



**UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL**

**INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Departmental Heads' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning

by

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

in the

Discipline of Educational Leadership Management and Policy

Supervisor: Dr N.I. Jaca

May 2025

UKZN INSPIRING GREATNESS

DECLARATION

I, Zandile Busisiwe Gloria Ngcobo, declare that

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This dissertation is submitted with / without my approval.

.....
N.I.  Jaca

May 2025

02 September 2024

Zandile Busisiwe Gloria Ngcobo (223139958)
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Dear ZBG Ngcobo,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00007444/2024

Project title: Departmental Heads experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning.

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 06 August 2024 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.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 02 September 2025.

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.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,





Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)
/nng

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research work to my parents:

- My late father, Brighton Jabulani Ngcobo, may your soul rest in peace and my mother, Nonhlanhla Docus Ngcobo, for giving me the opportunity to pursue my education despite the challenges and adversities our family faced. Your unwavering support and constant reminder that “*education is the one thing no one can ever take away from you*” have been my guiding light.

I also wish to dedicate this research to the following people:

- My son, Esethu Lwandle Nqubeko Ngcobo, whose presence has been my greatest source of inspiration. I aspired to be a role model for him, instilling in him the belief that education is invaluable, and that learning has no age limit. Rather than merely preaching the importance of lifelong learning, I wanted to embody it, to be a living testimony of perseverance and dedication.
- Lastly, I extend this dedication to my siblings and my partner, with deep gratitude for their unwavering support, patience, and sacrifice. Thank you for understanding and for giving up quality family time during my studies. Your encouragement has been invaluable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TO GOD BE THE GLORY. I thank my Heavenly Father for granting me health, strength, perseverance, and protection throughout this long journey. Without His presence, I would not have been able to complete this study.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following people, whose support and guidance made the completion of this work possible:

- My heartfelt appreciation goes to my supervisor, Dr. N.I. Jaca, for her unwavering support, guidance, advice, intelligence, and patience throughout this long journey.
- The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (KZN DoE), as well as the principals and Departmental Heads (DH) of the participating schools, for granting me access to conduct this study within their district, schools, and departments.
- A million thanks to all the participants in this study for their willingness to participate and for granting me the opportunity to conduct this research.
- The University of KwaZulu-Natal peer students for their mutual support and encouragement during challenging times.

I also extend my gratitude to my employer for the financial support and to my line manager for her encouragement throughout the course of this study.

A special thank you to my mother, Nonhlanhla Docus Ngcobo, for her unwavering support, for enduring my absence, and for lovingly taking on the role of raising my son, Esethu Lwandle Nqubeko Ngcobo, during the course of this study. I am also deeply grateful to my siblings, my son, and my partner for their encouragement, patience, and support throughout this journey.

ABSTRACT

The role of Departmental Heads (DHs) in schools is complex and multifaceted, requiring a balance between teaching responsibilities and leadership for effective curriculum management. In South Africa, DHs are middle managers who play a critical role in improving teaching and learning. However, existing research suggests that many DHs struggle with their leadership responsibilities due to unclear role expectations, inadequate training, heavy workloads, and limited support. While studies have explored the challenges DHs face, there is limited research on their lived experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning, particularly in primary schools. This research aimed to explore the experiences of DHs in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. A qualitative case study was conducted within an interpretivist paradigm, guided by Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership theory. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews with four DHs from different schools. The study aimed to understand how DHs perceive and perform their leadership role, identify enabling and disabling factors, and explore the support they require. The findings of this research reveal that DHs face substantial difficulties in managing both their teaching responsibilities and leadership roles. These challenges include a lack of role clarity, insufficient leadership training, time constraints, and inadequate institutional support. Additionally, DHs struggle with resistance from teachers, administrative overload, and limited professional development opportunities. Despite these difficulties, DHs utilise multiple coping mechanisms, including delegation, self-empowerment, teamwork and pursuing external assistance from teacher unions and school management teams (SMTs). This study underscores the need for targeted leadership training, structured mentorship programmes, and increased institutional support to enhance the effectiveness of DHs in primary schools. The findings suggest that strengthening professional development and reducing administrative burdens could enable DHs to provide more effective instructional leadership, ultimately improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Keywords: Departmental Heads, instructional leadership, middle management, leadership and management, professional development, teacher supervision, educational leadership

LIST OF ACRONYMS

4IR	FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION
CPD	CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
DBE	DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION
DC	DEPARTMENT CHAIR
DH	DEPARTMENTAL HEAD
DoE	DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
INTERSEN	INTERMEDIATE-SENIOR
KZN	KWAZULU-NATAL
PAM	PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES
PCK	PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE
SMT	SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM
UK	UNITED KINGDOM
USA	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction and background

The school is a growing, living and multifaceted institution and its growth and practices need to be effectively managed (Maifala, 2024). In South Africa, school management teams (SMTs) are tasked with the responsibility of managing schools and they exist at every school be it primary or secondary (DBE, 2016). SMTs are comprised of the principals, deputy principals and departmental heads (DHs) and, according to Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM), each member has comprehensive responsibilities which they are mandated to carry out and are held accountable for (DBE, 2016).

The management system inspires schools to decentralise decision making and increase learners' achievement and accountability for curriculum development (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). The leadership and management of the school cease to be the principal's responsibility alone, but rather that of a team which is comprised mainly of deputy principals and DHs (Kalane & Rambuda, 2022). DHs are referred to as middle managers, and they often lead key departments and specialise in specific subjects in a school setting (Kalane & Rambuda, 2022; Mahome & Mphahlele, 2023; Tapala et al., 2022)

The role of DHs can vary, depending on the country and educational system (Tahir et al., 2023). However, in general, DHs are typically teachers who have been appointed to a leadership position within a school (Fourie & Naidoo, 2022). They are generally considered to be in a position above teachers and below senior school management (Waters & Marzano, 2006). In the United States of America (USA), DHs are referred to as Department Chairs (DCs), and they are responsible for overseeing a specific subject area, such as English or Math, within a school (Leithwood et al., 2004). Leithwood et al. (2004) further note that the responsibilities of DHs in America include curriculum development, teacher evaluation, and monitoring student performance. In the United Kingdom (UK), DHs are known as subject leaders and they are responsible for managing a specific subject area within a school (Mpisane, 2015). Their duties include curriculum development, teacher evaluation, student performance monitoring, and professional development (Mpisane, 2015). In Australia, DHs are referred to as head teachers, and they are responsible for managing a particular subject area within a school (Reitzug & West,

2011). They are responsible for leading a team of teachers and ensuring that the school's educational objectives are met.

In South Africa, DHs were previously called Heads of Department. However, they are currently referred to as DHs (DBE, 2016). In South Africa, DHs are responsible for teaching co-curricular and extracurricular activities, overseeing specific subject areas within a school. They play a significant role in curriculum development, teacher development, teacher management, improving student performance in their respective subjects, and implementing policies adopted by the school (DBE, 2016). This study sought to explore the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

The roles and responsibilities of DHs as middle managers are multi-dimensional and complex. DHs act as team managers, team leaders as well as teachers (Mpisane, 2015). Hauptfleisch (2022) conducted a study in South Africa on the experiences of primary school teachers regarding the leadership role of DHs. The study found that DHs in primary schools struggled to balance management demands with curriculum and instruction because they were unsure of their roles and responsibilities. DHs are entrusted with multi-functional roles such as organising all the educational activities between the teachers in the classrooms and the top management. In addition, DHs are tasked with managing and supervising their departments within dissimilar grades, while at the same time teaching (Tapala et al., 2022). In South African primary schools, especially those in townships, most DHs experience challenges in executing their duties and this has a bearing on the effective teaching and learning of the pupils (Bipath & Nkabinde, 2018). Some of the challenges include time constraints, lack of facilities and resources, a heavy workload, school environment and culture as well as lack of or inadequate training and development (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). According to Kalane and Rambuda (2022), these challenges are worse in rural areas due to various factors which include but are not limited to shortage of teachers and poor training.

According to a South African study by Kalane and Rambuda (2022) that explicitly targeted the nation's primary schools, there are a number of elements that have an impact on how DHs in South African primary schools manage teaching and learning. These factors encompass inadequate administrative and financial support, insufficient parental engagement, limited

learner academic progress, substandard working environments, inadequate provision of learning support materials, and the absence of laboratories. Similarly, Madonsela and Proches (2022) observed that education of high-quality for learners is reliant on the DHs' leadership style and one of the key duties and responsibilities of the DHs of primary schools is effective management and leadership which is critical in achieving high-quality education.

Madonsela and Proches (2022), in their South African study, explored the factors that affect the management of teaching and learning by DHs in primary schools. They found that the manner in which DHs manage and handle learning and teaching in different or numerous subjects in primary schools can both positively and negatively affect the learners' academic performance. As middle managers, DHs in both secondary and primary schools are responsible for implementing the curriculum and are thus mandated to oversee the subjects they manage and supervise. Thus, overseeing teaching and learning processes stands as one of the most critical responsibilities for DHs in schools (Jenkins et al., 2019). However, Ogina (2017) contends that, due to lack of standardised and consistent training, DHs in primary schools in South Africa use varied leadership strategies and this contributes significantly to their management of teaching and learning in schools.

Various studies carried out in South Africa have found that the state and type of school a child attends have a bearing on that child's academic performance (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Prowle & Musgrave, 2018). Learners have better and higher chances of achieving higher grades or academic performance when DHs constructively provide instructional leadership when managing and running the departments (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2019). Kalane and Rambuda (2022) observe that factors such as insufficient understanding and support from senior leadership, inadequate professional training, limited leadership development among individual DHs, and underdeveloped professional skills and knowledge negatively impact the effectiveness of DHs in fulfilling their roles. Considering these challenges, research on DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in primary schools remains scarce. Consequently, this study aimed to explore DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

1.2 Problem statement

In South Africa, the PAM document delineates the fundamental roles and obligations of DHs (DBE, 2016). These include teaching, managing extracurricular and co-curricular activities, handling personnel matters, performing general and administrative tasks, and ensuring effective communication (DBE, 2016). According to PAM, DHs are assigned significant responsibilities to ensure effective teaching and learning within their respective departments. These responsibilities encompass various aspects, such as overseeing a phase or particular subjects. DHs must participate in instruction and act as class teachers when needed. DHs are supposed to advise teachers on the latest methodologies within their respective subjects or departments. They are also required to collaborate with colleagues to uphold effective teaching standards and optimise student performance (DBE, 2016). To promote teachers' professional development, DHs assess them administratively to determine their areas of strength and growth. After completing the appraisal process, DHs provide feedback to teachers and establish targets for their Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Moreover, they play a crucial role in implementing school policies that have been adopted to promote a conducive learning environment and improve overall school operations. DHs are expected to act as key brokers within the organisation by facilitating communication, coordination, and understanding between senior management and teachers. Their efficient performance guarantees seamless operations and empowers the organisation to function harmoniously in pursuit of its objectives (Hauptfleisch, 2022). This means that, within the SMTs, DHs are the ones closest to the teachers as immediate supervisors.

Studies show that DHs experience challenges in their role. These challenges include managing classwork and providing feedback due to their heavy workload, overcrowded classes, teacher absenteeism and late coming, lack of support from the school management, inadequate resources, and a lack of training and development opportunities (Dlamini, 2013; Mpisane, 2015). Tapala (2019) asserts that when opportunities for training and development were provided to the DHs, they were incoherently organised, badly managed, and of minimal benefit to the DHs. Sumida and Kawata (2021) maintain that in 2021 the Department of Education (DoE) rolled out various professional development training initiatives to assist DHs with the implementation of the curriculum as well as improving their teaching skills for improved teaching and learning. However, these authors also observed that DHs, as middle managers of

the schools failed to deliver on curriculum implementation and this grossly resulted in poor performance. The DBE (2016) has noted that DHs in public primary schools encounter numerous challenges in executing the curriculum to ensure effective teaching and learning. These challenges include inadequate training and professional development, excessive workloads, and insufficient facilities and resources. As middle managers, DHs find themselves navigating conflicting expectations from senior management and school teachers (Malinga et al., 2021).

The expectations attached to the leadership role of the DHs and the challenges DHs face provide evidence of the complexity of the DHs' leadership role. The role of the DHs has been over-researched, and the lack of training and challenges they experience has been documented (Bipath & Nkabinde, 2018; Jaca, 2018; Ogina, 2017; Sumida & Kawata, 2021; Tapala et al., 2022). However, very few studies have focused on how DHs experience the enactment of leadership for teaching and learning despite the complexity of their role, especially in primary schools that are situated at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. Most of the existing studies in the field of education leadership focus on urban areas and neglect the specific challenges faced by DHs in rural areas (Mulaudzi, 2019; Vanoostveen et al., 2019). Therefore, this study sought to explore the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu- Natal Province. The knowledge generated from this study has the potential to lead to the development of support programmes for newly appointed DHs in King Cetshwayo District primary schools and similar contexts.

1.3 Rationale of the study

The motivation for undertaking this study stemmed from my experiences and observations during my teaching practice while rotating through schools at the King Cetshwayo District. I observed that certain DHs faced challenges in balancing their managerial responsibilities with their teaching duties. Their capacity to supervise curriculum implementation, provide teachers with competent support, and guarantee the smooth operation of teaching and learning procedures within their departments was hampered by this imbalance.

I observed that there was inadequate time allocation for DHs to fulfil their teaching duties. Heavy administrative workloads often seemed to limit the time they could dedicate to

instructional supervision, affecting their classroom presence and their ability to interact effectively with teachers and provide instructional support. DHs also grappled with being overwhelmed by administrative tasks, including curriculum planning, school reports, and staff management. This overload of administrative responsibilities made effective time management a significant challenge for them.

The divided focus of DHs due to these challenges led to a lack of adequate support for teachers. They found it difficult to address teacher concerns, provide meaningful feedback on lessons, and assist with curriculum implementation. Furthermore, DHs exhibited signs of stress and burnout. Constantly juggling their multiple responsibilities seemed to take a toll on their well-being, further hindering their effectiveness and impacting the overall school environment.

Leithwood (2016) suggests a need for further research to better understand and address the challenges faced by DHs in their multifaceted roles. DHs are critical in providing leadership and management of the department, but there is limited research on their experiences in these challenging settings (Leithwood, 2016). Gjerde and Alvesson (2020) in their study conducted in UK, explored the role and identity of middle managers in the genuine middle of organisational hierarchies. The authors discovered that the overwhelming challenges faced by DHs can adversely affect middle managers and the quality of education, potentially resulting in role ambiguity, stress, and a decreased interest in teaching.

According to Kalane and Rambuda (2022), despite the critical role that DHs play in teaching and learning, there is a dearth of research on the leadership experiences of DHs, which hinders the development of effective policies and strategies to support their leadership practices. Madonsela and Proches (2022) share the same sentiment as they acknowledge the lack of studies exploring the leadership experiences of DHs in rural settings. Therefore, this study aimed to explore and provide valuable insights into the experiences of DHs in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. Even though the above studies emphasise the need for such studies in rural settings, that was not the emphasis in the context of this study. Lastly, the decision to conduct this study in primary schools was informed by a literature review conducted by Motilal (2014). The review highlighted that while there is a considerable body of research on instructional leadership and its potential contribution to learner performance in schools, fewer

studies have specifically examined instructional leadership in primary schools. Most of the previous research has focused on secondary schools, despite the fact that the issues addressed were relevant to primary schools as well.

1.4 Purpose statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of DHs in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. Specifically, the study sought to explore DHs' understanding of their leadership role for teaching and learning; understand how DHs enact their leadership role for teaching and learning; identify factors that enable and disable the DHs' leadership for teaching and learning; and explore the support DHs need to address the challenges they face in performing their leadership role for teaching and learning.

1.5 Research questions

Main research question:

- What are the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province?

Sub-questions

- How do DHs understand their leadership role for teaching and learning?
- How do DHs enact their leadership role for teaching and learning?
- What are the factors that enable or disable the DHs' leadership for teaching and learning?
- What support do DHs need to address the challenges they face in performing their leadership role for teaching and learning?

1.6 Research design and methodology

The research design and methodology used in the study are described in this section. The section starts by looking at the research paradigm, approach and design used for the investigation. The sample plan, data generation tools, and data analysis techniques used are then described in depth in this section. Ethical considerations, the trustworthiness of the study and potential limitations are also discussed in this section.

1.6.1 Research paradigm

According to Saunders et al. (2018), a research paradigm is a set of presumptions or viewpoints regarding the process of knowledge development. Similarly, Majid (2018) maintains that a research paradigm directs the researchers' actions when conducting research; hence, a research paradigm refers to the guiding principles or the lens used in explaining and clarifying reality. There are various research paradigms available in social science research, including but not limited to constructivism, positivism, pragmatism, interpretivism, social constructivism and post-positivism (Mohajan, 2017). The interpretivist research paradigm was used in this study since the purpose of this study was to gain in-depth insights and understanding into the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province (Cohen et al., 2017).

Polit and Beck (2017) assert that the interpretivist research paradigm is predicated on the idea that reality is socially created and that an interpretivist researcher's main goal is to comprehend the participants' perspectives and worldview. The hallmark of interpretive research lies in the collaborative creation of knowledge between researchers and participants (Mohajan, 2017). This paradigm emphasises generating comprehensive explanations by deeply exploring how individuals perceive their worlds and derive meaning from their actions. By adopting the interpretivist research approach in this study, I gained insights into how DHs construct meaning from their experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province (Cohen et al., 2017).

1.6.2 Research approach

A research approach describes a collection of many methods that combine to offer comprehensive responses to the research questions while concentrating intently on the one phenomenon under investigation (Polit & Beck, 2017). Three types of research approaches can be distinguished: mixed methods, qualitative, and quantitative. In order to investigate the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province, qualitative research was employed in this study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Thomas and Lacey (2016) describe qualitative research as an exploratory method that examines the attributes, features, or qualities of a phenomenon to achieve a deeper understanding or explanation of a specific occurrence. In this study, the focus was on the experiences of DHs in enacting leadership for teaching and learning.

Creswell and Poth (2018) argue that qualitative research is concerned with gathering non-numerical data such as the experiences and feelings of the participants on a phenomenon which in this study was DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

1.6.3 Research design

Research design, according to Saunders et al. (2016), is a systematic plan that identifies the objectives of a study and the best methods to accomplish them. This indicates that research design provides the researcher with a structured framework and clear instructions to guide the research process (Inaam, 2016). Yin (2011) argues that the researcher should take into account the purpose of the study when formulating a research design. A qualitative case study design was used in this study because it enabled me to explore the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in their natural settings, which were primary schools (Creswell, 2013). A case study involves a detailed examination of a specific subject, such as an individual, group, or event, studied as a singular entity (Kumar, 2011; Yin, 2018). In this study, the case focused on the experiences of DHs in enacting leadership for teaching and learning. The research questions guided the choice of design, with semi-structured interviews employed to gather data and probe deeper into relevant aspects of the study. While the case study design was selected for its appropriateness, certain methodological limitations must be acknowledged. For example, the findings cannot be applied to different situations (Smith & Johnson, 2015). Nevertheless, this design facilitated the generation of reliable data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Yin, 2014). Through this approach, I gained a comprehensive understanding of DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

1.7 Data generation

Data generation refers to the processes or methods of generating information or data from research participants in order to analyse them and infer conclusions (Inaam, 2016). Qualitative research employs various methods or techniques for data generation, including interviews, observations, focus group discussions (Saunders et al., 2016).

1.7.1 Research site and population

The study was conducted in four primary schools located at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. These schools were selected for their ease of access and willingness to participate in the study. Participants included DHs in charge of overseeing the Foundation phase, Intermediate-Senior (INTERSEN) phases, and the Senior phase.

1.7.2 Sampling

Sampling is a way or process of selecting participants into the study in order to gain understanding and draw conclusions about a target population (Creswell & Creswell, 2009). Sampling methods are classified into two broad categories; probability and non-probability sampling (Majid, 2018). According to Saunders et al. (2018), the probability sampling approach selects a sample for the study using randomised procedures, giving each item, member, unit, or component of the designated population an equal chance of being included. The probability sampling method is associated with quantitative research and employs techniques such as simple random sampling, cluster sampling and stratified sampling (Inaam, 2016).

The non-probability method is linked to qualitative research and entails participant selection based on the researcher's subjective judgment (Saunders et al., 2018). This sampling method also implies that individuals do not possess an equal opportunity for inclusion in the study (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) asserts that non-probability sampling relies on the researcher's judgment to select participants, aiming to identify a group most likely to provide rich and relevant data concerning the research topic, which in this case was the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. Techniques like convenience sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling, and purposive sampling are all included in the non-probability sampling method. Purposive sampling was used in this study to choose the participants.

Purposive and convenience sampling were employed to select a specific group of participants for the study based on their understanding, knowledge, experience, and familiarity with the problem being explored (Mohajan, 2017). Convenience sampling seemed appropriate as it enabled me to select those schools and participants that I could access easily (Creswell, 2012).

Four DHs from four primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province were selected based on my assumption that they were the right people with the correct information and knowledge of their experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning. This allowed me to capture rich information about this phenomenon (Majid, 2018). The DHs that were included in this study were those with five to 28 years in the DH position, based on my assumption that they would still have clear memories of their overall experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning. My decision to use public primary schools was primarily influenced by my assumption that they were more easily accessible than secondary schools. I also assumed that public schools were more accessible compared to private schools.

1.7.3 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interview format offers inherent flexibility, fostering an environment where participants are encouraged to openly share their experiences with the researcher in a relaxed manner (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, Polit and Beck (2017) assert that semi-structured interviews facilitate thorough data generation through the use of probes and stimuli. Semi-structured interviews were used to generate data from study participants. These techniques enabled the clarification and expansion of responses from DHs regarding their experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning. An interview protocol with open-ended questions was used during the data generation process and was designed to capture the information. According to Creswell (2012), an interview protocol is a set of guidelines that help researchers conduct interviews in a methodical and consistent manner using a sequence of open-ended questions designed to generate the data needed for the study. The DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province were better understood and insightful thanks to the use of semi-structured interviews, which made it easier to gather thorough information (Creswell, 2012). With the participants' permission, audio recordings of the interviews were made during school hours at their individual schools. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

1.8 Data analysis

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), data analysis is the act of grouping, summarising, and analysing the generated data in order to get meaning from it. Thematic analysis, discourse analysis, content analysis, and narrative analysis are just a few of the many data analysis techniques used in qualitative research. The data generated were analysed by using thematic analysis. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), this involves classifying data into themes, patterns, categories and sub-themes as well as providing detailed notes to enable readers to trace and explore the data further. Using thematic analysis to analyse data allowed for an easy understanding of the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province (Clarke & Braun, 2013). I transcribed the interviews. Then I used the procedures suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) for data analysis: familiarising myself with the data, creating preliminary codes, looking for themes, evaluating themes, defining and naming themes, and lastly creating the report.

1.9 Ethical considerations

The University of KwaZulu-Natal maintains a research code of ethics that emphasises excellence and ethical accountability in the generation, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge. Researchers are expected to obtain approval from their institution's ethics committees to receive impartial guidance regarding the ethical soundness of their proposed studies (De Vos et al., 2011). It is necessary to adhere to ethical standards, which include getting permission, getting informed consent, making sure that participation is voluntary, and protecting confidentiality and privacy.

To conduct a study in schools, I started by seeking information from schools and then requested permission from the DBE and applied for ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Ethics Committee. After being given access to schools, I requested potential participants to participate in the research. The purpose of the study and their expected role were explained to the participants. Furthermore, they received assurances that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any time. In order to verify their voluntary participation, participants were asked to sign informed consent forms that I had created.

I assured participants that the study involved no deception or compensation. Participants were informed about their access to the research report in the University of KwaZulu-Natal's library if needed. I guaranteed confidentiality by explaining that disclosures made during one-on-one interviews would only be shared with supervisors for guidance. Furthermore, I assured participants of anonymity by announcing that pseudonyms would be used in place of their real names when the results were shared.

1.10 Trustworthiness of the study

Similar to validity in quantitative research, researcher credibility in qualitative research refers to the researcher's ability to accurately reflect participants' perspectives (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Trochim & Donnelly, 2001). Triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, interviews, probes, and explicit acknowledgment of researcher bias were some of the techniques used in this study to assure credibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2009). Triangulation, which involves integrating multiple perspectives or methods to enhance findings' credibility (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012), was central to this approach. Henry (2015) asserts that triangulation employs diverse sources to examine a phenomenon comprehensively, strengthening methodological rigour. Yeasmin and Rahman (2012) note that the triangulation method depends on the study's objectives. This research specifically explored DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. DHs were selected as participants because they possessed firsthand experience of the phenomenon under study. Data source triangulation was deemed most appropriate, enabling theme development through multiple participant perspectives to bolster credibility (Creswell, 2014). This was achieved by interviewing four DHs from different schools to capture diverse experiences and perspectives in enacting leadership for teaching and learning.

Member-checking involves researchers sharing data, interpretations, and conclusions with participants to clarify intentions and provide insights, ensuring participants understand the research process and their role within it. Presenting the completed report to participants for validation of the interpretations may be part of this process (Creswell & Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2007; Henry, 2015). After every interview in this study, I summarised the

transcripts and spoke with participants again to get their feedback on these findings' summaries (Creswell, 2014). I also used peer debriefing to get clarification on parts of the study that I, as the researcher, might not have understood. In order to evaluate my study methodology and interpretation of DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning, I drew on the knowledge of a renowned academic from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, who also served as my peer reviewer (Henry, 2015).

I conducted thorough, semi-structured interviews with participants, using open-ended questions and probes to gather in-depth information. In addition, addressing researcher biases and assumptions throughout the research process through reflexive writing and critical self-examination contributes to the clarification of potential biases, enhancing the overall credibility of the study. In order to make sure that the results of the study are consistent with the raw data generated and that other researchers would reach comparable conclusions, interpretations, and findings regarding the data, dependability is essential (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To maintain the dependability of the findings in this study, I meticulously maintained an audit trail, which involved documenting all research activities (Creswell & Creswell, 2009). All project-related materials, including transcripts, notes, and audiotapes, were securely stored on both the supervisor's computers and my laptop to ensure accessibility if needed. I presented participants' viewpoints equally, allowing readers to form unbiased judgments (Creswell, 2014). In line with Cohen et al. (2007), participants were treated as partners in the research process to guard against power relations. I recognised and acknowledged the participants' pre-existing experiences and biases during the course of the study. In this context, transferability means that the study's findings can be applied to similar situations (Creswell & Creswell, 2009). As a result, I provided a thorough and detailed account of the entire investigative procedure to make it easier for others to replicate the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Qualitative researchers introduced the concept of confirmability to gauge the degree to which findings can be supported or verified by other people (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Morse et al., 2002). According to Biddix (2018), confirmability is a data analysis problem; researchers can validate confirmability by giving specific information regarding data analysis processes, such as how data sources were coded and how those codes were converted into themes. This approach, also known as an audit trail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), provides sufficient

information to enable another researcher to follow the same procedures and arrive at comparable findings. Another method, known as independent parallel coding, was proposed by Thomas (2006). In this method, two researchers independently code a data source and then compare their codes for congruence, clarity, and consistency when analysing the data. Essentially, confirmability is the degree to which other people may achieve the same outcomes, preferably by replication, although this is rarely possible (Elliott et al., 1999).

1.11 Limitations of the study

This study was conducted focusing on selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. Due to the small sample size, the findings could not be generalised to all DHs and schools. However, lessons could still be drawn from the experiences of these DHs and the findings might be used in similar contexts. Another potential limitation was the discomfort that DHs might have experienced in opening up and understanding the purpose of the study. This discomfort could have impacted the quality of the data obtained and, consequently, the overall success of the research. To address this limitation, I re-explained the purpose of the study to the DHs, ensuring transparency and credibility in the research findings.

1.12 Organisation of the dissertation

There are five separate chapters in this report.

Chapter one: Introduction and background provide the study's context by presenting its background and addressing the problem under exploration. This chapter discusses the role that DHs are legally expected to fulfil in schools, the challenges they face in fulfilling their roles, and outline the rationale, purpose, as well as the main and sub-questions of the study.

Chapter two: Literature review examines the relevant literature to contextualise this study within existing research. It explores various perspectives on the leadership role of DHs, exploring themes such as leadership and management skills; role ambiguity and lack of clarity; heavy workloads and time constraints; the balance between teaching and management duties; monitoring responsibilities; preparation and support for DHs; challenges faced by DHs; perceived reasons for these challenges; coping mechanisms for leadership challenges; and the

theoretical framework underpinning the study.

Chapter three: Research methodology outlines the methodology employed in this study, encompassing the research context, design, sample selection, and sampling procedures. It elaborates on the techniques and processes utilised for data generation and analysis. The chapter further provides a comprehensive examination of the strategies adopted to ensure the study's trustworthiness and addresses ethical considerations.

Chapter four: Data presentation, analysis, interpretation and discussion of findings focuses on the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the generated data. It also provides a description of the sample and explains the process used for identifying themes from the data.

Chapter five: Summary of findings, limitations, conclusions, and recommendations evaluates the research findings in relation to the existing body of knowledge and theoretical framework. It presents insights derived from the study, outlines conclusions, and offers actionable recommendations. Additionally, it proposes directions for future research and discusses the study's limitations.

1.13 Chapter summary

The background, research problem and the rationale were reviewed in this chapter. The main purpose of the research, was highlighted, and the main research question along with sub-questions were provided. The methodology was set out, and an outline of the chapters in the report was presented. In the next chapter, Chapter Two, the relevant literature and theoretical framework used for the study are discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

A literature review is a thorough and critical summary and analysis of existing literature such as books, published research, scholarly articles and other relevant sources, on a particular topic or research question (Taylor, 2020). In addition to identifying gaps, trends, controversies, and inconsistencies in the body of existing literature, a literature review aims to synthesise the present state of knowledge on a particular issue (Ridley, 2012). It involves systematically searching, reviewing, and evaluating relevant sources to develop a coherent understanding of the topic under investigation (Fink, 2019). This section provides a review and critical discussion of various existing literature that is related to this proposed study from both international and local contexts. This section discusses leadership and the three relevant types of leadership styles, the roles of DHs, DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning, challenges experienced by DHs in performing their leadership role in teaching and learning, and support needed by DHs to address the challenges they face in performing their leadership role in teaching and learning.

2.2 Definition of leadership

Effective leadership is crucial for both organisational success and the performance of individuals within the educational community. Educational management is tightly connected to leadership as it directly affects the realisation of educational objectives and drives significant changes in the field of education. Leaders are central to facilitating these transformations (Arar & Abu Nasra, 2019). According to Leithwood et al. (2020), school leadership improves teaching and learning in the most indirect and efficient way possible by enhancing important classroom and school factors that promote higher learner achievement. Different scholars have varying interpretations of leadership, which reflect its multifaceted nature. Yukl (2012) views leadership as the art of persuading followers to collaborate towards a shared objective, underlining its interactive dynamic. Leithwood et al. (2017) stress the necessity of defining and conveying a clear mission, goals, and objectives to staff, alongside managing the curriculum, supporting teachers, and tracking learners' advancement. Fullan (2019) describes leadership as

a process of guiding and exerting influence, while Sinek (2014) emphasises the centrality of relationships in effective leadership.

There are various types of leadership such as instructional, transformational, distributed, functional, positional, and transactional leadership. However, the types of leadership that are closely related to the leadership role of DHs are instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership.

2.2.1 Instructional leadership

Instructional leadership, which has evolved into the concept of leadership for learning, emphasises the primary direction of leaders' influence towards student achievement (Hallinger et al., 2015). Instructional leaders establish ambitious goals for their teams and provide rewards for outstanding work. DHs who practise instructional leadership actively evaluate their teachers' performance, examine their abilities, and identify areas in which they may improve. Teachers employing this leadership style also evaluate learners' achievements, recognise strengths, and identify challenges to offer tailored support, such as tutoring or personalised guidance. It involves teachers who are dedicated to enhancing student learning outcomes, encompassing pedagogical aspects beyond the sole direction of the principal (Avidov-Ungar et al., 2022). This approach empowers teachers to pursue better pedagogical strategies to foster values and facilitate improved outcomes (Bowers, 2020). Many teachers and DHs choose to adopt an instructional leadership style because it places a strong emphasis on enhancing student development and teaching effectiveness at the same time. While teachers collaborate closely with learners to enhance their performance, DHs are in charge of furthering teachers' professional development in order to accomplish these aims. Teachers are encouraged to exercise their own leadership skills, complementing other forms of leadership to ensure the effective functioning of the institution, and fostering trust, respect, and accountability among learners (Zhao et al., 2019).

2.2.2 Transformational leadership

Transformational leaders in education employ a collaborative management approach, serving as strong role models while empowering others to drive improvement and achieve goals collectively (Andriani et al., 2018). This leadership style entails clear communication at all levels, setting ambitious

objectives, and delegating tasks without micromanaging performance and progress (Bakker et al., 2023). Mastery of various leadership styles is essential, including the ability to inspire, motivate, and focus on individuals' self-interests, while also stimulating them emotionally and intellectually (Bunaiyan & McWilliams, 2018). By adopting a transformational leadership approach, leaders can foster mutual trust, loyalty, and respect among learners or team members (Awodiji & Katjiteo, 2024).

Transformational leadership in education entails leaders actively collaborating with teams to set an example (Anderson, 2017). This leadership style emphasises focusing on broader goals rather than individual interests, aiming for a shared vision within the team (Andriani et al., 2018). Educational transformational leaders typically engage extensively, working alongside fellow educators to achieve collective objectives while ensuring all viewpoints are taken into account (Ho et al., 2020). Recent studies have expanded upon ideas by investigating the role of transformational leadership, empowering leadership, and authentic leadership in shaping organisational outcomes. For example, Khan et al. (2020) found that transformational leadership positively influences employee intrinsic motivation, which in turn affects work performance and burnout. Similarly, studies on empowering leadership have shown that it fosters innovation, employee engagement, and job satisfaction by promoting personal development support, participative decision making, and delegation of authority (Bakker et al., 2023).

2.2.3 Distributed leadership

In educational literature, the concept of distributed leadership has gained prominence. For instance, Harris et al. (2022) investigated the concept of distributed leadership in educational settings, taking both a retrospective view, examining the literature from 2001 to 2011, and a contemporary view, exploring the literature from 2011 to 2021. By highlighting the key discoveries and patterns in distributed leadership research, the study sought to shed light on the chosen data from these two decades. During the Retrospective View period (2001-2011), researchers consistently linked distributed leadership to organisational improvement and student achievement. The beneficial correlation between organisational outcomes and distributed leadership was emphasised. The concept gained widespread adoption in educational policy circles globally, including in the UK, USA, Australia, parts of Europe, and New Zealand. During the Contemporary View period (2011–2021), the evidence base supporting distributed

leadership grew significantly, driven by an increase in large-scale quantitative research. Although the complexities of distributed leadership practices remain partially unresolved—underscoring the necessity for more targeted and collaborative empirical investigations—recent studies emphasise the advantages of teamwork and professional networks. These findings provide robust directions for future empirical research into distributed leadership.

2.3 The leadership role of DHs in enhancing teaching and learning

DHs hold significant positions in organisations, overseeing and managing specific departments or units (Kruse et al., 2020). Similarly, Smith et al. (2013) maintain that the role of DHs encompasses various responsibilities, including leadership, decision-making, coordination, and communication. These aspects are discussed in detail below.

According to an American study conducted by Brown (2019), aimed at exploring how to be an inclusive leader, DHs are recognised as key leaders within their respective departments, providing essential guidance and direction to their teams. Beyond their departmental responsibilities, they also play an active role in decision-making processes that have company-wide implications, including those related to resource allocation, budgeting, staffing, and project prioritisation. Brown (2019) notes that effective collaboration is expected of DHs, not only among themselves but also with senior management, to maintain organisational efficiency and synergy. In their role as intermediaries, DHs gather feedback and concerns from team members, ensuring these are communicated to senior leadership. Furthermore, they are tasked with identifying resource needs and recommending improvements, while also justifying these requirements at the executive level. By engaging their teams in problem-solving activities, DHs foster an environment that promotes innovation and creativity, ultimately driving the organisation forward (Brown, 2019).

A study conducted in Kenya by Onjoro et al. (2015), aimed at identifying challenges that negatively influence teacher motivation, maintains that there is a significant relationship between motivational factors and teachers' performance. Abolghasemi et al. (1999) investigated the importance of DHs in the development of teacher support for school vision. The study found that DHs play a crucial role in setting the vision, goals, and objectives for their departments, creating a positive work environment, and motivating teachers. Sankey (2017) emphasises that fostering collaboration and productivity is essential for DHs to establish a

culture conducive to achieving organisational goals. A study conducted by Myende and Bhengu (2015) aimed at investigating the involvement of DHs in strategic planning in schools in the Pinetown District, highlights the importance of DHs in strategic planning within schools. The findings indicated that while DHs participated in certain planning activities, their engagement in substantive aspects of strategic planning was limited. The study highlighted a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the core purpose of strategic planning, underscoring the necessity of DHs' active involvement in such processes. Transparency-driven leadership and collaboration were identified by Myende and Bhengu (2015) as essential factors to ensure meaningful participation of DHs in strategic planning. These findings suggest that improving teaching and learning in schools requires the crucial involvement of DHs in strategic planning. According to these authors, to enhance their participation, school leaders should focus on fostering a collegial model of management, where decisions are based on the approval of all members, and on promoting transparency and collaboration among stakeholders. In other words, DHs are responsible for achieving departmental goals and maintaining high productivity levels as well as being responsible for the results and performance of their departments (Mthiyane et al., 2019). The study titled “Perceptions of DHs on their Curriculum Leadership Roles: Voices from South Africa” conducted by Tapala et al. (2022) aimed to explore the responsibilities of DHs in South African schools. It was found that DHs also maintain open lines of communication with teachers, clarifying roles, responsibilities, and expectations.

2.3.1 DHs in leadership and management roles

DHs take on a complex and multifaceted role, combining leadership and management responsibilities within their departments. Bassett (2016), a researcher from New Zealand, argues that DHs play a crucial role in education as leaders in teaching because they guide pedagogical practice. This perspective aligns with Malinga et al. (2021), who emphasise that DHs are fundamentally leaders. Bassett (2016) also highlights that DHs carry dual responsibilities, including both management and pedagogy. He notes that DHs often face tension between their managerial duties and their leadership role.

Leadership literature often emphasises that school principals play a key role in instructional leadership but overlooks how DHs contribute. However, Ogina (2017) shows that DHs also take on instructional leadership roles within schools. Kalane and Rambuda (2022) argue that the increasing demand to enhance student achievement requires all school leaders, including DHs, to assume instructional leadership responsibilities. DHs manage the curriculum and instruction, oversee and support teachers, and track student progress (Ogina, 2017). They ensure that the school meets its objectives and goals across various departments and phases by guiding their teachers. Thus, DHs indeed act as instructional leaders. In addition, a study conducted in Kuwait by Alsaleh (2022) found that DHs are perceived as the instructional leaders of their departments and play a pivotal role in cultivating the culture within those departments.

2.3.2 Instructional leadership

Literature emphasises that instructional leadership is crucial for fostering an environment conducive to teaching and learning, thereby enhancing student performance in schools (Mestry, 2017). Moran (2021) asserts that instructional leadership is very important for making schools better. The study points out that good instructional leaders focus on improving teaching and student results, which helps build a culture of continuous progress in schools.

According to Mestry (2017), DHs must possess strong instructional leadership abilities to successfully carry out their duties. They are responsible for directing and supervising teaching and learning (Bipath & Nkabinde, 2018). According to Mampane's (2020) study conducted in South Africa, DHs should demonstrate effective teaching methods for teachers to see, conduct observations in the classroom, and provide insightful comments in order to enhance instruction. DHs must also be familiar with the issues they are responsible for. Seobi and Wood (2016) conclude that in order for DHs to acquire the necessary abilities to successfully lead and manage their departments, they require assistance and training from upper management.

DHs still seem to need to improve their management and leadership abilities. Their capacity to lead effectively is probably going to be restricted if they lack the necessary training and do not know how to carry out their responsibilities well. Thus, it is essential to give DHs the abilities they require in order to effectively supervise and guide teachers in classrooms (Seobi & Wood, 2016).

2.3.3 The necessity of leadership and management skills for DHs

Bush and Sargsyan (2013) emphasise the crucial role of skilled leaders, noting that governments worldwide have recognised the need for highly skilled workers to stay economically competitive. In schools, this includes principals, deputy principals, DHs and teachers. This study specifically focused on DHs because they need specialised skills for their leadership roles in teaching and learning, whereas their initial training was primarily as teachers rather than school leaders or managers. A key responsibility of DHs is to manage and lead their departments effectively. It appears that DHs need specific competencies to be well-prepared and confident in their leadership and management roles, and their success largely depends on the quality of their training and development (Bush & Sargsyan, 2013; Govindasamy & Mestry, 2022; Mpisane, 2015).

Jaca (2021) conducted a study in South Africa that examined the challenges primary school teachers face when transitioning to DH roles. The study underscored the lack of training opportunities for DHs, highlighting their need to develop skills in resource management, crisis management, interpersonal communication and understanding educational regulations. Many DHs struggled with inadequate management and leadership skills, which are crucial for their positions. This gap in training led to frustration and diminished confidence among DHs, hindering their ability to perform effectively. The study underscored the need for tailored professional development programmes that address the specific needs of DHs, thereby facilitating a successful transition into leadership roles (Jaca, 2021).

Awodiji (2024) conducted a study across Africa that examined how basic school leaders engage in CPD for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The study emphasised the necessity for school leaders to undergo ongoing training to manage technological changes effectively. It identified various CPD methods such as in-service training, cohort meetings, and formal leadership courses that can enhance leaders' skills in managing educational environments. The study underscores the importance of integrating technology and fostering skills like communication, critical thinking, and adaptability into school leadership training.

2.4 DHs' enactment of their leadership role for teaching and learning

2.4.1 Anticipated role and responsibility of DHs

DHs are essential in ensuring effective teaching and learning processes within schools. They are key to carrying out and achieving the main goal of schools—effective teaching and learning (Munje et al., 2020). DHs are responsible for helping teachers improve student outcomes (Mpisane, 2015). They are members of the management team and also take on teaching responsibilities. In some countries, DHs are referred to as middle managers. Besides teaching, DHs manage and are accountable for their departments or phases (Jaca, 2021). Despite their significant role in overseeing teaching and learning, many DHs do not receive any management or leadership training before they start their positions (Awodiji, 2024; Jaca, 2021; Seobi & Wood, 2016).

Tapala et al. (2022) conducted a study in South Africa examining how DHs perceive their roles in curriculum leadership, focusing on aspects such as monitoring, motivating, role modelling, communication, goal setting, and accountability. The findings showed that DHs are recognised as vital leaders who influence the educational environment by providing resources, fostering communication, and exercising authority. The study found that DHs need a deep understanding of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and subject knowledge to be recognised as competent. This finding aligns with Moeketsane et al. (2021), who explored how South African subject leaders view their leadership and skills. They discovered that the more knowledgeable subject leaders were about instructional leadership, the more competent they felt in their roles. Their perceptions of their roles also strongly influenced their feelings of competence. Thus, both understanding, and perceptions play crucial roles in how skilled subject leaders feel in their leadership roles. Seherrie and Mawela (2022) examined life orientation teachers in South Africa and found that teachers with strong subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge could better address learners' needs. The study emphasised the need for teachers to continually develop their subject knowledge to effectively tackle educational challenges.

DHs are viewed as subject specialists responsible for overseeing teaching and learning across different subjects through classroom observations. Therefore, it is crucial for them to have these competencies. Without these skills, they might struggle to identify the subject-specific challenges faced by the teachers they supervise, which would make it challenging to provide

the necessary support. Mthiyane et al. (2019) conducted a study in South Africa exploring the context of DHs' leadership practices in monitoring and supporting teachers in schools participating in *Jika iMfundo*. The study suggests that DHs' responsibilities extend beyond administrative tasks. It emphasises that DHs need substantial subject knowledge to effectively support educators and argues that their effectiveness depends more on their individual competencies and pedagogical expertise than on their formal titles or positions. The study also shows that the support DHs provide to teachers varies significantly based on their personal skills and knowledge, suggesting that their authority relies more on their teaching competence and understanding of the curriculum than on their managerial duties.

Nhlapo (2021) conducted a study in South Africa exploring the challenges faced by DHs in their roles as instructional leaders. The study focused on how DHs' management competencies and subject knowledge impact their ability to supervise teachers effectively. The study found that DHs frequently experienced doubts about their competencies and subject expertise, which influenced their ability to oversee teachers effectively. The study argues that DHs are frequently perceived as the weakest link in schools due to their managerial shortcomings. It also highlighted the difficulties DHs encounter in supervising teachers and discussing curriculum issues meaningfully. Nhlapo (2021) emphasised the need for ongoing support and training to improve DHs' management skills and confidence in their subject knowledge.

In addition to possessing extensive knowledge of pedagogy and subject matter, DHs are required to demonstrate strong interpersonal abilities to effectively fulfil their leadership and management responsibilities within schools. Vermaak (2020) examined how secondary schools manage interpersonal relations, highlighting the crucial role of interpersonal and communication skills among DHs. The study emphasised that DHs were pivotal in fostering strong interpersonal relationships within their teams, which was essential for creating a collaborative community of practice in educational settings. Vermaak (2020) explored DHs' perspectives on the significance of these relationships in establishing a supportive and cooperative environment. The study found that effective interpersonal skills enhanced educators' well-being, leading to increased job satisfaction and improved classroom productivity. It also indicated that strong interpersonal and communication skills were fundamental for effective school leadership and managing change within educational

institutions. Leaders who communicated well fostered a supportive climate that encouraged staff participation and engagement in school initiatives. The possession of these skills allowed DHs to listen to teachers and encourage them by offering solutions to the problems the teachers perceived. Additionally, the study addressed the challenges DHs encountered in promoting sound interpersonal relationships, noting that these challenges could hinder their ability to influence others and successfully implement changes.

In Israel, Shaked (2023) examined how middle leaders in elementary schools, who hold leadership positions focused on specific curriculum areas, fulfilled their instructional leadership roles. The study identified three key characteristics of instructional leadership among these middle leaders. They led by expertise, using their subject knowledge to guide and support teachers in enhancing instruction. They led by collaboration, working closely with teachers to create a supportive environment that encouraged collective learning. Additionally, they led by example, demonstrating effective practices that others could follow, thereby modelling instructional excellence and motivating teachers to improve their own practices. The study highlighted those principals and middle leaders, collaborating closely, approached their roles in distinct ways to advance teaching and learning.

Kalane and Rambuda (2022) investigated the factors impacting DHs' management of teaching and learning in primary schools from a South African perspective. They found that the overcrowded curriculum and pressure to cover content left DHs with little time to provide instructional leadership and support to teachers. The study recommended allocating sufficient time for DHs to balance the management of teaching and learning with their other job responsibilities.

In Kenya, Mathu (2013) investigated the perceptions of teachers, principals, and DHs regarding the roles of secondary school DHs, focusing on the discrepancy between their actual roles and expectations. The study revealed that most DHs, alongside some principals, acknowledged their responsibility for preparing and sharing subject schemes of work. In the study, DHs were tasked with setting, moderating, and marking examinations. Additionally, some DHs believed their duties included providing teachers with updated lesson plans, monitoring workbooks, and ensuring adherence to deadlines. Furthermore, DHs were

responsible for maintaining accurate and timely bookkeeping and records. Some principals believed that DHs had to implement the curriculum. They also thought DHs needed to prepare lessons with the right content and methods. Both principals and DHs had to track learners' progress and lead departmental meetings. Most principals thought DHs should help new teachers, while DHs felt they had to update parents on learners' welfare and discipline. This aligns with Muriuki et al. (2020), who investigated the effectiveness of professional development for DHs in enhancing their role in secondary schools in Kenya. The study underscored the growing complexity of DH roles and stressed the necessity of efficient professional development to provide them with the required skills and knowledge.

2.5 Factors that enable and disable the DHs' leadership for teaching and learning

2.5.1 Essential communication, delegation, and leadership models for DHs

Effective leadership for teaching and learning relies on several enabling factors for DHs. Ogina (2017) argues that strong communication helps DHs manage their leadership roles. DHs need senior management to keep them well-informed, consult with them regularly, and value their needs and ideas. Senior management should collaborate closely with DHs, adopting a supportive and constructive approach rather than remaining distant. Jaca (2021) highlights that DHs perform better when senior leaders demonstrate the skills, experience, and credibility needed to support them. Delegation and distributed leadership play a key role in developing staff skills and reducing pressure on leaders. Constantinides (2023) explains that DHs use delegation to enhance team capabilities and manage workloads efficiently. This practice not only fosters team growth but also allows DHs to focus on their leadership responsibilities and improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Leadership in teaching and learning requires DHs to balance instructional, managerial, and interpersonal roles. Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership theory underscores the significance of curriculum oversight, teacher development, and creating supportive environments. Fullan (2019) adds that transformational leadership models promote collaboration, empowerment, and resource optimisation.

Leithwood et al. (2017) and Seobi and Wood (2016) emphasise that professionalism, teamwork, professional development, and resource management enable DHs to succeed. These factors empower leaders to create environments conducive to teaching and learning while addressing challenges effectively.

2.5.2 Role ambiguity

Kundu et al. (2020) explored the mediating influence of intrinsic motivation and job involvement on the relationship between perceived role clarity and job performance in India. They describe a lack of role clarity as a condition where employees are uncertain about their job duties, expectations, or the essential information needed to carry out their tasks effectively. They indicated that insufficient role clarity adversely affected team dynamics, causing friction and lowering performance. Teams facing unclear roles often struggle with self-management and regularly experience workflow interruptions. Additionally, low role clarity was linked to increased anxiety and decreased job satisfaction, which in turn reduced motivation and innovative capabilities (Kundu et al., 2020).

Building on these findings, more recent studies have demonstrated similar patterns across different contexts. For instance, Lee et al. (2024) identified that when roles are ambiguous, individuals and teams experience poor prioritisation, duplicated efforts, and performance declines. Shinde (2025) supports this by showing that role ambiguity leads to higher stress, emotional exhaustion, and disengagement. Moreover, Kruse and Edge (2023) found role clarity mediates the relationship between workload and burnout, revealing that ambiguity directly contributes to burnout symptoms such as exhaustion.

The collective evidence confirms that employees who lack clarity about their responsibilities often spend more time deciphering their roles rather than executing tasks efficiently. This ambiguity not only elevates stress and job dissatisfaction but also diminishes intrinsic motivation and inhibits innovation. Together, these factors contribute to reduced team performance and employee well-being across different industries and regions.

Marchant et al. (2024) conducted a study in Wales and Northern Ireland, examining the well-being and work-related stress of senior school leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic, which they termed an 'educational leadership crisis' in their cross-sectional descriptive study. The study highlighted significant concerns about role clarity among school leaders. Many leaders reported feeling overwhelmed by their responsibilities and the challenges they faced in navigating their roles effectively due to increased scrutiny from various stakeholders, including policymakers and parents. The study further noted that female school leaders reported greater perceived stress and more pronounced exhaustion symptoms than their male colleagues, indicating that gender may play a role in the way stress is perceived and addressed within educational leadership roles. The study found that the stress and role ambiguity faced by school leaders could have detrimental effects not only on their health but also on the quality of leadership and, consequently, on student outcomes.

In South Africa, Tapala et al. (2022) sought to determine the perceptions of DHs regarding their roles in curriculum leadership within South African schools, while Mudau et al. (2024) conducted a study on role expectations, constraints, and strategies, focusing on the multifaceted roles and responsibilities of DHs in primary schools. Both studies identified challenges related to role clarity and the expectations placed upon DHs. The findings revealed that many DHs felt overwhelmed by their responsibilities and lacked clear guidelines on their roles. They struggled to fulfil their duties effectively due to unclear role expectations and significant constraints, such as heavy teaching loads. The studies emphasised the need for better-defined roles and support systems to enhance the effectiveness of DHs in their leadership positions and recommended strategies to empower them, including reducing their classroom teaching responsibilities to allow them to focus on their leadership roles.

When DHs take on a new leadership role, we cannot assume they automatically know their responsibilities, as this can be misleading. Induction, training, and mentoring help them get started in their new role. The literature shows that unclear roles often lead to role ambiguity and role tension, which are common experiences in leadership and management.

2.5.3 Shortage of leadership and management skills

Embarking on a leadership role for the first time is both thrilling and intricate, as it requires cultivating new leadership and management competencies (Northouse, 2025). Muriuki et al. (2020) highlight that teachers assigned to the role of DH often face challenges with management and leadership duties, especially if they lack prior experience in these areas. According to Mudau et al. (2024), DHs require specific training to perform their roles effectively. Bush and Sargsyan (2013) and Govindasamy and Mestry (2022) emphasise that DHs need specialised skills for teaching and learning leadership. However, their initial training is primarily as teachers rather than as school leaders or managers, suggesting that targeted competencies are essential for DHs to be well-prepared and confident in their roles. Kalane and Rambuda (2022) further argue that inadequate professional training and undeveloped skills negatively impact DHs' effectiveness. Seobi and Wood (2016) conclude that DHs need both support and training from top management to develop the necessary skills for effective departmental leadership. Ogina (2017) adds that the lack of standardised training leads to varied leadership strategies among DHs in South Africa, which significantly affects the management of teaching and learning. Overall, it appears that individuals appointed to leadership roles across different fields often recognise a gap in relevant skills, regardless of prior experience.

In Saudi Arabia, Ahmed and Al-Dhuwaih (2020) examined the early experiences of first-time principals to understand how they navigate their new roles, the challenges they face, and the gap between their expectations and the realities of school leadership. The study found that new principals often struggle to fully grasp their leadership roles and frequently feel unprepared for the complexities involved, such as managing staff, addressing student needs, and adhering to educational regulations. The researchers identified several significant challenges, including a lack of formal leadership training before assuming the principal's role. Their findings suggest that effective support systems, such as mentorship programmes and professional development opportunities, are crucial for helping new principals adapt to their roles and address the challenges they encounter.

Awodiji (2024) examined how basic school leaders across Africa engage in CPD for the 4IR. The study emphasised the need for ongoing training and identified various CPD methods, including in-service training, cohort meetings, and formal leadership courses, as effective ways to enhance leaders' skills. It highlighted the importance of developing skills such as

communication, critical thinking, and adaptability in school leadership training.

Despite their significant role in overseeing teaching and learning, many DHs receive no management or leadership training before starting their positions (Awodiji, 2024; Jaca, 2021; Seobi & Wood, 2016). Limited access to professional development and training opportunities further hampers DHs' ability to stay updated with current teaching methodologies and leadership practices (du Plessis & Eberlein, 2018). Jaca (2021) conducted a study in South Africa that explored the challenges primary school teachers face when transitioning to DH roles. The study highlighted the lack of sufficient training opportunities for DHs, revealing that many struggled with inadequate management and leadership skills essential for their roles. This gap in training led to frustration and diminished confidence among DHs, which hindered their effectiveness. Jaca (2021) emphasised the need for tailored professional development programmes that address the specific needs of DHs, thereby facilitating a successful transition into leadership roles.

Research suggests that after being appointed to a DH position, the induction process for DHs, if it occurs at all, often proves inadequate and sometimes irrelevant (Dlamini, 2013; Jaca, 2021; Kalane & Rambuda, 2022; Madonsela & Proches, 2022). As a result, DHs struggle with management and leadership duties due to insufficient preparation. Tapala (2019) asserts that when opportunities for training and development were provided to the DHs, they were incoherently organised, badly managed, and of minimal benefit to the DHs.

In this study, it is emphasised that DHs, irrespective of their prior experience or educational background, need to be equipped with the skills necessary to handle their leadership role effectively. Even when DHs have undertaken leadership responsibilities before their official appointment, they still require training in essential management and leadership competencies, such as time management. Moreover, existing literature underscores that DHs frequently encounter notable challenges, including demanding heavy workloads and only limited time available.

2.5.4 Heavy workload and time constraints

DHs are tasked with managing and supervising their departments within dissimilar grades while at the same time teaching. Studies suggest that most DHs experience challenges in executing their dual roles and this has a bearing on effective teaching and learning of the pupils (Bipath & Nkabinde, 2018).

Creagh et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review in Australia examining the workload, work intensification, and time poverty experienced by teachers and school leaders. This comprehensive review highlights how time constraints significantly impact school leaders, including DHs, and their ability to focus on educational leadership. The study found that principals and vice-principals often work over 50 hours per week, with a substantial portion of their time consumed by non-educational tasks. This extensive workload, which includes administrative duties, stakeholder engagement, and educational leadership, detracts from their ability to engage in instructional leadership and support teaching staff. The study emphasises that increasing demands, and the intensification of tasks create significant time poverty for these leaders. This lack of time affects their well-being and hampers their effectiveness in driving school improvement. Creagh et al. (2023) suggest that the pressures of workload and task intensification stem from the growing complexity of educational demands. They call for systemic changes to address these challenges, recommending better resource allocation and support mechanisms to help school leaders manage their workload and time constraints more effectively.

Mudau et al. (2024) conducted a study on the role expectations, constraints, and strategies for DHs in primary schools, focusing on their multifaceted roles and responsibilities. The study identified several challenges related to the expectations placed on DHs. Findings revealed that many DHs felt overwhelmed by their responsibilities and lacked clear guidelines for their roles. They struggled to fulfil their duties effectively due to constraints such as heavy workload. The study emphasised the need for support systems to enhance DHs' effectiveness in their leadership positions and recommended strategies to empower them, including reducing their classroom teaching responsibilities to allow them to focus more on their leadership roles.

Malloy (2017) examined the instructional leadership role of DHs in mathematics teaching and learning within South African secondary schools. The study found that DHs struggle to balance their instructional leadership duties with their teaching responsibilities. This dual burden leads to increased stress and feelings of being overwhelmed. The findings support the idea that time constraints prevent DHs from managing and leading effectively. Malloy (2017) highlights that heavy workloads and limited time make it challenging for DHs to fulfil their instructional leadership roles effectively. This aligns with Jaca (2021), who also found that time constraints and heavy workloads affect other functions of DHs, making it difficult for them to manage both teaching and administrative responsibilities effectively. Therefore, the literature indicates that DHs struggle to manage their time effectively between leadership responsibilities and other duties (Bipath & Nkabinde, 2018; Creagh et al., 2023; Jaca, 2021; Malloy, 2017).

2.5.5 Balance between teaching and management duties

Although DHs give precedence to teaching, which takes the greater part of the day in school, they also admit to observing the work of fellow teachers to ensure application and execution of school policies. However, Kalane and Rambuda (2022) note that although the new managerial role is acknowledged, DHs continue to face challenges in meeting new expectations due to time constraints. Besides their teaching roles, DHs are responsible for managing their departments (DBE, 2016). However, most of their time—80%—should be spent on carrying out teaching roles, whilst about 15% should be dedicated to carrying out management roles and duties (Africa, 1998). Therefore, DHs play a vital role in enhancing teaching and learning through supervision and oversight, but they face challenges in managing their workload effectively.

The DHs are expected to handle several tasks at once and this involves monitoring, observing learners and educators as well as teaching. Various studies on DHs (Mthethwa, 2011; Mulaudzi, 2019; Ogina, 2017) have found that DHs lack adequate time to balance their management duties as well as their teaching roles and this affects their overall performance in achieving the school goals.

2.5.6 Monitoring

Monitoring is key in any organisational set-up as it involves those in management positions—be it the managers or supervisors—looking over their subordinates to make sure that good work or proper behaviour is always maintained (Akpan & Etor, 2015). Similarly, Abdalla and Ali

(2017) contend that organisations must monitor their employees' performance at various levels. Therefore, systems and mechanisms to monitor performance should be put in place to ensure that employees and supervisors have a shared understanding of the anticipated performance outcomes. However, in the educational sector, especially at the school level, there has been a tendency by DHs to avoid monitoring the progress of learners taught by fellow teachers, as that is considered embarrassing (Mthethwa, 2011). Similarly, a study carried out by Ogina (2017) found that DHs view direct monitoring or observation as a challenge to professional standards of privacy and equality.

Studies by Mulaudzi (2019) and Vanoostveen et al. (2019) found that though the DHs are conscious of their role of monitoring the work of other teachers in classrooms while teaching, they however prefer to do so indirectly. Vanoostveen et al. (2019) assume that there is a general unwillingness by the DHs to formally report on the classroom performance of fellow teachers. Conversely, Mustafa et al. (2019) observe that DHs prefer to monitor the work of their colleagues by checking their assessments and lesson plans as well as exercise books instead of observing their teaching. However, checking teachers' records and planning as well as their exercise books only gives secondary evidence of the quality of teaching which may not be in compliance with the agreed standards.

2.5.7 Lack of support

Liljenberg and Andersson (2020) conducted a study in western Sweden to explore how new principals perceive and utilise support systems in their leadership roles. The research highlights the critical importance of support from various stakeholders, including mentors and colleagues. Their findings reveal that novice principals often feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities, underscoring the necessity of effective support for their development. The study emphasises the need for structured mentoring programmes and collaborative environments that promote open communication and guidance. This support not only fosters the principals' professional growth but also enhances the overall school climate and improves student outcomes (Bush & Glover, 2014).

Jaca (2021) argues that DHs who experience role stress require support from school management and training in management strategies. Leaders appointed to new roles must be aware of the forthcoming changes and receive support as they adjust to their new responsibilities (Kalane & Rambuda, 2022). This implies that, upon assuming their new positions, DHs should be oriented to the changes in their responsibilities to better prepare them for leadership (Muriuki et al., 2020). They need training and support (Liljenberg & Andersson, 2020). The literature highlights a global concern over the insufficient preparation and support for educational leaders (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020; Kalane & Rambuda, 2022; Liljenberg & Andersson, 2020; Muriuki et al., 2020).

Mahome and Mphahlele (2023) conducted a study emphasising the need for a structured induction programme for newly appointed DHs in South African public schools. Their research highlighted the lack of formal induction processes that adequately prepare DHs for their roles, which can lead to difficulties in managing their responsibilities effectively. Many DHs reported feeling unprepared due to insufficient training and support. The study revealed that without a formal induction programme, DHs face increased challenges, potentially resulting in poor learner outcomes. Typically, newly appointed DHs learn their roles through trial and error rather than structured guidance. The study proposed a three-week induction programme tailored to the specific duties and responsibilities of DHs. This programme would address essential job-specific issues, departmental expectations, and relevant policies, equipping DHs with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform effectively. The authors recommend that the DBE in South Africa develop a national induction programme for DHs and other members of the SMT. Such an initiative would standardise the induction process and ensure that all leaders are adequately prepared for their roles. By addressing the induction needs of DHs, the study contributes to the broader discourse on educational leadership and emphasises the importance of supporting middle leaders to enhance overall school performance and student achievement. These studies reinforce the notion that structured support and mentorship are vital for the success of DHs (Mahome & Mphahlele, 2023).

2.5.8 Barriers to DHs' leadership for teaching and learning

DHs encounter various challenges in overseeing curriculum management and their departments. These difficulties include but are not limited to the following: maintaining a balance between teaching and management duties, monitoring, challenges experienced by DHs in rural schools, lack of support, expectations and perceptions as well as knowledge of the subject.

In South Africa, rural primary school DHs encounter distinctive leadership challenges that influence their ability to effectively execute their duties. These challenges stem from the specific characteristics and context of rural schools in the country (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Several key challenges faced by rural primary school DHs in South Africa include limited resources, teacher shortages and high turnover rate, lack of professional development opportunities, inadequate infrastructure and facilities, socio-economic challenges, geographical isolation and transportation difficulties, as well as language and cultural diversity (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

Rural schools often struggle with resource constraints, including inadequate infrastructure, limited teaching materials and insufficient funding, which can hinder DHs in providing quality education and support (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Additionally, attracting and retaining qualified teachers is a challenge in rural areas, leading to teacher shortages and high turnover rates, placing greater demands on DHs (Mafora, 2013). Limited access to professional development and training opportunities further hampers the ability of DHs and teachers to stay updated with current teaching methodologies and leadership practices (Mabeba & Van der Walt, 2018).

In terms of infrastructure, rural schools often face inadequacies and maintenance issues in classrooms, libraries and laboratories, making it challenging for DHs to provide conducive learning environments (Cekiso, 2018). Socio-economic challenges prevalent in rural communities, such as poverty and unemployment, impact learners' well-being and academic performance, placing additional responsibilities on DHs to address these factors (Manuel, 2020). Geographical isolation and limited transportation networks also pose logistical challenges for DHs in managing school operations and facilitating collaboration (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2019).

Furthermore, South Africa's linguistic and cultural diversity presents communication and inclusivity challenges for DHs in rural areas (Kunene & Marfo, 2020). Effectively bridging cultural and language gaps becomes crucial for fostering a positive school environment and meaningful engagement (Cohen, 2013). To tackle these challenges effectively, a holistic strategy is essential, encompassing government assistance, collaboration among stakeholders, and focused initiatives. Strategies such as advocating for increased resources and support, providing professional development opportunities, implementing retention strategies, fostering community partnerships, promoting inclusive practices and utilising innovative approaches can help overcome these challenges and enhance the leadership effectiveness of DHs in rural primary schools in South Africa (Thomas, 2011). It is important to note that the above studies were not conducted at King Cetshwayo District where this study was conducted.

2.6 The support DHs need to address the challenges they face in performing their leadership role for teaching and learning

DHs in primary schools in South Africa require various forms of support to effectively address the challenges they face, one of which is the need for professional development opportunities. Mabeba and Van der Walt (2018) observe that accessible and relevant professional development programmes for DHs can enhance their leadership skills and equip them with the necessary knowledge and strategies to overcome challenges. On-going training sessions, workshops and mentoring programmes can help DHs stay updated with educational practices and policies (Thomas, 2011). Furthermore, implementing strategies to attract and retain qualified teachers in rural schools can alleviate the burden on DHs caused by teacher shortages and high turnover (du Plessis & Mestry 2019).

Tlali and Matete (2020) argue that DHs require support and training in promoting inclusive practices that embrace the linguistic and cultural diversity of rural schools. Professional development programmes focused on multicultural education, intercultural communication and fostering a sense of belonging can assist DHs in creating inclusive environments (Kunene & Marfo, 2020).

The other support DHs need in order to alleviate the challenges they face is technological assistance. Manuel (2020) observes that providing schools with technological resources and training can enhance teaching and learning experiences as well as facilitate communication and access to information. DHs may benefit from technological support such as access to

educational software, digital platforms and connectivity solutions (Timotheou et al., 2023). Tlali and Matete (2020) maintain that by receiving comprehensive support in these areas, DHs in rural primary schools can be better equipped to overcome the challenges they face and enhance the standard of education in their schools.

2.7 Theoretical framework

This study was underpinned by the instructional leadership theory as conceptualised by Hallinger and Murphy (1985). Their model is among the most widely recognised frameworks in educational leadership, particularly for its practical focus on how school leaders can improve teaching and learning. Hallinger and Murphy developed this theory in response to increasing concerns about school effectiveness and student performance, shifting the focus from administrative management to the core function of schools' instruction.

While instructional leadership theory has evolved over time, this study adopted Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) original version because of its clear and structured focus on curriculum leadership and teacher support, areas that directly relate to the role of DHs in South African schools (DBE, 2016). Although later scholars such as Hoy and Tarter (2011) have expanded on this theory to incorporate more transformational elements, the original framework remains highly relevant to the focus of this research: understanding and enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools

Instructional leadership theory asserts that school leaders, including DHs, play a pivotal role in fostering quality teaching and learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The theory consists of three core dimensions, which are defining the school's mission, managing the instructional programme, and promoting a positive school learning climate.

In the context of this study, this means that DHs are expected to clearly communicate academic goals, supervise and support the teaching process, and create a school environment conducive to learning. These three dimensions provided the analytical lens through which data in this study were both generated and interpreted:

Defining the school's mission

According to instructional leadership theory, one of the core responsibilities of school leaders is to define the school's mission by setting clear academic goals and ensuring that these goals are shared and supported by all staff members. In the context of this study, this means that

DHs, as middle leaders, are expected to contribute to shaping and communicating the academic vision of the school. Specifically, DHs should clarify instructional goals within their departments, ensure that teachers understand these goals, and guide them in aligning their teaching practices accordingly. This element of the theory was used in the study to assess how DHs understood their leadership role for teaching and learning, particularly in terms of setting expectations and shaping the academic focus within their departments.

Managing the instructional programme

Instructional leadership theory states that school leaders should coordinate, supervise, and evaluate the teaching and curriculum delivery process. This includes activities such as monitoring lesson planning, conducting classroom observations, and providing feedback to improve instructional quality. In the context of this study, this means that DHs, as instructional leaders, are expected to oversee the academic work within their departments by mentoring teachers, ensuring that the curriculum is effectively implemented, and facilitating continuous professional development. This element of the growth was used to explore how DHs enacted their leadership responsibilities, particularly their involvement in supervising instruction, supporting teacher growth, and ensuring curriculum coverage and quality.

Promoting a positive school learning climate

Instructional leadership theory states that school leaders should create a school environment that is conducive to effective teaching and learning. This involves building trust among staff, supporting teachers emotionally, recognising and celebrating good performance, and fostering collaboration among colleagues. In this study, this means that DHs should actively contribute to building a supportive and collegial working environment within their departments. Specifically, DHs are expected to offer emotional support to teachers, encourage teamwork, manage resistance constructively, and promote a culture of mutual respect and professional growth. This dimension of the theory was used to understand how DHs enacted their leadership role.

Instructional leadership theory has been used in other studies to investigate the challenges experienced by DHs in South African schools. For example, Madonsela and Proches (2022) used the instructional leadership theoretical framework to investigate the challenges experienced by DHs in managing curriculum changes in South African schools. The study

found that DHs face several challenges, including a lack of support, inadequate training, and undeveloped professional abilities and knowledge. The study recommended that DHs should undergo professional development activities such as workshops, in-service training, networking events, and seminars to update their knowledge, expertise, skills, and competence in the teaching profession. In this study, instructional leadership theory was used to explore the DHs' understanding of their leadership role for teaching and learning in selected primary schools and how they enact it at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

2.8 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed key concepts and analysis of existing literature from various scholars related to the study. It also examined the theoretical framework underpinning this study. During my review of relevant literature, I did not come across any studies on the experiences of DHs in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. The available studies focused on inclusive leadership, teacher motivation, DHs and teacher support for school vision, DHs and establishing a culture conducive to achieving organisational goals; strategic planning, curriculum leadership roles of DHs in South African schools, and challenges experienced by DHs in managing curriculum changes in South African schools (Abolghasemi et al., 1999; Brown, 2019; Madonsela & Proches, 2022; Myende & Bhengu, 2015; Onjoro et al., 2015; Sankey, 2017; Tapala et al., 2022). Therefore, this study focused on the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. The next chapter, chapter three, outlines the methodology employed in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter addressed the literature pertinent to this study. This chapter presents the research design and methodology used in the study. The chapter commences with a discussion of the research paradigm, research approach and research design that was used in this study. It further outlines the sampling strategy, data generation instrument and the data analysis strategy that were used, as well as the credibility and ethical considerations of the study.

3.2 Philosophical assumptions underpinning the study

Saunders et al. (2018, p. 245) define a research paradigm as “a set of assumptions or beliefs on the development of knowledge.” Similarly, Majid (2018) maintains that the research paradigm directs the researchers’ actions when conducting research; hence, the research paradigm refers to the guiding principles or the lens used in explaining and clarifying reality. There are various research paradigms available in social science research, including but not limited to constructivism, positivism, pragmatism, interpretivism, social constructivism and post-positivism (Mohajan, 2017). A paradigm includes the ideas of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods (Dieronitou, 2014; Scotland, 2012). The literature emphasises that researchers must understand the ontologies and epistemologies guiding their research. Scotland (2012) asserts that researchers must understand the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning their studies because these assumptions influence their choice of methodology, methods, and the presentation of their findings. This study was conducted within the interpretivists’ research paradigm. This paradigm enabled me to gain in-depth insights and understanding on the DHs’ experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province (Cohen et al., 2017).

The interpretivist research paradigm, according to Polit and Beck (2017), assumes that reality is socially constructed, and the primary focus of an interpretivist researcher is to understand the participants’ perceptions and worldview. The emblem of interpretive research is the collaborative generation of knowledge between the participants and the researcher (Mohajan,

2017). The interpretive paradigm is focused on providing elaborate explanations through detailed descriptions of how people make sense of their world and how they make meaning of their particular actions. Therefore, by employing the interpretivist research paradigm in this study, I was able to understand how DHs make meaning of their experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province (Cohen et al., 2017).

3.2.1 Ontological assumptions in research

Ontology pertains to the fundamental essence of existence and reality (Lawson, 2019). A researcher's ontological assumptions or beliefs reflect their view of what constitutes reality. Researchers have the option to select between two contrasting ontological stances: objectivism and subjectivism. An objectivist, typically aligned with positivism, maintains that reality must be examined objectively, separate from the researcher's influence. On the other hand, a subjectivist or nominalist believes that reality can only be understood through the meanings constructed by participants about their world. These researchers may also interpret the meanings participants assign to their lives (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022; Park et al., 2020; Ryan, 2018). Researchers with subjective perspectives align with constructivism/interpretivism (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

3.2.2 Epistemological assumptions in research

The term epistemology originates from the Greek verb 'epistame', which signifies knowing something thoroughly. It entails internalising knowledge through experiential learning (Weinberg, 2015). Frezza et al. (2013) describe epistemology as a recognised, valid, and acceptable method for producing, comprehending, and applying knowledge. Knight et al. (2014) highlight the intimate connection between the knower and the known within epistemology. As noted by Dieronitou (2014), researchers may adopt either the epistemological stance of natural science methods, referred to as positivism, or the humanistic sciences model, which encompasses interpretivism and constructivism.

Positivists assume that science is the only way to understand the truth about the world and to predict and control it. They also believe that the world and the universe operate deterministically, following laws of cause and effect that can only be uncovered through scientific methods (Knight et al., 2014). To develop theories, positivists use deductive

reasoning and rely on direct manipulation, observation and scientific methods such as experiments to uncover the truth (Park et al., 2020).

According to William (2024), constructivists and interpretivists assert that knowledge emerges from the meanings attributed to the phenomenon being studied. They stress the necessity of interaction between researchers and participants to extract meaning from data. Unlike the positivist paradigm, this approach requires researchers to be actively involved in the study rather than remaining detached. William (2024) further emphasises that understanding a phenomenon necessitates examining it within its specific context and engaging the researcher deeply to comprehend the lived experience of being part of that phenomenon. Moreover, constructivists and interpretivists advocate allowing research questions to evolve as familiarity with the study content increases, instead of adhering to a predetermined set of questions.

3.2.3 My philosophical assumptions in the study

This study explored the experiences of DHs in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. Adhering to the humanistic sciences model of interpretivism, the interpretivist paradigm was deemed suitable for this study as it aimed to understand and explain the experiences of DHs in their leadership role (Ponelis, 2015). Consistent with studies conducted within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, this research relied upon participants' perspectives to gain deeper insights and interpretations of their leadership experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Ontologically, it was assumed that individuals engage with their social environments in unique ways, resulting in the construction of diverse realities (Galbin, 2014; Phillips, 2023). In essence, while all DHs involved in this study had experience in leading teaching and learning, their distinct interactions with this role led to varied realities regarding their leadership experiences.

Epistemologically, I believed that fully comprehending how DHs experience leadership in enacting teaching and learning necessitated direct engagement with participants. Through such interaction, I aimed to discern the varied meanings participants assign to their experiences. Furthermore, I believed that their voices and experiences would contribute to building knowledge about DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning (Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). In this study, I interpreted various meanings that participants

constructed about their leadership experiences in enacting teaching and learning. By using an interpretivist framework, I asked open-ended questions that enabled participants to express their individual interpretations of their leadership experiences during their interactions with me.

The discussion demonstrated that the paradigm underpinning a study significantly influences the researcher's choice of methodology (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021; William, 2024). For instance, a subjective epistemology combined with relativist ontology would lead to the adoption of a qualitative approach, whereas an objective epistemology paired with realist ontology would result in a quantitative approach (Dieronitou, 2014). Consequently, the ontological and epistemological perspectives inherently determined the research approach selected for this study.

3.3 Research approach

A research approach indicates an assortment of multiple methods that work together to provide detailed answers to the research questions, focusing deeply on the single phenomenon being investigated (Polit & Beck, 2017). A research approach can be classified into three categories: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. Qualitative research was used in this study as the purpose of the study was to explore the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

3.3.1 Qualitative research approach

According to Thomas and Lacey (2016), qualitative research is an investigative approach whereby the properties, aspects, or qualities of a phenomenon are studied to gain a deeper understanding or explanation of a particular phenomenon which in this study was DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning. Creswell and Poth (2018) argue that qualitative research is concerned with gathering non-numerical data such as the experiences and feelings of the participants on a phenomenon which in this study was DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

A qualitative research approach aligned with the interpretivist paradigm within which this study was conducted. This methodology enabled the use of flexible interviewing as a method for data generation (Gellet, 2024). By employing this qualitative approach, I generated detailed data on DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning through interviews. My objective was to achieve a deep and nuanced understanding of DHs' experiences rather than to generalise a phenomenon. The qualitative approach facilitated direct data generation through an interview schedule I developed personally, rather than relying on tools designed by others, as is common in quantitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Kumar, 2011). I interacted with participants in their natural settings at selected primary schools while generating the data (Creswell, 2012).

Qualitative research, as noted by Kumar (2011) and Creswell (2012), prioritises understanding participants' meanings of the phenomenon rather than relying on interpretations suggested by existing literature. Using a qualitative research approach allowed participants to articulate their experiences and the significance of their leadership role in facilitating teaching and learning during the interviews (Yin, 2011). I conducted interviews without any preconceptions about the participants' thoughts or behaviours (Cohen et al., 2017). Furthermore, the research paradigm underpinning the study played a key role in shaping the choice of research design (Creswell, 2012).

3.4 Research design

Saunders et al. (2016) define research design as a structured plan that determines the focus of the investigation and outlines the most efficient methodology to accomplish it. This implies that research design provides researchers with a structured path and clear directives throughout the research process (Inaam, 2016). Yin (2011) emphasises that the purpose of the research must be carefully considered when formulating a research design. In this study, a qualitative case study design was employed as it facilitated an in-depth examination of DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning within their natural settings—primary schools (Creswell, 2013). A case study can focus on an individual, a group, or an event (Kumar, 2011; Yin, 2018), but it must be treated as a single entity. Here, the case pertains to DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning. The research questions guided the selection of the most suitable design. The case study approach enabled the use of semi-structured interviews to gather information and probe deeper into topics relevant to the study. While this

design was chosen for its appropriateness, some methodological limitations must be acknowledged, such as the inability to generalise findings to other contexts (Smith & Johnson, 2015). Nevertheless, employing a case study design allowed for the generation of reliable data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Yin, 2014). This study thoroughly explored and gained profound insights into DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District, in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

3.4.1 Research sites and participants' sampling

Sampling is a way or process of selecting participants into the study to gain understanding and draw conclusions about a target population (Creswell & Creswell, 2009). Sampling methods are classified into two broad categories: probability and non-probability sampling (Majid, 2018). The probability sampling method, according to Saunders et al. (2018), involves the selection of a sample into the study using randomised means and in which every item, member, unit or component of the defined population has an identical opportunity of inclusion into the study. The probability sampling method is related to quantitative research and it uses the following sampling techniques: cluster sampling, simple random sampling and stratified sampling (Inaam, 2016).

Non-probability sampling is commonly associated with qualitative research and involves selecting participants based on the subjective judgement of the researcher (Saunders et al., 2018). This method ensures that not everyone in the population has an equal chance of being chosen (Creswell, 2012). According to Creswell (2012), non-probability sampling relies on the researcher's discretion to select a group likely to provide the most relevant and rich data on the topic of interest. In this study, which focused on DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District, KwaZulu-Natal Province, a non-probability sampling approach was adopted, utilising both purposive and convenience sampling techniques. Non-probability sampling includes methods such as snowball sampling, quota sampling, purposive sampling, and convenience sampling.

For this study, purposive sampling was specifically used to select DHs based on their relevant understanding, knowledge, and experience of the problem being explored (Mohajan, 2017). In addition, convenience sampling was employed to select the participating schools. This method was deemed appropriate as it allowed me to choose schools that were easily accessible and within reach (Creswell, 2012). The combination of these two techniques ensured that both the

key informants, DHs, and the schools were appropriately aligned with the study's objectives. Four DHs from four primary schools in the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province were selected. Selection was based on my assumption that they were the right people with the correct information and knowledge of their experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning, and thus would allow me to capture rich information about this phenomenon (Majid, 2018). The DHs that were included in this study were those who had between five and 28 years in the DH position, based on my assumption that they still remembered their experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning. My decision to use public primary schools was primarily influenced by my assumption that they would be more easily accessible compared to secondary schools. I also assumed that public schools would be more accessible than private schools.

3.4.2 Selection criteria used in the study

For this study, I selected DHs responsible for the Foundation Phase and others overseeing INTERSEN phase and the Senior phase from four primary schools, choosing one DH per school. The participants' experience in their role ranged from five to 28 years, which led me to assume that they would still recall their experiences of enacting leadership for teaching and learning. Moreover, I chose participants who were willing to share their perspectives on their leadership role. A small sample size was preferred to enable detailed interviews and follow-ups, aligning with Roulston and Choi's (2018) view that analysing interviews becomes more complex with a larger number of participants.

3.5 Data generation strategies

Data generation refers to the processes or methods of generating information or data from research participants in order to analyse them and infer conclusions (Inaam, 2016). There are various methods or techniques of generating data in qualitative research and these include but are not limited to the following: interviews, observations, and focus group discussion (Saunders et al., 2016). Semi-structured interviews were used to generate data from the participants.

3.5.1 Interviews

The interview may be flexible or rigid, depending on the interviewer's ability to explore topics in greater depth. It entails an interaction between two or more individuals, conducted either in person or via alternative methods, with the goal of generating insights into a topic of shared

interest (Kumar, 2011; Roulston & Choi, 2018). During the interview, the interviewer determines which questions to ask and how to ask them. If probing is not allowed, the interviewer must strictly follow the prepared questions, making the interview less flexible (Kumar, 2011). There are different types of interviews—email, telephone, one-on-one, and focus group interviews. For this study, I chose to conduct one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Researchers have highlighted several benefits of using interviews and have argued that interviews provide participants with a platform to express their experiences related to the studied phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell, 2012; Roulston & Choi, 2018). For instance, in this study, interviews enabled DHs to share their experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning with a wider audience, including all relevant stakeholders. Cohen et al. (2017) note that interviews are versatile data generation tools, allowing researchers to adapt questions to gather detailed information as well as giving participants the freedom to discuss their reservations about the research topic. Qualitative interviews allowed participants to provide in-depth personal details.

Creswell (2012) highlights the risk of participants providing responses they believe align with the researcher's expectations. To mitigate this, I reminded participants to be honest and emphasised that the data were for academic purposes only. Creswell (2012) also notes that the researcher's presence could influence participants' responses. To address this, I initiated interviews with broad, general questions to establish rapport with participants.

3.5.2 One-on-one semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are flexible in nature and allow for the creation of an environment in which the participant feels free to openly share their experiences with the researcher in a more relaxed manner (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, Polit and Beck (2017) maintain that the use of semi-structured interviews allows for the comprehensive capture of data by employing probes and stimuli. These techniques enabled the clarification and expansion of responses from DHs regarding their experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning. An interview schedule with open-ended questions was used during the data generation process and was designed to capture the information. Creswell (2012) defines an interview protocol as a set of guidelines that researchers use to conduct interviews in a structured and consistent manner. It includes a list of open-ended questions that are designed to capture the

information needed for the research study. The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the generation of detailed information from the DHs, therefore allowing for the gaining of in-depth understandings and insights into the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province (Creswell, 2012).

Interviews took place during school hours and were conducted at the participants' schools. Each session lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent.

3.5.3 My role as a researcher

My experience teaching in a primary school influenced my decision to explore how DHs enact leadership for teaching and learning in primary schools. To create a comfortable environment for participants to share their leadership experiences, I clarified my dual roles as a researcher and student. I emphasised that my purpose was solely related to my master's study, distancing myself from any association with government authority. To maintain objectivity during the interviews, I adhered strictly to the interview schedule and avoided expressing personal opinions.

3.6 Data analysis

Data analysis is described as the process of grouping, summarising, and interpreting data to derive meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research employs various methods of data analysis, including thematic analysis, discourse analysis, content analysis, and narrative analysis. This study utilised thematic analysis to analyse the data. Creswell and Creswell (2017) define thematic analysis as the classification of data into themes, patterns, categories, and sub-themes while providing descriptive notes to facilitate readers' understanding of the data. The use of thematic analysis enabled a clear comprehension of the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province (Clarke & Braun, 2013). I transcribed the data generated through semi-structured interviews. I then conducted thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2023) proposed steps: familiarising myself with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

3.6.1 Familiarising myself with data

The process of becoming familiar with data entails transcribing, thoroughly reading, and revisiting it while noting key ideas, which is a pivotal step in qualitative research methodology (Clarke & Braun, 2013). In this study, I converted all verbal data into written transcripts and engaged deeply with it to grasp its full scope and meaning. This engagement involved repeatedly reviewing the data to uncover meanings and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2023). By the time I began creating initial codes, I had already reviewed the transcriptions multiple times to develop ideas and identify emerging patterns (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

3.6.2 Generating initial codes

Generating initial codes involves organising data into meaningful categories (Jackson & Nowell, 2021). Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) describe coding as a crucial step that connects data generation with interpreting its meaning. Busetto et al. (2020) suggest that coding helps researchers structure data to clearly understand the messages it conveys. Initial coding, also known as open coding, involves breaking down data into various segments and applying coding methods to them (Saldaña, 2021). Saldaña (2021) notes that initial codes are not fixed and may evolve throughout the analysis process. In this study, I organised the data according to the interview questions to facilitate coding. In the next step, I began to search for and refine themes in the analysis.

3.6.3 Exploring and realigning the analysis of themes

Braun and Clarke (2023) explain that themes provide a broader understanding than codes. I organised the various codes into prospective themes, grouping related codes under each theme. In line with their guidance, I utilised a table as a visual tool to sort the codes into themes. Subsequently, I refined these themes by reviewing the grouped concepts to ensure they formed a coherent pattern. The final step involved defining and naming the themes.

3.6.4 Defining and naming themes

This process involves understanding the essence of each theme and determining what aspects of the data each theme represents (Braun & Clarke, 2023). I reviewed the data extracts for each theme and organised them into a coherent interpretation, substantiated by direct quotations. The process culminated in the production of a report, which will be explored further in the

subsequent chapter. According to Braun and Clarke (2023), this phase involves the conclusive analysis and composition of the thematic analysis to construct a persuasive narrative that validates the analysis's credibility for the reader.

3.7 Credibility of the study

Researcher credibility in qualitative research involves the ability to faithfully represent participants' perspectives, paralleling the concept of validity in quantitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2013). In this study, credibility was maintained through methods such as triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, interviews with probing questions, and addressing researcher bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2009). These techniques are essential in ensuring the credibility of qualitative research findings.

3.7.1 Triangulation and member checking

Triangulation is a method researchers use to enhance the credibility of their findings by integrating diverse perspectives and approaches (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). As noted by Henry (2015), this involves collecting data from various sources about the same phenomenon, enabling researchers to expand their understanding and reinforce their conclusions. Yeasmin and Rahman (2012) note that the choice of triangulation type depends on the study's objectives. In this study, the focus was on exploring DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. I identified DHs as the key informants who could provide the necessary insights, as they directly experience the challenges and successes of enacting leadership. Therefore, data source triangulation was the most suitable approach, allowing me to identify themes from the diverse perspectives of participants and enhance the study's credibility (Creswell, 2014). I achieved this by interviewing four DHs from different schools to gather their unique insights on leadership experiences.

In a qualitative research process, member checking involves researchers sharing their data, interpretations, and conclusions with participants to ensure clarity of intentions and to gain valuable insights. This approach helps participants understand the research process and their role within it. Researchers may present the final report to participants for confirmation of the interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2007; Henry, 2015). Following each interview, I summarised the transcripts and conducted

follow-up interviews to allow participants to provide feedback on the findings (Creswell, 2014).

3.7.2 Peer debriefing and prolonged engagement in the field

According to Henry (2015), peer debriefing is essential for clarifying aspects of research that may be ambiguous in the researcher's mind. In this study, I engaged the expertise of a distinguished and accomplished academic from the University of KwaZulu-Natal as my peer reviewer to assess my research methodology and interpretations concerning the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning.

3.7.3 Clarification of my bias as a researcher

I conducted thorough, semi-structured interviews with participants, using open-ended questions and probes to gather in-depth information. Addressing researcher biases and assumptions throughout the research process through reflexive writing and critical self-examination contributes to the clarification of potential biases, enhancing the overall credibility of the study. Dependability is crucial for ensuring the reliability and consistency of the study's findings, ensuring that the findings are consistent with the raw data generated and that other researchers would arrive at similar findings, interpretations, and conclusions about the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To maintain the dependability of the findings in this study, I meticulously maintained an audit trail, which involved documenting all research activities (Creswell & Creswell, 2009). All project-related materials, including transcripts, notes, and audiotapes were securely stored on both the supervisor's computer and my laptop to ensure accessibility if needed. I presented participants' viewpoints equally, allowing readers to form unbiased judgments (Creswell, 2014). I engaged participants as partners in the research process to mitigate power imbalances (Cohen et al., 2007). I actively recognised and acknowledged participants' prior experiences and biases throughout the study.

3.7.4 Transferability of the findings of the study

In this context, transferability means that the study's findings can be applied to similar situations (Creswell & Creswell, 2009). As a result, I provided a thorough and detailed account of the entire investigative procedure to make it easier for others to replicate the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Qualitative researchers introduced the concept of confirmability

to gauge the degree to which findings can be supported or verified by others (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Morse et al., 2002). Biddix (2018) describes confirmability as a data analysis issue, stating that researchers can verify it by providing explicit details about data analysis procedures, such as how data sources were coded and how those codes were transformed into themes. This method, sometimes referred to as an audit trail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), offers enough detail for another researcher to replicate the same steps and reach similar conclusions. Thomas (2006) has suggested an alternative approach, called independent parallel coding, where two researchers independently code a data source and then compare their codes for consistency, clarity, and congruence during data analysis. In essence, confirmability refers to the extent to which others can attain the same results, ideally through replication, although this is rarely feasible (Elliott et al., 1999).

3.8 Ethical considerations

The University of KwaZulu-Natal has established a research code of ethics that emphasises excellence and ethical accountability in the generation, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge. Researchers are obligated to obtain approval from their institution's ethics committees to receive impartial guidance regarding the ethical aspects of their proposed studies (De Vos et al., 2011). Ethical standards, including obtaining permission, securing informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and safeguarding privacy and confidentiality, must be upheld.

To conduct a study in schools, I started by seeking information from schools and then requested permission from the DBE and applied for ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. After being granted access to schools, I requested potential participants to participate in the research. I informed participants about the study's purpose and their expected role, while assuring them that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. I then asked them to sign consent forms to confirm their voluntary participation.

I assured participants that the study did not involve any form of deception or compensation. They were informed that they could access the research report in the University of KwaZulu-Natal's library if needed. I guaranteed participants confidentiality, explaining that any information shared during one-on-one interviews would remain private and only be discussed

with supervisors for guidance. Additionally, I assured participants of their anonymity by informing them that their names would not be disclosed during the dissemination of results. Thus, instead of using their real names, pseudonyms were employed to protect their identities.

3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter described the processes followed in conducting the study. It addressed the philosophical assumptions underpinning the study and the paradigm guiding its execution. The chapter elaborated on the research approach, design, sampling techniques, and methods for data generation and analysis. Furthermore, it outlined the measures implemented to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and the ethical considerations maintained throughout the research process. The subsequent chapter, Chapter Four, provides an analysis and interpretation of the data generated, accompanied by a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The aim of the study was to explore the experiences of DHs in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. The chapter begins with a description of participants, followed by a table that explains how themes were identified from the data. The chapter then presents, analyses and interprets the findings thematically. Lastly, it discusses the findings in relation to the previous research.

Data were generated from four participants through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The participants were DHs from selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. The main research question for this study was: What are the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province?

4.2 Description of the participants in the study

This study included Foundation phase, INTERSEN phase and Senior phase DHs as participants. The DHs' teaching experience spanned 18 to 31 years, while their tenure in the DH role ranged from five to 28 years.

Table 1: Participants' biographical information

Participants	Gender	Phase	Years as a teacher	Years as a DH
DH1	Female	Senior	29 years	25 years
DH2	Male	INTERSEN	30 years	28 years
DH3	Female	Foundation and INTERSEN	31 years	Five years
DH4	Female	INTERSEN	18 Years	Seven years

4.3 Research questions, themes and sub-themes

Table 2: Research questions, themes and sub-themes

Research Questions	Themes and Sub-Themes
1. How do DHs understand their leadership role for teaching and learning?	<p>Theme 1: DHs’ understanding of their leadership role for teaching and learning.</p> <p>Sub-Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum monitoring and supervision • Creating a supportive environment for teachers and learners • Communication and teamwork
2. How do DHs enact their leadership role for teaching and learning?	<p>Theme 2: DHs’ enactment of their leadership role for teaching and learning.</p> <p>Sub-Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development and mentorship • Delegation and distribution of work • Democratic leadership
3. What are the factors that enable or disable the DHs’ leadership for teaching and learning?	<p>Theme 3: Factors that enable and disable the DHs’ leadership for teaching and learning.</p> <p>Sub-Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionalism and ethical leadership • Curriculum management and supervision • Building collaboration and team building • Access to professional development opportunities • Time and resource management • Resource limitations • Heavy workload and time constraints • Resistance from teachers and internal conflicts • Learners with learning barriers • Lack of management and leadership skills
4. What support do DHs need to address the challenges they face in performing their leadership role for teaching and learning?	<p>Theme 4: The support that DHs need to address the challenges they face in performing their leadership role for teaching and learning.</p> <p>Sub-Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased resources and infrastructure support • Professional development and emotional support • Parental and community involvement • CPD in DH responsibilities • CPD in teacher responsibilities • Support from the DoE

4.4 Discussion of themes

The themes were extracted based on participants' answers to the interview questions aligned with the research sub-questions that guided the study. Four themes emerged, each connected to the research questions, and each theme included sub-themes. The following theme emerged from participants in response to the study's first research question: How do DHs understand their leadership role for teaching and learning?

4.4.1 Theme 1: DHs' understanding of their leadership role for teaching and learning

This theme explores how DHs understand their leadership role for teaching and learning. When the participants were asked about their understanding of their leadership role, several shared similar views. The responses were categorised into the following sub-themes: curriculum monitoring and supervision, creating a supportive environment for teachers and learners, and communication and teamwork.

4.4.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Curriculum monitoring and supervision

This study found that the participants experienced changes in their role, with a strong focus on curriculum oversight and supervision. The participants emphasised the importance of their role in ensuring the curriculum was covered and aligned with lesson plans, ensuring the quality and integrity of learners' work. Some participants felt their primary responsibility was to oversee the curriculum's delivery, providing guidance and direction for curriculum development and instructional strategies. One participant saw their role as central to maintaining academic standards, providing a vision for the department and ensuring continuity in teaching. While some participants were enthusiastic about this responsibility, others highlighted challenges in maintaining quality due to the heavy workload associated with the role. Here are remarks provided by some of the participants:

As a DH, I see myself as the heart of the school because I'm the one who monitors and supervises curriculum coverage. (DH1)

My job is to provide vision and direction for curriculum development and instructional strategies. (DH3)

For some participants, this role was central to ensuring academic excellence and effective teaching. However, one participant expressed concerns about the balance between their workload and the expectations placed on them:

The responsibility of overseeing curriculum delivery is important, but the workload can sometimes be overwhelming. It's tough to manage everything and still ensure that the curriculum is being delivered effectively. (DH4)

Most of the study participants emphasised the importance of curriculum oversight as their central responsibility. They noted that curriculum management was vital for maintaining academic standards and ensuring continuity in teaching practices. Participants reported being deeply involved in various aspects of curriculum implementation, such as lesson planning, assessment, and instructional methods. This hands-on involvement was seen as crucial for ensuring that educational goals were achieved and that teachers received the necessary support to improve their instructional practices.

However, participants also noted the challenges they faced in fulfilling these responsibilities. Many reported difficulties due to limited training opportunities and heavy workloads, which impeded their ability to effectively monitor and supervise the curriculum. Some participants expressed frustration at being overwhelmed by these demands, particularly as their roles expanded beyond what they had initially anticipated. These findings resonate with those of Seobi and Wood (2016) and Ogina (2017), who similarly identify the heavy workloads and insufficient training as significant barriers to effective curriculum monitoring by DHs.

The findings from this study align with Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership theory, which underscores the necessity for school leaders to ensure the effective implementation of the curriculum while providing instructional support to teachers. Furthermore, Mestry (2017) found that the active involvement of DHs in curriculum supervision plays a critical role in enhancing teaching and learning outcomes. The participants' experiences suggest that while DHs are central to curriculum management, the challenges they face can hinder their effectiveness unless additional support and training are provided.

4.4.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Creating a supportive environment for teachers and learners

Participants emphasised the importance of creating a supportive environment for both teachers and learners. Participants acknowledged their role in leading by example and cultivating a positive, open, and respectful atmosphere. They highlighted the need to motivate teachers and to recognise and praise their good work. Empathy was also identified as crucial, with participants noting that understanding teachers' perspectives and continuously motivating them were key to fostering accountability and mutual respect. One participant explained that motivated teachers were more likely to pass on positivity to their learners, creating a better learning environment. Here are remarks provided by some of the participants:

A happy teacher is a happy class. If teachers are motivated and supported, they will transfer that positivity to their learners. (DH4)

You must understand their views, motivate them, and lead by example. Encourage teamwork and openness. (DH2)

Most of the study participants agreed that fostering a supportive and empathetic environment was crucial to ensuring both teacher satisfaction and student success. They emphasised that creating an atmosphere that uplifted teachers was key to cultivating a positive and effective learning environment. These participants expressed the belief that leadership that focused on morale-building, collaboration, and support was essential for achieving success for both teachers and learners. However, some participants noted challenges in their efforts to create such an environment. They cited resistance from some teachers and a lack of support from both peers and the wider school community as significant obstacles.

This finding aligns with Fullan's (2019) assertion that a supportive environment is essential for motivating educators and fostering a positive school climate. Furthermore, it aligns with instructional leadership theory, which highlights the importance of providing guidance and support to enhance teaching practices (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). As some participants reported, overcoming resistance and establishing a supportive atmosphere requires consistent effort and a leadership style rooted in empathy and understanding. This approach has been linked to greater teacher satisfaction and improved outcomes for learners, as leadership focused

on collaboration and morale-building can encourage a more positive and cohesive school culture.

4.4.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Communication and teamwork

This study found that when participants assumed the role of DHs, they recognised the significance of communication and teamwork in creating a positive and cooperative work environment. Some participants emphasised that open communication with their colleagues was crucial for maintaining a collaborative atmosphere and fostering mutual support. For some, encouraging feedback and ensuring that teachers felt comfortable sharing their challenges were key components of effective leadership. A few participants also highlighted that being approachable and maintaining respect were essential for building trust within the team. Some of the participants expressed their opinions as follows:

You must always communicate with your teachers and support them. Allow them to share their challenges so that you can assist them. (DH1)

When you lead, you must be approachable. Teachers should feel free to come to you with their concerns. (DH2)

The participants in this study agreed that effective communication played a crucial role in enhancing teamwork and fostering a collaborative environment within the school setting. They noted that clear communication allowed for the alignment of goals among staff members, thereby creating a shared understanding of objectives and expectations. Many participants highlighted the importance of open communication channels, which facilitated the smooth functioning of teams and allowed for addressing challenges collectively. However, a few participants pointed out that ineffective communication occasionally hindered progress, leading to confusion and delays in decision-making.

This finding is in line with the study by Bush and Sargsyan (2013), who found that communication is important in effective leadership and plays a crucial role in aligning organisational goals. Similarly, Hallinger and Murphy (1985), in their instructional leadership theory, argue that communication is central to promoting collaborative practices and shared

decision-making within educational institutions. This study's findings support these theoretical perspectives, suggesting that effective communication is not only essential for goal alignment but also for cultivating a team-oriented approach to problem-solving and decision-making in schools.

The following theme emerged from participants' responses to the second research question: How do DHs enact their leadership role for teaching and learning?

4.4.2 Theme 2: DHs' enactment of their leadership role for teaching and learning

This theme explores the strategies employed by DHs in fulfilling their leadership role in teaching and learning. When the participants were asked about how they enacted their leadership role, several responses highlighted similar approaches. Under this theme, the following sub-themes emerged: professional development and mentorship, delegation and distribution of work, and democratic leadership.

4.4.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Professional development and mentorship

This study found that participants played a significant role in supporting teachers through mentoring, organising workshops, and promoting skills enhancement. Many participants emphasised that it was their responsibility to equip new teachers with the necessary tools for success. Some participants mentioned that this commitment to mentoring was viewed as an essential aspect of fostering the teaching skills of new or less experienced teachers, which in turn helped to boost their confidence and instructional competence. Some participants frequently organised staff development sessions aimed at professionalising administrative and teaching practices. These sessions covered vital topics such as leave policies, register marking, and assessment preparation. Here are remarks provided by some of the participants:

It's my job to equip new teachers and mentor them so they can gain confidence in their teaching. (DH3)

I organise staff development sessions to guide teachers on important tasks like marking registers and preparing assessments. (DH1)

Most of the participants in this study acknowledged the importance of professional development and mentorship in their roles. They recognised the need to continually support the growth of less experienced teachers in order to maintain high educational standards and improve teaching practices. The participants expressed a commitment to developing staff capabilities, understanding that this not only benefitted individual teachers but also contributed to the overall quality of the educational environment. One participant remarked that they saw their role as a means to help foster the development of younger or less experienced teachers, particularly through offering guidance and sharing expertise. These findings suggest that while many DHs understand the importance of professional development and mentorship in fostering teacher growth, the effective delivery of such programmes requires sustained support and planning from the school leadership.

These findings align with Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership theory, which emphasises professional development as a key strategy for improving teaching practices. In their model, instructional leaders are expected to focus on the development of staff in ways that directly impact student learning outcomes. Furthermore, this study's findings align with the study by Awodiji (2024), who found that workshops and in-service training are vital tools for building the capacity of teachers. Despite the widespread recognition of the importance of professional development, some participants noted challenges in implementing effective mentorship programmes due to time constraints and resource limitations. In line with these observations, researchers have found that, although professional development is often prioritised, the availability of time and institutional support can be limiting factors (Hallinger, 2003). Some participants shared that mentorship efforts could be better structured to ensure consistency and follow-through in the development process, particularly for newer teachers. This indicates that while the recognition of the need for professional growth is strong, logistical barriers sometimes hinder its full implementation, a challenge highlighted in similar studies globally (Makaye, 2015; Munje et al., 2020).

4.4.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Delegation and distribution of work

This study found that some participants employed strategies such as sharing responsibilities and distributing tasks among team members to balance workloads and ensure effective administration. Some participants mentioned creating committees for various activities, such

as fundraising and disciplinary matters, to promote shared responsibility. This approach helped in managing the workload, allowing participants to focus on core leadership tasks. In addition, participants indicated that delegating tasks was a way to encourage staff participation and promote distributed decision-making. These explanations were provided by some of the participants:

I delegate tasks by creating committees for things like fundraising and discipline. It ensures that no one is overwhelmed. (DH4)

I distribute responsibilities to encourage teamwork and shared accountability. (DH1)

The study's findings indicate that the majority of participants believed in delegation and work distribution as a strategy to reduce their administrative burdens and promote shared responsibility within their departments. They maintained that sharing responsibilities with their teams reduced individual stress, alleviated administrative burdens, and fostered collaboration. Some participants indicated that delegation allowed them to engage their teams more deeply, fostering a sense of ownership and shared accountability within the department. However, while many participants acknowledged the benefits of delegation, some found it difficult to implement due to a lack of trust in their team members' capabilities or the perception that certain tasks required their direct oversight. While delegation is a vital strategy for managing workloads and fostering team cohesion, its successful implementation depends on trust, communication, and leadership training. The findings suggest that providing professional development in delegation and distributed leadership could help DHs maximise the benefits of this approach, reducing role strain and enhancing departmental efficiency.

This finding aligns with the findings of Harris et al. (2022), who found that the distribution of work fosters collaboration and improves organisational outcomes. Similarly, Leithwood et al. (2017) argue that effective delegation enhances teamwork and ensures that leadership responsibilities are more evenly distributed. Constantinides (2023) further explains that delegation is essential in developing staff competencies and managing workloads efficiently, ultimately leading to improved teaching and learning outcomes.

Despite the advantages of delegation, some participants expressed reluctance to delegate, fearing that their colleagues might not execute tasks to their expectations. This aligns with findings from Kalane and Rambuda (2022), who found that some DHs struggle with delegation due to concerns about accountability and quality assurance. Furthermore, Ogina (2017) found that strong communication between DHs and their teams is necessary to ensure that delegated tasks are carried out effectively.

Study participants who had previous leadership experience reported feeling more comfortable with delegation than their peers. It appears that their previous management experience helped them develop confidence in sharing responsibilities. This is in line with the findings of Muriuki et al. (2020), who suggest that leadership training and experience can influence the extent to which leaders effectively delegate tasks. Similarly, Jaca (2021) noted that DHs with leadership training are more likely to utilise delegation as a tool for effective management.

4.4.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Democratic leadership

This study found that some participants employed democratic leadership strategies by actively involving teachers in decision-making processes. These participants aimed to foster a supportive work culture where teachers felt respected and valued. By engaging teachers in the decision-making process, they sought to promote inclusivity and teamwork. Some participants described holding regular meetings, such as weekly briefings, to encourage open communication, which also served as a platform to motivate teachers. Others highlighted the importance of seeking teachers' input on decisions to build a collaborative and cohesive work environment. As some of the participants explained:

I lead democratically by holding weekly briefings where teachers can share their thoughts and ideas. (DH4)

I involve teachers in decisions to promote team building and ensure everyone feels valued. (DH2)

Some of the study participants agreed that collaboration and inclusivity were key leadership strategies in fostering a sense of belonging and mutual respect. They expressed that democratic

leadership encouraged teachers to actively participate in decision-making, which contributed to a more supportive and engaging work environment. Many participants felt that by involving teachers in decision-making, they could create a work culture where teachers felt valued, respected, and motivated to contribute towards achieving departmental goals. However, some participants expressed concerns that decision-making processes could sometimes be delayed due to the need for collective agreement, which occasionally led to inefficiencies.

This finding aligns with the findings of Fullan (2019), who found that collaborative decision-making plays a crucial role in achieving shared objectives. Similarly, Leithwood et al. (2017) argue that fostering a participatory work culture improves teacher motivation and strengthens professional relationships within departments. Harris et al. (2022) further emphasise that inclusive leadership contributes to organisational improvement by enhancing teamwork and shared accountability.

Despite the benefits of democratic leadership, some participants reported challenges in its implementation. They noted that not all teachers were equally willing to engage in decision-making, with some preferring to follow instructions rather than participating actively. This observation is supported by Kalane and Rambuda (2022), who argue that leadership effectiveness depends on both the leader's ability to encourage participation and the willingness of subordinates to engage meaningfully. Ogina (2017) stresses that clear communication between DHs and their teams is essential to ensuring that inclusive leadership remains productive rather than a hindrance to efficiency.

One participant, who had previous experience in a leadership position, expressed confidence in using a democratic leadership approach. This participant believed that engaging teachers in decision-making helped build trust and foster a more positive departmental culture. This finding is in line with Muriuki et al. (2020), who suggest that leaders with previous managerial experience are more likely to embrace inclusive leadership practices.

The following theme emerged from participants' responses to the third research question: What are the factors that enable/disable the DHs' leadership for teaching and learning?

4.4.3 Theme 3: Factors that enable and disable the DHs' leadership for teaching and learning

This theme examines the critical elements that enable and disable DHs in their leadership role for teaching and learning. The factors explored include personal skills, strategies, and support systems that empower DHs to navigate challenges and fulfil their responsibilities. The experiences of the participants were categorised in terms of enabling and disabling factors. Under this theme, the following sub-themes emerged: professionalism and ethical leadership, curriculum management and supervision, building collaboration and team building, access to professional development opportunities, time and resource management, resource limitations, heavy workload and time constraints, resistance from teachers and internal conflicts, learners with learning barriers, and shortage of management and leadership skills.

4.4.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Professionalism and ethical leadership

This study found that participants viewed professionalism and fairness as central to creating trust and respect within their departments. Many participants emphasised that maintaining ethical leadership practices was essential for promoting a positive working environment and ensuring equitable treatment of teachers. By focusing on fairness, they believed they could foster an environment of mutual respect. Here are remarks provided by some of the participants:

You must provide professionalism in your department. Treat all teachers equally, and don't make favours. (DH1)

You must observe teachers' performance fairly and offer constructive feedback. (DH3)

Some of the study participants agreed that professionalism and ethical leadership were essential in fostering a culture of trust, respect, and accountability within their departments. They stated that maintaining high professional and ethical standards motivated teachers to perform better and contributed to a positive work environment. Participants emphasised that treating all teachers equitably helped to build a cohesive team, minimise conflicts, and encourage collaboration. However, while most participants recognised the importance of professionalism, some admitted facing challenges in consistently upholding ethical leadership due to external pressures, workload demands, and conflicting expectations from senior management.

While professionalism and ethical leadership are vital for fostering trust, respect, and cohesion within departments, their success depends on consistent enforcement, clear communication, and the ability of DHs to navigate challenges with integrity. The findings suggest that professional development programmes focusing on ethical leadership and conflict resolution could further equip DHs with the skills needed to sustain a professional and ethical work environment.

This finding aligns with the study of Leithwood et al. (2017), who found that ethical leadership fosters trust and creates a positive organisational culture that promotes effective teaching and learning. Similarly, Bush and Sargsyan (2013) argue that professionalism in educational leadership is crucial for maintaining organisational integrity and ensuring that departmental goals are achieved through ethical decision-making. Muriuki et al. (2020) further emphasise that leaders who demonstrate professionalism and fairness are more likely to gain the trust and commitment of their teams, leading to improved teacher morale and student outcomes.

Despite the benefits of professionalism and ethical leadership, some participants reported challenges in balancing fairness with firm decision-making. They noted that certain teachers resisted accountability measures, perceiving them as punitive rather than developmental. This aligns with the findings of Kalane and Rambuda (2022), who suggest that while ethical leadership is essential for fostering a positive work culture, it requires clear communication and consistent enforcement of professional standards. Ogina (2017) stresses that DHs must demonstrate both fairness and decisiveness to maintain a disciplined yet supportive work environment.

One participant who had previous experience in a leadership position expressed greater confidence in maintaining professionalism and ethical leadership. This participant believed that leading by example was an effective way to instil professional values among teachers. This aligns with the findings of Jaca (2021), who found that leaders with prior management experience are more likely to uphold ethical leadership practices due to their understanding of organisational dynamics and conflict resolution strategies.

4.4.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Curriculum management and supervision

This study found that participants recognised the importance of monitoring curriculum implementation to ensure that lesson plans were in alignment with educational objectives. Participants emphasised their central role in maintaining teaching standards and promoting student success. Many participants viewed their position as crucial in providing guidance and direction for curriculum development and instructional strategies. Some of the participants in this study agreed that curriculum management was a crucial component of their responsibilities as DHs. They emphasised the importance of their role in maintaining consistency and quality in teaching practices, expressing that effective oversight was essential for achieving academic goals. However, some participants highlighted the challenges associated with supervising curriculum implementation, particularly in balancing these duties with their teaching responsibilities. One participant shared feeling overwhelmed by the additional administrative burden associated with supervising curriculum implementation. Comments provided by some of the participants are as follows:

You must monitor teachers' work, ensuring their lesson plans align with the curriculum.

(DH1)

I provide vision and direction for curriculum development and instructional strategies.

(DH3)

It appeared that some teachers who applied for the DH position did so with specific assumptions regarding the role's responsibilities. Some may have assumed that curriculum management would be a straightforward task, but they later realised the complexities involved. Several participants expressed frustration at the increased responsibility of monitoring lesson planning, ensuring alignment with academic standards, and addressing inconsistencies in instructional delivery.

This finding is in line with previous research that emphasises the significance of curriculum management in instructional leadership. Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership theory underscores the importance of curriculum oversight as a driver for student

achievement. Furthermore, Mestry (2017) found that the role of school leaders, including DHs, directly influences student outcomes through effective curriculum supervision.

While some participants had prior experience in leadership roles, they still found the demands of curriculum management challenging. A possible explanation is that their previous experience did not fully prepare them for the dual responsibilities of teaching and administration. This aligns with Davidson's (2016) findings in Australia, which indicate that new school leaders, including those with prior leadership experience, often feel overwhelmed by the scope of their responsibilities. One participant, despite acknowledging the increased demands, did not express the same level of frustration. This participant's prior experience of acting in a leadership role may have equipped them with the necessary skills to manage curriculum responsibilities effectively. It is also possible that the official appointment as a DH served as a motivating factor, inspiring confidence in handling the complexities of the role.

4.4.3.3 Sub-theme 3: Building collaboration and team building

Participants emphasised the importance of fostering teamwork among teachers, encouraging open communication, and creating a supportive work environment. Many participants believed that encouraging collaboration would directly lead to a stronger, more unified team, which would ultimately benefit the learners. One participant pointed out that by promoting teamwork, teachers felt more comfortable approaching each other with challenges, leading to better problem-solving. Others reflected on how collaboration among teachers created a stronger foundation for student success. The following are remarks provided by some of the participants:

Encourage teamwork and openness. Teachers should feel free to come to you with their challenges. (DH2)

When teachers work together, it creates a stronger foundation for student success. (DH4)

Most of the study participants agreed that fostering collaboration and teamwork among staff members was a key aspect of their responsibilities as DHs. They emphasised that a culture of

teamwork enhanced shared responsibility, encouraged innovation in teaching practices, and ultimately improved student learning outcomes. However, some participants expressed challenges in building effective collaboration, particularly in cases where staff members resisted change or lacked motivation.

Most participants expressed frustration at the difficulty of aligning different teaching styles, resolving conflicts, and fostering an environment of open communication. Some participants shared feelings of being overwhelmed by the additional responsibility of team-building initiatives. This finding aligns with previous studies that highlight the significance of collaborative leadership in educational settings. Fullan (2019) argues that transformational leadership fosters collaborative relationships, enhancing staff engagement and productivity while aligning departmental efforts with organisational goals. Harris and Jones (2017) found that strong teamwork and collaboration among educators contribute to more effective teaching strategies and improved student performance.

Some of the study participants had prior experience in fostering teamwork, while others did not. One participant, despite acknowledging the additional challenges, did not express the same level of frustration as others. This participant's prior experience in leading teams may have equipped them with the necessary skills to navigate team dynamics effectively. It is also possible that being an officially appointed DH served as a motivating factor, inspiring confidence in handling the complexities of collaboration. Nonetheless, many participants, even those with prior experience, found the demands of team-building challenging. One reason for this might be that their prior experience did not adequately equip them to navigate the interpersonal and organisational challenges involved in cultivating a cooperative teaching atmosphere. This finding is supported by the study of Bush and Glover (2014), which indicates that school leaders often struggle with balancing team dynamics while ensuring the achievement of academic goals.

4.4.3.4 Sub-theme 4: Access to professional development opportunities

Some participants highlighted the importance of professional development opportunities to stay current with new leadership and teaching strategies. Many participants expressed the need for workshops and ongoing training to enhance their leadership and management skills. Some

emphasised that professional development not only helped them stay updated but also allowed them to handle challenges effectively and improve teaching outcomes. One participant noted that these opportunities were essential for their growth as educators and leaders. Some of the participants in this study had previously engaged in professional development activities, while others had not. Some participants expressed confidence in handling leadership responsibilities due to prior exposure to professional training programmes. It is possible that this exposure provided a strong foundation for managing the multifaceted demands of the DH role. Despite this, many DHs indicated that the lack of structured professional development opportunities posed a significant challenge. A possible explanation for this could be that professional growth requires both institutional support and personal initiative, and some DHs struggled to find a balance between these two aspects. Some of the participants noted:

We need workshops on leadership and management skills to stay updated with new methods. (DH3)

Ongoing trainings helps us handle challenges and improve teaching outcomes. (DH 4)

Most participants in this study agreed that access to professional development opportunities played a critical role in enhancing their effectiveness as DHs. They highlighted that ongoing learning equipped them with modern techniques and best practices, enabling them to address challenges and adapt to evolving educational demands. Many participants expressed that professional development provided them with valuable insights into leadership strategies, curriculum management, and instructional supervision. However, some participants reported difficulties in accessing relevant professional development programmes due to time constraints and limited institutional support.

This finding is in line with the study of Seobi and Wood (2016), who argue that professional development is a cornerstone of improving leadership effectiveness and instructional quality. Leithwood et al. (2017) and Hoy and Tarter (2011) suggest that continuous learning opportunities empower school leaders to navigate complex educational landscapes and implement innovative solutions to improve student outcomes.

4.4.3.5 Sub-theme 5: Time and resource management

This study found that participants recognise the importance of having adequate resources and administrative support to carry out their leadership roles without becoming overwhelmed by operational tasks. Many participants felt that better resources and administrative assistance were crucial for managing their responsibilities efficiently. Some noted that without proper support, it became challenging to focus on their instructional leadership duties. Some of the participants noted:

We need better resources and administrative support to manage our role effectively.

(DH1)

Administrative support and better infrastructure would make it easier to focus on instructional leadership. (DH4)

This study found that another critical coping strategy used by participants to navigate the challenges of their leadership role was effective resource allocation and time management. Participants noted that their effectiveness as instructional leaders was significantly influenced by the availability of resources and the ability to manage their time efficiently. However, the lack of structured support and adequate resources within schools meant that participants had to find alternative ways to balance their leadership and teaching responsibilities. The findings of this study underscore the need for systematic workload management and resource allocation strategies to support DHs. Without these measures, DHs are likely to experience burnout, which may negatively impact their effectiveness as leaders. The study highlighted the importance of creating a structured approach to time and resource management to enable DHs to perform their roles efficiently and effectively. This finding aligns with Creagh et al. (2023), who argue that workload redistribution and resource provision are essential for enabling effective leadership. Without these supports, DHs often struggle to focus on instructional leadership, which in turn impacts the quality of teaching and learning.

Participants in this study reported that limited infrastructure, inadequate staffing, and excessive administrative tasks detracted from their core function of improving teaching and learning. These findings resonate with those of Kalane and Rambuda (2022), who found that the overwhelming workload placed on DHs often limits their ability to execute their instructional leadership responsibilities effectively. Additionally, the study highlighted that time constraints force participants to prioritise urgent administrative tasks over their leadership role, which compromises their ability to support teachers.

Despite these challenges, some participants developed coping mechanisms, such as prioritising essential tasks, delegating responsibilities where possible, and streamlining processes to maximise efficiency. However, this study suggested that a lack of structured workload management strategies at the school level contributed to the stress and inefficiency experienced by participants. This finding aligns with the study by Bipath and Nkabinde (2018), who found that DHs face challenges in balancing instructional responsibilities with administrative roles due to insufficient support systems and limited time availability.

4.4.3.6 Sub-theme 6: Resource limitations

Some participants identified resource limitations as a significant barrier to effective teaching and learning. The shortages of learning materials, overcrowded classrooms, and infrastructure issues like lack of water and electricity were common concerns. Some participants highlighted that the lack of resources, particularly for practical lessons, hindered learners' full participation. Others pointed out the need for more computers to promote digital literacy among learners. Overcrowded classrooms, where learners were required to share desks, were seen as impacting both concentration and productivity in the learning environment. Here are remarks provided by some of the participants:

The shortage of resources is a major challenge. Sometimes, learners don't have enough materials for practical lessons. (DH1)

Overcrowded classrooms where learners share desks affect teaching and learning. (DH3)

A further disabling factor that emerged from this study was that of resource limitations. Participants expressed concerns about inadequate resources, which significantly hindered their ability to facilitate effective learning environments. The lack of essential infrastructure, teaching materials, and administrative support placed additional stress on their role and negatively affected the quality of teaching and learning. The study findings suggest that resource constraints are a persistent disabling factor for DHs and that insufficient support structures exacerbate the problem. The findings suggest that a more structured and strategic approach to resource allocation is required to support DHs in their leadership roles. Without adequate resources, DHs are forced to find alternative coping strategies, which may not always be sustainable or effective. The study suggests that a more structured approach to workload management and time allocation is needed to ensure DHs can balance their teaching and leadership duties. Without proper intervention, DHs may continue to experience burnout, ultimately affecting their effectiveness as school leaders. This finding aligns with those of du Plessis and Mestry (2019), who argue that limited resources in schools, particularly in underprivileged areas, restrict DHs from effectively fulfilling their leadership role. Similarly, du Plessis and Mestry (2019) found that rural schools often struggle with inadequate infrastructure, teaching materials, and financial support, creating additional burdens for DHs. Kalane and Rambuda (2022) further support this by noting that DHs frequently face challenges in managing teaching and learning due to a lack of necessary resources, which ultimately affects student outcomes.

Moreover, Creagh et al. (2023) found that resource constraints contribute to workload intensification and time poverty among school leaders. This is particularly evident when DHs must compensate for the lack of resources by dedicating additional time and effort to make up for these deficiencies. The study also found that limited access to professional development opportunities further hinders DHs' ability to address these disabling factors effectively (Mabebe & Van der Walt, 2018).

This finding contradicts the assumptions of instructional leadership theory, which emphasises the role of school leaders in creating supportive learning environments (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Without adequate resources, DHs struggle to implement instructional leadership

effectively. The instructional leadership theory also stresses that school leaders require professional development opportunities and systemic support to enhance their leadership capacity, yet this study highlights that many DHs lack access to such resources.

4.4.3.7 Sub-theme 7: Heavy workload and time constraints

This study found that balancing the teaching and leadership role was a common challenge for the participants. Many participants reported that heavy workloads, combined with administrative duties, led them to work overtime, which affected their ability to focus on instructional leadership. The strain of balancing teaching responsibilities with leadership demands was evident across the responses. Participants mentioned the difficulty of managing and monitoring classes from grade R to 7 while also handling various administrative tasks. Several participants expressed the need for additional administrative support, as the demands often exceeded available time and energy. Below are comments shared by some of the participants:

I have a heavy workload. Managing grades R to 7 while doing admin tasks is overwhelming. (DH3)

I often stay late or work during holidays to keep up with everything. (DH4)

The participants emphasised that the combination of management, leadership, and teaching responsibilities significantly contributed to their heavy workloads. Many participants found it difficult to balance their teaching obligations with their leadership role, leading to stress and fatigue. This finding aligns with Creagh et al. (2023), who argue that workload redistribution and administrative support are crucial for effective leadership. Similarly, Malloy (2017) found that DHs struggle to balance instructional leadership with their teaching duties, resulting in increased stress and inefficiency.

Participants in this study highlighted limited time as a major obstacle to effectively managing their teaching and leadership responsibilities. Some reported slight reductions in teaching loads or relief from extra-curricular duties, yet they continued to feel burdened by the extensive administrative and instructional tasks. This issue of time constraints aligns with the findings of

Mudau et al. (2024), who observed that many DHs experience feelings of being overwhelmed due to ambiguous role expectations and heavy teaching workloads.

The issue of time constraints was also highlighted by Bipath and Nkabinde (2018), who found that DHs in South Africa struggle to execute their dual roles effectively. Additionally, Kalane and Rambuda (2022) observed that despite DHs accepting their new managerial role, the shortage of time makes it difficult to meet new expectations. The increased administrative workload detracts from their ability to provide instructional leadership, a key function of their role. This finding contradicts the assumptions of instructional leadership theory (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), which emphasises the importance of school leaders actively engaging in curriculum oversight and teacher development. The excessive workload and time limitations hinder DHs from effectively supporting teachers and monitoring student progress.

4.4.3.8 Sub-theme 8: Resistance from teachers and internal conflicts

This study found that some participants experienced resistance from teachers and internal conflicts, which made their efforts to implement positive changes in teaching practices more challenging. Some participants mentioned that certain teachers were reluctant to adapt to new strategies or expectations, making it difficult to achieve the desired changes. Others indicated that internal politics and conflicts among staff, often fuelled by union issues, disrupted teamwork and hindered effective collaboration. Here are insights offered by some of the participants:

Some teachers are not flexible or open to new ideas, which makes it difficult to implement changes. (DH2)

Internal conflicts, often fuelled by union issues, disrupt teamwork and cohesion. (DH4)

Another disabling factor identified in this study was teacher resistance to the leadership of the participants, which led to internal conflicts within the department. Some participants reported that teachers were reluctant to accept their authority, creating tensions that undermined their leadership efficacy. The findings suggest that resistance to change and internal politics limited the ability of participants to implement positive reforms effectively. Some participants

attributed this resistance to jealousy, particularly from teachers who had been their peers before the promotion. Others believed that teachers deliberately undermined their leadership credibility by resisting their directives and questioning their competence.

This finding aligns with Fullan's (2019) assertion that addressing resistance to change is crucial for organisational improvement. Similarly, Clark (2009) found that DHs in Ontario faced opposition from teachers who resisted supporting their new initiatives. In Virginia, Beam et al. (2016) reported similar findings where newly promoted school leaders struggled to gain credibility among teachers, especially when promoted within the same school. Their study also found that those promoted externally faced scepticism about their background and leadership abilities. Maboe (2013) found that South African middle managers faced resistance from difficult teachers who ignored deadlines and undermined their authority.

The study findings also suggest that DHs may lack the necessary conflict resolution and people management skills to navigate teacher resistance effectively. Some participants seemed unsure of the policies and procedures required to address insubordination and internal conflicts, leading to ongoing tensions. This reflects the importance of structured training in leadership and conflict management for newly appointed DHs. The study also implies that school principals and senior management may not be providing adequate support to DHs in asserting their authority and gaining teacher cooperation.

The findings suggest that DHs who encountered strong resistance from teachers found it difficult to fully embrace their leadership role, sometimes retreating into their previous teacher identities rather than asserting managerial authority. This highlights the need for formal induction programmes and professional development initiatives to equip DHs with the skills necessary for effective leadership and conflict resolution.

4.4.3.9 Sub-theme 9: Learners with learning barriers

Some participants highlighted the challenges learners faced due to various factors such as their socioeconomic backgrounds, long travel distances to school, and familial issues, which significantly affected their attendance, engagement, and academic performance. Participants noted that these barriers often hindered learners' ability to perform well academically. Here are

comments shared by most of the participants:

Some learners come from homes where they don't receive support from their parents, and this lack of support directly affects their learning. They struggle to complete their homework and keep up with the curriculum. (DH1)

There are learners who have learning difficulties, but unfortunately, we do not have enough resources or proper training to assist them effectively. (DH2)

Many learners travel long distances to school, and by the time they arrive, they are already exhausted. This exhaustion makes it difficult for them to focus and participate fully in class. (DH4)

The findings indicate that addressing learning barriers requires collaboration among teachers, parents, and communities, as well as the provision of additional resources and targeted teacher training. The lack of structured interventions within the school system appeared to contribute to the difficulties encountered by both learners and educators. Informal strategies, such as individual teacher efforts to provide additional assistance, were commonly used, but these were insufficient to meet the broader needs of learners with diverse learning challenges.

Moreover, the absence of comprehensive professional development programmes on inclusive education and differentiated teaching strategies exacerbated the problem. This aligns with Manuel (2020), who identified socioeconomic challenges and limited parental involvement as significant factors affecting learners' academic success. Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership theory also underscores the importance of creating inclusive learning environments to cater to diverse learner needs.

Participants in this study expressed the need for structured support from school management and the DoE to ensure that learners with learning barriers received adequate assistance. The findings suggest that without a unified approach to addressing learning challenges, teachers feel overwhelmed, and learners are at risk of falling behind academically. This is consistent with Tlali and Matete (2020), who argue that DHs require training in promoting inclusive

practices to accommodate linguistic and cultural diversity in schools. Furthermore, Manuel (2020) emphasises the importance of technological resources in enhancing learning experiences for learners with barriers.

The study also reveals that teachers believe that fostering a collaborative approach among stakeholders would minimise the challenges associated with learning barriers. Participants emphasised that beyond professional assistance, they needed empathy and active involvement from school leadership to foster a supportive learning environment. This finding aligns with the findings of Tapala et al. (2022), who argue that DHs play a crucial role in ensuring effective curriculum implementation and learner support.

The lack of structured forums for addressing learning barriers further complicated the situation, leaving teachers with limited avenues to seek guidance. This reflects the findings of Kalane and Rambuda (2022), who underscored the significance of professional development in equipping educators with the skills required to meet the needs of diverse learners. The findings suggest that an integrated support system, involving SMTs, teachers, and parents, is crucial for addressing learning barriers and improving learner outcomes.

4.4.3.10 Sub-theme 10: Lack of management and leadership skills

This study found that many participants encountered difficulties stemming from insufficient management and leadership skills, which were crucial for balancing their dual roles of administration and instructional leadership. These skills included decision-making, conflict resolution, time management, team leadership, and the ability to implement policies effectively. However, many participants reported feeling inadequately prepared for these responsibilities. Some participants shared that they were appointed to leadership role without sufficient training, and their backgrounds as teachers did not equip them with the managerial skills needed to manage their departments effectively or support teaching and learning. For many, the transition from teaching to leadership left a gap in their ability to address staff resistance, resolve conflicts, or balance their administrative duties with their teaching responsibilities. Here are the remarks provided by most of the participants:

I was never trained for this position. Everything I've learned, I had to learn on the job.

(DH3)

Leadership is different from teaching. I was trained as a teacher, not a manager, and that gap affects how I lead. (DH1)

I don't always know how to handle conflicts or difficult situations because I was not given the tools for that. (DH2)

The study's findings indicate that the majority of participants did not possess the required management and leadership competencies to fulfil their roles effectively. Consequently, many participants experienced frustration, leading to reduced self-confidence when fulfilling their leadership role. Although participants recognised the significance of having management and leadership skills, the lack of formal training made it difficult for them to navigate their roles, particularly when dealing with complex challenges such as teacher supervision and curriculum management. The study indicates that without adequate leadership and management training, DHs struggle to assert their authority and effectively lead their departments. This lack of preparedness results in increased job-related stress and hinders their ability to improve teaching and learning outcomes. The findings suggest an urgent need for structured leadership development programmes to equip DHs with essential skills to effectively fulfil their leadership responsibilities.

Similarly, Jaca (2021) found that DHs transitioning from teaching roles to leadership positions struggled due to inadequate training in management and leadership. This aligns with the findings of Seobi and Wood (2016), who emphasise the need for structured professional development programmes to provide DHs with required skills for effectively managing their departments. Likewise, Hoy and Tarter (2011) argue that instructional leadership theory advocates for continuous training and support to develop leaders' competencies and enhance their effectiveness.

Moreover, research by Bush and Sargsyan (2013) highlights the importance of leadership training for middle managers in education, noting that many DHs enter their roles with little or no prior management experience. Kalane and Rambuda (2022) further argue that the absence of targeted leadership training negatively impacts DHs' ability to support teachers and oversee curriculum implementation. The study findings also align with Muriuki et al. (2020), who stress the importance of professional development in helping DHs transition from teaching to leadership roles successfully. Ogina (2017) indicates that the lack of standardised training programmes results in inconsistent leadership strategies among DHs, further complicating their roles. In examining the broader implications of leadership training gaps, research by Ahmed and Al-Dhuwaihi (2020) in Saudi Arabia reveals that newly appointed school leaders often feel unprepared due to inadequate formal training before assuming leadership positions.

The following theme emerged from participants in response to the study's fourth research question: What support do DHs need to address the challenges they face in performing their leadership role for teaching and learning?

4.4.4 Theme 4: The support DHs need to perform their leadership role for teaching and learning

This theme focuses on the various forms of support that DHs require to perform their leadership role for teaching and learning. When participants were asked about the support they needed to perform their leadership role for teaching and learning, several common responses were shared. Under this theme, the following sub-themes emerged: increased resources and infrastructure support, professional development for DH responsibilities, professional development for teacher responsibilities, emotional support, parental and community involvement, and support from the DoE.

4.4.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Increased resources and infrastructure support

Participants expressed the need for additional teaching resources, improved infrastructure, and enhanced security measures. Some participants emphasised the importance of having better administrative support to manage tasks more efficiently. Others highlighted the necessity for more classrooms, modern technology, and better administrative spaces to create a conducive teaching and learning environment. Security was also a key concern for several participants,

who pointed out the importance of fencing and other safety measures to ensure the protection of learners, staff, and the school's infrastructure. The following suggestions were provided by some of the participants:

We need security measures like fencing to keep our learners and staff safe. (DH1)

Additional classrooms and modern technology would improve our teaching and learning environment. (DH2)

This study's findings suggest that most DHs believed improved resources and infrastructure were critical for establishing a secure and supportive learning environment, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes. Participants expressed the need for better-equipped classrooms, teaching materials, and access to technology to support both educators and learners. The absence of these resources was identified as a major challenge, limiting their ability to effectively manage teaching and learning within their departments. Despite these concerns, some participants acknowledged efforts by schools and local authorities to address resource shortages. However, they noted that these interventions were often inconsistent and lacked sustainability. The findings suggest that while some schools attempt to mitigate resource challenges through community involvement and partnerships, these efforts remain insufficient in addressing the broader systemic issues affecting resource allocation in schools.

The study indicates that insufficient resources and inadequate infrastructure contribute to the difficulties DHs face in managing their responsibilities effectively. Participants emphasised that an increase in resources and infrastructure support would not only improve teaching and learning conditions but also reduce stress levels among educators, allowing them to focus on delivering quality education. The findings highlight the need for a more structured and consistent approach by the DBE and other stakeholders to ensure equitable resource distribution across schools, particularly in underprivileged areas.

This finding aligns with du Plessis and Mestry (2019), who emphasises the critical role of adequate resources in facilitating effective teaching and learning. Similarly, du Plessis and Mestry (2019) highlight that resource constraints in schools, particularly in rural areas,

significantly impact the ability of DHs to perform their roles effectively. A study conducted by du Plessis and Mestry (2019) also found that a lack of resources and infrastructure in South African schools, particularly in rural areas, creates additional challenges for school leadership, making it difficult to implement curriculum policies and support learners with diverse needs.

Moreover, participants in this study indicated that the DBE needed to prioritise infrastructure improvements and resource provision to ensure that schools were adequately equipped to meet the needs of both teachers and learners. This concern echoes the findings of Mabeba and Van der Walt (2018), who stress that a lack of professional development opportunities and limited access to resources hinder DHs from effectively executing their leadership roles.

While most participants expressed the need for more physical resources, others highlighted the importance of technological support. Manuel (2020) asserts that access to technological tools and digital learning resources can significantly enhance the teaching and learning experience. Tlali and Matete (2020) further argue that incorporating technology in schools can help bridge gaps in resource shortages and provide innovative teaching solutions.

4.4.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Professional development and emotional support

Some participants expressed the need for more regular workshops and training to improve their management and leadership skills. Two participants pointed out that workshops in areas such as technology and the subjects they supervised were crucial for enhancing their effectiveness in the role. They also emphasised the importance of training in stress management, recognising that professional development should extend beyond technical skills to address emotional resilience and overall well-being. There was a clear desire for workshops specifically tailored to leadership skills, as both participants and teachers would benefit from such programmes. Some participants shared the following remarks:

Leadership workshops are important for both DHs and teachers. (DH3)

I need workshops on management and leadership skills to handle the stress and workload. (DH4)

This study's findings suggest that DHs require ongoing CPD and emotional support to effectively manage the pressures of their roles. Participants expressed the need for structured training programmes to equip them with both generic and subject-specific management and leadership skills. They also indicated that the leadership role was emotionally challenging, requiring support beyond just technical training. The increased workload, power shifts, and heightened responsibilities contributed to feelings of stress and uncertainty, making professional and emotional support crucial for their success.

This finding aligns with the study by Jaca (2021), who found that continuous training and emotional support are important for ensuring that school leaders can effectively navigate their roles. Similarly, Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership theory underscores the necessity of professional development as a fundamental pillar of instructional leadership, enabling school leaders to guide and support teachers effectively. Kalane and Rambuda (2022) also emphasise that without proper training, DHs struggle to assert their authority and effectively oversee teaching and learning within their departments.

Moreover, several participants expressed dissatisfaction with the professional development opportunities currently provided by the DBE. They noted that existing CPD programmes were often theoretical rather than practical, lacking continuity and failing to address the core challenges they faced, such as managing teachers, leading instructional activities, and balancing their administrative and teaching responsibilities. This concern echoes the findings of Muriuki et al. (2020), who argue that professional development must be relevant, ongoing, and tailored to the specific needs of educational leaders.

In addition to CPD, participants highlighted the need for emotional support, as many found the transition process overwhelming. Some participants admitted to struggling with the emotional burden of their new roles but were unsure how to access available support systems. This finding suggests that emotional resilience is a key component of successful leadership and that SMTs should provide mentorship and peer support structures to help DHs manage stress. The study also aligns with the findings of Seobi and Wood (2016), who emphasise that DHs require both practical training and psychological support to adapt effectively to their leadership roles.

4.4.4.3 Sub-theme 3: Parental and community involvement

Strengthening parental support and collaboration with the community was seen as crucial for addressing attendance issues and promoting student success. Many participants emphasised the importance of parental involvement in their children's education, noting that without their support, student success could be significantly hindered. Others highlighted the need for building stronger relationships with the community to tackle challenges like absenteeism and discipline. Some participants expressed frustration over the lack of involvement from parents, with one noting that this was a major obstacle to achieving student success. The study found that some parents lacked the time or knowledge to support their children's education, while others felt disengaged due to insufficient communication from schools. Here are remarks provided by most of the participants:

Parents need to be involved in their children's education. Without their support, it becomes difficult for learners to succeed. (DH1)

We need to build stronger relationships with the community because they can help us address some of the challenges, like absenteeism and discipline. (DH3)

Some parents don't even come to meetings or check their children's work. This lack of involvement is a big challenge. (DH2)

The findings of this study suggest that strengthening parental and community involvement is essential for improving learner outcomes and providing additional support to DHs. Participants indicated that the lack of active parental engagement contributed to challenges in learner performance and disciplinary issues, placing additional strain on teachers and school leadership. Many participants believed that fostering stronger collaboration between schools, parents, and the broader community could enhance educational outcomes and create a more supportive learning environment. The findings suggest that schools should implement structured parental engagement programmes and awareness initiatives to encourage greater participation. Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that improved engagement from

parents and community members can alleviate some of the pressures faced by DHs and teachers, creating a more holistic support system for learners. Participants recommended that schools should adopt strategies such as regular parent-teacher meetings, workshops on effective parenting in education, and community-driven initiatives to foster a culture of collaboration. By strengthening these relationships, schools can create a more inclusive educational environment that benefits both learners and educators.

This finding aligns with Kunene and Marfo (2020), who emphasise that parental involvement plays a crucial role in the academic success of learners. Research by Manuel (2020) also highlights that limited parental engagement, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, negatively affects learner motivation and performance. Similarly, Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership theory underscores the importance of collaboration with various stakeholders, including parents and community members, to support teaching and learning.

Participants in this study expressed concerns that some parents lacked adequate engagement in their children's education, often leaving all responsibilities to the teachers. Some participants reported that when parents were engaged, learners were more motivated and performed better academically. This is consistent with the findings of Tlali and Matete (2020), who found that schools that actively involve parents in their children's education see improvements in learner behaviour, attendance, and academic achievement.

Furthermore, the study revealed that active participation from the community could help tackle certain obstacles encountered by schools, particularly in under-resourced areas. Participants noted that schools that engaged with local businesses, non-governmental organisations, and community leaders were better equipped to secure additional resources and support for learners. This aligns with the findings of du Plessis and Mestry (2019), who found that community partnerships are crucial in enhancing school functionality and resource availability.

4.4.4.4 Sub-theme 4: CPD in DH responsibilities

Some participants highlighted the importance of CPD specifically tailored to their leadership role. Participants expressed the need for CPD programmes to address the unique challenges

and demands of their positions. Below are remarks shared by most of the participants:

I need workshops on how to manage our departments effectively and deal with the challenges I face. (DH4)

CPD programmes should focus on equipping us with skills like conflict resolution and time management. (DH1)

Leadership workshops should address the specific needs of DHs because our roles are unique. (DH2)

The findings of this study suggest that tailored CPD programmes are essential in enhancing DHs' leadership and management abilities, addressing gaps in their skills, and equipping them with the essential skills and abilities required to execute their responsibilities successfully. Participants expressed the need for structured CPD initiatives that focused not only on general leadership training but also on subject-specific management skills. Many participants reported that the professional development opportunities currently available to them were insufficient, often theoretical rather than practical, and lacked continuity.

This finding aligns with Bush and Sargsyan (2013), who found that professional development is crucial in equipping DHs with the necessary skills for instructional leadership, decision-making, and curriculum management. Similarly, Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership theory advocates ongoing training to support educational leaders in improving teaching and learning outcomes. Kalane and Rambuda (2022) also stress that professional development should be designed to bridge the gap between management expectations and DHs' actual preparedness for their roles.

Participants in this study expressed concerns that the DBE did not provide adequate training to prepare newly appointed DHs for their responsibilities. Some indicated that while induction programmes were available, they lacked depth and practical relevance. This aligns with the findings of Jaca (2021), who found that structured CPD programmes that focus on real-world leadership challenges, such as managing staff conflicts, overseeing curriculum implementation,

and balancing administrative duties with teaching responsibilities, are important.

Moreover, some participants noted that the absence of CPD tailored to their specific departmental needs resulted in ineffective leadership practices. This concern echoes the findings of Seobi and Wood (2016), who found that DHs require specialised training that focuses on instructional leadership, staff motivation, and school management strategies. Similarly, Muriuki et al. (2020) emphasise that targeted CPD initiatives can provide DHs with the confidence and skills necessary to support both teachers and learners effectively.

While most participants acknowledged the need for CPD, some suggested that workshops and training should incorporate mentorship programmes, where experienced DHs could guide newly appointed ones. This finding aligns with the study by Myende and Bhengu (2015), which found that collaborative learning environments and mentorship play a crucial role in strengthening leadership capacity within schools. The findings suggest that without ongoing and structured CPD, DHs may struggle to meet the demands of their roles, leading to increased stress and inefficiency in school leadership. Participants recommended that the DBE implement hands-on, practical training programmes tailored to the specific leadership challenges faced by DHs. They proposed reducing DHs' teaching loads to allow more time for professional development and leadership responsibilities, a recommendation supported by Atebe (2009), who found that DHs in Kenya required a reduction in their teaching duties to manage their leadership roles effectively.

4.4.4.5 Sub-theme 5: CPD in teacher responsibilities

Many participants mentioned the importance of CPD opportunities to enhance teachers' instructional practices. Some participants felt that training was crucial for teachers to adapt to modern teaching methods and incorporate technology into their classrooms. Others pointed out that there was a need for CPD to help teachers address diverse learner needs and improve their teaching approaches. Here are the remarks provided by most of the participants:

Teachers need training on how to use modern teaching strategies and integrate technology into the classroom. (DH3)

Some teachers don't know how to differentiate their lessons to accommodate learners with different needs. CPD should address this. (DH1)

Workshops should focus on helping teachers improve their subject knowledge and teaching methods. (DH4)

This study's findings suggest that providing teachers with CPD opportunities enhances the overall quality of teaching and learning. Participants expressed the need for structured training programmes to equip teachers with updated instructional strategies, classroom management techniques, and subject-specific knowledge. Many participants noted that teachers often struggled with curriculum implementation due to outdated teaching methods, making CPD essential for improving both instructional effectiveness and learner performance.

This finding aligns with Mampane (2020), who found that CPD for teachers is crucial in updating instructional practices, fostering professional growth, and ultimately improving learner outcomes. Similarly, Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership theory highlights the importance of supporting teacher development as a key component of enhancing classroom performance. Kalane and Rambuda (2022) further stress that without ongoing training, teachers may find it challenging to adapt to curriculum changes and implement innovative pedagogical approaches effectively.

Participants in this study indicated that while some CPD opportunities were available, they were often insufficient, overly theoretical, and lacked relevance to their specific teaching contexts. This concern echoes the findings of Seobi and Wood (2016), who argue that professional development programmes should be practical, continuous, and tailored to the specific challenges faced by educators in different subject areas. Manuel (2020) also highlights the need for CPD initiatives that focus on inclusive education, enabling teachers to address diverse learner needs effectively.

Moreover, some participants suggested that CPD should not only focus on instructional strategies but also on emotional intelligence, classroom leadership, and learner engagement techniques. This aligns with Muriuki et al. (2020), who assert that teacher training programmes

should include components on managing classroom dynamics, fostering collaboration among educators, and developing strategies for differentiated instruction.

While most participants acknowledged the value of CPD, they also noted that limited time and heavy workloads often prevented teachers from fully engaging in training opportunities. Some participants recommended that the DBE should implement more flexible, school-based CPD sessions to ensure that teachers could participate without disrupting their teaching schedules. This recommendation is supported by Atebe (2009), who found that reducing teachers' workloads allows them to focus more on professional development and curriculum implementation.

The findings suggest that without CPD, teachers may struggle to meet the evolving demands of education, leading to lower learner performance and increased job-related stress. Participants recommended that CPD programmes should be interactive, hands-on, and focused on real-world classroom challenges to ensure maximum impact. They proposed mentorship programmes where experienced teachers could support newer educators in improving their instructional practices.

4.4.4.6 Sub-theme 6: Support from the DoE

Some participants mentioned the importance of external support in addressing the challenges they faced. They expressed a need for more resources and regular training to enhance their effectiveness in the role. Some participants emphasised the importance of regular visits and support from subject advisors, indicating that at times they felt isolated in their responsibilities. Others noted the need for the DoE to ensure that schools had the necessary infrastructure and resources for smooth functioning. The following are remarks provided by most of the participants:

The Department of Education should provide more resources and regular training for DHs and teachers. (DH1)

I need more visits and support from subject advisors. Sometimes I feel like I am on my own. (DH2)

The Department of Education must ensure that schools have the infrastructure and resources needed to function effectively. (DH4)

This study's findings suggest that active support from the DoE is crucial in addressing resource gaps and providing the necessary guidance for DHs to succeed in their leadership role. Participants expressed concerns that the lack of structured support from the DoE hindered their ability to effectively manage their responsibilities, particularly in areas such as teacher supervision, curriculum implementation, and balancing administrative and teaching duties. Many participants felt that while some training programmes existed, they were often inadequate, lacked continuity, and failed to address the practical challenges they faced.

This finding aligns with Liljenberg and Andersson (2020), who emphasise that institutional support is essential for empowering DHs to navigate the complexities of their leadership roles. Similarly, Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership theory highlights the importance of external stakeholders, such as the DoE, in supporting school leadership through training, resources, and policy guidance.

Participants in this study noted that while the DoE offered CPD programmes, these initiatives often focused on theoretical knowledge rather than hands-on, practical leadership skills. This concern is consistent with the findings of Jaca (2021), who argues that professional development programmes must be aligned with the actual challenges faced by school leaders to be effective. Furthermore, Kalane and Rambuda (2022) highlight that DHs require targeted leadership training that focuses on their dual role as both educators and managers, ensuring they can effectively oversee teaching and learning processes.

Another issue raised by participants was the lack of sufficient human resources to support DHs in their roles. Some suggested that the DoE should provide additional teaching staff to reduce DHs' workload, allowing them more time to focus on their leadership duties. This recommendation aligns with the study by Atebe (2009), which found that reducing the teaching responsibilities of middle managers in schools allowed them to perform their leadership roles more effectively.

Despite these concerns, some participants acknowledged that the DoE had implemented initiatives aimed at supporting DHs, but these efforts were often inconsistent or not effectively communicated. This finding is consistent with the findings of du Plessis and Mestry (2019), who argue that a lack of clear communication and follow-through from educational authorities can lead to uncertainty and frustration among school leaders.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that without structured and continuous support from the DoE, DHs may struggle to fulfil their leadership responsibilities effectively. Participants recommended that the DoE should develop more practical, school-based training programmes tailored to the specific challenges faced by DHs. In addition, they suggested the establishment of mentorship programmes where experienced DHs could provide guidance to newly appointed DHs, ensuring a smoother step into the leadership role.

4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter analysed and interpreted the data generated in the study, focusing on understanding the DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning. It explored the strategies DHs employ to effectively enact their leadership role, such as leading by example, fostering collaboration, and promoting teacher accountability. The chapter also examined the challenges DHs face, including balancing management and leadership responsibilities and addressing gaps in support systems. Furthermore, it highlighted the support needed by DHs, such as professional development and resources, to overcome these challenges and enhance their effectiveness in leading teaching and learning. The following chapter, Chapter Five, presents the summary of findings, outlines the study's limitations, states the conclusion, and provides recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This study explored the experiences of DHs in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

Chapter one outlined the study through an overview of the background, problem statement, and rationale for the research, while also detailing its significance, purpose, and research questions. Furthermore, the chapter included a summary of the research methodology employed to conduct the study.

Chapter two reviewed the existing literature related to the leadership experiences of DHs, focusing on themes such as the understanding of leadership roles, the enactment of leadership responsibilities, challenges encountered, and the support required to effectively fulfil these roles. The chapter also introduced the theoretical framework underpinning the study, drawing from instructional leadership theory to provide insight into how DHs navigate their responsibilities.

Chapter three offered a comprehensive exploration of the research methodology employed in the exploration, encompassing the philosophical assumptions that formed the foundation of the study. It rationalised the selection of a qualitative approach and delineated the research design, sampling techniques, data generation techniques, and analysis methods. Additionally, the chapter addressed the strategies implemented to uphold the trustworthiness of the findings and the ethical considerations observed throughout the research process.

Chapter four presented, analysed, and interpreted the data generated from DHs, highlighting the main findings in relation to the research questions for the study. The chapter explored DHs' understanding of their leadership role, how they enact their leadership responsibilities, the factors enabling or disabling their effectiveness, and the types of support they require to navigate their leadership roles successfully.

This chapter summarises the study's findings, examines its limitations, and highlights its contributions to existing knowledge. It formulates conclusions based on the findings, proposes recommendations for enhancing DH support frameworks, and identifies potential recommendations for further research.

The main research question guiding this study was: *What are the experiences of DHs in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province?* This research question was addressed through the following sub-questions:

- *How do DHs understand their leadership role for teaching and learning?*
- *How do DHs enact their leadership role for teaching and learning?*
- *What are the factors that enable or disable DHs' leadership for teaching and learning?*
- *What support do DHs need to address the challenges they face in performing their leadership role?*

5.2 Summary of findings

The summary of findings is organised according to the research questions outlined above.

5.2.1 DHs' understanding of their leadership role for teaching and learning

With regard to their leadership role, DHs experienced a shift in responsibilities, with a stronger emphasis on curriculum supervision, fostering a supportive environment, and maintaining effective communication. While some embraced their leadership roles, others felt overwhelmed due to insufficient training and support. Curriculum oversight emerged as a key responsibility; however, many DHs struggled with this aspect because of heavy workloads and inadequate preparation. Supporting teachers and learners through motivation and empathy was considered crucial, yet efforts were often hindered by teacher resistance and limited institutional backing. Effective communication was essential for promoting teamwork and facilitating decision-making. However, unclear communication at times led to confusion and inefficiencies, further complicating their leadership role.

5.2.2 DHs' enactment of their leadership role for teaching and learning

DHs enacted their leadership role in teaching and learning through strategies such as mentorship, delegation, and democratic leadership. Some DHs facilitated professional development and mentorship, though time constraints limited structured mentorship opportunities. Task delegation helped distribute workloads; however, concerns about accountability and trust hindered its full adoption. Democratic leadership promoted inclusivity and teamwork but sometimes slowed decision-making. Despite these efforts, leadership effectiveness was often constrained by time limitations, inadequate training, and a lack of institutional support.

5.2.3 Factors that enable and disable the DHs' leadership for teaching and learning

The leadership of DHs in teaching and learning was influenced by several enabling and disabling factors. Ethical leadership, professionalism, structured training, and institutional support played a significant role in strengthening their leadership. However, various challenges hindered their ability to lead successfully. Workload stress and a limited understanding of curriculum management made it difficult for DHs to provide adequate guidance. Additionally, resistance from teachers, team conflicts, and a lack of motivation created barriers to fostering a collaborative teaching environment. Time and resource constraints, such as overcrowded classrooms and inadequate materials, further restricted their capacity to support teachers and learners. Moreover, the absence of structured interventions made it particularly challenging for DHs to assist struggling learners. These factors collectively shaped their leadership in teaching and learning.

5.2.4 The support that DHs need to address the challenges they face in performing their leadership role for teaching and learning

DHs required various forms of support to address the challenges they faced in their leadership role for teaching and learning. Improved classrooms, enhanced security, and modern technology were identified as essential resources and infrastructure to facilitate effective leadership. Professional development was also a key need, with DHs highlighting the importance of CPD focused on leadership responsibilities, conflict resolution, time management, and structured mentorship. Additionally, emotional support was crucial, as DHs

experienced significant stress and uncertainty, emphasising the need for stress management training. Engaging parents and the broader community was seen as vital in improving student outcomes, underlining the necessity of fostering stronger partnerships. Furthermore, support from the DoE was requested, including consistent guidance, school-based CPD, additional staff appointments, and clearer communication to enhance their leadership effectiveness.

5.3 Research conclusions

This qualitative research primarily sought to explore the experiences of DHs in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. To achieve this goal, the study sought to answer specific research questions. The first research question was to examine DHs' understanding of their leadership role for teaching and learning. The second was to determine how DHs enact their leadership role for teaching and learning. The third research question was to identify factors that enable or disable the DHs' leadership for teaching and learning, while the fourth research question focused on exploring the support DHs need to address the challenges they face in performing their leadership role for teaching and learning.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four DHs from four selected primary schools. Addressing the first research question—*How do DHs understand their leadership role for teaching and learning?*—this study found that participants recognised their role as multifaceted, encompassing curriculum oversight, creating a supportive environment, and fostering communication and teamwork. Curriculum monitoring and supervision were identified as a core responsibility, with participants highlighting the need to ensure curriculum alignment and lesson quality. However, while some participants viewed this responsibility positively, others found it overwhelming due to workload constraints. The creation of a supportive environment was also emphasised, with participants acknowledging the importance of motivating teachers and fostering collaboration. Furthermore, effective communication and teamwork were regarded as crucial elements of their leadership approach, with participants highlighting the significance of open dialogue in promoting a cooperative work environment.

Based on these findings, it may be concluded that DHs under study understand their leadership role as extending beyond administrative oversight to include mentorship, collaboration and curriculum management. However, the leadership role is complex, as participants reported experiencing difficulties in balancing these responsibilities effectively. Many participants struggled with workload distribution, which hindered their ability to execute their leadership roles optimally.

The findings from the second research question—*How do DHs enact their leadership role for teaching and learning?* indicate that participants adopted various strategies to navigate their responsibilities. These included professional development and mentorship, delegation of tasks, and democratic leadership. Participants facilitated staff development initiatives, mentored teachers, and organised training sessions to enhance teaching practices. Delegation was a key strategy for workload management, with participants forming committees to distribute responsibilities. A democratic leadership style was employed to foster inclusivity in decision-making and strengthen team cohesion.

From these findings, it may be concluded that DHs in this study actively engage in leadership practices that promote professional growth and teamwork. However, challenges in delegation and decision-making efficiency suggest that while shared leadership is beneficial, it requires clear structures and ongoing support.

Regarding the third research question—*What are the factors that enable or disable DHs' leadership for teaching and learning?*—it was found that participants encountered both enabling and disabling factors. Enabling factors included professionalism, ethical leadership, and collaboration, while disabling factors comprised heavy workloads, resource limitations, resistance from teachers, and insufficient management training. Many participants found it difficult to balance their dual roles as teachers and leaders, particularly due to time constraints and a lack of structured support systems. Some participants also reported encountering resistance from teachers, particularly in cases where they had been promoted internally. Furthermore, a lack of access to professional development opportunities and inadequate infrastructure were seen as significant barriers to effective leadership.

From these findings, it may be concluded that while DHs in this study are committed to their leadership roles, structural and institutional barriers limit their ability to perform effectively. The study highlights the need for clearer role expectations, enhanced professional training, and improved resource allocation to support DHs in their responsibilities.

Data generated from participants in response to the study's fourth research question—*What support do DHs need to address the challenges they face in performing their leadership role for teaching and learning?* indicate that participants require increased resources, professional development, and emotional support. Participants expressed the need for more structured CPD programmes focused on leadership skills, curriculum management, and conflict resolution. They emphasised the importance of emotional support mechanisms, acknowledging that leadership can be stressful and demanding. Some participants also called for increased involvement from parents and the community to enhance school functionality and learner outcomes. Support from the DoE was deemed essential, with participants requesting more regular engagement and targeted training programmes.

It may be concluded that DHs require a comprehensive support system that includes professional development, administrative assistance, and psychological support. Without these mechanisms, DHs may continue to face challenges in fulfilling their leadership responsibilities effectively. Schools and education authorities should consider implementing structured induction and mentorship programmes to equip DHs with the necessary skills and resources for effective leadership. Additionally, a collaborative approach involving stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and the DoE is essential to creating an environment that supports teaching and learning.

5.4 Recommendations

It has been established that the experiences of DHs in enacting leadership for teaching and learning are accompanied by disabling factors. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- Based on insights gained from the four participating schools, it is suggested that schools with similar contexts may consider refining their interview and selection procedures by incorporating scenario-based questions. These questions could help assess candidates'

understanding of the responsibilities, challenges, and expectations associated with the DH role. Such an approach may contribute to the appointment of individuals who are mentally and professionally prepared for the demands of the position. While these findings are specific to the schools studied, they may offer useful considerations for other schools facing comparable challenges.

- It is recommended that the participating schools consider establishing structured mentorship and induction programmes to provide ongoing support for newly appointed DHs. These programmes could address both professional responsibilities and personal adjustments, enabling DHs to effectively manage leadership duties, curriculum oversight, and relationships with colleagues. Additionally, CPD workshops may be beneficial in strengthening key management skills, such as conflict resolution, instructional leadership, and time management. While these suggestions are based on the context of the participating schools, they may offer valuable insights for similar settings.
- Given the challenges experienced by DHs in the participating schools, it is recommended that these schools consider implementing more robust induction programmes to clarify leadership roles, strengthen subject knowledge, and support leadership development. Based on the findings, there is also a need for context-specific professional development opportunities focused on curriculum supervision, leadership, time management, and subject-specific knowledge. While this study does not generalise to all schools or stakeholders, the insights gained may prompt further reflection or exploration by relevant education authorities on how best to support DHs in similar contexts.
- Based on the experiences of DHs in the participating schools, it is recommended that these schools consider integrating emotional support and coping-skills training into their existing mentoring and CPD programmes. Support structures such as peer support groups, stress management workshops, and clear guidance on navigating professional relationships, including interactions with teachers' unions may assist DHs in managing their well-being more effectively. While these suggestions are specific to the study context, they may offer valuable considerations for similar school environments.

5.5 Recommendations for further research

According to the study's findings, additional research is recommended to further investigate multiple dimensions of the DH role in greater detail. The following areas are proposed for future research.

- Given that this was a qualitative research study conducted on a small scale, further investigation is recommended, with a larger-scale study using mixed-methods research to enhance the generalisability of findings. Future investigations should encompass both primary and secondary schools to explore if DHs in varying school contexts encounter similar or unique leadership challenges. Moreover, such research should take into account variables like school size, the gender of DHs, and whether DHs were promoted internally or externally. A comparative study between DHs in urban, township, and rural schools could also provide insights into the contextual factors influencing their leadership experiences.
- Further investigation could explore how schools promote the emotional well-being of DHs. Furthermore, future studies should explore how schools address the challenges DHs face and assess the effectiveness of the support structures available to them. Such research could examine the role of principals, senior management teams, and school governing bodies in helping DHs balance their leadership and teaching responsibilities. Furthermore, it should evaluate the role of the DoE in providing ongoing professional development and structured mentorship programmes for DHs.

By conducting further research in these areas, a more comprehensive understanding of the DH role can be developed, leading to improved support structures and leadership development programmes for current and future DHs.

5.6 Limitations of the study

Ross and Bibler Zaidi (2019) assert that limitations in a study are inherent weaknesses within a research design that can influence the outcomes and conclusions of the research. This study had the following limitations: it focused on selected primary schools at the King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal Province. Due to the small sample size, the findings of this study

cannot be generalised to all DHs and all schools. However, lessons can still be drawn from the leadership experiences of these DHs, and the findings may be used in similar contexts.

Another limitation of this study was the discomfort that some DHs experienced in opening up and fully understanding the purpose of the study. To address this limitation, I re-explained the purpose of the study to the DHs, ensuring transparency and credibility in the research findings.

5.7 Chapter summary

This chapter summarised the main findings of the study, which explored DHs' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning. The findings revealed that while DHs understand their role as extending beyond administration to include curriculum oversight, mentorship, and fostering collaboration, many feel overwhelmed due to inadequate training, support, and workload pressures. The chapter also highlighted how DHs enact their leadership using strategies such as delegation, mentorship, and democratic leadership, though these efforts are often constrained by time and institutional limitations. Several enabling and disabling factors were identified, including professionalism, ethical leadership, teacher resistance, and resource constraints. In terms of support, DHs expressed the need for professional development, emotional support, and improved infrastructure to navigate their responsibilities effectively. The chapter also outlined the study's limitations, provided practical and research-related recommendations, and proposed areas for future research to better understand and support DHs in similar contexts.

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Miss Zandile Busisiwe Gloria Ngcobo

KWADLANGEZWA

3886

Dear Miss Ngcobo

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DOE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **“DEPARTMENTAL HEADS’ EXPERIENCES IN ENACTING LEADERSHIP FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING”**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 August 2024 to 31 March 2027.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu- Natal Department of Education.

KING CETSHWAYO DISTRICTS

Mr GN Ngcobo

Head of Department: Education

Date: 01 August 2024



██████████

Empangeni

3886

02 August 2024

The Principal

_____ School

Dear Sir / Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL

I wish to request your permission to conduct research in your school. I am currently registered as a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) specialising in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy. As part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education I am required to conduct research.

My research topic is: **Departmental Heads’ experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning.**

I will interview one of the Departmental Heads in your school. The interview will last for a maximum of 45 minutes. Participation in the research project is voluntary, and the Departmental Head may withdraw at any time. In analysing the data, confidentiality and anonymity will be observed and at no stage in the research report will the name of the school and Departmental Head be mentioned but instead pseudonyms will be used. Findings will only be used for writing up my dissertation. The research report will be made available to you if you need it.

If you require further information, please feel free to contact me on ██████████ or my supervisor, Dr. N.I. Jaca, on 031 260 6095 during working hours.

Yours sincerely

Ngcobo Z.B.G. (██████████)

I.....have been informed about the study titled Departmental Heads’ experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning by Zandile B.G. Ngcobo and give permission for research to be conducted in the school.



██████████
Empangeni

3886

02 August 2024

The Departmental Head

_____ School

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR YOUR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN MY STUDY

I invite you to consider participating in a study that is part of my Master of Education degree research. I am currently registered as a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) specialising in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy.

The title of the study is: **Departmental Heads' experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning.**

The study is expected to enroll four Departmental Heads from four selected primary schools in King Cetshwayo District, KwaZulu-Natal. It will involve semi-structured interviews. The interview will last for a maximum of forty-five (45) minutes and will be voice recorded. It will be conducted on a one-to-one basis between you and me. To check whether it provides a true reflection of what you mentioned during the interview, the data collected will be transcribed and be made available to you. Please be informed that participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from participating at any time. Your views will be kept anonymous, and all your contributions, as well as your name and school name will be treated confidentially.

If you require further information, please feel free to contact me on ██████████ or my supervisor, Dr. N.I. Jaca, on 031 260 6095 during working hours.

Yours sincerely

Ngcobo Z.B.G. (██████████)



CONSENT

I.....have been informed about the study entitled Departmental Heads’ experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning by Zandile B.G. Ngcobo.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study which is to explore Departmental Heads’ experiences in enacting leadership for teaching and learning in selected primary schools at King Cetshwayo District of KwaZulu-Natal.

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.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact the researcher at, [redacted] email: [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

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview YES / NO

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness
(Where applicable)

Date



UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

RESEARCH DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Interview Schedule

Icebreakers

- a. What are your qualifications?
- b. How long have you been a teacher?
- c. How long have you been a Departmental Head?

Main Interview Questions

1. What is your understanding of your leadership roles in teaching and learning?
2. Can you describe your general approach to leadership within the department?
3. Can you identify the key factors that enable you to be effective in your leadership role for teaching and learning?
4. What are the main obstacles that hinder your leadership in teaching and learning?
5. How do you address the challenges you face when enacting your leadership role in teaching and learning?
6. What support do you need to address the challenges you face in performing your leadership role in teaching and learning?

ORIGINALITY REPORT

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