements. As Mathunyane (2013) concluded, the use of period registers and other tools to monitor teachers does not improve instruction but only serve to ensure teacher compliance. Thus, the pedantic checking of various documents and ticking boxes without TPD or feedback that leads to improved practices, serves no purpose in instructional leadership in this school. This is highlighted in the literature on the role of school managers in rural contexts (Mathunyane, 2013; Taole, 2013) and other geographical areas of South Africa (Bambi, 2012; Malinga et al., 2021). It suggests that SMTs tend to function largely as managers than leaders.

Literature indicates that being able to interpret policies and adapting them to suit the unique context of the school, leads to better implementation (Constantinides, 2021; Koyama, 2014; Schechter et al., 2018). This is because government policies are generic and do not consider the unique challenges and opportunities that exist in a particular school (Maringe et al., 2015). In this study, the findings suggest that because teachers are expected to implement the policies rigidly, the SMT made no effort to collaborate with teachers to develop these to fit the school context. As will be discussed in Chapter Six, teachers were not satisfied with these practices. However, the CAPS document (discussed above) stipulates that tools such as pacesetters and programmes of assessment are meant to serve as guidelines (DBE, 2011). This gives schools the liberty to develop their own policies relevant to their context.

The findings revealed that most SMT members did not identify providing teachers with opportunities for professional development as part of their instructional leadership role. Rather, with a few exceptions, they seemed satisfied with government workshops, bursaries and the IQMS

appraisal system as forms of TPD. Conversely, in some ways by availing curricular and policy documents to teachers the SMT did provide some form of TPD for teachers. However, these efforts were inadequate because they were not followed up with TPD opportunities to ensure teacher learning and improvement. These findings are consistent with Nhlumayo's (2021) study conducted in rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal province which found that one of the challenges of school based TPD was lack of leadership from principals. Similar to the participants in this study, the principals also cited IQMS and DBE workshops as TPD they provided and saw their role as ensuring that teachers attended such workshops and managing IQMS.

The disconnections in how SMT members understood their roles were not limited to supporting teacher TPD. In terms of conducting school walkabouts, for instance, the findings suggest that while most members understood this as part of the SMT role, one member felt that it was the role of the principal. As argued throughout this thesis, these varied views of their roles could lead to the SMT pulling in different directions, with negative consequences for the functionality of the school and its objectives (see also, Mathunyane, 2013).

An aspect of the SMT that is positively linked to instructional leadership is the provision and management of LTSM. The findings presented in this chapter reveal that although some of their role perceptions were driven by management rather than leadership, members of the SMT also identified the resources needed in the school and made recommendations to the SGB and SMT. In this function, they could influence some of the resources that teachers had access to, potentially improving teaching and learning. However, as I will illustrate in Chapter Six, the findings suggest

that while the SMT lamented the lack of resources, they also sought to preserve the resources that the school had and, thus, inadvertently failed to support the effective use of these in the teaching and learning programme.

An important finding in this study relates to the value the SMT members placed on their partnerships with the DBE and parents as key stakeholders in the school. However, there were also missed opportunities in linking with local businesses, the community and outside organisations such as Non-government Organisations (NGOs). As argued in Chapter Two, partnering with these entities could help to harness community resources, including the expertise of different stakeholders, to enhance TPD and other aspects of the school. Chikoko et al. (2015), for example, found that effective schools in resource-poor areas such as rural communities cite community involvement as one of the factors that contribute to their effectiveness. The influence of teacher unions on school management is identified as contributing negatively to the SMT's ability to function as instructional leaders. In addition to other challenges identified in this study is the finding that members of the SMT have a real threat of teacher defiance which they attribute to teacher unions (see also: Bhengu et al., 2014; Khumalo et al., 2018; Maifala, 2017; Msila, 2014).

Lastly, the findings of this inquiry suggest that the context of rurality influences how members of the SMT understand their instructional leadership roles. The challenges, which include the scarcity of resources, have meant that members of the SMT prioritise safeguarding resources over having them utilized in learning. In addition, because of their understanding that rural parents are uneducated and do not care much about the education of their children, SMT members do not

make enough effort to include them in the education of their children. Moreover, I argue that members of the SMT understand their roles managerially because of lack of professional development. The findings also indicate that this lack of professional development is influenced by rurality for various reasons including neglect from the DBE.

## 5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter addressed the two critical questions posed in this study: 1) *How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school understand and perform their instructional leadership roles?* 2) *How does rurality influence the School Management Team's understandings and practices of their instructional leadership roles?* The findings reveal that members of the SMT have inadequate understanding of their instructional leadership roles and function more as managers than leaders of instruction. This includes their understanding of the roles of conducting classroom observations and school walkabouts, the role of assessing LTSM and their role of leading teacher professional development. Further, the influence of teacher unions is also a hindrance to instructional leadership.

In addition, the findings also indicate that rurality negatively influences how members of the SMT understand their roles. This is evidence of their lack of professional development which has led to them inadequately understanding their roles. Their lack of professional development is attributed to rurality because of the few opportunities available in that context for them to develop their leadership skills. Moreover, the findings also indicate that rurality influences the SMT

understandings of how best to protect the school resources. Because of lack of security and crime in the context, they prefer to keep the resources in storage rather than to use them in teaching and learning. Furthermore, their understanding is that the rural parents' involvement in the education of their children. is inadequate. Rural parents do not care about it. They do not make any effort to involve them despite recognising it as important.

The next chapter, Chapter Six, seeks to respond to the second part of the research question: *How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school perform their instructional leadership roles?* In addition, the chapter explores how rurality influences SMT members' performance of their instructional leadership roles.

## CHAPTER SIX

# INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AMONG THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM IN A RURAL SCHOOL: OBSERVATIONS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD

### 6.1 Introduction

While the literature reviewed in this thesis suggests that understanding one's role influences the performance of activities related to one's responsibility in an organisation, several factors in the environment (e.g., in a school) tend to either facilitate or inhibit the enactment of such tasks. For example, in their study, Bhengu et al. (2014) found that despite completing a formal qualification in which principals were taught the roles of instructional leaders, upon returning to their positions in schools, the principals could not translate their learning into practice. Therefore, in the study reported in this thesis I wanted to address two research questions:

1. *How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school understand and perform their instructional leadership roles?*
2. *How does rurality influence the School Management Team's understandings and practices of their instructional leadership roles?*

This means that in addition to investigating how members of the SMT in this rural school, Crocodile High School, understood their roles as instructional leaders, I wanted to explore how they performed these roles. Chapter Five presented findings on the participants' understandings of their instructional leadership roles. This chapter (Chapter Six) presents and analyses the findings on the SMT's role performance and the influence of rurality on the performance of such roles.

Informed by emerging findings which address the SMT's role understandings, in my fieldwork I generated data related to their role performance by shadowing and observing each member for a period of one week (Appendix I). In addition, I conducted a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) (Appendix K) with a sample of six teachers to uncover how they experienced the SMTs' performance of their instructional leadership roles in the school. In this phase of the study, I wanted to understand the nature of the SMT's practices in the school and their interaction with teachers and learners. In essence, I wanted to see whether the SMT's role performance was related to their understandings of their instructional leadership role.

## **6.2 From Role Understanding to Role Performance**

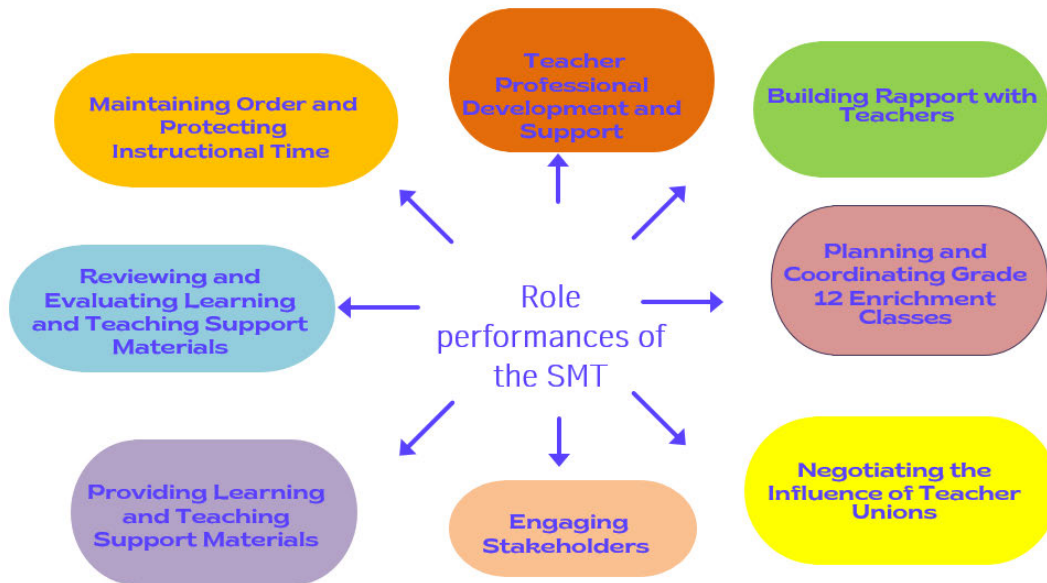
Available literature suggests that understanding one's roles has a significant impact on how such roles are performed. For instance, an inquiry by Mestry (2017b) found that principals who understand their instructional leadership roles have a more positive influence on teacher and learner performance than those who function as administrators and managers. In addition, there is abundant literature that supports the view that effective teacher professional development (TPD) leads to a better understanding of roles, thus also leading to improved practices and student learning (Kennedy, 2016; Philipsen et al, 2019). This scholarship suggests that understanding one's roles has a significant influence on one's ability to effectively perform such roles.

In Chapter Five, I reported on how members of the SMT at Crocodile High School, the main participants in this study, understood their instructional leadership roles in the school. Specifically,

the SMT members identified three main roles: 1) leading curriculum and policy development and implementation, 2) supporting and monitoring teaching and learning and 3) supporting teaching and teacher professional development. The findings indicated that members of the SMT have a limited understanding of their instructional leadership roles and, in many ways, function as managers rather than leaders. The findings also revealed that rurality has a negative impact on how members of the SMT understand their instructional leadership roles. My assumption in the study was that as beneficiaries of the SMT instructional leadership and support, teachers are best placed to reflect on the SMT's role performance in the school. Thus, in this chapter, I analyse the FGD with the teachers to present their perspectives on the instructional leadership practices of the SMT in the school. I further juxtapose these experiences with my observation of the seven SMT members.

Data from the teacher FGD was analysed thematically through the inductive data analysis process. To recap, I transcribed the FGD with teachers and read through the data to identify patterns which later formed the themes. On the other hand, observational findings were generated from field notes and my reflection journal. I read and analysed these to identify patterns and similarities or differences between the FGD findings and observations. The findings from my analysis produced eight themes as depicted below:

**Figure 6.1: Thematic Map of Instructional Leadership Role Performances of the SMT**



### **6.2.1 Maintaining Order and Protecting Instructional Time**

As discussed in Chapter Three, there is abundant literature indicating that effective teachers tend to utilise the allocated instructional time optimally to avoid interruptions and maximize student learning (Stronge, 2018). Sadly, this is not always the case in schools. For example, although I could not identify a recent study on how much instructional time is used for teaching and learning, a dated study Abadzi (2007) in Ghana showed that only about thirty-nine percent of the time allocated for learning is utilised as teachers and learners are often absent or late. In the context of South Africa, teachers often go on strike actions for several days at a time (Fleisch, 2010; Wills, 2014), further negatively impacting instructional time.

In this study, the findings show that members of the SMT understood maintaining order as an important part of their instructional leadership roles and as an important aspect of protecting instructional time; for example, they conducted walkabouts to monitor the activities in the school (see Chapter Five). The findings also reveal some misconceptions about whose role this is. Some SMT members understood it as the role of the principal, while others saw it as the role of the SMT.

The findings from the FGD indicate that from the teachers' perspectives, protecting instructional time is a vital part of the SMT's instructional leadership roles in the school. For instance, Mr Yellow (an English teacher) stated that the role of the SMT included monitoring. When asked to explain what this entailed, another teacher ventured a response, suggesting that the SMT members were responsible for "*monitoring day to day work, including finding out whether teachers are going to classes.*" (Mrs Blue- Teacher FGD, December 2019). Sharing the sentiment, Mr Brown also added:

*Sometimes there are no teachers in classrooms, or some have gone somewhere.*

*SMT members go to the staffroom to find out whose period it is and make sure the teacher goes to class* (Mr Brown- Teacher FGD, December 2019).

This exchange among the teachers also highlighted how members of the SMT were responsible for seeing to it that learners are on time for classes. In this regard, Mrs Orange declared:

*After break we usually have learners walking around and taking their time. The SMT is there to push them back to class and make sure that teachers go to lessons as expected.* (Mrs Orange- Teacher FGD, December 2019).

The teachers' views mirrored those of the SMT members (see Chapter Five). They argued that it was important to conduct regular walkabouts to ensure that teachers and learners got to class on time. In Chapter Five I argued that in a professional environment where teachers are aware of the times they are meant to be in classes, it should not be necessary for them to be reminded to do so. This could create an environment of lack of trust and undermine teachers' professional status. However, effective instructional leaders should seek to involve teachers and learners in finding a solution to poor performance and raising outcomes within the school (Leithwood et al., 2020), these perspectives indicate that the culture of the school where time on task (of teaching and learning) was challenging for all.

My observations in the school also revealed that despite the bell informing teachers and learners that classes had started at the beginning of the day and end of two breaks, many sat in the staffroom while learners roamed around the school until they were ushered back to classes. During my observations in the school, only Mr Zebra, the principal, was consistent in this role. For example, he regularly walked around the school and when he saw a class that was without a teacher, he would try to locate the teacher responsible. Similarly, during the week when I was observing Mr Lion, the deputy principal in charge of the Further Education and Training phase, he would occasionally conduct walkabouts and on one occasion, he went past a class where learners were making noise and reprimanded them and inquired about the whereabouts of the teacher. This was

not the case with other members of the SMT. Only once did I witness two SMT members, Mrs Elephant and Mrs Leopard, standing outside their shared office together and telling learners to get to class. In their private conversations, Mrs Leopard and Mrs Elephant lamented the challenge of teachers leaving their classes unattended. Other members of the SMT, when they were not teaching, mostly sat at their desk doing administrative duties.

It was perplexing that the SMT who were meant to be identifying gaps in teaching practices and seeking solutions, would discuss this matter among themselves as conversation rather than seeking solutions together and with the teachers. In Chapter Five, I concluded that the SMT, in many ways, did not have a collective understanding of their instructional leadership roles. Thus, despite the principal's best efforts to ensure that instructional time was protected, the strategy was not effective. Neither did it ensure that once the teachers and learners were in their classroom, any meaningful teaching and learning took place. These findings are consistent with available literature which suggests that members of the SMT do not always have a similar or collective understanding of their instructional leadership roles, thus making it difficult for them to achieve their goals (see for example, Mestry, 2018).

A related factor that may be attributed to this lack of collective approach to instructional leadership among the SMT was an apparent lack of commitment to their roles. For example, during my observations in the school, most SMT members would often leave school early or come in late for various personal reasons. To illustrate, Mr Giraffe (DH for Sepedi Home Language and Social Sciences) was also a member of the Advisory Committee of the Chief of Moletsi, Kgoshi Kgabo

Moloto II (see Chapter One). While his engagement with this committee revealed a positive relationship between the school and the community, his involvement in these duties had a negative impact on his instructional leadership role in the school. For example, on my second day of observing him, Mr Giraffe left the school soon after he arrived, at 9:25 to attend a meeting in the homestead of the Chief not far from the school. I remained in the school using the office that he shared with Mrs Elephant and Mrs Leopard. The two informed me that this was common behaviour for him and relayed an incident in which he once left the school early to attend a function at the royal homestead. Thus, while his intentions may have been to build relations that would benefit the school and the community, his management of these engagements was poor as they interfered with his core duties as a DH and teacher in the school.

Being late or leaving school early was common among other SMT as well. For example, Mrs Eland, the deputy principal in charge of the General Education and Training (GET) phase, also came in late on two occasions. Her explanation for her lateness on one occasion was that she had to call the municipality about power outages at her home. Another member of the SMT, Mr Springbok, also left at 11AM once to attend to private matters that he did not elaborate on. As such, it is likely that because members of the SMT may not see anything wrong with this behaviour in themselves, they were unable to recognise it as improper conduct from teachers.

As the literature suggests, effective instructional leaders establish and communicate behavioural standards and model appropriate behaviours for teachers and learners (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Nettles & Herrington, 2007). For example, during my fieldwork in the school, teachers were

constantly seeking permission to leave early and often came in late or left the school during teaching hours. Their reasons for leaving early included going home to lock the house, going to the doctor and others. While in any work environment it is reasonable that employees will have emergencies, in this school it appeared to be happening excessively and seemingly, without control from the SMT. This suggests that despite the SMT's understandings of their instructional leadership as involving maintaining order and protecting instructional time, their practices contradicted these roles and led to a chaotic school environment where, in many instances, very little time was spent on teaching and learning in the school.

### **6.2.2 Reviewing and Evaluating Learning and Teaching Support Materials**

As established in Chapter Five, the SMT members in this school identified reviewing and assessing learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) as central to their instructional leadership. This role is in line with the literature on effective instructional leadership as it gives SMT members insight into classroom practices which can be used to improve teaching practices and influence student learning (Robinson et al., 2008; Romero & Ventura, 2020). Similarly, in the FGD with the teachers, this role was identified as one that the members of the SMT performed as a way of ensuring adherence to national policies. For example, Mr Yellow observed:

*They check that the activities are standardised and that we are using departmental rubrics to mark. They also check that marking is done by us and such things (Mr Yellow- Teacher FGD, December 2019).*

Mr Red added:

*They also check our work output in line with the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP). For example, in our department the policy says we must give two homework tasks and two classwork tasks per week. (Mr Red- Teacher FGD, December 2019)*

In addition to ensuring policy adherence, the teachers also indicated that the SMT ensures that the content taught per subject and the time allocated for a particular unit aligns with policy stipulations. I wanted to find out how teachers navigated the necessary deviation from these policies should they identify learning needs that require deviation, such as deciding that more time was required to teach a certain unit. The FGD revealed that despite the value placed on assessing LTSM as a way of monitoring and supporting teaching and learning, teachers experienced the fastidious checking of LTSM negatively. Mr Red commented:

*It is a challenge whereby one feels that the learners do not understand at all but because of the policy, we end up giving them that activity to tick it off because the SMT is after you (Mr Red- Teacher FGD, December 2019).*

Explaining why this approach was not helpful for improving teaching and learning, Mr Brown observed:

*That kills the standard of what we are teaching. Sometimes we just give classwork and homework for the sake of the monitoring, not that they add any value (Mr Brown-Teacher FGD, December 2019).*

Another teacher who added his frustration at having to implement the policy without developing it to suit the needs of the school was Mrs Orange who declared:

*Somehow, I feel like it disadvantages the learners because I give them work and find that they don't understand it but because of the pacesetter, I only have three periods a week to teach and assess even when they don't understand. I see it when we do corrections that these learners did not understand but because of pressure to assess we do, even when they need time to go through the work gradually to understand it before writing activities. (Mrs Orange-Teacher FGD, December 2019).*

While Mrs Orange's frustration is understandable, her views indicate a limited understanding of the different types of assessments and their purposes. For example, I felt she was missing an opportunity to use the different types of formative assessment such as giving classwork, to diagnose challenges and to improve her teaching and enhance learning. In addition, the teachers' views also suggest that the SMT's understandings and performance of their role relates mostly to checking for adherence to the policy rather than supporting teachers to improve their teaching.

Further, these frustrations reveal that shared decision-making and distribution of leadership to teachers, was not common among the SMT members in the school. In retrospect, I should have asked the teachers whether this matter had been raised with the SMT and what the outcomes were.

However, their perspectives suggest that they recognised the role that they could play in informing how they might be supported to improve their classroom practice if they were involved in decision-making in the school. For example, Mrs Blue asserted:

*The other thing is that the SMT does not seem to consult teachers in the school. They need to come back to us and sit down to see steps we can take in order to bring progress in the school and benefit the learners and teachers. They should care about finding out what our needs are in order for them to meet these needs.*

(Mrs Blue- Teacher FGD, December 2019).

The above statement as well as the understanding by teachers that they must teach and assess according to policy without deviation, suggest that there is no open dialogue for teachers to raise these issues and develop policies to suit their teaching and learning needs.

My findings from the observations that I conducted with SMT members in the school also indicate that reviewing and evaluating LTSM forms an important part of the SMT's practices in the school. For instance, my observation of Mr Giraffe (DH for Sepedi Home Language and Social Sciences) who shares an office with Mrs Leopard and Mrs Elephant, indicated that the three of them used a common rubric to evaluate learner books in each of their departments. On one of the days that I was with Mr Giraffe, he requested teachers in his department to submit samples of the learners' books for him to review. To do this, from each teacher and subject, he selected five books to review. To document his findings, he counted the number of tasks found in the workbook, the expected number as per Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) and others such as tests and projects.

In the last section of the document, he provided comments for the teacher being evaluated. Whether Mr Giraffe used the information that he obtained from checking the learner books to provide

effective feedback to teachers or for their development (TPD) did not become evident during my data generation period in the school.

In addition to checking learner books, the SMT also played an active role in moderating assessment papers before and after assessments had been given. In the FGD with teachers, their perspectives were that the SMT has an important instructional leadership role of checking the suitability of the teaching and learning materials and evidence of differentiation in teaching and assessment methods. For instance, Mr Red observed:

*They check that the question papers are relevant to the content that I'm teaching as well as the standard because when you give the learners the question papers, we have the simple questions, the middle questions and the tough questions. It must go that way (Mr Red-Teacher FGD, December 2019).*

During my observation of the SMT members, teachers frequented the office shared by three of the DHs to have their assessment papers moderated before being given the go-ahead to give learners summative assessments. However, no conversation or feedback took place regarding the test papers despite them telling me that this ensures quality. However, in one case, after a post-moderation of an English test, Mrs Leopard (DH for Tourism and Business, Commerce and Management Studies) submitted it to Mr Lion as part of the process.

The DH moderates the learners' papers after the test and hands them to one of the deputies or the principal to sign before a copy is given to the DH to file. For DHs, the papers are moderated by

the Deputy Principal. I realised that even at that level, there were no discussions or feedback. Rather, the responsible DH or Deputy Principal simply signs the papers and makes a copy for the teacher. Therefore, the findings from this study suggest that the SMT did not use this role to identify challenges and provide support or guidance. Instead, it appears to have been conducted only because it was expected. As such, the SMT missed opportunities to identify challenges and use them to provide opportunities for TPD. This indicates that their understandings of their instructional leadership roles, as it relates to providing TPD, is limited (I elaborate on the SMT's role in promoting TPD later in this chapter).

### **6.2.3 Providing Learning and Teaching Support Materials**

As discussed throughout this thesis, learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) are invaluable to effective teaching and learning and student achievement (Akungu, 2014; Maringe et al., 2015). Managing and allocating such resources accordingly is therefore an important part of instructional leadership in school (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Horng & Loeb, 2010; Stronge & Xu, 2021). As instructional leaders in a resource constrained context, ensuring that the best LTSM are sourced and safeguarded is vital to the SMT's instructional leadership roles. In this study, the FGD indicated that while teachers regarded this as an important instructional leadership role, they found their SMT's efforts to be ineffective. For instance, Mr Green commented:

*We don't get enough help with resources. Say I need a laptop, but I do not have money to buy it. If I ask for help from one of my DHs, no one will help. They will send me from pillar to post about it, which is frustrating. Schools should buy resources for departments so that if I want a particular resource, it will be easy for*

*me to have access to it, use it and give it back to the DH upon use. Because sometimes you find that I wrote some of the things by hand and they tell me that I cannot write it by hand. What must I do then? That DH cannot even help me with his or her laptop, so I become frustrated, and learners suffer (Mr Green- Teacher FGD, December 2019).*

I asked what the teachers thought the SMT could do to ensure that they have access to these resources. Mrs Orange responded:

*As SMT members, they should push that we have all the necessary tools, they are not doing enough to address the problem. They need to make sure that the learning takes place and is fair to the learners (Mrs Orange- Teacher FGD, December 2019).*

My observations of the SMT indicate that in some ways they value making LTSM available to teachers and understandably go to great lengths to keep them safe. For instance, Mr Giraffe kept resources such as maps for Geography in his office and teachers would send learners to borrow them as needed. My assessment was that the frustrations that teachers had regarding the use of the school's laptop may stem from the scarcity rather than the SMT's refusal to provide the resources.

Mr Lion, for example, informed me that each department in the school was allocated a laptop which was kept by the DH and which teachers may borrow when required. Sadly, this was also the same laptop that the DHs used for their own administrative and teaching duties. This meant that only one member of a particular department in the school could use the laptop at any given time. In addition, because of crime and lack of security (see Chapter Five), each DH is tasked with taking the departmental laptop home at the end of the day for safekeeping. Thus, it meant that

when a member of the SMT had to leave early, as I observed them doing on different occasions, members of their department were left without the opportunity to use it. This could explain why teachers had lost confidence in the SMT providing LTSM.

Further, during my week of observing Mr Springbok (DH for Physical and Natural Sciences), there were two days in which he was facilitating a national baseline assessment of the Department of Basic Education (DBE). This DBE initiative aims to use the baseline diagnostic assessments in Grade 9 to assess the relationship between classroom instruction in South African schools and Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. Crocodile High School was one of the sampled schools to participate in the assessment. (DBE, n.d) I witnessed the effort that he made to ensure that learners have the devices to take the online test. He began by collecting laptops from other SMT members and collecting two other laptops from storage and the tablet computers which were also kept in storage (see Chapter Five). To recap, there were 26 tablets in the school that had been donated by an NGO which Mr Springbok admitted were not used often despite their potential for improving teaching and learning. Some of the devices collected were faulty and did not connect to the internet. Realising that the pulled resources were not enough, Mr Springbok used two of his personal mobile phones to accommodate the learners who were still without devices. This illustrates how rurality and lack or shortage of resources, rather than the practices of the SMT, influenced some of the challenges that teachers experienced in accessing LTSM.

While the SMT members' interactions with teachers and learners around LTSM revealed a willingness to provide support, the findings also indicated that other opportunities to improve

instruction were missed. This is evident in the school's inability to work around some of the shortages in LTSM to solve teaching and learning challenges in the school. To illustrate, on one occasion Mrs Eland (Deputy principal for GET) took me to a room designated as the school library. However, my observation was that the room functioned more as storage than a library. For example, a strong room had been built inside the room, thus reducing the library space. A lot of the feeding scheme items were also in that room while others were inside the strong room. Outside the strong room were piles of old and out-dated textbooks on the floor which occupied much of the space. In addition, there were three shelves in the middle of the room which had current textbooks. By no means did the room represent or function as a library. I was surprised that books that were not currently being used were littering the floor instead of being stored properly or disposed of if they were out-dated and not going to be used in the future. The limitations outlined here notwithstanding, the school had no established system of borrowing books from the library apart from the textbooks that were allocated at the beginning of the year and collected at the end. Moreover, as Mrs Eland had explained to me in my first week of observation, a mobile library had been donated by a group of visiting Americans about a week after my initial visit in early December 2019.

In the seven weeks that I was in the school between September and November 2020, the library had not been used. When Mr Springbok took me to see the library, a room about the size of a camper trailer, there were textbooks and fiction and non-fiction texts on various subjects from different parts of the world. I estimated these books to be anywhere between three to five hundred in number. There was however not enough space for learners to sit in the library as there was only a small sitting area with a single desk. This library also came with an attached veranda which I

was informed had been used by learners for debating practice and sessions. While SMT members had lamented not having a functional library, nearly a year after one had been donated, they had not yet created a system for learners to access books. Rather, the space seemed to serve an aesthetic purpose as it was well positioned in the centre of the school. I decided to ask Mrs Elephant how the library operated as she was responsible for overseeing book allocation and was the DH for English in the school. According to her, the school was still working out a system that would allow learners to have access to the books. While I understood that the Covid-19 pandemic may have resulted in a delay in getting a system going in the library, in my view, the school had had enough time to develop a system in the intervening months. Thus, despite members of the SMT's views that safeguarding and providing resources was an important aspect of their instructional leadership role, in practice, they fell short. In addition, the findings suggest that while rurality contributed to some of the challenges, members of the SMT were too focused on the school's deficits and problems (Myende & Chikoko, 2014) and failed to recognise the assets and opportunities available in the school.

#### **6.2.4 Teacher Professional Development and Support**

As indicated throughout this thesis, research on effective teaching and learning shows that TPD in pre-service training and on-going upon qualifying (continuous teacher professional development), plays a vital role in teacher instructional practices, thus positively impacting student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Nettles & Herrington, 2007). As discussed in Chapter Five, SMT members in this study believed that TPD was largely the responsibility of the DBE as promoted through the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) appraisal. In seeking to understand how the SMT practices promoted TPD, I asked the teachers in the FGD about TPD opportunities

available to them. Like the SMT, the teachers in this study reported that such opportunities were provided by the DBE. For instance, Mrs Orange stated: *“I think per subject there are workshops which teachers attend which are very good and show us what is expected from our subjects”* (Mrs Orange- Teacher FGD, December 2019).

When asked whether the school organized any internal workshops, Mr Brown responded: *“Normally within the school we cannot say we have such workshops. We get our workshops from the department”* (Mr Brown- Teacher FGD, December 2019). In addition, Mrs Blue explained:

*I think the school is too reliant on the department (DBE). I don't think they consider that there is a policy they can use which can provide professional development internally* (Mrs Blue- Teacher FGD, December 2019).

Looking back, I should have tried to find out which policy she was referring to in order to understand her perspective better. Nevertheless, at this point, I shared my personal experience with the hope that it could remind them of other opportunities they have had in the school for development. For example, in my experience of working as a teacher abroad, some of the opportunities for TPD came in the form of schools inviting professionals from outside the school to run workshops for teachers. I asked whether such opportunities had ever been available in the school. While some participants stated that they had not been part of any workshops like that, Mr Yellow recalled instances in which a professional had been invited to the school to train teachers on matters such as wellness and leave policy:

*No, we don't have such. Except in terms of wellness, then they would outsource someone. There is a certain lady who has adopted our school in terms of wellness. The school invited her here to give us a workshop on learner discipline and interrelationships as educators. I think even in terms of certain challenges we face in the school; the school has outsourced someone. For example, if teachers don't understand what is happening in terms of different types of leave according to policy, the SMT invites an official from the DBE to give a workshop about that (Mr Yellow- Teacher FGD, December 2019).*

Mr Yellow's recollection suggests that while it is not a common occurrence for the school to organise TPD workshops, there are cases in which the SMT deems it necessary to train teachers on a particular issue, thus revealing evidence of instructional leadership. However, other accounts in the teacher FGD reveal that novice teachers may not receive the necessary mentoring in the school as part of TPD. For example, Mrs Orange indicated:

*I will speak about myself because I'm new in the system. Sometimes I find that I need guidance, someone to say this is what you must do. I need someone to check on me and say, "Are you okay with this? Are you coping? What do you need help with?" Unfortunately, we do not have that. One is thrown into the dungeon of the lions. These kids are not easy to deal with, so one needs support (Mrs Orange- Teacher FGD, December 2019).*

As discussed in previous sections, my observations in the school corroborated both the understandings of the SMT (Chapter Five) and teachers' experiences of the instructional leadership that they received. For instance, in the weeks that I was in the school, there were no internal

workshops conducted or planned for the future. From my observation, there were also no coaching, demonstrations or mentoring opportunities that took place in the school. The only activity which involved teachers were in the form of meetings held to distribute policy documents and update teachers on various changes from the DBE. For example, in a brief meeting that I attended, Mrs Elephant informed teachers about the amended programme of assessment which needed to align with the amended Annual Teaching Plan (ATP). She also informed teachers that the documents were given to them as a pile by the DBE and that they would each get a copy and could keep what was relevant to their teaching subjects and throw the rest away. Another point emphasised in that meeting was lesson planning in which she reminded teachers to have daily lesson plans according to the requirements and submit them to her weekly for evaluation. Teachers asked her to confirm the number of activities per subject per week and raised some of the challenges that they were encountering. For example, an English teacher informed Mrs Elephant that she had problems with one of her classes in which learners kept failing the listening comprehension test. Mrs Elephant's advice was for the teacher to try reading more slowly and with a louder voice. I wondered whether this was useful advice but could not follow this up as my time in the school was coming to an end. Neither the teacher nor Mrs Elephant linked this to the mandatory pace setter and whether or not the former could deviate so as to allow her learners to catch up. Surprising to observe about this meeting was that it did not lead to discussions about how the amended ATP would affect teaching and learning or how teachers might identify and develop teaching and learning strategies to mitigate the effects of the mandated changes on learning. These findings are consistent with those from the study by Mathunyane (2013) on instructional leadership behaviours of school principals in the Limpopo province which suggested that principals did not fully understand whose role it was to provide teachers with opportunities for development.

This is not to say that SMT members did not make any effort to support instruction in the school. For example, on one occasion while I was observing Mrs Eland, Mr Zebra came to her to discuss making changes to how teachers assign work/assignments. This was after some teachers had expressed apprehension about assigning classwork activities using the regular classwork books since learners were in school some days and learning remotely (online) on other days. This, they explained to me, was a challenge because teachers kept the books at school to assess on days when learners were at home. This meant that learners did not have access to the books on the days when they were studying remotely. Thus, Mrs Eland and Mr Zebra decided that they would introduce a system involving two files: one file would be for homework, while the second would be for work done in school and requiring marking. This incident revealed that despite resource shortages and the lack of TPD opportunities, some of the SMT members found creative ways to support teachers in addressing the challenges that they encountered in their classrooms. In a few instances, they worked together to solve problems.

### **6.2.5 Engaging Stakeholders**

As discussed in Chapter Five, the SMT's ability to identify and collaborate with various stakeholders is important to their instructional leadership roles in the school. This is particularly important in a rural school setting struggling with various challenges. As Myende (2015) posits, partnerships with other stakeholders are an important part of the school's assessment of its assets and finding ways to make the different assets work for the betterment of the school. For instance, partnerships with other professionals such as social workers, psychologists and health practitioners, could go a long way towards addressing some of the social and health outcomes that teachers and learners face in an under-resourced rural school. The school could also collaborate

with the community to have access to the community library which, in the case of the school in this study, is a walking distance away.

The experiences of the teachers in the FGD revealed that the SMT played an important role in conflict resolution between learners, teachers and parents. For example, Mr Yellow noted:

*What I can add about maintaining order is being a mediator between teachers and learners and parents during conflict. When learners are disrespectful for example and we involve the SMT, they issue a letter to summon the parents in for a meeting*  
(Mr Yellow- Teacher FGD, December 2019).

Like the teacher accounts, in my one-on-one interview with her, Mrs Elephant observed that sometimes when angry parents came to the school, Mrs Eland (Deputy Principal for GET)) used her interpersonal skills to calm them down. During my observation, it was evident that the SMT collaborated with parents on mostly discipline and pastoral matters while also solving other internal conflicts between learners and teachers. Mrs Eland, for example, played an important role in disciplining and reprimanding learners for bad behaviour. On one occasion, a learner was brought to her for being disrespectful to the security guard and refusing to have his hands sanitised in the morning. In her office, she had a detailed discussion with the learner which included explaining why it was important to sanitise his hands and why it was important to respect all adults around the school, including non-teaching staff. In observing this interaction and comparing it to others in which Mrs Eland was reprimanding learners, I concluded that while she was firm with them, she was also very kind.

Another incident that stood out during my observation of Mrs Eland, involved a grandmother who came to speak about a troublesome grandchild whom she was raising. The grandparent had come to ask Mrs Eland to assist her in reprimanding the child as she was disrespectful, and the family had failed to correct her behaviour. From my experience, this was unusual. In most disciplinary cases in schools, it is usually the school that approaches parents to intervene where a child is being disruptive or disrespectful. The fact that in this case, it was the parent approaching the school suggested that parents had faith in the school and Mrs Eland's pastoral role. The examples given above and other interactions I observed Mrs Eland having with parents and learners regarding learner welfare, suggested that she was exemplary in her pastoral care role in the school. Her interventions reflected a holistic approach to pastoral care and to teaching and learning which incorporate meeting not only the learners' academic learning needs but also their spiritual, emotional and social needs (Schoeman, 2015; Seary & Willians, 2020). This approach is particularly important in this rural context which, as I argued in Chapters One and Two, has a multitude of challenges which stem from the communities and influence the operations of the school. Ensuring that the learners' basic needs are met might go a long way towards helping them learn better.

Other members of the SMT that I observed engaging parents were Mr Zebra and Mr Lion who involved them specifically about the school's Grade 12 Enrichment Programme (detailed in detail in section 6.2.7). For instance, Mr Zebra called meetings with parents of learners in Grade 12 who had missed either the early morning, afternoon or weekend enrichment sessions. I observed a meeting in which a woman purporting to be an aunt of a learner in Grade 12 presented herself to Mr Zebra's office to discuss the issues. Upon speaking to her and hearing which learner she had

come to discuss, Mr Zebra asked me to call Mr Lion into his office. Mr Zebra explained that the learner had missed two weekend sessions and the SMT were concerned about the implications of this on her performance in the national Grade 12 examinations. Mr Lion then added that in the school's knowledge, the learner was an orphan and lived with her grandmother. When pressed for various details, the woman admitted that the learner was a girlfriend of her adult son and had moved out of her grandmother's house and into her house which she shares with the son. Mr Zebra and Mr Lion pleaded with the woman to send the learner back to her grandmother's home so that she could focus on completing her studies. After she left, the two agreed that they would contact the girl's grandmother to ensure that she worked with them to get the learner back home and attending both school and enrichment classes. This incident revealed that members of the SMT had consistent engagement with the learners and parents to identify inconsistencies in the woman's story.

Beyond these three members of the SMT (the principal and two deputies), none of the others interacted with parents during my observations in the school. Further, much of the engagement between the school and parents, except for Grade 12 learners' parents, involved issues unrelated to teaching and learning. As such, parents did not seem to be involved in enhancing instructional practice in the school, highlighting a missed opportunity for tapping into this population as a resource.

Other stakeholders the SMT engaged included the DBE. Mrs Elephant and Mr Leopard, for example, attended two workshops organised by the DBE regarding the amended ATP and upon

her return to the school, held meetings with teachers in their departments. The meeting that Mrs Elephant held in her department is the one that I mentioned in a prior section in which there was no evidence of TPD, rather, she only announced the changes to teachers. Unfortunately, Mrs Leopard held her departmental meeting on a day I was off, sick, so I was not able to observe how her meeting was conducted. Despite these engagements, in the FGD, the teachers asserted that the SMT did not adequately use available opportunities to collaborate with stakeholders. For example, in relation to the lack of LTSM in the school, Mr Yellow asserted:

*In my opinion, the SMT could go out and outsource funds somewhere if they were so eager and knowledgeable. They would do it because we are seeing it, it is happening in other schools. We have got former learners that are mining engineers and doctors. We have a range of careers, those with influence. The SMT could contact them to find out how they can give back to the school. And I'm telling you, if they were interested, we could expand the school with multiple blocks of classrooms. Some of our former learners are doing very well out there. They have the right positions to press buttons and make things happen (Mr Yellow- Teacher FGD, December 2019).*

Contrary to Mr Yellow's understandings, my findings from the observations revealed that the SMT members were trying to forge partnerships with members of the community and other schools and organisations to benefit the school. For example, Mrs Elephant showed me a document which indicated that the school had borrowed textbooks from a neighbouring school. According to her, this was her initiative when she realised that sharing such resources could benefit both schools. She further informed me that in the past, resources such as projectors had been borrowed between the schools for workshops and related purposes. As part of her instructional leadership, she took the initiative to identify the needs of the school and available assets in the community and to form

partnerships with neighbouring schools to source much needed LTSM in a resource constrained context (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Myende, 2015; Stronge & Xu, 2021).

Outside of this initiative, as discussed earlier in this chapter, Mr Giraffe was a member of the Chief of Moletsi's advisory committee and the partnership he had with the Traditional Council could be beneficial to the school. However, my research did not yield any evidence of the school harnessing resources or expertise from it. Therefore, while some partnerships were forged, my observations and the concerns the teachers expressed in the FGD pointed to the inadequacy of the SMT's efforts. As I have argued above, the SMT missed opportunities to make use of available resources within the school and in the community to address the various problems besetting the school.

### **6.2.6 Building Rapport with Teachers**

The literature on effective school leadership suggests that collaborative decision-making leads to collective agreement and ownership of decisions by members of the organisation (Burns, 1978; Dou et al., 2017; Leithwood et al., 2020). Linked to this, scholars have argued that good relationships between school management and teachers and other stakeholders, influence the creation of a positive school climate that is conducive to learning (Allen et al., 2015; Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021). Yet, in this study, the findings from the teacher FGD suggest that teachers believed the SMT had a top-down leadership approach in which teachers were not included in decisions (discussed in section 6.2.2) and did not make effort to have positive working relationships with them. For example, when I asked teachers what influence they thought the SMT had on instruction, Mr Brown expressed:

*I want to be frank and truthful. Sometimes they have a very negative influence, given the teacher-DH relations. My understanding is that when one is my DH and they notice faults in my work, the aim should be to empower me, to guide and mentor me. However, sometimes it is more of a personal thing than what we are here for. Because I may have made a number of mistakes, it's not like I must be sentenced to death. There must be some mechanisms that you as the DH must use to get me on track (Mr Brown- Teacher FGD, December 2019).*

When asked to elaborate on how, in his perspective, the poor relationship between the SMT and teachers had a negative impact on learning, Mr Brown responded:

*It affects my morale and sometimes I feel like why doesn't the bell ring and I go home? At times I go to my lessons but because I would still be thinking about what happened, my teaching is affected. A happy teacher is someone who produces great results (Mr Brown- Teacher FGD, December 2019).*

Adding to Mr Brown's sentiment, Mrs Orange asserted:

*I think it is about power when one is in a certain position, as most of them want to suppress subordinates. It is as if they are saying: "you must know that I am your departmental head" not necessarily providing support. I mean if I submit something to them and they find something wrong with it, I need them as DH to show me where it is wrong, rather than just saying it is wrong, they must show us where it is wrong (Mrs Orange- Teacher FGD, December 2019).*

My analysis was that the teachers did not have confidence in the SMT's ability to build strong working relationships that would benefit their practice and student learning. Thus, while the findings also revealed that SMT members valued ensuring that teachers' work was aligned to national policies, they did not provide the necessary support and TPD for effective implementation.

Despite these negative experiences of instructional leadership, the teachers also admitted that sometimes, their relationships with members of the SMT were positive. Mr Brown highlighted inconsistencies in the ways the SMT interacted with teachers:

*But also, you find that the negativity is inconsistent, sometimes they are happy sometimes they are not. At the end of the day, it's like some days they support us and other days they don't. Hence I'm saying it is inconsistent. (Mr Brown- Teacher FGD, December 2019).*

The seven weeks that I spent at the school to observe the SMT at work enabled me to see both positive and negative interactions between them and teachers. Firstly, even though some teachers had to constantly be reminded to go to their lessons or hand in weekly lesson plans, from what I could observe, these interactions were handled with respect and professionalism. For example, when Mr Zebra went to the staff room at the beginning of the day or end of breaks, he would always greet teachers and inform them that the bell had rung. He would then ask if they were all supposed to be in the staff room at that time. These interactions were short and I did not observe resistance or discussions from teachers. Rather, those who had lessons would go and Mr Zebra would leave the staff room.

In addition, my observation of Mrs Eland suggests that she values building positive relationships with teachers. For instance, during her tea and lunch breaks, she joined teachers in one of the two staff rooms. Some teachers also visited her office to make conversation, sometimes about things unrelated to work. During those visits, I also observed banter between Mrs Eland and some teachers that revealed familiarity and positive social cohesion.

Linked to her care for teachers' welfare, on one occasion while I was observing her, she visited a storeroom in which the feeding scheme products were kept. After assessing the stock, she concluded that some of the items would have to be given out to teachers. As she explained, since learners came to school on alternate days, and could not take food parcels as intended, there was more food in the storeroom than was needed. Therefore, she decided that since new deliveries were scheduled for that week, there would be no space for more perishable items such as vegetables; therefore, such items would be given to teachers. When she went to the staffroom and announced the decision, the teachers cheered in excitement. While this may seem insignificant, based on the teachers' reactions, I recognised this initiative as an incentive and reward for teachers to continue to work hard. As discussed in Chapter Three, incentivising teachers for their efforts is an important instructional leadership role as it can improve teacher motivation, thus positively impacting teaching and learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

However, I also observed negative interactions between teachers and the SMT. In one of the meetings that I observed for example, the SMT and teachers clashed on various issues, leading to exchanges that I felt were disrespectful and offensive. For example, at the start of that meeting, a

teacher raised his hand to ask Mr Zebra why he had not fixed the door of their staffroom despite them complaining about it before. Before Mr Zebra could answer, the teacher stood up and asked if Mr Zebra would like to work in an office with a broken door where dust would constantly be bothering him. Once again, before Mr Zebra could speak, the teacher interjected, saying that he knew Mr Zebra would not appreciate it if this problem was in his office. When the teacher finally sat down, showing great restraint, Mr Zebra calmly responded that he had noted down the teacher's concerns and would make sure the door was fixed.

Once that initial conflict had been dealt with and the main item of the agenda was introduced, more disagreements emerged. Because my data generation period started at the beginning of the fourth term and the school was still learning to deal with the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, many changes were taking place. This included changes in the teaching and learning timetable to accommodate the protocols that the school had adopted. As Mrs Eland explained, in the third term, the SMT realised that some teachers had too many classes on some days and no classes on others. Some had back-to-back classes, while others were responsible for the first and last lesson and too much time in between. Thus, to be fair to all teachers and improve the quality of contact time, Mr Zebra, along with Mr Lion, collaborated in creating an amended timetable. However, the changes were not well received by teachers and created misunderstandings and frustrations, with some teachers feeling that they were given more work than others. In the morning briefing held for Mr Zebra to explain the changes to the teachers, one teacher stood up and expressed his disappointment at the lack of transparency and teacher involvement in the process, suggesting that the allocation of duties at the beginning of the year also did not involve teachers. According to this

teacher, this led to the SMT choosing certain teachers to teach Grade 12 learners who later produced “rubbish” results in the national examinations.

These findings suggest that even though the SMT attempted to build a rapport with teachers, and in some cases, provide incentives where possible, the conflicts had a negative effect on the functioning of the school and possibly on teaching and learning. From these discussions, a follow-up emergency meeting was scheduled to amend the timetable. These meetings meant that the attention and efforts of the teachers and the SMT were diverted from their core business: teaching and learning. As discussed in Chapter Four, I was not permitted to observe this meeting, so I am not privy to what was discussed and concluded. However, I noticed that instead of involving the whole SMT, only the principal and one of the deputies attended the emergency meeting. As such, the teachers could be justified in their perception that decisions in the school did not consider teachers’ perspectives. These findings mirror Malinga’s (2016) which found that DHs were often excluded from decisions (for example about teacher class allocations). Instead, decisions were made by principals. From the findings, Malinga concluded that DHs were unable to influence teaching and learning and were therefore unable to function as instructional leaders.

### **6.2.7 Planning and Coordinating Grade 12 Enrichment Classes**

The literature on the leadership functions and roles that improve student learning and achievement is insistent that the best leaders of instruction are those who are involved in practices that directly influence teaching and learning (Leithwood et al., 2020; Marks & Printy, 2003; Waters et al., 2005). Although teachers in the FGD did not refer to the role of coordinating the Grade 12

enrichment programme discussed above as important to the practices of the SMT, during my observation it became evident that this was a central instructional leadership practice among the members of the SMT. The enrichment classes included early morning, after-school and weekend classes meant to prepare learners for the national matric (Grade 12) examinations. During my observations, Mr Zebra played a pivotal role in the planning and coordinating of these extra classes. He began each day at 6:30 AM with Grade 12 learners involved in independent study until the start of the school day an hour later. Mr Zebra informed me that on some days, learners studied independently while on others they had teachers coming in early to teach them. Each morning, he would stand outside Grade 12 classrooms to greet the learners and mark the register at the start of the lessons. Once satisfied that most learners were there, he would leave them to work, affirming that they were usually disciplined and worked well on their own on the days that teachers were not allocated. Then, ten minutes before the end of the enrichment classes, he would go to each class to find out if any more learners had arrived after he had marked the register before releasing them to use the bathroom before reporting to their first class. Based on Mr Zebra's register, I noticed that most of the learners attended every morning class and were mostly punctual. This is important to note because the school serves learners from more than one village and many walk long distances to school. Mr Zebra informed me that the attendance registers were analysed fortnightly to review attendance. Based on this analysis, he would call the parents of learners who were inconsistent in their attendance for a meeting in which the implications of non-attendance would be explained. Furthermore, he reported that the school compared the records of learner absenteeism from the classes to their performance in formal assessments throughout the Grade 12 year. From this analysis, the learners and their parents are informed to make them understand the correlation between the two. Furthermore, study sessions were held from 3:30 to 4:30 in the afternoon. These

sessions were organised in a similar manner to the morning sessions. However, unlike the morning sessions in which only Mr Zebra (the principal) was involved, most members of the SMT participated in managing the afternoon sessions. In this regard, Mr Giraffe showed me a timetable that stipulated the days on which each member of the SMT was expected to stay after school supervising learners. According to him, two members of the SMT, Mrs Elephant and Mrs Leopard, were exempt from the supervision as they had other commitments after school.

As I learned from members of the SMT, during the mid-term and mid-year (trial) examinations periods there were even more extensive study periods which ran from five in the afternoon to eight in the evening and six to ten at night during final examinations. Because the school was situated far from some of the villages that it serves, parent collaboration in accompanying the learners on their walk to school and meeting them on the way home was pivotal for the success of those study sessions. Notably, the SMT's collaboration with parents as it related to Grade 12 classes needed significant and meaningful involvement of parents. Beyond accompanying and meeting the learners on their way to and from school for safety reasons, their cooperation ensured that the children benefited from the extra support that the school provided.

My analysis in this study indicates that because the Grade 12 national examinations and results are a matter of national interest and are subject to community and societal scrutiny, the school tended to focus most of its effort to support learning in that grade. This is particularly visible in these efforts to prepare learners for summative assessment at the end of this grade, leaving the other grades with little support and attention. As Sempe (2021) found in a study that sought to understand

the reasons for this phenomenon in schools, good performance in the national matric examinations and outside scrutiny influences instructional leadership and teacher practice in schools. While the literature suggests that these extra classes have a positive influence on student performance in rural schools, many learners drop-out before they get to Grade 12. In addition, going to school early, leaving late and missing weekends and holidays during the final year of high school, when learners are potentially also dealing with the stress of university applications and financing. Such efforts may harm their physical and mental health. This suggests that interventions are needed earlier in their schooling (Mokoena & van Breda, 2021; Runhare et al., 2021).

The findings in this study suggest that the SMT has two approaches to its instructional leadership in the school: a seemingly robust and well-coordinated Grade 12 programme on one hand, and a lackadaisical approach to instructional programming in the rest of the school on the other. As the findings suggest, practices such as protecting instructional time, classroom observations and others which the SMT have identified as important in the interviews (See Chapter Five) were seemingly not prioritised in the instructional leadership practices of the SMT.

### **6.2.8 Negotiating the Influence of Teacher Unions**

Available literature suggests that there exists a hostility toward members of the SMT among teacher union members in South Africa, leading to teacher insubordination and making it difficult for members of the SMT to function as instructional leaders (Bhengu et al., 2014; Fleisch, 2010). Similarly, in this study, the findings from interviews with members of the SMT suggest that the SMT identify negotiating the influence of teacher unions on the school and its programme as an

important part of their work as instructional leaders (see Chapter Five). While teachers did not identify this role in their FGD, my observations suggested that negotiating the influence of teacher unions in the school was one of the challenges that SMT members encountered in performing their instructional leadership role in the school. For example, in addition to being a member of the SMT, Mr Giraffe was also the chairperson of a teacher union in the school. This, in my view, hampered his instructional leadership performance. While union activity and even chairing a committee is not a negative thing, in the case of Mr Giraffe it appeared to add more responsibility to his already heavy teaching and instructional leadership roles. For example, on one of the days I observed him when he had fewer lessons; he spent a significant amount of time preparing for a union meeting. In addition, his union activities made it challenging for other members of the SMT to perform their instructional leadership roles. For example, during my observation of Mr Zebra, I observed a School Governing Body (SGB) meeting in which the main topic was a new teacher that had been hired to teach a particular subject, but who, upon assuming duties, decided that the subject was not the best fit for her. According to Mr Zebra, the teacher complained to him and when he informed her that because she had been specifically hired for that subject, she would have to continue teaching it, she escalated her complaints to union representatives in the school. The latter held a meeting with the principal to defend her. Therefore, the principal called the SGB to seek a solution. During the week of my observation of Mr Giraffe, he had attended a meeting with the principal and a few others to which I was not invited. Looking back, I realise that this meeting must have been where the teacher, the principal and union representatives, including Mr Giraffe as the chairperson of the union in the school, met to discuss the case. My analysis suggests that Mr Giraffe's involvement with the union created a conflict of interest where, for example, as a member of the SMT, he had to ensure that teachers honoured their teaching duties and in his role as the

chair of the union, his role was to defend the teachers, including those who refused to perform their duties. In the end, the SGB decided to compel the teacher to teach the subject she was hired to teach. Moreover, as discussed above, the conflict that resulted from the changes in the teaching timetable during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic may have been aggravated by the presence and influence of teacher unions in the school. The teacher insubordination and intimidation of the SMT that I witnessed could have been influenced by the unionisation of teachers in the school. Thus, as discussed in Chapter Five, while teacher unions are meant to professionalise teaching and represent the interests of teachers in policy making and implementation (Mafisa, 2017; Ramokgotswa, 2015), their politicisation in South Africa threatens teaching and learning and the SMT's instructional leadership role performance, thereby negatively impacting instruction.

### **6.3 Discussion**

The findings reported in this chapter suggest that in some ways, members of the SMT did not adequately understand their roles as instructional leaders in the school. As such, their practices are administrative and managerial in nature rather than practices of effective instructional leadership. This is visible in the culture of the school where instructional time is not protected and learners, teachers and members of the SMT have a relaxed attitude towards getting to class at the start of the day or end of the break, and teachers and SMT frequently leave early and come in late. In addition, the findings indicate that members of the SMT were relaxed in their approach to managing the school and despite understanding some roles as important to their instructional leadership roles, many of those roles could not be observed. For instance, members of the SMT professing the protection of instructional time as forming part of their leadership roles, in reality, the principal was also the only member of the SMT observed doing walkabouts to ensure that

teachers and learners get to classes. Other such roles include conducting classroom observations which were also not part of their observed practices. It appears that members of the SMT were comfortable working this way as they are aware that the DBE did not frequent rural schools and by their own understandings, parents were uneducated and may not hold them accountable (du Plessis, 2014).

The findings show that members of the SMT did not have a collective understanding of their roles in collaboratively making decisions within the school. For instance, the reality that some decisions such as timetabling for both Grade 12 enrichment program and teaching timetable were made by Mr Lion and Mr Zebra alone, without consultation of teachers or the rest of the SMT reveals a lack of collective action. In addition, some members of the SMT were aware that teachers were asking teachers' assistants to teach their classes but only spoke about in private conversations rather than setting high expectations for teachers and learners (Leithwood et al., 2006). It is evident that this role was perceived to be the job of the principal. In the absence of this collective understanding, members of the SMT worked as individuals, pulling in different directions (Rosenholtz, 1985) and harming instruction.

Further, the findings suggest that members of the SMT had a rigid understanding of curriculum policy and its relationship to teachers as professionals. They seemed to understand their role as ensuring compliance to DBE requirements and disregarding the many guidelines on enabling teacher professionalism (see for example, DBE, 2011b). Further, effective implementation of any policy requires schools to adapt the materials to fit the unique opportunities and challenges of a

particular context (Carl, 2012; Constantinides, 2021; Schechter, Shaked, Ganon-Shilon & Goldratt, 2018). Thus, their insistence on rigid compliance to national policy in a context that faces a plethora of contextual challenges can only mean that their instructional leadership is blind to real needs of the teachers and learners in their school. The findings in this study revealed that the SMT members did promote or provide opportunities for teacher autonomy or professional development (TPD) in the school.

Lastly, this study also revealed that rurality has a negative impact on the instructional leadership practices of the SMT seen in their inability to properly allocate resources and failure to perform even roles they regard as important. The role of rurality in this disconnection between understandings and practices lies in the perception by members of the SMT that because parents are uneducated and the DBE was uninvolved, they did not have to account, thus their approach to management was relaxed. Further, also because of rurality, the SMT was unable to look forward at opportunities in the school and community because their focus was on what the school lacked because of its context.

#### **6.4. Chapter Summary**

This chapter set out to answer the research question: *How do members of the SMT in a rural school enact their instructional leadership role?* In essence, the chapter focuses on the role performance of the SMT while the previous chapter explored the understanding of instructional leadership among the SMT. In addition, it responds to the second research question which asked: *How does rurality influence the School Management Team's understandings and practices of their instructional leadership roles?* The findings from my observations of the SMT members indicate

that in many ways, influenced by their role understandings, they failed to provide the instructional leadership and support needed in the school, with negative consequences for teaching and learning, and overall educational outcomes. For example, they tended to prioritise management responsibilities such as providing learning and teaching support material, reviewing and evaluating learning and teaching support materials, maintaining order and protecting instructional time, and putting resources (human, time, and material) into preparing Grade 12 learners for examinations, the latter only in the last year of schooling. Furthermore, an analysis of the teacher FGD suggests that they viewed the SMT instructional leadership negatively, citing factors such as lack of support and resources for teaching and learning. Other negative influences on the school included teacher unions and their negative impact on school climate and teaching and learning, rurality and the many contextual challenges it bestows on schools, including poverty, poor resources, lack of appropriately qualified teachers, etcetera.

The next chapter concludes the study and the thesis and discusses the implications of the findings made in this inquiry.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

#### 7.1 Introduction

I undertook this study motivated largely by my personal experiences as a learner in rural schools. As discussed in Chapter One, my entire basic education schooling was in a rural village in the Limpopo Province, the same place where the study reported in this thesis took place. Reflecting on my high school journey and the fact that I had to repeat Grade 11, I concluded that my teachers and the School Management Team (SMT) as instructional leaders in my school, failed to guide me to make the right curriculum decisions as a learner. At the end of Grade 9, learners in South Africa have to choose subject specialisations to study from Grade 10 to Grade 12. In Grade 12, they write stringent national examinations<sup>6</sup> (the Matric Examinations) that determine whether they qualify for university entry or not in all subjects. Despite my Grade 9 grades showing that I was struggling in Mathematics and Science, influenced by peer pressure, I chose these subjects even though they were clearly not suitable for my aptitude. As a result, I failed my Grade 11 and had to repeat it. In my view, my teachers and the SMT failed to use my performance to guide my subject choices for Grade 11. As argued throughout this thesis, effective instructional leaders use student assessment data to understand learning challenges to make important decisions (Romero & Ventura, 2020; Schildkamp, 2019).

---

<sup>6</sup> In South Africa, all students write common national examinations in all subjects at the end of Grade 12 whose results determine entry into university or other higher education institution.

While my schooling was more than 15 years ago, as I have argued throughout this thesis, rural schools in South Africa continue to experience a multitude of challenges that make it difficult for learners to learn and to compete with their counterparts in other areas of the country (see Chapter One). This thesis is premised on the view that the role played by the SMT as instructional leaders is pivotal if schools in such contexts are to overcome their challenges and succeed. From this perspective, I set out to investigate the SMT understanding and enactment of their instructional leadership roles and the influence of rurality on these. Two questions guided the inquiry:

1. *How do members of the school Management Team in a rural school understand and perform their instructional leadership roles?*
2. *How does rurality influence the School Management Team's understandings and practices of their instructional leadership role?*

This chapter reflects on the study and my analysis thereof and concludes this thesis. I begin with a review of each chapter and the key findings made in the inquiry. This is followed by reflections on the methodology and analytical framework employed. I then reflect on the research and professional and personal lessons that I take away from conducting this study. Finally, before concluding the thesis, I discuss the contributions that this study makes and the implications from the findings.

## **7.2 Review of the Study**

As indicated above, the study analysed in this thesis sought to explore how the SMT in a rural school, which I have called Crocodile High School, located in the Limpopo Province in South Africa, understood and enacted its instructional leadership roles. Because context influences the effectiveness of leadership in schools (Gillett et al., 2016), the study also sought to uncover how

rurality might have shaped how the SMT understood and performed their instructional leadership roles.

The thesis is organised into seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the inquiry and provided a detailed background into my motivation, the problem statement, the purposes of the study as well as an overview of the research design and the conceptual framework. Informed by available literature, my point of departure in the thesis was that rural communities in South Africa experience a myriad of challenges such as poverty in the school communities, inadequate parental involvement, lack of teaching and learning support materials (LTSM) and other issues which negatively influence teaching and learning and learning outcomes. Within this context, school leadership (and in particular, instructional leadership) plays a significant role in improving teaching and learning, and the overall learning outcomes in such contexts. By prioritising instruction, for example, through providing support and resources to teachers, instructional leaders ensure that some of the challenges are mitigated and teaching and learning improve.

In Chapter Two I set out to develop an analytical framework to use as a lens to analyse the findings from the study. First, I reviewed dominant models of instructional leadership, Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) and Murphy's (1990) models. In addition, I also reviewed theories of school leadership such as distributed leadership, transformational leadership and leadership for learning (LfL). From this review, I identified six key roles that are important for effective instructional leadership in rural schools. These roles are: 1) defining and communicating goals, 2) leading teaching and learning, 3) creating a nurturing and supportive environment, 4) partnering with

parents, the local community and other stakeholders, 5) promoting and supporting teacher professional development and 6) protecting instructional time and modelling high expectations.

In Chapter Three I review empirical scholarship on the influence of instructional leadership on teaching and learning, particularly in resource-constrained contexts. My review suggested that most of the international studies followed Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model of instructional leadership. The findings from such studies such as those conducted in inner-city schools in the USA and those serving indigenous communities in Australia and Canada revealed that, in addition to known instructional leadership practices, working with parents and the community mattered the most and led to improved practices in those schools (MacIver, 2012; Preston et al., 2018; Trimmer et al., 2021). In addition, various studies conducted in poorly resourced township and rural schools in South Africa found that effective instructional leadership led to school success (Chikoko et al., 2015; du Plessis, 2017; Mbokazi, 2015; Shava & Ndebele, 2016). Although my literature review was extensive, I could not locate studies that focused on how the SMT in the rural context of South Africa understand and enact their instructional leadership roles collectively or how if at all, rurality influences their understanding and practices. These remained an enigma. This is the gap in the literature that I hoped the study would contribute to addressing.

In Chapter Four I present and reflected on the research design and methodology employed in this study. The inquiry was underpinned by the interpretive paradigm and employed a qualitative case study design to answer the research questions. I selected one high school, located in a village of Moletsi in Limpopo Province, South Africa, as the location of the study, and recruited members

of the SMT to participate in the study. To generate data with the SMT members, I used three research methods: a) in-depth interviews with each of the seven SMT members, b) a focus group discussion (FGD) (to understand their shared perspectives on their instructional leadership roles) and c) weeklong individual observations of each SMT's instructional leadership practices in the school. In addition, I carried out a FGD with a group of six teachers working in the school to explore their perspectives on the instructional leadership practices of the SMT. To analyse the data, I employed the inductive content analysis method in which, guided by the analytical framework developed in this study, I carefully read the data and broke it down into patterns which led to themes that were presented as findings (Thomas, 2006).

Chapter Five presents findings that addresses the first research question in this study. While the question seeks to investigate how members of the SMT *understand* and *perform* their instructional leadership roles, the first section of the chapter responds to the first part, "*How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school understand their instructional leadership roles?*" The findings suggest that while in some ways members of the SMT understand their instructional leadership roles, to a large extent, they do not distinguish between instructional leadership and school managerial roles. For example, they understand their role in analysing LTSM to be about ensuring teacher compliance with national policies rather than for the purpose of supporting teaching and learning. While following policies is important and allows teaching and learning to align with assessment standards and to ensure that learning is at a national level, in the FGD the teachers expressed feeling micromanaged and without autonomy to make even the smallest curriculum decisions in their classrooms. Linked to this, the findings from the study suggest that the SMT could have been more effective in their instructional leadership roles if they had used the

knowledge from the analysis of LTSM to identify strengths and weaknesses to develop Teacher Professional Development (TPD) programmes to improve teaching and learning and teacher autonomy. Instead, when teachers were found not to comply with policy for example, such as if they had fallen behind in their teaching schedule, the SMT focused on instructing teachers to teach according to policy. In addition, although I argue throughout the thesis that it is the collective roles of the SMT as instructional leaders that are important in bringing about positive change in their schools, the findings suggest that the SMT members at Crocodile High School did not seem to have a common understanding of how they might work together to make the school work better and, in some ways, seemed to pull the organisational goals in different directions. For instance, some SMT members did not regard some of the instructional leadership roles (such as protecting instructional time) as part of their responsibility. Rather, they regarded them as the responsibility of the principal. These divergent perspectives may have negatively impacted the overall effectiveness of their instructional leadership in the school. As some studies have found, when SMT members do not have a collective understanding of their roles, it often leads to misunderstandings regarding such roles as conducting lesson observations, or supervising and other roles (Maponya, 2015; Mathunyane, 2013; Mestry, 2018). Such roles could be unfulfilled, with a negative effect on teaching and learning.

The second section of Chapter Five presents the findings on the influence of rurality on the SMT's understanding of their instructional leadership roles. It responds to the second research question in this study: *How does rurality influence the School Management Team's understandings and practices of their instructional leadership roles?* The findings indicate that rurality tends to negatively influence how members of the SMT understand their instructional roles and, in some

ways, how they perform them. For example, as a context, rurality influenced how the SMT at Crocodile High School perceived two important instructional leadership roles identified in the analytical framework in Chapter Two, effective parental involvement as well as the acquisition and allocation of resources. For instance, they viewed parental involvement as important and lamented the absence of parents in school activities. Yet, the findings show that because of rurality, they viewed the parents as uneducated and disinterested in the education of their children and because of this, they felt the parents would not understand the challenges and demands of the school, nor would they cope with some of the demands of the school. For example, many of parents in the community worked on commercial farms owned by white farmers, and a letter from school stating a need for a parents' meeting would not be enough to warrant permission to miss a day of work. Instead of developing creative strategies around such community challenges, the SMT concluded that due to rurality and their low educational levels, the parents were not interested in their children's education. Therefore, no measures or policies that would encourage parental involvement were in place at the school (I return to the issue of parental involvement below).

The findings also revealed that rurality has a negative impact on how SMT members understood and enacted their instructional leadership role of acquiring and allocating resources. This is because even though they complained about the lack of LTSM, the findings suggested that being in a resource-constrained context had led to them focusing on what they did not have as a school, often missing opportunities for improving teaching and learning and educational outcomes. For example, tablet computers were kept in storage for safekeeping and did not serve the purpose that they were intended for. While this was related to the lack of security and criminal activities which often affect schools in contexts of rurality and their fears may have been justified, this could have

been an opportunity to work with teachers and other stakeholders to brainstorm safe ways in which the computers were used to enhance teaching and learning. For instance, the SMT could have worked with teachers, learners and the community to find strategies to safeguard LTSM.

While Chapter Five focuses on the SMT's understandings of their instructional leadership roles and the influence of rurality, Chapter Six addresses the question: *How do members of the School Management Team perform their instructional leadership roles?* (This is the second part of the first research question in this study). As such it focuses on the SMT members' perspectives of their instructional leadership practices and the influence of rurality on them. In line with the second research question, the chapter presents findings on the influence of rurality on the instructional leadership practices of the SMT in the school. The findings revealed that SMT members sought to create a conducive teaching and learning environment through building rapport with teachers. This was evident, for example, in how some members of the SMT often interacted with teachers in informal conversations and had lunch in the staffroom with teachers. In addition, they also tried to provide small incentives in the form of giving them leftover perishable items from the school feeding scheme. Furthermore, SMT members also treated teachers with respect and professionalism despite teachers sometimes raising grievances in a disrespectful manner. In addition, the findings suggest that regarding the Grade 12 (matric) classes, SMT members created a robust enrichment programme that included early morning, after school and weekend classes. However, while the coordination of the Matric Enrichment Programme showed good instructional leadership, it raised various concerns, including the amount of stress put on learners in their final year of high school. In contrast, no such programmes existed in the early years of schooling and instead, the rest of the school showed a less coordinated effort, with various roles, such as lesson

observations which they regarded and identified as important (see Chapter Five), not being performed for nearly the whole term that I was there. In addition, other SMT members were often seen leaving the school early or coming in late for personal reasons on various occasions, and thus, negatively impacting instructional time and their instructional leadership in the school.

The findings suggest that members of the SMT did not always adequately perform their instructional leadership roles. For example, some often assessed LTSM largely for the purpose of ensuring teacher compliance with national policies, with no effort to use such analysis to provide teachers with feedback or to work with them to plan programmes for TPD. From my FGD with the teachers, this led to teachers perceiving the SMT as autocratic and not giving them professional autonomy to make decisions in their own classrooms. For these teachers, this meant that even when they understood the needs of the learners as requiring minor deviation from policy, they were compelled to comply and would be penalised if they deviated. Obviously, for this rural school, with its resource context and learners with diverse learning needs, such an approach to instructional leadership is not effective, and would not improve educational outcomes.

Linked to the above, the findings from the study suggest that while they rightfully complained about the shortage of resources in the school, the SMT did not allocate or utilise the available resources properly. For instance, the SMT identified the low literacy levels of Grade 8 learners when they first join the high school from primary schools. However, when a mobile library was donated, it was left unused for nearly a year as the SMT had not created a plan or schedule to use it. This could have also provided an opportunity for teacher leadership if the SMT had identified

teachers who could lead the use of the library. In this case, the SMT provided no instructional leadership, and in turn, the teachers did not take the initiative, perhaps because of past experiences, to access the library for teaching and learning. As a result, despite the SMT working to build rapport with teachers, the relationship between the two parties was strained.

The findings point to various contributors to these problems and lack of confidence in the SMT was clearly one of them. As I have argued throughout this thesis, partnerships with the school community are vital to schools in rurality and other deprived contexts as they allow for the harnessing of necessary resources for the school to thrive (Bhengu & Svosve, 2019; Chikoko et al., 2015). Yet, the findings suggest that despite the members of the SMT indicating that they valued parental involvement and lamenting the lack of it, their views were that due to their location in a rural context, the parents were uneducated and did not care about education (See Chapter Five). As such, the SMT in the school made little effort to involve the parents in any significant way (as discussed above). For example, when parents visited the school to pick up report cards or inquire about issues related to their children, they were never engaged in curricular or other matters which could influence teaching and learning. Meetings held at the school were mostly about report cards, Matric Enrichment classes, and attendance. While the SMT desired for parents to be more involved in the education of their children, they did not seem to have a plan of exactly what they wanted parents to be involved in and how they could be encouraged to do so. Moreover, the SMT did not form strong partnerships with organisations in the school community. The school largely relied on its partnership with the Department of Basic Education (DBE), particularly the district level.

The findings also suggest that the influence of teacher unions is another obstacle that members of the SMT already dealing with various challenges because rurality, must also contend with. For example, my observation in the school revealed that some teachers often created chaos in the school, refusing to teach the classes that they had been assigned, opposing the school timetable and leaving the leadership without a solution. While this also suggests that the SMT failed to involve teachers in decision-making, it also reveals the negative influence of teacher unions. One teacher's refusal to take up her assigned roles led to her approaching her union representatives in the school to defend her against the School Governing Body (SGB). This had a negative effect on teaching and learning but also further strained the relationship between teachers and the SMT, making it difficult for the latter to perform their roles as instructional leaders (see also Bhengu et al., 2014; Msila, 2014; Wills, 2014).

These findings suggest divergent understandings of the instructional leadership roles by the SMT at Crocodile High School. For example, while they could identify the roles of an instructional leader, some members of the SMT felt that some roles were the responsibility of the principal rather the collective responsibility of the SMT. As a result, the SMT at the school were unable to provide effective collective instructional leadership to support teachers and learners, and thus failed to enhance teaching and learning and ultimately improve educational outcomes. While rurality had a significant negative influence on their understandings and practices of their instructional leadership roles, these divergent understandings led to lack of cooperation within the school and between the school and the community. This in turn, led to poor or ineffective pooling of the few available resources and skills to benefit teaching and learning.

This current chapter, Chapter Seven, concludes the study and reviews the methodological, conceptual and ethical decisions that I made in this journey and how they have led me to the findings and the analysis thereof. The chapter positions the findings in the literature, the analytical framework and the contributions that the study makes to knowledge in the field of education leadership and management. Lastly, the chapter discusses the implications of the findings for policy and practice.

### **7.3 Reflections on the Analytical Framework**

To develop a framework to use in generating data for this study, first, I reviewed models of instructional leadership and began with a conceptual framework that utilised Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) and Murphy's (1990) models of instructional leadership. I chose this combination because Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model has been tried and tested and has been used in hundreds of studies (Hallinger, 2011). In addition, while not many empirical studies have used Murphy's (1990) model, it adds a new dimension to the earlier model (Hallinger and Murphy's (1985): community involvement. Together, these two models informed the development of the research questions and instruments to generate data. The key features of the conceptual framework were: 1) defining organisational goals; 2) supervising teaching and learning; 3) involving of parents and other stakeholders; 4) acquiring and allocating resources; 5) promoting teacher professional development and 6) protecting instructional time. Developing this conceptual framework enabled me to create suitable questions for the in-depth interviews with SMT members and the FGD with both the SMT and teacher participants. I also used the conceptual framework to design a schedule for the observations of the SMT which served as a guide for what was important to focus on while conducting the observations (see Chapter Four).

Second, a review of the literature suggested that while instructional leadership models dominated research and practice in contexts similar to the South African rural context, other theories of school leadership had also been influential. These included Leadership for learning (LfL), distributed leadership, and transformational leadership. I identified key concepts from these theories and integrated them into my initial conceptual framework to develop the analytical framework to analyse the findings in this study. Thus, in this thesis, I came to understand effective instructional leadership for a rural school such as Crocodile High School as characterised by six key broad features: 1) defining and communicating goals; 2) leading teaching and learning; 3) creating a nurturing and supportive environment; 4) partnering with parents, the local community and other stakeholders; 5) promoting and supporting teacher professional development and 6) protecting instructional time and modelling high expectations.

In response to the first research question (*How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school understand and perform their instructional leadership roles?*), the findings suggest that in many ways, while SMT members could identify the many roles expected of them in various educational policies. For example, they understand their roles in terms of the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document (DBE, 2016). However, they often did not adequately understand their instructional leadership roles and functioned as managers rather than leaders. An illustrative example relates to promoting and supporting TPD. As discussed above, the findings suggest that some SMT members felt that conducting lesson observations and assessing LTSM were meant to ensure that teachers strictly complied with national policies. In addition, their implementation of such policies was also rigid and left teachers without room for professional autonomy even if teachers' understanding of slight deviations was necessary, based on learning

needs. Linked to this, for members of the SMT in this school, even though they had identified supporting teaching and learning as one of key roles, they identified TPD, an essential aspect of effective curriculum, as the responsibility of the DBE and not their instructional leadership role. Clearly, while the SMT members all identified this as one of their roles and indicated their support for it, none of them adequately understood what it meant for their instructional leadership practice.

### **7.3.1 Explaining Instructional Leadership at Crocodile High School**

In response to the second research question (*How does rurality influence the School Management Team's understandings and practices of their instructional leadership roles?*), while the literature on the influence of rurality on schooling abundant (see Chapters One & Two), and indeed, the findings in this study have confirmed this, in this thesis, the findings suggest a much more complex combination of factors as the analytical framework developed in this thesis proposes (see Figure 7.1 below).

**Figure 7.1: *What Might Explain Effective Instructional Leadership in a Rural School?***



Rural schools such as Crocodile High School, face challenges that include limited resources, poor access to TPD opportunities, lack of professionalism, teacher unionism, absenteeism, late coming, and others. To be effective, as the analytical framework shown in Figure 7.1 suggests, instructional leadership involves intersecting and interrelated strategic activities that members of the team have collectively developed and agreed to as a strategy for supporting teaching and learning in the school. These include defining and communicating organisational goals to teachers, learners and school community. Three key areas are worth highlighting. First, as the analytical framework suggests, and as these findings confirm, for instructional leadership to be effective, at Crocodile High School and schools in similar contexts, SMT members must define the organisational goals and work as a collective to communicate these to teachers and other stakeholders and lead the school towards achieving these goals.

Second, a key finding in this study is related to the resource-constraints in this rural schools. As the analytical framework suggests, to be effective, the SMT must collaborate with the community, and together, identify community assets to improve the resources of the school. This collaboration must include developing policies on parental involvement to guide roles and responsibilities so that parents play a more significant role in the curriculum beyond providing money and physical infrastructure for the school (Myende, 2017; Newman et al., 2019; Riley & Webster, 2016).

Third, in leading the instructional programme, the SMT members could conduct classroom observations as sources of information to identify gaps in teaching and learning. From their classroom observation reports, they could then work with teachers to identify areas for TPD and where possible, design their own programmes for development. This could also give them the opportunity to possibly identify opportunities for TPD in the district or even the province. For this to work, all stakeholders, particularly the instructional leadership, must recognise and treat teachers as professionals. This means involving teachers in key instructional leadership decision making, giving them some autonomy to function as professionals in their own classrooms and in the school, and protecting instructional time and modelling professional behaviour to ensure that teaching and learning time is always used productively. Moreover, the SMT could also collaborate with teachers to source and allocate resources appropriately where they needed, and effectively support teaching and learning in the school. As the findings in this study indicate that despite the best efforts of the SMT, relationships between the SMT and teachers remain one of the SMT's major challenges.

Thus, involving teachers and other stakeholders (parents and learners) in decision-making might serve to create a more conducive work environment and motivate them to take more ownership of school goals. Instead of showing hostility to the SMT, these stakeholders might work with the SMT to achieve the goals of the schools (Dou et al., 2017; Leithwood et al., 2020). This also suggests that effective instructional leadership in the rural context requires strong and positive human relations between key stakeholders- not only teachers and the SMT, but also the school and the community. This is because in a resource poor context, positive relations between the school and parents as well as the school community are vital to effective teaching and learning and may enable the school to thrive despite its challenges. In a context characterised by positive relationships, the school would be able to harness local resources and knowledge/skills, including indigenous knowledge systems in the local community. These could be used to support teaching and learning programmes, including literacy programmes, in which parents could share storytelling to motivate and excite learners about local stories and languages. Other resources in the community could include professionals such as psychologists, social workers, and nurses and working with them to address commonly identified areas of need in the school. Other resources could include taxi associations that could be invited to develop, with the SMT and the school community, strategies for providing transportation for Grade 12 learners who sometimes have early morning and evening classes. The idea is for the SMT to involve the whole community in identifying and developing strategies and harnessing resources for supporting teaching and learning in the school. Without such a collaborative strategy, both within the school and between the school and the community, effective instructional leadership in a rural school like Crocodile High School will remain a pipe dream.

## **7.4. Reflections on the Methodology**

As discussed above, the study was located in one rural high school which I have named Crocodile High School, located in a village in the area of Moletsi outside the city of Polokwane in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. I chose the area for this study because as outlined in Chapter One, and earlier in this chapter, Moletsi is also the area I still call home and the area in which I began my own educational journey. As the findings above indicate, and as I outlined in my own educational journey in Chapter One, not much has changed in the schooling system of rural children in this context. The children of Moletsi seem to be walking through a similar education path beset with challenges of rurality. Thus, motivated by my own rural educational journey, in this study, I wanted to understand the trajectories of the children who are currently going to school in the area.

I embarked on this study with several assumptions: First, despite efforts by the current dispensation to initiate several programmes to address the educational inequalities and gaps (including resource inequalities, teacher skills, leadership skills, and others) across the education system, schools in the rural context continue to lag behind in learning outcomes (Myende & Maifala, 2020; Seobi & Wood, 2016). Second, in any school, particularly, in a resource-constrained context, the SMT plays a particularly significant role in the enhancement of teaching and learning, and the improvement of educational outcomes (Hallinger et al., 2020; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Myende & Maifala; 2020). Third, to overcome the challenges of rurality, the SMT members must prioritise instructional leadership practices (Bhengu et al, 2014; du Plessis, 2017; Mestry, 2018). Informed by these assumptions, in this study, I sought to examine how members of the SMT in this rural school understood and enacted their instructional leadership roles.

The study was underpinned by the interpretive paradigm which holds the view that reality is subjective (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010) and that what is important lies in understanding the experiences and perspectives of those being studied rather than the need to quantify their experiences (Cooper & White, 2012; O'Reilly, 2009). Informed by this paradigm, the study employed a research design which allowed me to examine how participants made meaning of their phenomenon as they experienced it. The qualitative approach allowed me to use a variety of methods of data generation, thus deepening my understanding of the phenomenon and enhancing the rigour and trustworthiness of the findings in this study (Ormston et al., 2014; Richard & Morse, 2013).

To address the first part of the first research question (*How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school understand their instructional leadership roles?*), I used in-depth interviews and a FGD with members of the SMT. To answer the second part of the first research question (*How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school perform their instructional leadership roles?*), as experienced by others, I conducted a FGD with a sample of teachers in the school. While the study focused on the SMT, because teachers work directly with the SMT and experience and benefit from their instructional leadership practices, it was important to include them in this study. Their perspectives benefitted the study as their shared experiences shed light on some of the SMT's instructional leadership practices.

However, while I hold the view that involving teacher participants in this study was a success, in retrospect, I could have gained a better insight into the phenomenon through conducting two sets

of FGDs with two groups of teachers. This is because no two FGD dynamics are the same, and through discussing their shared experiences, participants of a FGD can influence each other's recall and perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Richie et al., 2014). It would have been interesting for this study to have explored this and to compare the experiences shared in the two groups.

To answer the second research question (*How does rurality influence the School Management Team's understandings and practices of their instructional leadership roles?*), I employed observations as a data generation method. Although I had initially not intended to use observations, during the proposal writing stage of the journey, my supervisor advised that to gain a deeper insight into the phenomenon, I should consider adding this as part of deepening my understanding of the instructional leadership practices at Crocodile High School. At the time, I believed that my design was robust and could respond to the research questions sufficiently without the observations. However, after much consultation with my supervisor, I relented and included observations in the design. It was not until I started the observations that I realised how significant observing the SMT members as they went about performing their day-to-day duties was, in relation to how I understood the phenomenon. This is because while in-depth interviews allowed me to respond to the first part of the first research question "*How do members of the School Management Team understand their instructional leadership roles?*", to answer the second part of that question: *How do members of the School Management Team perform their instructional leadership roles?*

I could not rely on the perspectives of teachers alone (through the teacher FGD) or the self-reported accounts of SMT members themselves (as shared in the in-depth interviews or FGD). Rather, through observations, I was able to identify the actual day-to-day activities the SMT members undertook and pick up on relationship dynamics between the SMT and other stakeholders in the school and other aspects of their instructional leadership roles in the school. For instance, in the FGD, the teachers reported that the SMT were not trying hard enough to provide them with resources and that their leadership was autocratic. However, in my observations, I saw instances of real efforts in which the SMT members were attempting to provide resources. Their efforts were negatively impacted by the challenges of rurality, including inadequate resources, inadequate infrastructure that are characteristic of most rural communities and schools in South Africa.

My observations also suggested that the SMT members spent a lot of time and effort on providing intangible resources such as building rapport with teachers and providing them with moral and pedagogical support. I also witnessed some gaps and weaknesses in the instructional leadership provided at Crocodile High School. For example, the relationship between the SMT and teachers was, in some ways, negatively impacted by teacher unions. In addition, absenteeism, late coming, leaving school early, were some of the factors I witnessed as negatively impacting the instructional leadership of the SMT at the school. The interviews and FGDs alone would not have provided these insights. Thus, to answer the research questions fully, I could not have arrived at how SMT members understood and performed their roles and the influences of rurality without observations as a method of data collection. After all, as the literature suggests, observations allow researchers to witness practices and behaviours that participants may choose to exclude or overlook during interviews, thus shedding more light on the phenomenon (Maxwell, 2012; Vogt et al., 2012). Thus,

using these qualitative methods enabled me to ask the “what”, “why” and “how” questions which gave the participants a voice to interpret and make sense of their phenomenon (Yin, 2004), as was important in this inquiry.

Despite the strengths of this research design, I encountered various challenges along the way. A significant challenge was that when I began this journey in 2018, I was employed as a teacher in the Middle East and only had a single two-month window a year which I could use to carry out my fieldwork. In 2019 when the university granted my ethical clearance, I had about two weeks left in the country and could only conduct interviews and the FGD with the SMT and teachers. I intended to return home to South Africa in June 2020 to conduct seven weeks of observations at the school, a week with each of the seven members of the SMT.

However, the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 put a temporary halt on the planned observations. With the uncertainties of that time, I had no way of telling if and when I would be able to resume my observations. I feared that at the time it would be safe to go back into the field, I might not have time out of work to carry these out or could find that the school was no longer interested in being part of the study. At this juncture, I was once again confronted with the dilemma of whether the study needed observations or not. However, this time I had the advantage of having preliminary findings from the interviews and FGD conducted the previous year and found gaps in the findings that required observations. Thus, in September 2020 when the South African government eased some of the Covid-19 protocols, I approached the school again and was able to continue with the observations. While it was a relief that the school received me with the

warmth they had shown the previous year and my work continued, some COVID-19 protocols such as learners alternating days in school, were still in place. These protocols meant that I could not observe some of the challenges, such as overcrowded classrooms, that the members of the SMT had lamented as making their roles difficult. Despite the struggles, the findings uncovered in the observations added value to this study that the other methods alone could not have unearthed. The methodology in this study illustrates how the triangulation of several qualitative methods (interviews, FGDs and observations) in studying phenomena, may lead to a robust analysis (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

Lastly, during the research process, I learned about the importance of transcribing my interview recordings personally instead of outsourcing the task to a professional transcriber. Although I had initially lamented the unavailability of Sepedi transcribers as my interviews with participants consisted of code-switching between English and Sepedi, I was later glad this had been the case. I found that because transcribing one tape took such a significant amount of time and required relistening to ensure accuracy, by the time I completed the transcription I had a better understanding of my data. Looking back, I realised that even though the interview had gone very well, it was only when I began listening to audiotapes and transcribing that I really understood the participants' perspectives and responses to my questions. Thus, by the time I completed the transcriptions and started coding, my familiarity with the data enabled a more productive and easier writing process.

## 7.5 Personal and Professional Reflections

There are many important lessons, both personal and professional, that I take away from walking this PhD journey. Some of the biggest lessons include the realisation that for research to truly be impactful, researchers must be immersed in the communities that they study and form part of the resources of such communities. This includes using findings from studies to design community engagement programmes that seek to empower such school leaders and their communities. For example, in this study, after learning that members of the SMT had missed many opportunities to improve instruction through the provision of already available resources in and around the school, that knowledge could be used to discuss the findings with them and working with them to identify ways that they can improve their practices. Moreover, I could also use my knowledge as an emerging scholar of education leadership and management to offer workshops that target their leadership shortcomings. This will serve the school much more than writing the findings in this thesis and journal articles that participants may not have access to. I used the findings to highlight some implications for TPD to the school and the district office (I discuss some of these implications below).

In addition, through my seven weeks of observing the SMT members whom I sometimes found to be functioning in a hostile environment due to teacher resistance, I learned about the importance of a leader remaining professional and continuing to work towards building positive relationships. For example, when teachers locked horns with members of the SMT and some were disrespectful, such as in a meeting that I attended in which the principal was confronted and accused of not fixing a door because the dust in the staffroom did not affect him (See Chapter Six), I observed members of the SMT carrying themselves with dignity and respect. From this, I learned that, as Hallinger

(2011) affirms, the personal characteristics of leaders are influential on the type of environment created in the school and ultimately, school effectiveness. I imagine that even though the environment was sometimes unpleasant, it could have been far worse had SMT members in that school had a similar conflict resolution approach as some of the teachers. In my experience as a teacher in different schools, I have watched colleagues and school management teams having conflict and the positive and negative ways in which it would be resolved. Furthermore, I have also found myself in conflict with colleagues or school managers at different points in my career. However, in my capacity as a researcher in an environment where I did not have a personal interest, I learned new lessons about peaceful conflict resolution and its role in creating a conducive working environment, particularly in the context of instructional leadership. I hope to take these lessons to my future as a professional and as a scholar, particular, as a mentor to young scholar who will come after me.

## **7.6 Discussion**

The two key questions that I intended to respond to in this study were, 1) *How do members of the School Management Team in a rural school understand and perform their instructional leadership roles?* And 2) *How does rurality influence the School Management Team's understandings and practices of their instructional leadership roles?* Using a qualitative case study approach which included in-depth individual interviews, FGD and observations with members of the SMT at Crocodile High School, a rural school in Limpopo Province, South Africa, the study reported in this thesis has yielded many lessons and implications. Using the analytical framework developed in this study to analyse the SMT instructional leadership effectiveness, the findings indicate that first, in many ways, SMT members of Crocodile High School were not always effective as

instructional leaders. For example, they did not clearly define or communicate their organisational goals. When they did, such goals were not commonly shared among all the members of the team. This was evidenced in how in their role understandings (reported in Chapter Five) members of the SMT did not identify defining and communicating goals as important to their instructional leadership. For example, there was evidence of Rosenholtz's (1985) concept of "loose coupling" (p.359) in which, because the goals were not well defined and communicated, members of the organisation pull in different directions. An example of this loose coupling was seen in how some SMT members did not see such tasks as protecting instructional time (for example through monitoring attendance, punctuality and discipline) as their duty as instructional leaders.

Second, when I set out to conduct this study, I wanted to understand how the SMT at Crocodile High School individually and *collectively* understood and performed their instructional roles. My assumption was that due to the rurality of the school and resource constraints that it is faced with, a collective approach to instructional leadership would work best towards developing a conducive teaching and learning environment. However, the findings suggest the opposite: the SMT did not seem to have a collective approach to the leadership in the school. Instead, the principal and one deputy principal tended to make most of the decisions in the school. This is despite the literature that has shown that teachers are more likely to take ownership of decisions if they were included in making them (Hargreaves, 2019; Leithwood et al., 2020) and that teacher autonomy leads to more teacher efficacy and job satisfaction (Bandura, 1997; Skinner et al., 2019).

The findings from the FGD with the teachers at Crocodile High School also showed that they had ideas about sourcing and allocating resources and strategies to enhance teaching and learning. However, because the teachers were not involved in decision-making, the SMT sometimes missed opportunities to improve the school. For a rural school with limited resources (including human and material resources), a collective approach to instructional leadership, particularly involving teachers, would have gone a long way towards developing an effective resource strategy, and towards enhancing teaching and learning and improving educational outcomes.

Third, the SMT at Crocodile High School tended to understand their role as involving policy compliance and ensuring that teachers complied with the prevailing education policies, particularly curriculum policies. This had to be despite the diversity of the learning needs of the learners in their school and the different pace at which they learned compared to their counterparts in well-resourced contexts. The findings showed that the SMT's preoccupation with policy compliance made their performance in this role ineffective.

While ensuring that the curriculum is implemented according to national standards, as the analytical framework adopted in this study suggests, the SMT members performed this role in a manner that was rigid. For example, not enabling teacher autonomy and creativity, therefore not making room for the teachers to improve learning (Hargreaves, 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015, Skinner et al., 2019). Linked to this, this may suggest that the SMT had limited understandings of teacher strengths and learner strengths and needs, and therefore were often unable to provide ameliorative strategies where needed. Neglecting this role might be attributed to their expectations

that teachers must always follow or comply to policies without making sense of them or adapting them to meet the needs of learners or their context.

Fourth, the findings in this study suggested that the school's Grade 12 Enrichment Programme was well-coordinated and showed evidence of effective instructional by the SMT. In contrast, the rest of the school received very little attention. However, neglecting the rest of the school, particularly the early years of high school, in a context where dropout rates are already high (Runhare et al., 2021) means that learners in lower grades receive less quality education and even more may drop out before reaching Grade 12. Therefore, it would be important for SMT members to prioritise quality teaching and learning in all grades.

Fifth, the SMT at Crocodile High School identified creating an environment that is nurturing and supportive (Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2020) as an important instructional leadership role for effective teaching and learning in the school. The findings revealed that despite some incidents of conflict with teachers, members of the SMT tried to create a nurturing environment to support teaching and learning in the school. For example, members of the SMT treated teachers with respect and tried to build rapport with them despite the hostility coming from some of them. However, creating a nurturing environment, as I argued in Chapter Two, requires much more and the SMT in this rural did not always perform this role effectively. For instance, the SMT often failed to involve teachers in decision making or distributing some of the leadership decisions to them. In the FGD with the group of teachers in the school, they reported feeling unheard which would explain some of their resentment towards the SMT.

Finally, supported by evidence from the literature (Hlalele, 2019; Preston et al., 2018; Riley & Webster, 2016) and the analytical framework is that effective instructional leaders in rural contexts tend to prioritise partnerships with parents, the school community and other stakeholders mainly to harness resources for teaching and learning. The SMT of Crocodile High School, to a certain extent, was able to form some partnerships with stakeholders. For instance, one SMT member was part of the Advisory Committee of the Chief of Moletsisi, a partnership that could potentially be used to benefit the school. Another SMT member worked with a neighbouring school to exchange/share (limited) resources such as books. A further partnership between the SMT and parents was formed for the coordination of the Grade 12 Enrichment Programme in which parents of truant learners were called to an intervention meeting. In addition, SMT members also relied on parents to fetch the learners from school on foot after evening classes, thereby ensuring safety and better attendance. However, to a large extent, the SMT were not always effective in this role. Their partnership with parents, for the most part, was not for curricular purposes, and was therefore, ineffective. However, as discussed above, no real effort was made to engage parents in the academic programme and no policies or plans were in place to do so. This study concludes that Crocodile High School is to fully benefit from parental involvement, the attitudes of the SMT members and teachers towards parents and what parents can contribute to school, will need to change. Instead of viewing parents as uneducated and uninterested, and therefore, as not capable of contributing to curriculum and instruction, more targeted strategies that seek to involve them in these issues need to be developed and implemented with the community.

As argued in Chapter Two, a lack of mainstream or formal education does not indicate that parents cannot contribute to teaching and learning (Hlalele, 2019). For example, most parents and elders in rural communities such as in the villages in the area of Moletsi, in which Crocodile High School is located, are custodians of immense indigenous knowledge which can be harnessed through, for example, storytelling, to benefit teaching and learning in the school. Rurality, however, and in particular, distance from available resources can negatively impact the ability to negotiate such partnerships. For example, du Plessis (2014) argues that many rural schools cannot easily form partnerships with universities because many such schools are far from universities. To illustrate, the school in this study is indeed far from the two universities in the province. It is over an hour away from the University of Limpopo and about three hours away from the University of Venda. This distance from some of the organisations that may be keen to partner with schools may influence how members of the SMT understand their instructional leadership roles and collaborate with such institutions. Therefore, this thesis concludes that it might serve the school better to aim to work with the community, rather than focus on what is not available because of the proximity to bigger organisations. Working with community libraries near the school in reading programmes as well as strengthening ties with other schools in the area to share resources (as the school did in a few instances) might serve the school better than trying to partner with universities which are a distance away. Linked to this, the DBE could provide appropriate professional training to equip the SMT with the skills to access and manage such resources for teaching instruction, and the teachers with the skills to use such resources for teaching and learning optimally.

## **7.7 Contributions to Knowledge**

Much has been written about the challenges of instructional leadership in rural schools in South Africa. For example, du Plessis and Mestry, (2019) and Seobi and Wood (2016) suggest that socioeconomic challenges in rural communities affect how the schools function and, in turn, negatively affect the role of instructional leaders in such schools. However, much of this literature tends to focus on the challenges encountered by the school and the instructional leaders and the strategies they adopt to improve resources. While this is understandable and important, studies that seek to investigate how those who lead instruction (teaching and learning) understand and perform their instructional leadership roles, particularly in South African rural schools could not be located in the literature reviewed in this thesis. In particular, studies that focus on instructional leadership practices of the SMT in rural schools in Limpopo province could not be located. Thus, this thesis aimed to contribute to addressing this knowledge gap. In other words, the findings shed light on how members of the SMT working in this rural high school in Limpopo province in South Africa, understood and enacted their instructional leadership roles and how rurality influenced their understandings and practices. Informed by the analytical framework, the study sheds light on the features of instructional leadership that would make effective teaching and learning possible in this rural school possible.

## **7.8 Implications from the Findings**

The findings from this study suggest that SMTs working in rural schools in South Africa tend to have a limited understanding of their instructional leadership roles. This has a negative impact on their instructional leadership practices. Additionally, rurality has a negative effect on their

understanding and enactment of their instructional leadership. Based on the findings, there are several implications for SMT members working in the rural context of South Africa and similar contexts. The findings have implications for policy, teacher unions and research in the field of education leadership and management.

### **7.8.1 Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings in this study have several implications for policy and practice. First, they reveal that members of the SMT had divergent understandings of instructional leadership and their roles in it. To address this, this thesis concludes that professional development is needed. This could include enrolling in programmes such as the Advanced Diploma in School Leadership and Management (AdvDip: SLM) which was initiated by the DBE to replace the Advanced Certificate in Education: School Management (ACE:SL) and offered by various higher education institutions. The DBE indicates that the programme was amended to align it with new policy requirements for school leaders (DBE, 2015). The earlier programme which was introduced by the DBE in 2008 with the intention of equipping SMT members with leadership skills, was shown to have significant positive impact on the leadership development of SMT members (Bush et al., 2009; Heystek, 2007; Naidoo, 2019). Other forms of learning necessary for the SMT include other postgraduate courses in education leadership and management as well as workshops and other forms of training. However, the findings in this study also suggest that relying on the DBE alone to solve the school challenges might be problematic as, according to the participants in this study, the government does not always provide adequate support. This means that SMT members must seek to strengthen school and community partnerships through identifying assets in the community in the form of businesses and organisations and collaborating with them to improve teaching and learning in the

school. Moreover, the findings indicate that while members of the SMT reported valuing parental involvement, they did not have appropriate strategies in place to get parents meaningfully involved in the affairs of the school. For this happen, it is necessary for the SMT to develop policies which clearly indicate what type of parental involvement is important to improve teaching and learning in the school, what the role of parents and the community would be, and how it would be implemented.

Second, the findings from the study suggest that while the DBE is already providing training programmes for school leaders in South Africa, SMTs working in rural communities continue to have serious challenges in their leadership roles. These findings point to the need for interventions that target instructional leadership practices of SMTs in rural schools. As attested to by Chikoko et al. (2014), generic school leadership training programmes are ineffective because they disregard the different contexts in which school leaders function, and the divergent needs of SMTs working in different contexts. Such intervention programmes for SMTs working in the rural communities could make use of models that target instructional leadership roles which are important to leading effective schools in similar contexts.

Third, this thesis has argued that rurality has a negative impact on how SMT members understand their roles. Furthermore, training alone would be insufficient if other challenges are not addressed in the addressed. This suggests that the DBE could work closely with SMT members and the community to facilitate positive relationships for collaborating to identify assets for addressing

some of the contextual challenges such as lack of security, scarcity of resources, poor infrastructure, and others.

### **7.8.2 Implications for Teacher Unions**

The findings in this study have implications for teacher unions and other professional organisations. For example, while teacher unions are an important part of protecting teachers' rights and promoting democracy, much like previous studies (Bhengu et al., 2014; Msila, 2010; 2014; Wills, 2014), this study found that they can also be an obstacle to instructional leadership in schools. This is even though in their documents, teacher unions such as the South African Democratic Teachers Union and National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa emphasise the importance of professionalism and contributing to a collegial work environment as key to a positive conduct in the workplace. Specifically, the findings showed that the negative influences of such unions included teacher defiance and hostility towards the SMT as they believed their unions would defend them. This created a chaotic environment in the school with teachers sometimes refusing teaching assignments and requiring union intervention. This is particularly problematic in the rural context where this study was conducted, as many of these schools already function with limited support from the DBE (Chikoko et al., 2015; Maifala, 2017). The question is: *to address this challenge and to improve the organisational cultures of teacher unions, how will rural schools end or address the culture of defending teachers based on patronage or union affiliation rather than policy or merit within some unions?* This is a question for debate and/or research within the teacher unions themselves.

### **7.8.3 Implications for Future Research**

The findings from the study have implications for further research. First, this thesis aimed to address how members of the SMT working in this rural high school in Limpopo province in South Africa, understood and enacted their instructional leadership roles and how rurality influenced their understandings and practices. Informed by my analytical framework, the study shed light on the features of instructional leadership that would make effective teaching and learning possible in this rural school possible. Future research is needed that would work with the school in a participatory action research project, for example, to test the six features of effective instructional leadership identified in this thesis: 1) defining and communicating goals; 2) leading teaching and learning; 3) creating a nurturing and supportive environment; 4) partnering with parents, the local community and other stakeholders; 5) promoting and supporting teacher professional development and 6) protecting instructional time and modelling high expectations. After several cycles of such an action research project, the school and the community could find strategies for developing an effective instructional leadership strategy, and by so doing promote enhance teaching and learning and improve overall educational outcomes in the school.

## **7.9 Conclusion**

I began my research at Crocodile High School in Moletsi in the Limpopo Province with two assumptions. The first was that instructional leadership positively influences learning. As such, the ways in which SMT members understand instructional leadership would be reflected in how they enacted their instructional leadership roles in this rural school. The second assumption was that effective instructional leaders (in this case, the SMT) would focus on teaching and learning as the key factors in addressing the many known challenges of rurality facing schools like Crocodile

High School. Linked to these assumptions, the aim of the study was two-fold: First, the inquiry aimed to examine how members of the SMT in this rural school understood and enacted their instructional leadership roles. Second, it aimed to explore how rurality influenced the SMT's understandings and enactment of their instructional leadership practices.

In sum, the findings suggest that members of the SMT had divergent understandings of their instructional leadership roles. In particular, they did not have a shared understanding of the school goals, nor did they adequately communicate them to all stakeholders in the school and school community. This led to a somewhat chaotic teaching and learning environment. For example, while some members of the SMT exemplified professionalism, others were implicated in cases of absenteeism, late coming and leaving school. This in turn led to teachers losing confidence in the leadership of the school, and in their ability to provide any guidance for improving teaching learning and educational outcomes.

The literature reviewed in this thesis suggests that due to the scarcity of resources in rural schools, forming partnerships with key stakeholders is key to effective instructional leadership (Hlalele, 2019; Myende, 2015; Riley & Webster, 2016; Sarra et al, 2018). The findings from the study suggest that the SMT at Crocodile High School were not effective in forging partnerships with parents, the community and other stakeholders and as such failed to harness resources for improving teaching and learning in the school. This may be linked to the rurality of the school and its socio-economic context, and teachers' perceptions of the community members' low level of education and the lack of wealth/resources of potential value to the school. Nonetheless, it is a

missed opportunity. Without going out to the community and forging close relationships, available resources, however sparse they might be, the SMT and the school might miss opportunities for collaborating with community members to creatively identify resources for teaching and learning in the school.

The findings in this inquiry suggest that the best interventions are not always without the will of the local leaders (in this case the SMT) to excel in their roles and lead to positive change. For example, at Crocodile High School, motivated by a desire for learners to have good educational outcomes (good Matric results), the SMT coordinated the Grade 12 Enrichment Programme with enthusiasm and put all their resources and time into it (see Chapter Six). While this is commendable, as discussed above, it also indicates a gap in how this was at the expense of the earlier grades at the school. The questions for schools such as Crocodile High is: *Is it not too late to put so much energy and so many resources at the Grade 12 level while teaching and learning at the lower levels is neglected?*

These findings have left me with mixed emotions about the state of the education currently being offered to children who, like me years ago, are going through basic education in rural areas of South Africa. On one hand, carrying out this study has enabled me to contribute to the growing body of research seeking to understand instructional leadership in South African rural schools. This study has also made a unique contribution by uncovering the ways in which rurality influences how members of the SMT understand and enact their instructional leadership roles and thus contributes to addressing an important gap in the current literature. On the other hand, as a teacher

who has mostly worked in urban schools in South Africa and in four other countries in the Middle East, Southeast and Central Asia, I know that the opportunities that children have at Crocodile High School are far fewer than what is available elsewhere. If the playing field is to be levelled and children of Moletsi are to equally compete with their counterparts in well-resourced schools in different parts of South Africa and the rest of the world, it will be a long road ahead. To walk this road, the full participation of all key stakeholders, including partners in the Department of Basic Education, other government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), traditional authorities, communities, youth organisations and the rest of the country is necessary.

## References

- Abadzi, H. (2007). *Absenteeism and beyond: Instructional time loss and consequences*. World Bank.
- Abdullah, J. B., & Kassim, J. M. (2011). Instructional leadership and attitude towards organizational change among secondary schools principal in Pahang, Malaysia. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 15*, 3304-3309.
- Abonyi, U. K., & Sofo, F. (2021). Exploring instructional leadership practices of leaders in Ghanaian basic schools. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 24*(6), 838-854.
- Adelson, N. (2005). The embodiment of inequity: Health disparities in aboriginal Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health, 96* (2), S45-S61.
- Adonis, C. K., & Silinda, F. (2021). Institutional culture and transformation in higher education in post-1994 South Africa: a critical race theory analysis. *Critical African Studies, 13*(1), 73-94.
- Ahlan, A., Atanda, B. N., & Shehu, Y. (2014). Information technology enhances students' academic performance: A case of University of Ilorin. *The Online Journal of Distance Education and e-Learning, 2*, 15-20
- Akungu, J. A. (2014). *Influence of teaching and learning resources on students' performance in Kenya certificate of secondary education in freeday secondary education in Embakasi district, Kenya* [Master's dissertation, University of Nairobi].
- Alhosani, A. A., Singh, S. K., & Al Nahyan, M. T. (2017). Role of school leadership and climate in student achievement. *The International Journal of Educational Management, 31*(6), 843–851.
- Allen, N., Grigsby, B., & Peters, M. L. (2015). Does leadership matter ? examining the relationship among transformational leadership, school climate, and student achievement. *NCPEA International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 10*(2), 1–22.
- Alsaleh, A. (2019) Investigating instructional leadership in Kuwait's educational reform context: School leaders' perspectives, *School Leadership & Management, 39* (1), 96-120.
- Ananga, E. (2011). *Dropping out of school in southern Ghana: The push-out and pull-out factors* (CREATE Pathways to Access Research Monograph No. 55)
- Andrae, D., McIntosh, T., & Coster, S. (2017). Marginalised: An insider's view of the state, state policies in New Zealand and gang formation. *Critical Criminology, 25*, 119-135.

- Andriani, S., Kesumawati, N., & Kristiawan, M. (2018). The influence of the transformational leadership and work motivation on teachers performance. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 7(7).
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2015). *The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*. AIHW.
- Bademo, Y., & Tefera, B. F. (2016). Assessing the Desired and Actual Levels of Teachers' Participation in Decision-Making in Secondary Schools of Ethiopia. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 11(13), 1236-1242.
- Balfour, R. J., Mitchell, C. & Moletsane, R. (2008). Troubling contexts: Toward a generative theory of rurality as education research. *Journal of Rural and Community Development* 3(3),95–107.
- Balfour, R. J., Mitchell, C., & Moletsane, R. (2011). Understanding rurality in the troubling context: Prospects and challenges. *Partnerships for hope: A school–university collaboration for educational change in rural South Africa*. New York: Edwin Mellen.
- Bambi, A. (2013). *The role of head of departments as instructional leaders in secondary schools: Implications for teaching and learning*. [Master's dissertation, University of Johannesburg].
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W H Freeman/Times Books/ Henry Holt & Co.
- Basma, B., & Savage, R. (2023). Teacher professional development and student reading in middle and high school: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 1-5.
- Bass, B. M. (1985). Leadership: Good, better, best. *Organizational dynamics*, 13(3), 26-40.
- Bass, B. M. (1998). The ethics of transformational leadership. *Ethics, the heart of leadership*, 169-192.
- Battiste, M., & Henderson, J. Y. (2018). Compulsory schooling and cognitive imperialism: A case for cognitive justice and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. *The Palgrave Handbook of Education Law for Schools*, 567-583.
- Beaty-O'Ferrall, M. E., Green, A., & Hanna, F. (2010). Classroom management strategies for difficult students: Promoting change through relationships. *Middle School Journal*, 41(4), 4-11.

- Beebe, J. (2014) *Rapid qualitative inquiry. A field guide to team-based assessment. Second addition.* Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bhengru, T. T., & Svosve, E. (2019). Transforming education through school-community partnerships: Lessons from four rural early childhood development schools in Zimbabwe. *Africa Education Review, 16*(2), 16-35.
- Bhengru, T. T., Naicker, I., & Mthiyane, S. E. (2014). Chronicling the barriers to translating instructional leadership learning into practice. *Journal of Social Sciences, 40*(2), 203-212.
- Biddle, N. (2014). Measuring and analysing the wellbeing of Australia's Indigenous population. *Social Indicators Research, 116*, 713-729.
- Biggs, M. A., & Buchler, D. (2007). Rigor and practice-based research. *Design issues, 23*(3), 62-69.
- Blakesley, S. (2008). Remote and unresearched: Educational leadership in Canada's Yukon Territory. *Compare, 38*(4), 441-454.
- Blasé, J., & Blasé, J. (2000). Effective instructional leadership: Teachers' perspectives on how principals promote teaching and learning in schools. *Journal of educational administration, 38*(2), 130-141.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
- Booyens, I. (2010). Rethinking township tourism: Towards responsible tourism development in South African townships. *Development Southern Africa, 27*(2), 273-287.
- Boyce, J., & Bowers, A. J. (2018). Toward an evolving conceptualization of instructional leadership as leadership for learning: Meta-narrative review of 109 quantitative studies across 25 years. *Journal of educational administration, 56*(2).
- Brezicha, K. F., Ikoma, S., Park, H., & LeTendre, G. K. (2020). The ownership perception gap: Exploring teacher job satisfaction and its relationship to teachers' and principals' perception of decision-making opportunities. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 23*(4), 428-456.
- Bridges, E. M. (1967). Instructional leadership: A concept re-examined. *Journal of Educational Administration, 5*(2), 136-147.
- Bryan, J., Young, A., Griffin, D., & Holcomb-Mccoy, C. (2017). Leadership practices linked to involvement in school– family–community partnerships: A national study. *Professional School Counseling, 21*(1), 1.

- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford university press.
- Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. Harper & Row
- Bush, T. (2007). Educational leadership and management: Theory, policy, and practice. *Educational Leadership and Management: Theory, Policy, and Practice*, 27(3), 391–406.
- Bush, T. (2013). Instructional leadership and leadership for learning, *Education as Change*, 17(S1), 5-20.
- Bush, T. (2015). Understanding instructional leadership. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 43(4), 487–489.
- Bush, T., Duku, N., Glover, D., Kiggundu, E., Kola, S., Msila, V., & Moorosi, P. (2009). External evaluation research report of the advanced certificate in education. *School Leadership and Management*. Pretoria, South Africa: Department of Education.
- Bush, T., & Glover, D. (2016). School leadership and management in South Africa: Findings from a systematic literature review. *International journal of educational management*, 30(2), 211-231.
- Business Tech. (2020, May 22) *Curro is launching an online school: Here's how it works*. <https://businesstech.co.za/news/business/400507/curro-is-launching-an-online-school-heres-how-it-works/>
- Bybee, R. W., & Fuchs, B. (2006). Preparing the 21st century workforce: A new reform in science and technology education. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* 43, 349–352.
- Carl, A. E. (2012). *Teacher Empowerment through Curriculum Development. Theory into Practice*. Kenwyn: Juta Academic press.
- Carroll, C., & O'Loughlin, D. (2014). Peer observation of teaching: enhancing academic engagement for new participants. *Innovations in education and teaching international*, 51(4), 446-456.
- Cavanaugh, B. (2013). Performance feedback and teachers' use of praise and opportunities to respond: A review of the literature. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 36(1), 111-136.

- Chabalala, G., & Naidoo, P. (2021). Teachers' and middle managers' experiences of principals' instructional leadership towards improving curriculum delivery in schools. *South African Journal of Childhood Education, 11*(1), 1-10.
- Chenail, R. J. (2011). Qualitative Researchers in the Blogosphere: Using Blogs as Diaries and Data. *Qualitative Report, 16*(1), 249-254.
- Chikoko, V., Naicker, I., & Mthiyane, S. (2015). School leadership practices that work in areas of multiple deprivation in South Africa. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership, 43*(3), 452–467.
- Cohen, J., Loeb, S., Miller, L. C., & Wyckoff, J. H. (2020). Policy implementation, principal agency, and strategic action: Improving teaching effectiveness in New York City middle schools. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 42*(1), 134-160.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education, 6*. Routledge.
- Cohen, M. J. (2015). *Principal leadership in high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools*. [Doctoral Thesis, The University of Nebraska].
- Conger, J. A. (1991). Inspiring others: The language of leadership. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 5*(1), 31-45.
- Constantinides, M. (2021) High-stakes accountability policies and local adaptation: Exploring how school principals respond to multiple policy demands. *School Leadership & Management, 42* (2),170-187.
- Cooke, M., Mitrou, F., Lawrence, D., Guimond, E., & Beavon, D. (2007). Indigenous well-being in four countries: An application of the UNDP'S human development index to indigenous peoples in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. *BMC international health and human rights, 7*(1), 1-11.
- Cooper, K. & White, R. E. (2012). *Qualitative research in the post-modern era: Contexts of qualitative research*. Springer.

- Cornell, S. (2005). Indigenous peoples, poverty and self-determination in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States. Indigenous peoples and poverty: an international perspective, 199-225. In R. Eversole, J.A, McNeish & A., D. Cimadamore (Eds), *Indigenous people and poverty, an international perspective*. (pp 199-225). Zed Books.
- Crooks, C. V., Burleigh, D., Snowshoe, A., Lapp, A., Hughes, R., & Sisco, A. (2015). A case study of culturally relevant school-based programming for First Nations youth: Improved relationships, confidence and leadership, and school success. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, 8(4), 216-230.
- Crotty, M. (2003): *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspectives in the Research Process* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Sage Publications.
- Daniëls, E., Hondeghem, A., & Dochy, F. (2019). A review on leadership and leadership development in educational settings. *Educational research review*, 27, 110-125.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective Teacher Professional Development*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
- Datnow, A., & Hubbard, L. (2016). Teacher capacity for and beliefs about data-driven decision making: A literature review of international research. *Journal of Educational Change*, 17, 7-28.
- Day, C., Sammons, P., & Gorgen, K. (2020). Successful School Leadership. *Education development trust*.
- De Clercq, F. (2008), Teacher quality, appraisal and development: The flaws in the IQMS, *Perspectives in Education*, 26 (1), 9-13.
- De Lima, J. Á., & Silva, M. J. T. (2018). Resistance to classroom observation in the context of teacher evaluation: Teachers' and department heads' experiences and perspectives. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 30, 7-26.
- Delamont, S. (Ed.). (2012). *Handbook of qualitative research in education*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2011) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*, Sage.

- Department of Basic Education (2016). Personnel administrative measures (PAM). *Government Gazette*, 608(39684).
- Department of Basic Education. (2011) *National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12*, 11 September. South Africa.
- Department of Basic Education. (2013). *General Education System Quality assessment: Country report South Africa*. Department of Basic Education, Pretoria.
- Department of Basic Education. (2014). *National strategy on screening, identification, assessment and support (SIAS) – Operational guidelines*, Department of Basic Education, Pretoria.
- Department of Education (1999). *Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM): Terms and conditions of employment of educators determined in terms of section 4 of the Employment of Educators act 1998*. Government Gazette, No. 19767, 18 February. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Devereux, S. (2019). Violations of farm workers’ labour rights in post-apartheid South Africa, *Development Southern Africa*, 1-23.
- DiPaola, M. F., & Walther-Thomas, C. (2003). *Principals and special education: The critical role of school leaders*. University of Florida, Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education.
- Dou, D., Devos, G., & Valcke, M. (2017). The relationships between school autonomy gap, principal leadership, teachers’ job satisfaction and organizational commitment. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 45(6), 959-977.
- du Plessis, E. (2020). Student teachers’ perceptions, experiences, and challenges regarding learner-centred teaching. *South African Journal of Education*, 40(1).
- du Plessis, P. (2014). Problems and complexities in rural schools: Challenges of education and social development. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(20), 1109.
- du Plessis, P. (2017). Challenges for rural school leaders in a developing context: A case study on leadership practices of effective rural principals. *Koers*, 82(3), 1-10.
- du Plessis, P., & Mestry, R. (2019). Teachers for rural schools – A challenge for South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 39(1), 1-9.

- Dube, B. (2020) Rural online learning in the context of COVID 19 in South Africa: Evoking an inclusive education approach. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research*, 10, (2), 135–157.
- Duke, D. L. (1987). *School leadership and instructional improvement*. Random House.
- Durden, P. C. (2008). Wanted: Good leaders for urban schools. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 3(1), 1-33.
- Ebersohn, L., & Ferreira, R. (2012). Rurality and resilience in education: Place-based partnerships and agency to moderate time and space constraints. *Perspectives in Education*, 30(1),30-42.
- Education Labour Relations Council (2003). *Collective Agreement 8. Integrated Quality Management System*. Review Printers.
- Edwards, R., & Holland J. (2013) *What is qualitative interviewing?* Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Egbert, J., & Sanden, S. (2013). *Foundations of education research: Understanding theoretical components*. Routledge.
- Finch, H., Lewis, J., & Turley, C. (2014). Focus groups. In J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, C. M. Nicholls, & R. Ormston (Eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers (2nd ed.)*. Sage.
- Finley, M. J. (2014). *An exploration of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of principals' instructional leadership and transformational leadership behaviors* [Doctoral dissertation, Georgia Southern University].
- Firestone, W. A., & Donaldson, M. L. (2019). Teacher evaluation as data use: What recent research suggests. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 31, 289-314.
- Fleisch, B. (2010) The politics of the governed: South African Democratic Teachers' Union Soweto strike, June 2009. *Southern African Review of Education*, 16(2), 117-131.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.

- Ford, M. (2013). Achievement gaps in Australia: What NAPLAN reveals about education inequality in Australia. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 16(1), 80-102.
- Fossey, E., Harvey, C., McDermott, F., & Davidson, L. (2002). Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Australian & New Zealand journal of psychiatry*, 36(6), 717-732.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. Jossey-Bass.
- Ganon-Shilon, S., & Schechter, C. (2017). Making sense of school leaders' sense-making. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 45(4), 682-698.
- Gardiner, M. E., & Enomoto, E. K. (2006). Urban school principals and their role as multicultural leaders. *Urban Education*, 41(6), 560-584.
- Gehrke, S. R. (2005). Poor schools, poor students, successful teachers. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 42(1), 14-17.
- Gibbens, M., & Schoeman, C. (2020). Planning for sustainable livelihood development in the context of rural South Africa: A micro-level approach. *Town and Regional Planning*, 76, 14-28.
- Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008). Methods of data collection in qualitative research: interviews and focus groups. *British Dental Journal*, 204(6), 291-295.
- Gillett, J., Clarke, S., & O'Donoghue, T. (2016). Leading schools facing challenging circumstances: Some insights from Western Australia. *Issues in Educational Research*, 26(4), 592-603.
- Glanz, J., Shaked, H., Rabinowitz, C., Shenhav, S., & Zaretsky, R. (2017). Instructional leadership practices among principals in Israeli and US Jewish schools. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 26(2), 132-153.
- Goodall, J. (2018). Parental engagement in children's learning: Moving on from mass superstition. *Creative Education*, 9(11), 1611.
- Grant, C. (2017). Distributed leadership in South Africa: yet another passing fad or a robust theoretical tool for investigating school leadership practice? *School Leadership & Management*, 37(5), 457-475.

- Grant, C. (2010). *Distributed teacher leadership: troubling the terrain*. [Doctoral thesis, University of KwaZulu Natal].
- Greiman, B. C., Addington, L. S., Larson, T. G., & Olander, K. R. (2007). Preferred Leadership Style of Agricultural Education Teachers: An Expression of Epistemological Beliefs about Youth Leadership Development. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 48(4), 93-105.
- Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). *How principals affect students and schools*. Wallace Foundation.
- Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology Journal*, 29, 75–91.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Sage.
- Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2(163-194), 105.
- Gumus, S., Bellibas, Hargreaves M. S., Esen, M., & Gumus, E. (2018). A systematic review of studies on leadership models in educational research from 1980 to 2014. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 46(1), 25-48.
- Gurr, D. (2019). Australian considerations in relation to instructional leadership and leadership for learning. *Instructional leadership and leadership for learning in schools: Understanding theories of leading*, 77-104.
- Gurr, D., Drysdale, L., & Mulford, B. (2006). Models of successful principal leadership. *School Leadership and Management*, 26(4), 371-395.
- Gurr, D., Drysdale, L., Clarke, S., & Wildy, H. (2014). High-need schools in Australia: The leadership of two principals. *Management in Education*, 28(3), 86-90.
- Gyamerah, A. K. (2021). *Instructional Leadership Practices that Support Increased Student Achievement in Ghana's Rural Districts* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University].
- Habi, T. D. (2022). *School leadership practices in high performing rural primary schools in Lesotho: A case study* [Masters dissertation, University of Kwa Zulu Natal].
- Hallam, P. R., Smith, H. R., Hite, J. M., Hite, S. J., & Wilcox, B. R. (2015). Trust and collaboration in PLC teams: Teacher relationships, principal support, and collaborative benefits. *NASSP Bulletin*, 99(3), 193-216.

- Hallinger, P. (2003). Leading educational change: Reflections on the practice of instructional and transformational leadership. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 33(3), 329–351.
- Hallinger, P. (2005). Instructional leadership and the school principal: A passing fancy that refuses to fade away. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 4(3), 221-239.
- Hallinger, P. (2007). Research on the practice of instructional and transformational leadership: Retrospect and prospect. *Proceedings of the ACER Research Conference*, 1-7.
- Hallinger, P. (2011). Leadership for learning: Lessons from 40 years of empirical research. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 49(2), 125–142.
- Hallinger, P. (2018). Bringing context out of the shadows of leadership. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 46(1), 5–24.
- Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2002). What do you call people with visions? The role of vision, mission and goals in school leadership and improvement. *Second international handbook of educational leadership and administration*, 9-40.
- Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2011). Collaborative leadership and school improvement: Understanding the impact on school capacity and student learning. *School Leadership and Management*, 30(2), 95-110.
- Hallinger, P., & Heck, R., H. (2010) Collaborative leadership and school improvement understanding the impact on school capacity and student learning. *School Leadership & Management*, 30 (2), 95-110.
- Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J. (1985). Assessing the instructional management behavior of principals. *The Elementary School Journal*, 86(2), 217-247.
- Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J. F. (1986). The social context of effective schools. *American Journal of Education*, 94(3), 328-355.
- Hallinger, P., Gumuş, S., & Bellibaş, M. Ş. (2020). 'Are principals instructional leaders yet?' A science map of the knowledge base on instructional leadership, 1940–2018. *Scientometrics*, 122(3), 1629-1650.
- Hargreaves, A. (2000). Four ages of professionalism and professional learning. *Teachers and Teaching*, 6(2), 151-182.

- Hargreaves, A. (2019). Teacher collaboration: 30 years of research on its nature, forms, limitations and effects. *Teachers and Teaching*, 25(5), 603-621.
- Harper, A. O., & Thompson, S. (2017). Structural oppressions facing Indigenous students in Canadian education. *Fourth World Journal*, 15(2), 41-66.
- Harris, A. (2004). Distributed leadership and school improvement: Leading or misleading? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 32(1), 11-24.
- Harris, A. (2011). Distributed leadership: Implications for the role of the principal. *Journal of Management Development*, 31(1), 7-17.
- Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2015). Transforming education systems: Comparative and critical perspectives on school leadership. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 35(3), 311-318.
- Harris, A., & Spillane, J. (2008). Distributed leadership through the looking glass. *Management in Education*, 22(1), 31-34.
- Harris, A., Day, C., & Hadfield, M. (2003). Teachers' perspectives on effective school leadership. *Teachers and Teaching*, 9(1), 67-77.
- Haskell, L., & Randall, M. (2009). Disrupted attachments: A social context complex trauma framework and the lives of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, 5(3), 48-99.
- Heystek, J. (2007). Reflecting on principals as managers or moulded leaders in a managerialistic school system. *South African Journal of Education*, 27(3), 491-505.
- Heystek, J. (2015). Principals' perceptions of the motivation potential of performance agreements in underperforming schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 35(2), 1-10.
- Hitt, D. H., & Tucker, P. D. (2016). Systematic review of key leader practices found to influence student achievement: A unified framework. *Review of Educational Research*, 86, 531-569.
- Hlalele, D. (2012). Social justice and rural education in South Africa. *Perspectives in Education*, 30(1), 111-118.

- Hlalele, D. J. (2019). Indigenous knowledge systems and sustainable learning in rural South Africa. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 29(1), 88-100.
- Hoepfl, M. C. (1997). Choosing qualitative research: A primer for technology education researchers. *Journal of Technology Education*, 9(1), 4.
- Hogarth, M. (2018). Talkin'bout a revolution: The call for transformation and reform in Indigenous education. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 45, 663-674.
- Hornig, E., & Loeb, S. (2010). New thinking about instructional leadership. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(3), 66-69.
- Howes, L. M., & Goodman-Delahunty, J. (2015). Teachers' career decisions: Perspectives on choosing teaching careers, and on staying or leaving. *Issues in Educational Research*, 25(1), 18-35.
- Huisman, S., Singer, N. R., & Catapano, S. (2010). Resiliency to success: Supporting novice urban teachers. *Teacher Development*, 14(4), 483-499.
- Human Rights Watch (2011). *Ripe with abuse: Human rights conditions in South Africa's fruit and wine industries*. Human Rights Watch, United States of America. ISBN: 1-56432-801-5.
- Hunzicker, J. (2004). The beliefs-behavior connection: Leading teachers toward change. *Principal Arlington*, 84, 44-46.
- Imenda, S. (2014). Is there a conceptual difference between theoretical and conceptual frameworks? *Journal of Social Sciences*, 38(2), 185-195.
- Imig, D., Holden, S., & Placek, D. (2019). Leadership for learning in the US. In T. Townsend (Ed.), *Instructional leadership and leadership for learning in schools: Understanding theories of leading* (pp. 105–131). Springer International Publishing.
- Ingram, M., Wolfe, R. B., & Lieberman, J. M. (2007). The role of parents in high-achieving schools serving low-income, at-risk populations. *Education and Urban Society*, 39(4), 479-497.
- Janesick, V. J. (2016). *Contemplative qualitative inquiry: Practicing the Zen of research*. Routledge.
- Jenkins, B. (2009). What it takes to be an instructional leader. *Principal*. 88(3), 34-37.

- Jeynes, W. H. (2018). A practical model for school leaders to encourage parental involvement and parental engagement. *School Leadership & Management*, 38(2), 147-163.
- Jorgensen, R., & Niesche, R. (2011). Curriculum leadership in remote Indigenous communities. *Leading and Managing*, 17(1), 45-58.
- Jung, C. (2009). Canada and the legacy of the Indian residential schools: Transitional justice for Indigenous Peoples in a non-transitional society. *Aboriginal Policy Research Consortium International (APRCi)*. 295.
- Kabeta, R. M., Manchishi, P. C., & Akakandelwa, A. (2015). Instructional leadership and its effect on the teaching and learning process: The case of head teachers in selected Basic Schools in the Central Province of Zambia. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 4(4), 1876-1884.
- Kennedy, M. M. (2016). How does professional development improve teaching? *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 945-980.
- Khumalo, S. S. (2019). The role of transformational school leadership in promoting teacher commitment: An antecedent for sustainable development in South Africa. *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, 10(2), 22-32.
- Khumalo, B., & Mji, A. (2014). Exploring educators' perceptions of the impact of poor infrastructure on learning and teaching in rural South African schools. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(20), 1521.
- Khumalo, J. B., Van Vuuren, H. J., Van der Westhuizen, P. C., & Van der Vyver, C. P. (2018). Problems experienced by secondary school deputy principals in diverse contexts: A South African study. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 16(2), 190-199.
- Klar, H. W., & Brewer, C. A. (2013). Successful leadership in high-needs schools: An examination of core leadership practices enacted in challenging contexts. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 49(5), 768-808.
- Kneebone, E. (2014). The growth and spread of concentrated poverty, 2000 to 2008-2012. *The Brookings*.

- Kouni, Z., Koutsoukos, M., & Panta, D. (2018). Transformational leadership and job satisfaction: The case of secondary education teachers in Greece. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 6(10), 158-168.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2007). Leadership is in the eye of the follower. *The Pfeiffer book of successful leadership development tools*, 154(3).
- Koyama, J. (2014). Principals as bricoleurs: Making sense and making do in an era of accountability. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 50(2), 279–304.
- Krishnan, V. R. (2005). Transformational leadership and outcomes: Role of relationship duration. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 26(6), 442–457.
- Kushwaha, P., Tripathi, R., Chauhan, S., & Saxena, R. (2017). Exploring the role of knowledge sharing in digital era: A conceptual study. *National seminar on the digital transformation of business in India: Opportunities and challenges*.
- Kutu, A. A., Nzimande, N., & Ngema, Z.G. (2020). Availability of educational resources and student academic performances in South Africa. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(8), 3768-3781.
- Lawrence, J. E., & Tar, U. A. (2018). Factors that influence teachers' adoption and integration of ICT in teaching/learning process. *Educational Media International*, 55(1), 79-105.
- Leahy, M. M., & Shore, R. A. (2019). Changing roles in sustaining successful charter school leadership in high poverty schools: Voices from the field. *Journal of School Choice*, 13(2), 255-277.
- Leithwood, K. A., & Montgomery, D. J. (1982). The role of the elementary school principal in program improvement. *Review of Educational Research*, 52(3), 309-339.
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2000). The effects of transformational leadership on organizational conditions and student engagement with school. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 38(2), 112-129.
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2005). A review of transformational school leadership research 1996–2005. *Leadership and policy in schools*, 4(3), 177-199.

- Leithwood, K., & Mascall, B. (2008). Collective leadership effects on student achievement. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(4), 529-561.
- Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2006). *Successful school leadership: What it is and how it influences pupil learning*. DfES and Nottingham: NCSL.
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership & Management*, 40(1), 5-22.
- Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D. and Steinbach, R. (1999), *Changing Leadership for Changing Times*, Buckingham, Open University Press.
- Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). How Leadership Influences Student Learning. Review of Research. *Wallace Foundation*.
- Lemmer, E. M. 2007. Parent involvement in teacher education in South Africa. *International Journal about Parents in Education*, 1(0),218-229.
- Lezotte, L. (2001). Revolutionary and evolutionary: The effective schools movement. *Okemos, MI: Effective Schools Products, Ltd*, 5.
- Li, L., & Liu, Y. (2022). An integrated model of principal transformational leadership and teacher leadership that is related to teacher self-efficacy and student academic performance. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 42(4), 661-678.
- Litz, D., & Scott, S. (2017). Transformational leadership in the educational system of the United Arab Emirates. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 45(4), 566-587.
- Liu, S., & Hallinger, P. (2018). Principal instructional leadership, teacher self-efficacy, and teacher professional learning in China: Testing a mediated-effects model. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 54(4), 501-528.
- Liu, Y., Bellibaş, M. Ş., & Gümüş, S. (2021). The effect of instructional leadership and distributed leadership on teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction: Mediating roles of supportive school culture and teacher collaboration. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 49(3), 430-453.

- Lumby, J., & Heystek, J. (2012). Leadership identity in ethnically diverse schools in South Africa and England. *Educational management administration & leadership*, 40(1), 4-20.
- Lunenburg, F. C., & Irby, B. J. (2014). Strengthening the principal's toolbox: Strategies to boost learning. In *National Forum of Educational Administration & Supervision Journal*, 32 (1),4-17.
- Lung-Amam, W., Anacker, K. B., & Finio, N. (2022). Worlds Away in Suburbia: The Changing Geography of High-Poverty Neighbourhoods in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area. In *Suburbia in the 21st Century* (pp. 179-201). Routledge.
- MacBeath, J. (2019). Leadership for learning. In T. Townsend (Ed), *Instructional leadership and leadership for learning in schools: Understanding theories of leading* (pp. 49-73).
- MacBeath, J., & Dempster, N. (2009). (Eds) *Connecting leadership and learning. Principles for practice*. Routledge.
- Mace-Matluck, B. (1987). The Effective Schools Movement: Its History and Context. An SEDL Monograph.
- MacIver, M. (2012). Aboriginal students' perspectives on the factors influencing high school completion. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 14(3), 156-162.
- Mafisa, L. J. (2017). The role of teacher unions in education with specific reference to South Africa. *Gender and Behaviour*, 15(4), 10553-10566.
- Maifala, S. S. (2017). *Leading 21st century schools: An exploratory case study of leadership practices adopted by principals in rural context* [Master's dissertation, University of KwaZulu Natal].
- Maja, T. S. A. (2016). *School management team members' understanding of their duties according to the personnel administration measures* [Master's dissertation, University of Pretoria].
- Malinen, O. P., & Savolainen, H. (2016). The effect of perceived school climate and teacher efficacy in behavior management on job satisfaction and burnout: A longitudinal study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 60, 144-152.

- Malinga, C. B. B. (2016). *Middle management and instructional leadership: a case study of Natural Sciences' Heads of Department in the Gauteng Province* [Doctoral Thesis, University of the Free State].
- Malinga, C. B., Jita, L. C., & Bada, A. A. (2021). Instructional Leadership Capacity of Secondary School Science Heads of Department in Gauteng, South Africa. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 20(12), 267-293.
- Maponya, S. H. (2015). *The role of the principal as instructional leader in improving learner achievement in South African primary schools* [Doctoral Thesis, University of South Africa].
- Marais, P. (2016). " We can't believe what we see": Overcrowded classrooms through the eyes of student teachers. *South African Journal of Education*, 36(2), 1-10.
- Maringe, F., & Moletsane, R. (2015). Leading schools in circumstances of multiple deprivation in South Africa: Mapping some conceptual, contextual and research dimensions. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 43(3), 347-362.
- Maringe, F., Masinire, A., & Nkambule, T. (2015). Distinctive features of schools in multiple deprived communities in South Africa: Implications for policy and leadership. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 43(3), 363-385.
- Marks, H. M., & Printy, S. M. (2003). Principal leadership and school performance An integration of transformational and instructional leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(3), 370-397.
- Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Mashaba, E. K., & Maile, S. (2018). Factors underlying teacher absenteeism in selected schools located in Tshwane West District, South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development in Africa*, 4, 24-pages.
- Matherson, L., & Windle, T. M. (2017). What do teachers want from their professional development? Four emerging themes. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 83(3), 28.

- Mathunyane, S. S. (2013). *Instructional leadership: Exploration of instructional behaviours of two secondary school principals in Limpopo Province* [Master's dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand].
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012) *A realist approach for qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, California, Sage.
- Mayrowetz, D. (2008). Making sense of distributed leadership: Exploring the multiple usages of the concept in the field. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(3), 424-435.
- Mbambo, S. B., & Agbola, S. B. (2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in townships and lessons for urban spatial restructuring in South Africa. *African Journal of Governance & Development*, 9(1.1), 329-351.
- Mbokazi, Z. (2015). Dimensions of successful leadership in Soweto township secondary schools. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 43(3), 468-482.
- McGehee, J., & Griffith, L. K. (2004). Technology enhances student learning across the curriculum. *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School*, 9(6), 344-349.
- McLachlan, R., Gilfillan, G., & Gordon, J. (2013). *Deep and persistent disadvantage in Australia*. Productivity Commission.
- McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in Education: Evidence-Based Inquiry*, MyEducationLab Series. Pearson.
- Mendelson, M. (2008). *Improving education on reserves: A First Nations education authority act*, 1553822811. Caledon Institute of Social Policy.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education. Revised and expanded from " Case Study Research in Education."*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Mestry, R. (2017a). Empowering principals to lead and manage public schools effectively in the 21st century. *South African Journal of Education*, 37(1), 1–11.
- Mestry, R. (2017b). Principals' perspectives and experiences of their instructional leadership functions to enhance learner achievement in public schools. *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, (69), 257-280.

- Mestry, R. (2018). The role of governing bodies in the management of financial resources in South African no-fee public schools. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 46(3), 385-400.
- Mestry, R., Moonsammy-Koopasammy, I., & Schmidt, M. (2013). The instructional leadership role of primary school principals. *Education as Change*, 17(S1), S49-S64.
- Mhlanga, D., & Moloi, T. (2020) COVID-19 and the digital transformation of education: What are we learning on 4IR in South Africa? *Education Science*, 10(80),1–11.
- Mkhize, B. N., & Bhengu, T. T. (2015). Creating and sustaining conditions for improved teaching and learning: An ethnographic case study of one secondary school. *International Journal of Educational Sciences*, 10(3), 370-380.
- Mlachila, M. M., & Moeletsi, T. (2019). *Struggling to make the grade: A review of the causes and consequences of the weak outcomes of South Africa's education system*. International Monetary Fund.
- Mohale, A. B., Litshani, N. F., Mashau, T. S., Sebopetsa, N. S., & Moyo, H. (2020). Perceptions of school leadership in pursuit of developing effective teaching and learning culture in schools. *Gender & Behaviour*, 18(1), 15217–15232.
- Mokoena, P., & van Breda, A. D. (2021). School dropout among female learners in rural Mpumalanga, South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 41(3).
- Moletsane, R. (2012). Repositioning educational research on rurality and rural education in South Africa: Beyond deficit paradigms. *Perspectives in Education*, 30(1), 1-8.
- Moletsane, R., Juan, A., Prinsloo, C., & Reddy, V. (2015). Managing teacher leave and absence in South African rural schools: Implications for supporting schools in contexts of multiple-deprivation. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 43(3), 386-399.
- Moreeng, B., & Tshelane, M. (2014). Transformative curriculum leadership for rural ecologies. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(23), 850.
- Morgan, D. L. (1988) *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage

- Moss, C. M., & Brookhart, S. M. (2019). *Advancing formative assessment in every classroom: A guide for instructional leaders*. ASCD.
- Moyo, C., & Maifala, S. (2022). Navigating the New Covid-19 Normal: The Challenges and Attitudes of Teachers and Students during Online Learning in Qatar. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 21(8), 368-383.
- Msila, V. (2012). Black parental involvement in South African rural schools: Will parents ever help in enhancing effective school management. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 2(2), 303-313.
- Msila, V. (2014). Teacher unionism and school management: A study of (Eastern Cape) schools in South Africa. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 42(2), 259-274.
- Msila, V. (2021). Revisiting Robert Axelrod: Cooperation, school management and teacher unions. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 20(4), 284-301.
- Mtsi, N., & Maphosa, C. (2016). Challenges encountered in the teaching and learning of the natural sciences in rural schools in South Africa. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 47(1), 58-67.
- Mturi, A. J. (2012). Child-headed households in South Africa: What we know and what we don't. *Development Southern Africa*, 29(3), 506–516.
- Muijs, D., & Harris, A. (2003). Teacher leadership—Improvement through empowerment? An overview of the literature. *Educational Management & Administration*, 31(4), 437-448.
- Murphy, J. (1990). Principal instructional leadership. In P. W. Thurston, N. A. Prestine, L. S. Lotto, & P. P. Zodiates (Eds.), *Advances in educational administration: Changing perspectives on the school, 1 (part B)* (pp. 163–200). JAI Press.
- Murphy, J., Elliott, S. N., Goldring, E., & Porter, A. C. (2007). Leadership for learning: A research-based model and taxonomy of behaviors. *School Leadership and Management*, 27(2), 179–201.
- Murphy, J., Neumerski, C. M., Goldring, E., Grissom, J., & Porter, A. (2015). Bottling fog? The quest for instructional management. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 46(4), 455-471.

- Murtadha-Watts, K., & Stoughton, E. (2004). Critical cultural knowledge in special education: Reshaping the responsiveness of school leaders. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 37(2).
- Muthusamy, N. (2015). *Teachers' experiences with overcrowded classrooms in a mainstream school*. [Masters dissertation]. Pinetown, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Myende, P. E. (2015). Tapping into the asset-based approach to improve academic performance in rural schools. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 50(1), 31-42.
- Myende, P. E., & Hlalele, D. (2018). Framing sustainable rural learning ecologies: A case for strength-based approaches. *Africa Education Review*, 15(3), 21-37.
- Myende, P. E., & Maifala, S. (2020). Complexities of leading rural schools in South Africa: Learning from principals' voices. *International Journal of Rural Management*, 16(2), 225-253.
- Myende, P. E., & Nhlumayo, B. S. (2022). Enhancing parent-teacher collaboration in rural schools: Parents' voices and implications for schools. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 25(3), 490-514.
- Myende, P., & Chikoko, V. (2014). School-university partnership in a South African rural context: Possibilities for an asset-based approach. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 46(3), 249-259.
- Naicker, I., Chikoko, V., & Mthiyane, S. E. (2013). Instructional leadership practices in challenging school contexts. *Education as Change*, 17(1): 137-150.
- Naidoo, P. (2019). Perceptions of teachers and school management teams of the leadership roles of public school principals. *South African Journal of Education*, 39(2), 1-14.
- Naidoo, P., & Petersen, N. (2015). Towards a leadership programme for primary school principals as instructional leaders. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 5(3), 1-8.
- Naylor, P. J., Scott, J., Drummond, J., Bridgewater, L., McKay, H. A., & Panagiotopoulos, C. (2010). Implementing a whole school physical activity and healthy eating model in rural and remote First Nations schools: A process evaluation of Action Schools! BC. *Rural and Remote Health*, 10(2), 38-52.

- Ncontsa, V. N., & Shumba, A. (2013). The nature causes and effects of school violence in South African high schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 33(3), 1-15.
- Neeganagwedgin, E. (2011). A critical review of Aboriginal education in Canada: Eurocentric dominance impact and everyday denial. *Aboriginal Policy Research Consortium International (APRCi)*, 440. 1-17. Routledge.
- Nettles, S. M., & Herrington, C. (2007). Revisiting the importance of the direct effects of school leadership on student achievement: The implications for school improvement policy. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 82(4), 724-736.
- Neu, D. (2000). Accounting and accountability relations: colonization, genocide and Canada's first nations. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 13(3), 268-288.
- Neumerski, C. M. (2013). Rethinking instructional leadership, a review: What do we know about principal, teacher, and coach instructional leadership, and where should we go from here? *Educational administration quarterly*, 49(2), 310-347.
- Newman, N., Northcutt, A., Farmer, A., & Black, B. (2019). Epstein's model of parental involvement: Parent perceptions in urban schools. *Language Teaching and Educational Research*, 2(2), 81-100.
- Nguyen, D. T., Ng, D., & Yap, P. S. (2017). Instructional leadership structure in Singapore: A co-existence of hierarchy and heterarchy. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 55(2), 147-167.
- Nhlumayo, B. S. (2021). Enhancing teacher practice in times of crises through school-based teacher professional development: Implications for rural-based schools in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *Proceedings of the South Africa International Conference on Education*, 111-121.
- Obadire, O. T., & Sinthumule, D. A. (2021). Learner discipline in the post-corporal punishment era: What an experience! *South African Journal of Education*, 41(2).
- OECD (2019). *Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development*, OECD rural policy reviews. OECD Publishing.

- Oke, A., & Fernandes, F. A. P. (2020). Innovations in teaching and learning: Exploring the perceptions of the education sector on the 4th industrial revolution (4IR). *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 6(2), 31.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Leech, N. L. (2006). Linking research questions to mixed methods data analysis procedures. *The Qualitative Report*, 11(3), 474-498.
- Opie, C. (2004). What is educational research. *Doing Educational Research*, 1-14.
- Oplatka, I. (2017). Fifteen years of publication: Leadership and policy in schools and its scholarly contribution since its foundation. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 16(1), 1-26.
- O'Reilly, K. (2009). *Key concepts in ethnography*. Sage.
- Ormston, R., Spencer, L., Barnard, M., & Snape, D. (2014). The foundations of qualitative research. *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*, 2(7), 52-55.
- Osterman, P. (2009). *The truth about middle managers: Who they are, how they work, why they matter*. Harvard Business Press.
- Partin, T. C. M., Robertson, R. E., Maggin, D. M., Oliver, R. M., & Wehby, J. H. (2009). Using teacher praise and opportunities to respond to promote appropriate student behavior. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 54(3), 172-178.
- Patterson, J. A., AlSabatin, H., Anderson, A., Klepacka, M., Lawrence, J., & Miner, B. (2021). A distributed leadership perspective on implementing instructional reform: A case study of an urban middle school. *Journal of School Leadership*, 31(3), 248-267.
- Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health services research*, 34(5 Pt 2), 1189.
- Perumal, J., & Moyo, Z. (2019). Disadvantaged school contexts and female school leadership in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies*, 14(1), 83-105.
- Phakathi, E. N. (2015). The management of learning and teaching support materials in public schools: A comparative study. [Master's dissertation, University of Kwazulu-Natal].

- Philipsen, B., Tondeur, J., Pareja Roblin, N., Vanslambrouck, S., & Zhu, C. (2019). Improving teacher professional development for online and blended learning: A systematic meta-aggregative review. *Education Tech Research Dev* 67, 1145–1174.
- Pillay, J. (2016). Problematising child-headed households: The need for children’s participation in early childhood interventions. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 6(1), 8.
- Poggenpoel, M., & Myburgh, C. (2003). The researcher as research instrument in educational research: A possible threat to trustworthiness? (A: research instrument). *Education*, 124(2), 418-423.
- Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2013). Is there still gender bias in nursing research? An update. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 36(1), 75-83.
- Preedy, M., Bennet, N. & Wise, C. 2012. *Educational leadership: Context, strategy and collaboration*. Sage.
- Preston, J. P., Claypool, T. R., Rowluck, W., & Green, B. (2018). Principal Leadership for Indigenous Student Success in Canada: Student, Parent, and Community Relationships. *International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM))*, 46(3).
- Printy, S. M., Marks, H. M., & Bowers, A. J. (2009). Integrated leadership: How principals and teachers share transformational and instructional influence. *Journal of School Leadership*, 19(5), 504-532.
- Qatar Government Communications Office (2020). *Government Communications Office statement on the suspension of public and private schools and universities for all students until further notice as a precautionary measure to contain the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19)*. Press Release on 9 March 2020.
- Ramokgotswa, N. I. (2015). *The role of teacher unions in the appointment and promotion of teachers in public schools* [Master’s Dissertation, University of Pretoria].
- Ramrathan, L. (2020). What knowledge is most worthwhile in crisis conditions? Re-engineering our curriculum in the context of Covid-19. In L. Ramrathan, N., Ndimande-Hlongwa, N., Mkhize, & J.A. Smit (Eds.). *Re-thinking the humanities curriculum in the time of Covid-19*, (pp.7-21). CSSALL Publishers.

- Republic of South Africa (2004). *Breaking new ground: A comprehensive plan for the development of integrated sustainable human settlements*. Pretoria.
- Republic of South Africa (2012). Amended National Norms and Standards for School Funding. *Government Gazette*, 566(35617), August 27.
- Republic of South Africa (2022). *Annual Report for 2021/22 Financial Year Vote 3*. Limpopo Department of Education.
- Richards, L., & Morse, J. M. (2012). *Readme first for a user's guide to qualitative methods*. Sage.
- Riley, T., & Webster, A. (2016). Principals as Literacy Leaders with Indigenous Communities (PALLIC) building relationships: One school's quest to raise Indigenous learners' literacy. *Teaching Education*, 27(2), 136-155.
- Robin, T., Dennis, M. K., & Hart, M. A. (2022). Feeding Indigenous people in Canada. *International Social Work*, 65(4), 652-662.
- Robinson, V. M. J. (2009). *Fit for purpose: An educationally relevant account of distributed leadership*, 219-240. Springer.
- Robinson, V., Lloyd, C. and Rowe, K. (2008) The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44 (5), 635-674.
- Romero, C., & Ventura, S. (2020). Educational data mining and learning analytics: An updated survey. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Data Mining and Knowledge Discovery*, 10(3), e1355.
- Romero, M., & Barbera, E. (2011). Quality of learners' time and learning performance beyond quantitative time-on-task. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 12(5), 125-137.
- Rosenholtz, S. J. (1985). Effective schools: Interpreting the evidence. *American Journal of Education*, 93(3), 352-388.

- Ross, J. A., & Gray, P. (2006). Transformational leadership and teacher commitment to organizational values: The mediating effects of collective teacher efficacy. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 17*(2), 179–199.
- Roux, C. J., & Sakala, M. (2020). Physical education in rural primary schools of Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces, South Africa: teachers' perspectives. *African Journal for Physical Activity and Health Sciences (AJPHEs)*, 26(sup1\_1), 128-142.
- Royer, D. J., Lane, K. L., Dunlap, K., & Ennis, R. P. (2018). A systematic review of teacher-delivered behavior-specific praise on K-12 student performance. *Remedial and Special Education. Advance online publication.*
- Runhare, T., Ouda, J.B., Vele, M.T. & Mudzielwana, M. (2021) School–community interventions to curb learner dropout: The perceptions of key education stakeholders in a rural South African school neighbourhood. *International Review of Education*, 67, 591–610.
- Sammons, P. (1995). *Key characteristics of effective schools: A review of school effectiveness research.* B & MBC Distribution Services.
- Sandada, M., & Makamani, M. (2016). An evaluation of the role of instructional leadership on the performance of schools in Zimbabwe. *Psychologia Paedagogia, 83.*
- Sang, G., Zhou, J., & Muthanna, A. (2021). Enhancing teachers' and administrators learning experiences through school–university partnerships: A qualitative case study in China. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community, 6*(3), 221-236.
- Sarra, C., Spillman, D., Jackson, C., Davis, J., & Bray, J. (2018). High-expectations relationships: A foundation for enacting high expectations in all Australian schools. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, 49*(1), 32-45.
- Schechter, C., Shaked, H., Ganon-Shilon, S., & Goldratt, M. (2018). Leadership metaphors: School principals' sense-making of a national reform. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 17*(1), 1-26.
- Schildkamp, K. (2019). Data-based decision-making for school improvement: Research insights and gaps. *Educational Research, 61*(3), 257-273.

- Schoeman, S. (2015) Towards a whole-school approach to the pastoral care module in a Postgraduate Certificate of Education programme: A South African experience. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 38 (1), 119-134.
- Schwab, R. G. (2012). Indigenous early school leavers: Failure, risk and high-stakes testing. *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, (1), 3-18.
- Scotland, J. (2012). Exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research: Relating ontology and epistemology to the methodology and methods of the scientific, interpretive, and critical research paradigms. *English language teaching*, 5(9), 9-16.
- Searly, K., & Willans, J. (2020). Pastoral care and the caring teacher-value adding to enabling education. *Student Success*, 11(1), 12.
- Sempe, M. N. J. (2021). *The school management team's role in conducting extra classes on weekends and during vacations for matriculants: A critical investigation* [Master's dissertation, University of KwaZulu Natal].
- Sengai, W. (2021). Heads of Department's role in implementation of History syllabi at selected Zimbabwean secondary schools: An instructional leadership perspective. *Yesterday and Today*, (25), 1-30.
- Seobi, B. A., & Wood, L. (2016). Improving the instructional leadership of heads of department in underresourced schools: A collaborative action-learning approach. *South African Journal of Education*, 36(4), 1–14.
- Shatzer, R. H., Caldarella, P., Hallam, P. R., & Brown, B. L. (2014). Comparing the effects of instructional and transformational leadership on student achievement: *Implications for practice*. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 42(4), 445-459.
- Shava, G. N., & Ndebele, C. (2016). Enhancing learner achievement through effective school leadership: Experiences from selected rural schools in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Sciences*, 14(3), 205-216.
- Shava, G. N., Heystek, J., & Chasara, T. (2021). Instructional leadership: Its role in sustaining school improvement in South African schools. *International Journal of Social Learning (IJSLS)*, 1(2), 117-134.

- Shay, M. (2016). Seeking new paradigms in Aboriginal education research: Methodological opportunities, challenges and aspirations. *HSE Social and Education History*, 5(3), 273-296.
- Shelile, L. I., & Hlalele, D. (2014). Challenges of continuing professional teacher development in inclusive Lesotho schools. *International Journal of Educational Sciences*, 7(3), 673-686.
- Shengnan, L., & Hallinger, P. (2021). Unpacking the effects of culture on school leadership and teacher learning in China. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 49(2), 214-233.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), 63-75.
- Sibanda, L. (2017). Understanding distributed leadership in South African schools: Challenges and prospects. *Issues in Educational Research*, 27(3), 567-581.
- Skaalvik, C. (2020). School principal self-efficacy for instructional leadership: Relations with engagement, emotional exhaustion and motivation to quit. *Social Psychology of Education*, 23(2), 479-498.
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2015). Job Satisfaction, Stress and Coping Strategies in the Teaching Profession-What Do Teachers Say?. *International Education Studies*, 8(3), 181-192.
- Skinner, B., Leavey, G., & Rothi, D. (2019). Managerialism and teacher professional identity: Impact on well-being among teachers in the UK. *Educational Review*, 73(1), 1-16.
- Song, Y. (2017). To what extent is Universal Design for Learning “universal”? A case study in township special needs schools in South Africa. *Disability and the Global South*, 3(1) 910-929.
- Spillane, J. P. (2004). Educational leadership. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 26(2), 169-172.
- Spillane, J. P. (2005). Distributed leadership. In *The Educational Forum*, 69, (2), 143-150. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (2004). Towards a theory of leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36(1), 3-34.

- Statistics South Africa. (2019). *National Poverty Lines*. Stats SA.
- Stewart, D. W., & P. M. Shamdasani. (1990). *Focus groups: Theory and practice*. (Vol. 1). Applied Social Research Methods Series. Newbury Park, CA: Sage
- Stronge, J. H. (2018). *Qualities of effective teachers*. Ascd.
- Stronge, J. H., & Xu, X. (2021). *Qualities of effective principals*. ASCD.
- Sun, R. C., & Shek, D. T. (2012). Student classroom misbehavior: An exploratory study based on teachers' perceptions. *The Scientific World Journal*, 2012, 1-8.
- Susanto, R., Rachmadtullah, R., & Rachbini, W. (2020). Technological and pedagogical models: Analysis of factors and measurement of learning outcomes in education. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 7(2), 1-14.
- Tapala, T. T., Van Niekerk, M. P., & Mentz, K. (2021). Curriculum leadership barriers experienced by heads of department: a look at South African secondary schools. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 24(6), 771-788.
- Teemant, A., Yoder, G. B., Sherman, B. J., & Graff, C. S. (2021). An equity framework for family, community, and school partnerships. *Theory into Practice*, 60(1), 28–38.
- Thaba-Nkadimene, K. L. (2020). The influence of educational provision on teacher performance and learner outcomes among Limpopo primary schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 40(4).
- The Wallace Foundation. (2013). *The school principal as leader: Guiding schools to better teaching and learning*. The Wallace Foundation.
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 237-246.
- Tigere, M. T., & Netshitangani, T. (2022). School management teams' perceptions of ICT integration in township and rural secondary schools of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa: infrastructure challenges. *Gender and Behaviour*, 20(3), 20022-20041.

- Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 30(3), 167-186.
- Tondeur, J., Forkosh-Baruch, A., Prestridge, S., Albion, P., & Edirisinghe, S. (2016). Responding to challenges in teacher professional development for ICT integration in education. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 19(3), 110-120.
- Torres, D. G. (2019). Distributed leadership, professional collaboration, and teachers' job satisfaction in US schools. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 79, 111-123.
- Townsend, T., Acker-Hocevar, M., Ballenger, J., & Place, A. W. (2013). Voices from the field: What have we learned about instructional leadership? *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 12(1), 12-40.
- Trimmer, K., Dixon, R., & Guenther, J. (2021). School leadership and Aboriginal student outcomes: Systematic review. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 49(1), 20-36.
- Tsakeni, M., Munje, P. N., & Jita, L. C. (2020). Instructional leadership sensemaking for science and maths in South African multi-deprived middle schools. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30(1), 345-364.
- Uhl-Bien, M., Marion, R. & McKelvey, B. (2007). Complexity Leadership Theory: Shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era. *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, 298–318.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)(2020). *Covid-19 Education Response*.
- Urlick, A., & Bowers, A. J. (2014). What are the different types of principals across the United States? A latent class analysis of principal perception of leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 50(1), 96–134.
- Veloo, A., Komuji, M. M. A., & Khalid, R. (2013). The effects of clinical supervision on the teaching performance of secondary school teachers. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 93, 35-39.
- Vogt, W. P., Gardner, D. C., & Haefele, L. M. (2012). *When to use what research design*. Guilford.
- Wang, M. T., & Degol, J. L. (2016). School climate: A review of the construct, measurement, and impact on student outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review*, 28(2), 315-352.

- Weber, J. (1996). Leading the instructional programme. In S. Smith & P. Piele (Eds.), *School leadership*, (pp.253–278.) Clearinghouse Educational Management.
- Webster, S., Lewis, J., & Brown, A. (2014). *Ethical considerations in qualitative research. Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers, 2*, (pp.77-110). Sage.
- Wedel, K. (2021). Instruction time and student achievement: The moderating role of teacher qualifications. *Economics of Education Review, 85*, 102183.
- Whitley, J. (2014). Supporting educational success for Aboriginal students: Identifying key influences. *McGill Journal of Education, 49*(1), 155-181.
- Whittle, G. (2007). *The role of the South African Democratic Teachers Union in the process of teacher rationalisation in the Western Cape between 1990 and 2001* [Doctoral thesis, University of Pretoria].
- Wieczorek, D., & Lear, J. (2018). Building the" Bridge": Teacher Leadership for Learning and Distributed Organizational Capacity for Instructional Improvement. *International Journal of Teacher Leadership, 9*(2), 22-47.
- Wills, G. (2014) 'The Effect of Teacher Strikes on Learning in South African Schools', *Economic Research South Africa Working Paper Series*, January.
- Winnar, L. (2021). The effect of school climate: How feelings of safety and belonging support learners' achievement. *HSRC Review, 19*(2), 20-23.
- Yin, R. K. (2004). *The case study anthology*. Sage.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods, 5*. sage.
- Zenda, R. (2020) Impact of the learner-educator ratio policy on learner academic achievement in rural secondary schools: A South African Case Study. *Africa Education Review, 17*(3), 37-51.
- Zengele, V. T. (2013). *The school as an organisation. The effective management of a school: Towards quality outcomes*, (pp17-28). Van Schaik.

## Appendix A: Application to conduct a research study in the Limpopo Province



[Missmaifala@gmail.com](mailto:Missmaifala@gmail.com)

31 May 2019

Head of Department: Education

Cnr. 113 Biccard & Excelsior Street

Polokwane

0700

**Application to conduct a research study in the Limpopo province.**

**Dear Head of Department,**

My name is Selaelo Sylvia Maifala, a Doctor of Education student at the University of KwaZulu Natal. I hereby request your permission to conduct a research study with a school in the department of basic education in the Limpopo province. The title of the research is **“Examining the understanding and enactment of instructional leadership among the School Management Team in a Rural Secondary School in the Limpopo Province: A Qualitative Study.”**

I further request your permission to conduct interviews with the principals, deputy principals, Head of departments and teachers in that school. The interviews will be conducted outside school contact time. In addition, SMT will be observed as they perform their duties within the school as part of the research.

For further enquiries in this regard, kindly contact my supervisor, Prof R. Moletsane at the University of Kwazulu-Natal at (+27 (0)31 260 3023).

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

Selaelo Maifala

## **Appendix B: Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research (SMT)**

Date: 06 June 2019

Dear SMT member,

My name is **Selaelo Sylvia Maifala**, a PhD Candidate in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal. My contact details are: [REDACTED]; [missmaifala@gmail.com](mailto:missmaifala@gmail.com).

You are being invited to consider participating in a study/research project for my PhD thesis. The aim of the study is to understand how SMT members in a rural school in the Limpopo province understand and enact their roles as instructional leaders and to examine how rurality impacts the understandings and enactment of instructional leadership.

Your involvement in the project will take the form of:

- 1) Participation in at least 2 interviews lasting for a maximum of 60 minutes each.
- 2) Participation in up to 2 Focus Group Discussion with other members of the SMT
- 3) SMT interviews lasting for a maximum of 90 minutes each.
- 4) Observations: Being observed by me for 5 days as you go about your daily duties as a member of the SMT in the school; and
- 5) Sharing with me your daily plans (if available) of your duties

The duration of my fieldwork and your involvement in the project is expected to be about 12 months, from July 2019 to June 2020.

Kindly note that participation in this project is voluntary and you may withdraw participation at any point or decline to answer any of my question should you feel uncomfortable doing so. In the

event of refusal/withdrawal of participation, you will not incur any penalty. You will not incur any costs as a result of participation in the project.

The study may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: Your identities and that of your school and school community could be identifiable. To mitigate this, I will make sure not to your names of the in any of the files, including both hard copies and electronic files, the thesis and any publications that will arise from the study. Instead, pseudonyms will be utilized.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact me at: [REDACTED]; missmaifala@gmail.com OR my supervisor at: tel: 031 260 3023; moletsaner@ukzn.ac.za; or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

## **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

## CONSENT

I \_\_\_\_\_ have been informed about the study entitled **“Examining the understanding and enactment of instructional leadership among the School Management Team in a Rural Secondary School in the Limpopo Province: A Qualitative Study.”** by **Selaelo Sylvia Maifala** in the field of Education leadership and policy.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study (to understand how SMT members in a rural school in the Limpopo province understand and enact their roles as instructional leaders and to examine how rurality impacts the understandings and enactment of instructional leadership.) I further understand that I will be asked to participate through individual interviews, group interviews and be observed for a period of one week by the researcher.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at ([missmaifala@gmail.com](mailto:missmaifala@gmail.com) or [REDACTED])

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Video-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes YES / NO

---

**Signature of Participant**

---

**Date**

## Appendix C: Permission to Conduct Research Study in the Limpopo Province



**LIMPOPO**  
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

### DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Ref: 2/2/2      Exq: Mabogo MG      Tel No: 015 290 9365      E-mail: [MaibogoMG@edu.limpopo.gov.za](mailto:MaibogoMG@edu.limpopo.gov.za)

Maifala SS



#### RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

---

1. The above bears reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct research has been approved. Topic of the research proposal: **"EXAMINING THE UNDERSTANDING AND ENACTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AMONG THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM IN RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOL IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE :A QUALITATIVE STUDY "**.
3. The following conditions should be considered:
  - 3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.
  - 3.2 Arrangements should be made with the Circuit Office and the schools concerned.
  - 3.3 The conduct of research should not in anyhow disrupt the academic programs at the schools.
  - 3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the fourth term.
  - 3.5 During the study, applicable research ethics should be adhered to; in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: MAIFALA SS

CONFIDENTIAL

Cnr. 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X9469, POLOKWANE, 0700  
Tel: 015 290 7600, Fax: 015 297 6920/4220/4494

*The heartland of southern Africa - development is about people!*

## Appendix D: Letter to the School Governing Body

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[Missmaifala@gmail.com](mailto:Missmaifala@gmail.com)

06 June 2019

### **Request for permission to conduct a research study in your school**

Dear School Governing Body,

My name is Selaelo Sylvia Maifala, a Doctor of Philosophy (Education) student at the University of KwaZulu Natal. I hereby request your permission to conduct a research study in your school. The title of the research is **“Examining the understanding and enactment of instructional leadership among the School Management Team in a Rural Secondary School in the Limpopo Province: A Qualitative Study.”**

**The aim of the study is** to understand how SMT members in a rural school in the Limpopo province understand and enact their roles as instructional leaders and to examine how rurality influences the understandings and practices of instructional leadership.

The research will involve interviews with members of the SMT in the school. Each member will be interviewed at least twice. The interviews will be conducted outside school contact time, for example, after school or during weekends, depending on the SMT member preferences. In addition, members of the SMT will be observed as they perform their duties within the school as part of the research for a period of one week each member.

For further enquiries in this regard, kindly contact my supervisor, Prof R. Moletsane at the University of Kwazulu-Natal at (+27 (0)31 260 3023).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact me at: 031 260 3023 or email: [moletsaner@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:moletsaner@ukzn.ac.za); or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

## **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Selaelo Maifala

## Appendix E: Letter to the Principal

Date: 06 June 2019

Dear Principal,

My name is Selaelo Sylvia Maifala, a PhD Candidate in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal. My contact details are: [REDACTED]; [missmaifala@gmail.com](mailto:missmaifala@gmail.com).

You are being invited to consider participating in a study/research project for my PhD thesis. The aim of the study is to understand how SMT members in a rural school in the Limpopo province understand and enact their roles as instructional leaders and to examine how rurality influences these understandings and practices of instructional leadership.

Your involvement in the project will take the form of:

- 1) Participation in at least 2 interviews lasting for a maximum of 60 minutes each.
- 2) Participation in up to 2 Focus Group Discussion with other members of the
- 3) SMT interviews lasting for a maximum of 90 minutes each.
- 4) Observations: Being observed by me for 5 days as you go about your daily duties as a member of the SMT in the school; and
- 5) Sharing with me your daily plans (if available) of your duties

The duration of my fieldwork and your involvement in the project is expected to be about 12 months, from July 2019 to June 2020.

Kindly note that participation in this project is voluntary and you may withdraw participation at any point or decline to answer any of my question should you feel uncomfortable doing so. In the

event of refusal/withdrawal of participation, you will not incur any penalty. You will not incur any costs as a result of participation in the project.

The study may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: Your identities and that of your school and school community could be identifiable. To mitigate this, I will make sure not to your names of the in any of the files, including both hard copies and electronic files, the thesis and any publications that will arise from the study. Instead, pseudonyms will be utilized.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact me at: [REDACTED]; missmaifala@gmail.com OR my supervisor at: tel: 031 260 3023; moletsaner@ukzn.ac.za; or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

## **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

## **Appendix F: Information sheet and consent to participate in research (Teachers)**

Date: 06 June 2019

Dear Teacher,

My name is **Selaelo Sylvia Maifala**, a PhD Candidate in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal. My contact details are: [REDACTED]; [missmaifala@gmail.com](mailto:missmaifala@gmail.com).

You are being invited to consider participating in a study/research project for my PhD thesis. The aim of the study is to understand how SMT members in a rural school in the Limpopo province understand and enact their roles as instructional leaders and to examine how these understandings and practices impact instruction in the school.

Your involvement in the project will take the form of:

1. Participation in a focus group discussion which will involve between 6 to 8 teachers.

The duration of my fieldwork and your involvement in the project is expected to be about 12 months, from July 2019 to June 2020.

Kindly note that participation in this project is voluntary and you may withdraw participation at any point or decline to answer any of my question should you feel uncomfortable doing so. In the event of refusal/withdrawal of participation, you will not incur any penalty. You will not incur any costs as a result of participation in the project.

The study may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: Your identities and that of your school and school community could be identifiable. To mitigate this, I will make sure not to use your names in any of the files, including both hard copies and electronic files, the thesis and any publications that will arise from the study. Instead, pseudonyms will be utilized.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact me at: [REDACTED] missmaifala@gmail.com OR my supervisor at: tel: 031 260 3023; moletsaner@ukzn.ac.za; or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

## **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

## CONSENT

I \_\_\_\_\_ have been informed about the study entitled **“Examining the understanding and enactment of instructional leadership among the School Management Team in a Rural Secondary School in the Limpopo Province: A Qualitative Study.”** by **Selaelo Sylvia Maifala** in the field of Education leadership and policy.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study (to understand how SMT members in a rural school in the Limpopo province understand and enact their roles as instructional leaders and to examine how rurality influences these understandings and practices of instructional leadership.) I further understand that I will be asked to participate through individual interviews, group interviews and be observed for a period of one week by the researcher.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at ([missmaifala@gmail.com](mailto:missmaifala@gmail.com) 

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Video-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes YES / NO

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

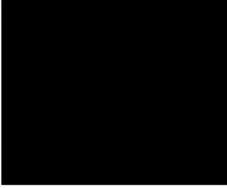
**Signature of Participant**

**Date**

## **Appendix G: Permission to conduct research at the school**

---

07 June 2019



Dear Ms Maifala,

### **PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY IN OUR SCHOOL**

The School Governing Body of the above mentioned institution has received and reviewed your request to conduct a research study in our school. We are pleased to inform you that you are welcome to conduct the study in our school.

We understand that this letter is non-binding to the school, and we are free to withdraw our participation at any given stage should your presence at the school disrupt teaching and learning.

## **Appendix H: Interview schedule for in-depth interviews**

1. Can you tell me about the mission of the school? How did this mission come about?
2. Who was responsible for drafting it?
3. How is this mission communicated to the school?
4. What is your role in the school?
5. Of all these roles and duties, which do you consider most important?
- 6.. What is your understanding of the term “Instructional leadership”?
7. What do you understand to be your instructional leadership role in the school?
8. What are some of the activities or duties you perform as part of your role as a member of the SMT?
9. Which of these duties would you consider as providing instructional leadership?
10. In what ways do you feel what you do as the SMT influences teaching and learning in the school?

## **Appendix I: Observation schedule**

**The observation of individual SMT members was guided by the following broad questions:**

1. On a day-to-day basis, how does this member of the SMT spend their time in the school?
2. Which aspects of their daily routines are directly linked to teaching and learning? What is the nature of their interaction with teachers?
3. What is the nature of their interactions with learners?
4. What is the nature of the interactions among members of the SMT?
5. In what ways are these interactions linked to teaching and learning?

## **Appendix J: Focus Group Discussion schedule: SMT**

1. What is the main role of the SMT within the school?
2. In what ways does the main role of the SMT related to supporting teaching and learning in the schools?
3. To what extent and in what do you as the SMT plan together to support teaching and learning in the school?
4. Specifically, what does the SMT as a collective do to support teaching and learning in this school?
5. What professional development opportunities are available in the school?
6. What role does the SMT play in providing these opportunities?
7. In your view, how do the activities of the SMT influence teaching and learning in the school?

## **Appendix K: Focus Group Discussion schedule: Teachers**

1. What is the mission and vision of this school?
2. How were the mission and vision developed? Who was involved in developing it?
3. How was it communicated to the school community?
4. What duties do the SMT perform in the school?
5. What types of professional development opportunities and support are available for teachers in the school? Who provides them?
6. In what ways do they influence your teaching?
7. In your view, in what ways do the SMT play a role in the implementation of the curriculum in the school?
8. In what ways do their activities in the school influence the quality of teaching and learning in the school?

## **ADDENDA**

## Addendum A: Turnitin Report

### Examining the Understanding and Enactment of Instructional Leadership among the School Management Team in a Rural Secondary School in the Limpopo Province: A Qualitative Study

#### ORIGINALITY REPORT

<b>10%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>4%</b>
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

#### PRIMARY SOURCES

<b>1</b>	<b>Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal</b> Student Paper	<b>3%</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>hdl.handle.net</b> Internet Source	<b>1%</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>researchspace.ukzn.ac.za</b> Internet Source	<b>1%</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>core.ac.uk</b> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1%</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>ukzn-dspace.ukzn.ac.za</b> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1%</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>scholarworks.waldenu.edu</b> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1%</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Ramashego Shila Mphahlele, Mncedisi Christian Maphalala. "Contextualising Rural Education in South African Schools", Brill, 2023</b> Publication	<b>&lt;1%</b>