Wrestling with Underperformance Pressures: Narratives of six secondary School Principals in iLembe District

By

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Durban, South Africa

Supervisor: Prof T.T. Bhengu

DECLARATION

I, Ishmael Chibelihle Simelane, declare that

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Supervisor: Prof TT Bhengu

______01/07/2023_________________________

Date

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

22 May 2020

Mr Ishmael Chibelihle Simelane (213570060)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Simelane,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00001243/2020
Project title: Wrestling with Underperformance Pressures: Narratives of six secondary school principals in Ilembe District
Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 29 March 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted FULL APPROVAL

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

This approval is valid until 22 May 2021.
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.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

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

Yours sincerely,

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

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INSPIRING GREATNESS

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the Almighty, my God—the God of Shembe and AmaNazaretha—for His help, safeguarding, and unwavering love. This thesis is also dedicated to my late parents, Nomthandazo Matembe and Robert Simelane, as well as my late brother Alex Mthokozisi Simelane, who financially helped me earn my first teaching qualification. I also want to express my gratitude to my family, especially my wife Nozipho, my sisters Buke and Bhekisile, and my kids, for giving me the time to finish this study and for being there for me when I needed them most. I could never have achieved success without their love and support.

I am grateful.

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My profound gratitude goes out to the six principals who participated in this study by sharing their experiences of leading underperforming schools.

ABSTRACT

According to statistics, Grade 12 pass rate in the iLembe District has been progressively falling. Poor examinations result of Grade 12 learners in South Africa have caused major concerns in the educational and public sectors, particularly because there has been a growing awareness about issues of accountability for underperformance. Accountability meetings and criticism from commentators put principals under severe pressure, but some of them choose to skip meetings by taking lengthy sick leaves. These accountability sessions have caused a lot of stress on the principals involved, and in some instances, with lethal consequences. However, very little is known about the experiences of principals who experience pressure because of Grade 12 poor performance. This study has adopted a qualitative approached within an interpretive research paradigm and Narrative Inquiry was adopted as a research methodology. Field texts (data) were generated through narrative interviews and artefact inquiry. Narrative analysis and analysis of narratives—were completed.

The study's focus was on six principals in the iLembe District. The study adopted three theories as its framework, and these are Identity Theory, Teacher Education and Diversity (ITTED), Context-Responsive Leadership (CRL)and Five Domains of Instructional Leadership Model. The findings suggested their leadership responses to underperformance in Grade 12 examinations was associated with the identities they had constructed about who they are. One of the major findings is that the performance of their school improved remarkably. From the strategies that these principals adopted, this study has generated a model I call a *Multi-Stage Underperformance Pressure Coping Mechanism.* This model is presented in Chapter Eight, and this model serves as one of the original contributions of this thesis.

ABBREVIATIONS

KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
S.A	South Africa
DBE	Department of Basic Education
US	United States
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act
NSC	National Senior Certificate
PHD	Doctor of Philosophy
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Union
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
ITTED	Identity Theory, Teacher Education and Diversity
CRL	Context Responsive Leadership
USA	United States of America
LTSM	Learner Teacher Support Material
ERLC	Education Relations Labour council
CEP	Centre for Education Policy
SI	System Improvement
STD	Secondary Teachers' Diploma
DH	Departmental Head
DD	District Director
SMT	School Management Team
HOD	Head of Department
DP	Deputy Principal
CTT	Compulsory Temporary Transfer
PPN	Post Provisioning Norm
LIFO	Last in First Out
SGB	School Governing Body
B COM	Bachelor of Commerce
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

PPM	Post Provisioning Model
ANC	African National Congress
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
SEM	Senior Education Manger
ATPs	Annual Teaching Plans
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
UKZN	University of KwaZulu Natal
SRC	Student Representative Council
PLCs	Professional Learning Communities
TD	Technical Drawing
OSS	Oxford Secondary School
JC	Junior Certificate
ECD	Early Child Development
PD	Professional Development
RAM	Resource Allocation Model
HRM	Human Resource Management
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System
EMS	Economic Management Sciences
MUPCM	Multi-Stage Underperformance Pressure Coping Mechanism

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CHAPTER ONE
THE BEGINNING OF MY RESEARCH JOURNEY: ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I begin my research journey for this study, which examines the phenomenon of wrestling with the underperformance pressures faced by principals of underperforming schools in the Ilembe District, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa (SA). I commence this chapter by presenting the background to the study and the research problem. This is followed by the threefold justifications for undertaking this study, namely, my personal, practical, and social justifications. The objectives of the study and the research puzzles that serve as the drivers of this study are then presented. Next, I explicate the key concepts that are used in this study. Lastly, I outline how this study is organised in terms of chapters.

1.2 Background to the study

Commentators on poor performance in schools hold principals accountable for failing to raise standards at their institutions. For instance, Shahjahan et al. (2021) from Bangladesh in India and Dangara (2016) from Nigeria echoed the views expressed by South African scholars such as Mbele (2021), Botha (2006), Engelbrecht (2009), Mestry and Globler (2004). All of the scholars named above, including Kamba et al. (2020) from Nigeria, Jared (2011) from Uganda, David (2014) from Tanzania, Oumer (2014) from Ethiopia, Baffour-Awuah (2011) from Ghana, Smith (2005) from the United States of America, Yariv (2011) from Israel, Kotola (2016) from Finland, and Mendez (2009) from Mexico, claim that school principals lack the managerial abilities to run their institutions efficiently. In South Africa, Vilakazi (2016) argues that the principals' silence and denial of the fact that they are failing to lead teaching and learning but focus more on administrative duties was what was causing the underperformance in Grade 12. According to Wanjiru (2013) in Kenya, learner underperformance was brought about, largely by the learners’ lack of motivation than anything else.

Poor examination results of Grade 12 learners in South Africa have caused serious worries in the educational and public spheres, since there is growing concern about accountability for the underperformance (Subramoney, 2016). Principals of failing schools were required to attend accountability meetings, which were meant to put them under pressure; as a result, some of them

choose to take extended sick leaves to avoid these meetings (Ntombela, 2014). It appears that the majority of the comments criticised principals for the poor performance of their schools, which put pressure on those principles (Beausaert et al., 2016). Spaull (2013) asserts that the involvement of numerous news media platforms in the publication of the Grade 12 results raises awareness among the general public, who then criticise principals for their poor performance, thus, placing pressure on them to perform. Additionally, according to Mafora (2015), one just needs to read newspaper articles around the time that the Grade 12 results are released to understand the pressure that principals of underperforming schools endure. Govender (2006) cited in Mafora (2015) elaborates by presenting this issue in the form of a newspaper headline that reads, "Principals face an axe after their Grade 12 learners' poor results."

Although several studies have been conducted on below par performance in Grade 12 around the world and in some parts of South Africa, none of these studies has been focussed on the principals of underperforming schools in Ilembe District grappling with underperformance pressures. The district in question has historically been known for underperformance in terms of Grade 12 examinations results. For instance, the pass rate for the Ilembe District in Grade 12 results dropped from 69, 7% to 60, 7% in 2015 (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2016). This pass rate pegged the iLembe District as the lowest performer in the KZN Province (Geist, 2015). There are 124 secondary schools in the iLembe District. The secondary schools, at Grade 12 achieved a pass rate of 43% in 2011. In 2012, the percentage plummeted to 27%, only to slightly improve to 30% in 2013. There was further improvement in 2014 when the rate went up to 54%, and 2015 was its best year where it achieved 68% (Ilembe District, 2016). The district saw a further decline in Grade 12 performance in 2020, going from 76,9% to 75,7%, which is lower than the 77,9% provincial pass rate and the 76,2% national pass rate (Dlamini, 2022).

In response to recurring underperformance, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) appointed a task team in 2016 to establish the contributing factors for this persistent decline in Grade 12 performance (Herbst, 2016). The task team's report listed a number of reasons why the iLembe District Grade 12 results were below the expected norm. The task group listed a number of factors, including, chronic absenteeism by the learners at the end of the months to collect social grants; learner pregnancy; a lack of commitment on the part of learners; a lack of properly qualified teachers; overcrowding because there were not enough classrooms; a lack of resources like textbooks,

unreliable electricity supply, and faulty photocopy machines, as well as other problems related to teacher unions that frequently caused conflict among the staff (Herbst, 2016). According to other research reports (David, 2014; Isaiah & Isaiah, 2014; Jared, 2011; Oumer, 2014; Yariv, 2011), school underperformance is not a district-specific problem, but rather a global phenomenon that occurs in many different countries and can be attributed to various factors besides those listed above.

It is not unique to South Africa that principals are held accountable for learners' poor academic performance; instances of this have also been documented in other nations. For instance, Holbein and Ladd (2015) report that in the United States (US), principals experience an increased accountability pressure if their schools do not perform well. They claim that in the US, the pressure to be accountable is dependent on two things; first, whether a school fails to make adequate yearly progress compared to the previous year, and second, whether a school was already facing sanctions for its past performance. According to Holbein and Ladd (2015), a school that did not make sufficient yearly progress in a given year was subjected to a discrete increase in accountability pressure the following academic year. In the US, the schools' principals were under pressure for three reasons. They feared being labelled as failing schools; they expected future sanctions to be imposed if they continued to fail, when, they had already failed and were currently facing sanctions (Holbein & Ladd, 2015). Since all schools must comply with No Child Left Behind (NCLB)'s requirements, there was some accountability pressure on all of them. For instance, schools that barely met the NCLB standards were under pressure because future failure was a possibility (Holbein & Ladd, 2015). The majority of the principals believed that their mistakes received more attention than their accomplishments as a result of increased accountability for principals to account for learners' below par performance (Evans, 2010).

Researchers (Ail et al., 2014; Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014; Msila, 2013; Oumer, 2014; Sharma & Jain, 2013) have found that secondary school principals are under pressure to raise academic performance in their institutions. The related literature also agrees that the majority of principals fail to fulfil their duties as instructional leaders (Enueme & Egwunyenga, 2008; Firmaningsih-Kolu, 2016; Goslin, 2009; Hutton, 2010; Moonsammy-Koopansammy, 2011). Bush and Heystek (2006) state that of the 10 leadership activities of principals, instructional leadership only ranks seventh. Principals are expected to carry out one of their responsibilities, which is to carry out instructional leadership that is directly related to learners' academic accomplishment and its improvement, as a result of their appointments as instructional leaders (Maponya, 2015). As instructional leaders, principals are

responsible for making decisions and creating plans for teachers to follow in order to ensure success in the classrooms (Maponya, 2015).

It seems that there is a widespread belief that the principals' failure to perform their duties, such as engaging in instructional leadership, is another factor contributing to the underperformance in schools. The principals of underperforming schools were put under pressure as a result. According to Mulkeen et al. (2007), principals in the majority of African nations do not value instructional leadership and do not see it as their responsibility. Hoadley et al. (2007) discovered that, like in many other African nations, South Africa's principals lack sufficient training in instructional leadership. In agreement with the aforementioned viewpoint, the Republic of South Africa (1998) mandated that school principals had to exercise instructional leadership in order to raise the performance of their Grade 12 learners. According to Jita and Mokhele (2013), principals frequently disregarded instructional leadership because they were disoriented and overburdened with administrative responsibilities. Principals also struggled to achieve a balance between their administrative and instructional leadership responsibilities (Jita & Mokhele, 2013). Msila (2013) shares similar view in this regard. Since financial administration, human resource management, and policy concerns take up much of a principal's time, they neglect their duties as instructional leaders, and place instructional leadership at the bottom of their list of ten workload activities **(**Bush & Heystek, 2006).

The issue with this study's debates, comments, and news releases was that they linked secondary schools' poor performance on the Grade 12 examinations to the principals' failure to adequately implement instructional leadership. African principals were heavily criticised and reprimanded for undervaluing instructional leadership and failing to perceive it as their duty **(**Mulkeen et al., 2007). My view is that perhaps these debates about principals failing to enact instructional leadership might be unfair, especially given that they project a one-sided perspective that excludes principals' views on the matter. Obviously, the principle of '*audi alteram partem'* was mostly ignored by many of those people who criticised secondary school principals. The principle of audi alteram partem prioritises that the other side of the story deserves equal attention (Oosthuizen et al., 2005). By giving narratives about their experiences of managing underperforming schools in their specific contexts, this study aims to give the principals of the underperforming schools a chance to share their experiences and perspectives. Lefever et al. (2014) claim that narrative inquiry is the most effective technique for learning about teachers' experiences. Hence, this methodology was adopted in this study in order to elicit principals' narratives about their experiences in the underperforming secondary schools.

1.3 The statement of the problem

The National Education Evaluation and Development Unit's acting head's remarks that they will be severe on principals and teachers of the underperforming schools have put extra-ordinary pressure on underperforming school principals (Ntombela, 2014). After the release of the Grade 12 results in 2006, the Director General of education is alleged to have stated that underperforming schools, as indicated by the Grade 12 results, would be closed (Heystek, 2007). According to Heystek (2007), the National Minister of Education stated that schools with unsatisfactory Grade 12 performance would be placed under administrative control. In a meeting with the principals in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in 2009, the previous President of the country, the Honourable Jacob Zuma, issued a warning to principals of underperforming schools that they would be demoted if their schools' performance did not improve in five years (Ntombela, 2014). The aforementioned claims provide unequivocal proof that principals of underperforming schools were under immense pressure from numerous interested parties.

I had a private conversation with some principals of the underperforming secondary schools after one of the district meetings, in which the District Director had criticised the secondary school principals of underperforming schools for failing to practise instructional leadership; hence resulting in their schools' underachievement. I gathered anecdotal evidence from those private conversations about the seriousness of the lived professional experiences of the principals concerned. The few principals of underperforming schools confirmed that they experienced too much pressure because of the underperformance of their schools. They disclosed to me that the pressure was so unbearable that they were finding it hard to continue working as principals. The pressure exerted on these individuals, underscores their importance in the lives of their schools, including their performance.

According to Beausaert et al. (2016), school leaders are the second biggest influence on learner outcomes behind that of the teacher. Therefore, when principals are not functioning well, arguably the whole school suffers. In other words, a principal is at the heart of every good school. Viewed that way, it can be said that a principal who is both mentally and physically unwell can have a potentially disastrous impact on the well-being of a school and those within it (Beausaert et al., 2016).

The few principals of the underperforming schools named some former principals whom they claimed, had left their positions due to underperformance pressures. To support the view that pressure

causes some principals to quit their jobs, Koome (2007) found that school management-related pressure among principals has been on the rise in Kenya, which has led to some of them resigning from their principalship positions and joining other ministries in the government and private sector. In my informal conversations with principals who did not form part of this study, they named of some former principals who developed illnesses due to depressions from the underperformance pressures and died thereafter. It is clear that some of the principals had difficulties coping with underperformance pressures.

The perceived consequences of excessive pressure include reduced productivity and working efficacy, presenteeism and absenteeism, illness, casualties, psychopathology, emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment that occurs among individuals who do work of some kind (Beausaert et al., 2016). After hearing these principals' accounts, I became curious to understand how principals of the underperforming schools fight the pressures that is brought about by the underperformance of their schools. I started reading widely and deeply to comprehend this phenomenon. I discovered for instance, that the majority of research on Grade 12 underperformance places a strong emphasis on the need for principals of underperforming schools to use instructional leadership to raise their schools below par performance (Leepo, 2015; Maponya, 2014; Moonsammy-Koopansammy, 2011; Yimaki, 2007). Additionally, it asserts that the majority of principals are ineffective in their duties as instructional leaders **(**Bush & Heystek, 2006; Firmaningsih-Kolu, 2016; Goslin, 2009; Hutton, 2010). Although there is an indication that some principals are struggling with underperformance, particularly in the Ilembe District, I was unable to locate a study that discusses their experiences in coping with underperformance pressures. I learnt that a narrative inquiry study methodology can provide useful and particular insights for educators looking for personal experiences in actual educational situations (Creswell, 2012). As a result, I took a decision to undertake a narrative inquiry to understand how some of the principals of the underperforming schools feel about running their institutions. As part of understanding how they wrestle with underperformance pressure, I thought it prudent to also explore how they constructed their professional identities, and whether their identities play a role in the manner in which they provide leadership in their respective schools. At the core of this study is an attempt to understand how they wrestle with underperformance in their leadership practices, and how they improve performance in the underperforming secondary schools. According to Lefever et al. (2014), teachers' narratives can demonstrate the connections between their knowledge, contextual realities, and identities.

1.4 Rationale of the study

In this section, I present what I call an autobiographical question on the issues being studied. According to Clandinin (2016), autobiographical questions that show the researcher's perspective on the issue being studied whether personal, practical, theoretical, or societal justifications are the foundation of any narrative research. Personal justification is justification of the inquiry in light of the researcher's own personal experiences. Practical justification is the way the study might affect practice, and social justification is the theoretical addition that the study might make to the already established theories (Clandinin, 2013).

1.4.1 Personal justification

I use the three terms National Senior Certificate (NSC), Matriculation, and Grade 12 interchangeably throughout this work. Since 2008, the NCS has been given as the last exit qualification in South Africa (SA) (UMALUSI, 2012). I became a learner because of my late mother. She proclaimed that I would one day use education to soothe our impoverished family by becoming a teacher because one of my names, Mduduzi, means to be a comforter. It was difficult for me to live up to her expectations because of these feelings. I felt under pressure in secondary school to fulfil my mother's wishes, but through perseverance, I was able to pass even the supposedly challenging subjects.

My mother convinced my older brother to pay for my post-secondary studies when I graduated from matriculation. I received advice to make teaching my career. My principal took notice of my dedication and hard work when I first started working. He then gave me the responsibility of teaching Mathematics and Natural Science which were subjects that he was teaching. He led me to non-profit organisations that provided teachers with the necessary training to teach Mathematics effectively. I took full advantage of this chance and enthusiastically participated in their programmes. I received a stipend from the British Council in recognition of this, and I subsequently travelled to Leeds University in England to undergo extensive training in Mathematical teaching techniques. I taught other teachers' Mathematical approaches when I got back, which gave me more confidence. I have felt the pressure to ensure that Mathematics educators in the circuit have mastery of their craft. I made the decision to improve my credentials, and I finished one academic programme after another until I was awarded a Master of Education degree in education in 2015.

My life has been shaped by the qualities I grew up with. These qualities are; adopting Ubuntu's core ideals; modelling excellence in all facets of my life; persistence; striving for achievement, and being a lifelong learner. My appointment to the principalship position which I presently hold, was heavily influenced by these qualities and mantras. When I was appointed as a principal, I learned that managing the challenges of underperformance at schools comes with a variety of emotions and tensions that secondary school principals must contend with. Even though my own school is not among the underperforming schools, I am quite concerned about this issue. My interest in obtaining a doctoral degree and studying the phenomena of principals struggling under the challenges they encounter in underperforming secondary schools has been aroused as a result of this. I would also like to know the extent to which their leadership practices are in any way influenced by their perceived identities.

1.4.2 Practical justification

Anecdotal evidence from conversations with certain principals reveals that departmental officials and teacher union leaders do manipulate the pressures on school principals. Some principals of underperforming schools allegedly undergo accountability meetings in an effort to pressure them into either improving their performance or resigning from their positions and responsibilities. Additionally, it is alleged that after leaving their jobs, principals are marketed to prospective union members. Roodt (2018) argues that the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) has successfully taken control of South Africa's educational system and that its officials have taken over the provincial education departments, and are selling promotion posts to its incompetent members, The South African Schools Act mandates that a school principal must answer for the success of his or her school, hence it is acceptable if the education authorities ask the principals to account (Republic of South Africa, 2007). According to Siamoo (2013), some principals are believed to lack the knowledge necessary to support their teachers in becoming competent. Principals lack knowledge of instructional leadership because they haven't received any help from the DBE in terms of resources or materials to help their learners achieve better results (Vilakazi, 2016).

The department representatives exerted pressure on the principals at both circuit and district meetings by criticising and blaming them for failing to carry out their instructional leadership responsibilities in schools. The District Director emphasised that in order to raise the iLembe District's standing in the KZN league, the district would hold accountability sessions through school inspections. These sessions have been given the names '*Operation MBO*', "*Operation Gonqa*," and "*Operation Phuma*

esishozini" (iLembe District, 2016). All of these names give the sense that the goal is to put pressure on principals to perform at a required level. Despite this viewpoint, I, as a researcher acknowledge that a school principal has a major responsibility for the learner's academic performance and achievement (Leithwood, 2010). Siamoo's (2013) argument that principals should take responsibility for Grade 12 learners' below par performance is supported by the fact that they are praised and even given gifts for the best learners' performance after the release of national examination results. However, principals do not actually teach in the classroom. If the pressure on the underperforming schools is justified or not, it would be interesting to hear from principals themselves.

1.4.3 Social justification

According to the Bakker and Demerouti (2014) job demand-resource hypothesis, employees perform at their best when they are placed in stressful work contexts since these environments encourage their work engagement. Organisations should provide their workers with enough job challenges and workplace resources, such as feedback, social support, and skill variation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). According to the literature (Al Hosani, 2016; Heystek, 2015; Siamoo, 2013; Simuchimba, 2016), principals of underperforming schools are under a great deal of pressure to raise learner academic performance. However, the reviewed literature has failed to demonstrate how principals deal with underperformance pressures. The connection between the identities of principals and how they handle underperformance pressures, and the rationale behind the strategies employed by principals to deal with underperformance pressure has not been provided.

According to Bhengu (2005), secondary school principals in rural areas need to be heard and have a space where they can reflect on their work practices and experiences. Through the use of narratives about their experiences, Bhengu (2005) was able to overcome an epistemological and methodological problem as a result of his research. I am motivated to use these approaches in this study, and a narrative inquiry seemed to be the most suitable approach in that regard. The majority of the Ilembe District principals are under pressure to perform since their schools are not performing well (Naidoo, 2017; Ntombela, 2014; Pieterse, 2017).

In the iLembe District, the Matric pass rate has decreased from 69.7% in 2014 to 60.7% in 2015 (Department of Education, 2016). The 2018 class has the lowest grade point average in the province at 78.2% (Geist, 2019). According to these findings, the KZN province's Ilembe District currently has the worst performance, and to add salt to the wound, some of its schools are among those in the

province where all learners failed (Abraham & Troksie, 2017). Several threats have been made to put pressure on underperforming school principals between 2006 and 2017 in South Africa. Such pressures include the use of school visits by district officials who hold accountability sessions with them, and even close schools down, or place them under administration. In some cases, this may result in demotion of principals, or even expulsion of a principal (Mavuso, 2013; Ntombela, 2014). Several stakeholders reportedly visited underperforming schools to hold accountability sessions for their schools' poor academic performance after the release of the Matric results (Herbst, 2017). According to Mngomezulu (2018), the MEC for Education in Gauteng Province was cited as suggesting that he would fire principals of the worst-performing schools after the announcement of the Matric results. According to Heystek (2007), the Director General of the Department of Basic Education stated that failed schools, as determined by the Matric examination results, would be shut down or placed under administrative control.

It is noteworthy that the situation in SA, particularly in KZN, differs from that in other countries. The stick principle, in terms of which, principals are subjected to significant pressure if their schools perform poorly, is used in South Africa, including the KZN province. Other nations apply a "stick and carrot" principle – sanctions - and rewards - to school principals based on the academic success of their institutions. For instance, Davis et al. (2005) argue that policy makers are putting a lot of pressure on principals by granting them incentives for good school performance and penalties for poor performance. According to Davis et al. (2005), the United States' statutes threaten to fire the principal of a failing school. A tiny amount of a principal's pay in the Portland, Oregon region of the United States is determined by a set of professional standards that are ostensibly related to the accomplishments of the learners. According to Boyland (2011), underperforming Californian schools receive funding reductions as sanctions for below par performance. According to Mendez (2009), if a principal's school performs poorly in Mexico, he or she may face a range of penalties, including an oral warning, a warning notice, a bad performance remark, a suspension without pay, and finally termination of employment. In order to accomplish its goals, this study aims to fill in any gaps in the body of knowledge and to break the taboo surrounding the struggles that underperformance pressures pose for principals of failing schools.

1.5 Main Research Puzzle (Main Research Question)

- What were secondary school principals' lived experiences of wrestling with underperformance pressures in the iLembe District?

These are addressed by the following sub-research puzzles (Supporting Questions)

- Who were the principals that wrestled with underperformance pressures in the iLembe Districts' secondary schools?
- How did principals of underperforming secondary schools lead their schools in the iLembe District?
- What did the principals of underperforming schools considered as solutions to outwrestle underperformance in the iLembe District secondary schools?

1.6 Clarification of key concepts used in this study

There are five key concepts that are clarified below, and these are 'wrestle, underperformance, job pressure, principalship and narratives.

1.6.1 Wrestling

The term 'wrestling' is a verb that means to engage in serious thought, consideration, argument, or to act as though one is engaged in a violent or determined fight, such as wrestling with heavy luggage. It also means to contend by grappling with and trying to trip or knock an opponent off balance (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 1999).

1.6.2 Underperformance

The economic ideology known as neoliberalism introduced the idea of underperformance to the educational debate (Codd, 2005; Paterson, 2016)**.** The idea of "school underperformance" relates to the typical examination performance of learners in a school (Du Plessis, 2017; Heystek, 2015; Leepo, 2015; Mrali, 2012; Myende, 2014; Ntombela, 2014; Sijako, 2017; Vilakazi, 2016). Vilakazi (2016) persuasively defines underperformance in schools as referring to schools with high retention rates; schools with pass rates in their Grade 12 examinations that are below the national average of 60%; primary schools with more than 50% of learners performing at level 3 or below in the annual national

assessment. Underperformance in schools is when learners perform below the desired levels (David, 2014; Paterson, 2016). It refers to matric scores that are lower than the national average of 50% (Ramala, 2009; Sijako, 2017). It may also denote reading and numeracy outcomes for Grades 3 and Grade 6 that are less than 60% (Heystek, 2015; Leepo, 2015; Ntombela, 2014). What is clear from these definitions is that there is no single yardstick to use to define underperformance. In the context of this study, underperformance refers to pass rates in Grade 12 that are below a 60% average.

1.6.3 Job pressures

The term job pressure refers to threats to employees' work-life balance, as well as their emotional, mental, and physical health and wellbeing, which result from a quantity of work that does not match the time scheduled for it (Koltai & Schiemann, 2015; Lott, 2017). The terms pressure, challenges, and work-related stress all have the same connotation; they do not work in unison, but rather, highlight different aspects of the employee's complex experience (Drumea, 2016). Stress can result from increasing pressure, however, reducing the likelihood of this component and its effects is another way to prevent its emergence (Drumea, 2016). According to Sinha (2014), stress is an external pressure that interacts with several types of interior worry; it is frequently used as a synonym for words like anxiety, frustration, conflict, tension, pressure, strain, and many others.

1.6.4 Principalship

A principal was formerly referred to as a "principal teacher" since the word "principal" was used as an adjective before the word "teacher" (Mendels, 2012). This meant that a principal was a sort of first among equals, and as such, should not be seen as the chief, the top executive, the boss of everyone else, or the one in charge of all the levers (Mendels, 2012). He or she was a learner who put academics first at school (Mendels, 2012). Principals are currently faced with the challenges of turning around failing schools while striving to uphold the principles expressed in the more modern phrase "instructional leader" (Mendels, 2012). The idea of principalship is framed within the idea that teaching is a profession that seeks to directly support the upkeep of social democracy by creating communities of educated and informed citizens. Teachers, including principals, are employed by the state to carry out this mission by exercising a certain amount of professional autonomy in choosing what and how to teach (Codd, 2005). Therefore, principalship is a high-wire act that can only be accomplished by those with the utmost skill, who are able to manage the days that are typically filled with various administrative and management tasks, scheduling, reporting, managing relationships

with parents and the larger community, handling unexpected multiple learner and teacher crises and extraordinary situations, engaging in activities that are intended to increase learner achievement and maximise potential (Mestry, 2017). This is the sense of this term that is used throughout this study.

1.6.5 Narratives

The term 'narratives' refers to expressions of accounts of daily life; stories that spring from the imagination; vignettes of daily life; news reports of events of public interest; histories; gossip, and other oral and written accounts in the past, present, and future (Daiute, 2014). Characters, whether human or otherwise, are frequently present in narratives and are usually placed in settings that are both spatial and temporal in order to convey some sort of meaningful experience or idea (Daiute, 2014). Therefore, a narrative would point beyond its brevity and would draw in the careful reader's or listener's curiosity and ideas about the surrounding situation. As a by-product of social life and human social activity, narrating is culture in action. It highlights relationships between characters and events even when the reader or listener is unaware of the specifics of the context (Daiute, 2014). Clandinin (2006) asserts that the term "narrative," which is sometimes used interchangeably with "story," has a wide range of meanings and is utilised in a variety of ways by various disciplines.

Narrative inquiry in the human sciences is a twentieth-century phenomenon; the discipline has realist, post-modern, and constructionist threads, and researchers and practitioners differ on a specific definition (Chase, 2005; Langellier, 2001; McLeod, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993). Even when the reader or listener is unaware of the specifics of a context, a narrative point beyond its brevity piques their interest and ideas about the situation at hand (Muylaert et al., 2014). Narrating is the interaction of expressions and contexts in ways that make relationships among characters and events prominent plus, it is a culture in action since it is a result of social life and human social interaction (Daiute, 2014). According to Clandinin (2006), the term "narrative" has many different meanings and is used in a variety of ways by different disciplines. The use of story is a useful investigative approach in qualitative research, according to Muylaert et al. (2014). The narrative is a classic style of communication whose goal is to serve and communicate the content of subjective experiences.

1.7 Outline of chapters

In this section, I present the outline of the chapters

Chapter One

This is the first chapter, and in it, I analyse the phenomenon of this study and provide some background about why this study was conceived in the first place. The study's history and the research challenge are presented. Following that, there are three perspectives on the rationale for conducting this study, and these are personal, practical and social reasons. I also outline the study's goals and the puzzles (or research questions) that are the inspiration for it. Finally, I describe the chapter structure of this study.

Chapter Two

What has been written about this phenomenon by researchers is described in this chapter. To highlight important points that are pertinent to this study, I have organised this literature review by theme. Principalship, the work environments in which principals work, principals' personalities and behaviours, principals' practices, underperformance and its causes, underperformance pressures and their effects, and techniques for reducing underperformance pressures are all relevant issues covered in the chapter.

Chapter Three

The theoretical foundation for this study is the main subject of this chapter. It examines the three theories, Identity Theory, Teacher Education and Diversity (ITTED) theory by Olsen (2012); Context-Responsive Leadership (CRL) theory by Bredeson, Klar and Johansson (2008) as well as the Five Domains of Instructional Leadership Model by Weber (1996). It begins by going over what ITTED is and how it relates to this study, then covers what the CRL theory is and how it relates to this study and the Five Domains of Instructional Leadership Model. Finally, it examines how the theories were put together to form a theoretical framework and why this framework is appropriate for supporting this research.

Chapter Four

The methodological progression of this investigation is presented in this chapter. It begins by outlining the paradigmatic positioning of this investigation before moving on to discuss the research design, narrative research tradition, researcher's function, sample design, participants, sample size, recruiting and access, piloting, as well as data generation.

Chapter Five

In order to address the first research sub-puzzle, this chapter introduces the first level of analysis, known as narrative analysis. The participant narratives are presented in this chapter in the following order: Mr Smith's narrative, Miss Zuma's narrative, Mr Moroka's narrative, Miss Govender's narrative, Mr McDonald's narrative, and finally, Dr Sikhakhane's narrative.

Chapter Six

This chapter presents the second level analysis known in narrative inquiry as the analysis of the narratives. The attempts to depict how principals' leadership practices respond to the second research sub-puzzle constitute the focus of this chapter. The commonalities and particularities of the experience are given as part of expressing the leadership practices of the six principals. Beginning with commonalities of experience, the chapter moves on to particularities of experience.

Chapter Seven

This chapter offers suggestions for how to overcome the pressure for underperformance in secondary schools in an effort to address the third research sub-puzzle. Only the most salient recommendations made by the participants as potential fixes to raise achievement in the secondary schools with low test scores are presented in this chapter.

Chapter Eight

In this final chapter, I summarise, clarify, and draw conclusions based on my findings as presented in the previous three chapters. I begin by summarising all of the preceding chapters to introduce the reader to the chapter's major theme and prepare the ground for this chapter's presentation. The study's theoretical contributions, methodological contributions and research implications are then discussed.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the background to the study and the research problem. This was then followed by the three reasons for doing this study, namely, personal, practical and social reasons. After that, the study's goals and the problems (research questions) that guided it were laid out for the reader. I then went on to explain the key ideas that were applied to this study. Finally, I described the outline of the structure of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

RECURRING DEBATES: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has introduced the study and provided a justification for the research problem and need for the study. As part of the justification, I drew from three key areas, personal, professional and theoretical. This is the second chapter and it is dedicated to the review of related literature. A literature review describes the topic being studied using information gleaned from a review of the literature (Mudavanhu, 2017). A comprehensive, methodical and critical analysis of publications that are pertinent to a research endeavour is how Maponya (2015) defines a literature review. The goal of a literature review, according to Chigbu et al. (2023), is to learn about the research that has been done on a particular subject and to uncover some solutions to the concerns that have been raised. To highlight important issues that are pertinent to this investigation, I have organised the literature review in this study by themes. The main research puzzles and the sub-research puzzles serve as the foundation for the concerns that are covered here. The debates that relate to the subject matter and goals of this study are the focus of the thematic presentation. The principals of the underperforming secondary schools in the iLembe District are the main subject of this study's narratives.

The discussion of the literature I reviewed is organised into 13 broad themes and one of the themes has 11 Sub-themes. These themes are (a) Conceptualising principalship; (b) Conceptualising schools' and teachers' underperformance; (c) Conceptualising learner performance; (d) Underperformance in education: International and national perspectives; (e) Principals' personalities and behaviours when leading teaching and learning; (f) The context within which the contemporary principals work; (g) The discrepancy between principals' practices and their conceptual perspectives on curriculum leadership; (h) Factors that contribute to underperformance in schools; (i) Underperformance pressures that school principals endure; (j) Factors that contribute to the creation of pressure for the principals in schools; (k) The impact of underperformance pressures on principals': practices, performances, personal wellbeing, behaviours, and on principals' instructional leadership; (l) The impact of underperformance pressure on principals' curriculum leadership; (m) Strategies used by principals to mitigate underperformance and its effects.

2.2 Conceptualising school principalship

In this section, I unpack the concept principalship because its conception is important for understanding the impact of academic underperformance pressures on principals. The reviewed literature reveals that at an international level principalship has been widely conceptualised, and that it has evolved over centuries. For example, Mendels (2012) writing for the Wallace Foundation in New York City, provides a view which suggests that during the 19th century, the concept of principalship was understood and used differently from how it is conceptualised today. According to Mendels (2012), during the 19th century, the term principal was an adjective in front of the word teacher, thus, meaning that a principal was referred to as the principal teacher. This meant that a principal was a kind of first among equals. Therefore, he/she should not be viewed as the chief, or as the top executive, or as a head of all others, or as the person who controls the levers (Mendles, 2012). It is noticeable that principals were the same as any other teachers in the schools. According to Mendels (2012), the principal was a person who was concerned with instruction above everything at the school. Those views are history today because principals are facing the challenges of turning around the failing schools and work to live up to the ideals embodied in a more contemporary term known as instructional leader (Mendels, 2012).

One lesson to draw from that conception of a principal teacher is quite useful today as well because, what it meant at the time was that a principal is essentially a teacher before she or he can be regarded as a principal. I say that such a conception is useful because it suggests that school principals should first and foremost, consider themselves as teachers. In the context of South Africa, many of us are aware that school principals have been focusing largely on administrative duties, and in some instances, have forgotten that their main duties are those of leading teaching and learning.

In Australia, Codd (2005) presents an Australian view of the concept principalship. He draws from a contemporary political and economic context. According to him, the concept of principalship is framed within a view of teaching as a profession that aims to contribute directly to the maintenance of social democracy through building communities of literate and informed citizens where teachers, including principals are employed by the state to fulfil such a mission by exercising a degree of professional autonomy in determining what and how to teach. According to Akinbode and Shuhumi (2018), a successful principal in the 21st century will be the one who switches from being a principal leader to being a servant leader. Instead of using bureaucratic and psychological authority, the

principal should employ moral authority. By being a servant leader, successful principals see their position as a service to humanity and see themselves as servants to their followers. In doing so, a principal would be highly committed to the school.

This literature evaluation identified three alternative conceptualisations of principalship in South Africa from researchers working in various contexts. For instance, Gowpall (2015) sees the principalship as a position held by a teacher who acts as a leader and manager at the school and whose practices are to influence the culture of teaching and learning through interactions with the teachers and learners in an effort to achieve effective curriculum delivery and coverage. Her study was conducted in an urban setting of the Pinetown District in the eThekwini Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal. In an urban setting in the Ekurhuleni District of Gauteng Province in South Africa, Mestry (2017) sees principalship as a high wire act that can only be accomplished by the most skilled people who are able to manage the days that are typically filled with various administrative and management tasks, scheduling, reporting, managing relationships with parents and the larger community, dealing with unforeseen multiple learner and teacher crises, and more. Drawing conclusions regarding the notion of principalship from the views that have already been expressed above reveals how complex it is to be a school principal. These views also give some clues about how various researchers conceptualise it. This study follows the perspective of Akinbode and Shuhumi (2018) who claim that the successful principal during the twenty-first century is one who switches from being a principal leader to being a servant leader. This conceptualisation is not different from those expressed by Mestry (2017) in the sense that a school principal is a person who handles just too many issues, relating to administration, leadership, management and also teaching and learning. This indicates the extent and nature of work of a school principal today. It must be a daunting task.

2.3 Conceptualising schools' and teachers' underperformance

The low performance of Grade 12 learners in a school during the Grade 12 national examinations is what South African researchers like Du Plessis (2017), Hendriks and Dunn (2021), Heystek (2015), Leepo (2015), Mrali (2012), Myende (2014), Ntombela (2014), Sijako (2017), and Vilakazi (2016) have all defined as school underperformance. Vilakazi (2016) persuasively defines underperformance in schools as referring to schools with high retention rates; schools with pass rates in their Grade 12 examinations that are below the national average of 60%. In relation to primary schools, these are school wherein more than 50% of the learners perform at Level 3 or below in the Annual National

Assessment tests, as well as schools with high retention rates. Vilakazi's (2016) conception of schools' poor performance is used in this study, particularly, in relation to secondary schools.

According to several scholars, poor performance of teachers is to blame for the education system's shortcomings. For instance, Mabena et al. (2021) in South Africa, and Mendez (2009) in Mexico describe underperformance in education as a below par work performance by teachers who either fall short of fulfilling their tasks or perform them to an unfavourable standard. Academic underperformance refers to teachers acting in an unsatisfactory manner and disobeying established norms (Codd, 2005; Patterson, 2016; Shahjahan et al., 2021). The market-focused environment, where teachers' performance and their capacity to teach are closely scrutinised, and where teachers have increasingly been managed so that their productivity can be measured in terms of the test results and examination performances of their learners, are the main causes of underperformance (Codd, 2005; Paterson, 2016).

Kotola (2016) and Ahlström and Aas (2020) conclude that underperformance in education occurs when a teacher, as an employee, does not completely contribute to his or her profession, and, as a result, the learner's academic outcomes are neither quantitatively sufficient nor sufficiently satisfying. This indicates that a teacher is truly failing to perform his or her job obligations or is defying orders, although the employer has a right to expect sufficient activity from the teacher as an employee when entering into a contract with the employer. According to King'aru (2014), underperformance in education in Tanzania is defined as a failure of the teachers to execute work in accordance with the current criteria of correctness, completeness, cost and speed. Thaba-Nkadimene and Mmakola (2019), Heystek (2015), Myende (2014), Rammala (2009), and Sijako (2017) have also conceptualised academic underperformance of teachers in South Africa. But among them, I thought that Myende's (2014) interpretation of the teachers' academic underperformance was intriguing since he clarifies what academic performance and academic achievement actually are. According to Myende, "Academic achievement is both a component of and an outcome of academic performances" (2014, p. 38). According to Myende (2014), academic success is the degree to which a teacher has met their educational objectives, which are assessed by tests or ongoing evaluations. From this perspective, it may be concluded that underperformance in education refers to the degree to which teachers have fallen short of their objectives as judged by tests or ongoing evaluations.

2.4 Conceptualising learner's underperformance

Researchers in South Africa (Dhurumraj, 2013; George, 2019; Ngema, 2016; Rammala, 2009; Seobi & Wood, 2016) concur with other scholars on the continent (Baffour-Awuah, 2011; Chileya, 2016; David, 2014; Makondo & Makondo, 2020; Mapolisa & Tshabalala, 2014; Simuchimba, 2016) when they define learners' underperformance as an inability to meet a predetermined standard in their competencies. Academic underperformance of learners is defined by Joseph (2019) and Paterson (2016) from Australia and Al-Zoubi (2015) from Jordan, as any performance that is below a desirable standard and as a candidate's inability to achieve a predetermined performance standard in a certain evaluation exercise, such as an examination. These academics go on to explain that performance indicators like the candidate's grades, divisions, and marks on standards examinations are used to measure it.

2.5 Academic underperformance in education: International and national perspectives

In this section, the idea of academic underperformance is explored. It seems that there is an agreement among the researchers in Australia that neo-liberalism, a sort of economic ideology, is responsible for introducing the idea of educational underperformance into the debate (Joseph, 2019; Paterson, 2016). Neo-liberalism also brought to the concepts of performance: standards, excellence, accountability, choice and quality in education (Codd, 2005; Joseph, 2019; Paterson, 2016). The word 'managerial', which is used to describe principals' activities as they control outcomes in the school, is included in the idea of underperformance (Paterson, 2016). This creates conflict (pressure) with the parallel discourse of the principal as the primary educator in a school. Underperformance in schools, underperformance by teachers and underperformance by learners are the three categories into which the concept of underperformance in education is separated in this study.

2.6 Principals' personalities and behaviours when leading teaching and learning

The notions of principals' personalities and actions are discussed in this section because, in my opinion, understanding them is crucial to understanding the effects of learners' academic underperformance on principals. According to Ali (2011) in Iran, Akinbode and Shuhumi (2018), Asri and Tahir (2014), all from Malaysia, the principals' leadership significantly influences how teachers adapt their self-personalities to the culture of employment at schools. School principals should possess the following personal values, according to Asri et al. (2014) and Ali (2011): self-acceptance, self-

control, changes, honesty, adjustment, self-assessment, ability, forward movement, commitment, compliance, self-symbolic, reaction, professionalism, friendliness, self-confidence, wilfulness, intelligence, ability to manage, discernment, and so forth. In order to promote economic growth, Akinbode and Shuhumi (2018) also urge for knowledge acquisition through new technologies and inventions. As a result, the community expects soft skills from the school, which are prerequisites for open positions.

According to Niqab et al. (2014), an effective principal must possess personal wisdom. These scholars further argue that a principal will most likely be able to turn a failing school into a successful institution if he or she has a strong personality and will-power, a motivational skill, a soft attitude, and the ability to communicate effectively (Niqab et al., 2014). Ibukun et al. (2011) in Ekiti State, Nigeria, emphasise that age, sex, and experience are the three personality factors of leadership that define a principal's efficiency in Nigerian secondary schools. Self-discipline is cited by Engelbrecht (2009**)** and Purnomo et al. (2020) as one of the key characteristics of principals that improves learners' academic achievement. Openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism are the principals' main five personality characteristics (Garcia et al., 2014). In Pakistan, Bakhsh et al. (2015) agree with Garcia et al. (2014) and add that principals who exhibit these personalities become highly effective in their leadership and management and can complete work from their subordinates and followers on schedule.

The American researcher, Garland (2018) highlighted four key leadership behaviours for principals, namely, articulating the school's objectives, conveying those objectives, coordinating the curriculum and encouraging professional growth. According to Gerald (2018), a principal's high visibility encourages the development of relationships between teachers and learners and recognises teachers individually for their efforts or performance. Principals who exhibit this kind of behaviour are frequently seen taking the time to chat informally with teachers and learners, visiting classrooms to discuss school-related issues with teachers and learners and participating in extracurricular and co-curricular activities. The attitudes and behaviours of principals are vital, according to van Niekerk (2022), who cites the results of various studies. Van Niekerk (2022) lists the following behaviours of the best principals; respecting and valuing teachers as professionals; having an open-door policy; being accessible, available and willing to listen; being fair, honest and trustworthy; supporting teachers with parents; supporting teachers in matters of student discipline; effective administrative behaviours; emotional support behaviours; and appreciating teachers' judgement as professionals.

These values and qualities are shared by many scholars in the field of educational leadership and management. According to Maponya (2015), principals' behaviours reflect their deeds. Maponya (2015) highlighted five key principals' instructional leadership characteristics, including action research, grouping development, directing help, developing professionally, and establishing the curriculum. One of the most effective instructional leadership behaviours is offering professional development to instructors (Maponya, 2015).

2.7 The context within which the contemporary principals work

Understanding the environments in which principals operate is crucial for comprehending their practices and actions. This would make it easier to comprehend how academic underperformance affects principals. The perspective of the environment in which principals lead and manage their schools that is supported by several scholars is presented in this literature review. This literature study presents a viewpoint on the setting in which principals' guide and oversee their schools. These academics include Akinbode and Shuhumi (2018); Codd (2005); Heystek et al. (2008); Peterson (2016). Uijens and Ylimaki (2017) concur in saying that managerialism and neo-liberalism have an impact on the environment in which education leadership and management occurs. The researchers emphasise that governments have sought to obtain greater and more direct control over public education within the framework of neoliberal strategies of structural adjustment. Since it is claimed that education is directly tied to economic growth, this positions public education within the sphere of economic policies and views state spending on public education as an investment in human capital (Akinbode & Shuhumi, 2018; Codd, 2005; Mestry, 2017; Paterson, 2016). The ultimate objective of education policy is to make it possible for individual learners to gain the skills and abilities required to perform more successfully and productively in a changing global market, within the framework of economic ideology, and within which schools and principals operate (Codd, 2005; Paterson, 2016).

Since children are seen as human capital who require quality education to ensure that they are given the skills and information they need to thrive in the job market, the performance of principals and their teaching skills are closely scrutinised in a market-focused environment (Mafuwane, 2011; Oumer, 2014; Paterson, 2016). It is widely believed, and has been stated in various ways in the literature, that under neo-liberalism, principals and their schools are increasingly regulated such that their productivity can be gauged in terms of the test results and examination performances of the learners in their schools. Performativity, which is defined by what is created, observed and assessed,

is the supervision of principals and their teachers by district officials through inspection that uses judgements, comparisons, and displays as a way means of incentive, control, attrition, and change (Paterson, 2016). Principals' responsibilities are compared to those of chief executive officers in the commercial sector within the neo-liberal and managerial paradigm **(**Paterson, 2016). Where public education is taking place, economic goals have taken the place of citizenship goals, producing individuals who should contribute significantly to the nation's economy (Codd, 2005; Heystek et al., 2008; Mafuwane, 2011; Mestry, 2017; Paterson, 2016). Principals must concentrate more on what can be recorded, documented and reported regarding teaching and learning than on the educational process itself due to the performativity culture enforced by the market setting in education (Paterson, 2016).

As a result of being expected to manage their schools like small businesses and carry out strategic planning, effective financial management, and entrepreneurial activities, principals in this market context experience stress that negatively affects both their roles and their wellbeing (Codd, 2005; Paterson, 2016). Schools must compete for enrolment using business tactics because this affects the funding and operating grants they receive from the Ministry of Education (Codd, 2005; Heystek et al., 2008).

2.8 The discrepancy between principals' actual practices and their theoretical perspectives on instructional leadership

The difference between theoretical viewpoints on principals' instructional leadership and their practical real-world implementations must be made clear in order to establish the framework for understanding how underperformance pressure affects principals' instructional leadership. In a more restricted meaning, instructional leadership is limited to behaviour that concentrates on teaching practises (Petrovic & Vracar, 2019). Instructional leadership refers to a principal's behaviour when dealing with school concerns such school culture. Whether instructional leadership is used in a more restricted or general meaning, its objective is to raise learner accomplishment. According to McBrayer et al. (2020), an instructional leader is a school leader who prioritises the following aspects of education: instruction; developing a community of learners; sharing decision-making; maintaining the fundamentals; maximising time; supporting the continuous professional development of all staff members (Isaiah & Isaiah, 2014; Mestry, 2017); rerouting resources to support a multifaceted school plan (Mafuwane, 2011; Magwaza, 2016**),** and fostering an environment of integrity, inquiry, and respect (Shaked, 2018).

In many nations, principals are frequently accused of failing to fulfil their responsibilities as instructional leaders, according to the literature review for this study. For example, Shaked (2018) found that principals frequently lack awareness of what is occurring in the classroom because they view themselves as managers rather than instructional leaders. As a result, they are unable to recognise the difficulties that teachers and students are dealing with. For a variety of reasons, South African principals neglect or disregard their instructional obligations in favour of concentrating on their administration responsibilities (Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021; Chikoko et al., 2015; Goslin, 2009; Leepo, 2015; Magwaza, 2016; Mathunyane, 2013; Mestry, 2017; Moonsammy-Koopansammy, 2012; Ntombela, 2014; Seobi & Wood, 2016). According to Gedifew (2020) and Atnafu (2014), in the Ethiopian context, principals have disregarded instructional leadership despite widespread calls for it because they do not believe it will improve the quality of the educational system's output after a number of widespread failures and half-baked efforts from various educational institutions around the world, including their own nation Ethiopia. According to Gedifew (2020) and Atnafu (2014), the quality issue has caused considerable discussion and controversy among Ethiopians over the years in newspapers, radio shows, and television shows, as well as among parents, religious institutions, and non-governmental groups.

Although most principals are found to be busy on a daily basis dealing with a lot of personal difficulties rather than engaged in teaching obligations, the instructional leadership in Pakistan contributes more to the improvement of the school (Khan et al., 2020; Niqab et al. (2014). According to Puruwita et al. (2022), and Firmaningsih-Kolu (2016) from Indonesia, instructional leadership is necessary for efficient school leadership; however, more principals today are failing to exhibit this behaviour on a regular basis due to the numerous complex problems and distractions that are preventing the implementation of instructional leadership at schools.

2.9 Factors that contribute to underperformance in schools

The literature review has uncovered many factors that contribute to underperformance in schools. In this section I discuss 10 of these factors. The 10 factors are (a) Teachers' incompetence and bad practices which lead to academic underperformances; (b) Principals' poor leadership and management approaches; (c) School working environment as a contributing factor to learner academic

underperformance; (d) Principals' misunderstanding of education policy as a contributing factor to learner academic underperformance; (e) Teacher unions as a contributing factor to learner academic underperformance; (f) Socio-economic and political factors as contributing factors to learner academic underperformance; (g) Family issues as contributing factors to learner academic underperformance; (h) Learners' behaviour as a factor to learner academic underperformance; (i) Learners' lack of competency in English as a contributing factor to learner academic underperformances. These contributory factors are discussed next.

2.9.1 Teachers' incompetence and bad practices lead to academic underperformance

The first contributory factor relates to teachers' incompetence and bad practices. The review of related literature indicates that the two primary factors contributing to learners' academic underperformance in schools are directly linked to teacher incompetence and poor teaching and learning practices. In this regard, Thaba-Nkadimene and Mmakola (2019) as well as Ngema (2016) provide the first evidence in support of this claim. These scholars state that in a remote rural South African setting, teachers' inability to engage learners in subject content contributes to learners' educational underperformance. Siamoo (2013), who contends that a lack of pedagogical expertise on the part of teachers contributes to academic underperformance in education, supports this view and bases these claims on experiences in a rural setting in Tanzania.

Mabena et al. (2021); Van der Berg et al. (2011), as well as Dhurumraj (2013) highlight that learner underperformance in school is directly linked to teachers' poor content knowledge, poor pedagogical skills, combined with poor understanding of the syllabus and negative attitudes in South African urban contexts. Other factors that contribute to underperformance include teachers' high absenteeism rates (Du Plessis, 2017), their tardiness and reduced instructional time (Maponya, 2015), their use of ineffective teaching methods, their poor lesson planning, and the absence of opportunities for ongoing professional development (Nadas, 2019; Seobi & Wood, 2016). King'aru (2014) discovered that poor academic performance was caused by incompetent teachers in Tanzania's metropolitan Kinondoni District. In agreement, Sa'ad and Usman (2014) from the city setting of Dutse Metropolis in Jigawa State, Nigeria, add that poor performance is brought on by under-qualified teachers who are unable to effectively apply instructional methods and who have a negative attitude toward innovation. All these narratives echo the same notion of teachers' knowledge and teaching skills deficits as major

contributory factors for learners' underperformance in schools, particularly, in rural communities of many African countries.

There are a variety of factors that contribute to underperformance in education, including poor practises. For instance, in Tanzania, it is brought on by the teaching of unexpected material and the use of inappropriate teaching techniques (King'aru, 2014; Nyangarika & Ngasa, 2020) in Nigeria, it is brought on by the use of the native mother tongue in all interactions, the use of English only inside the four walls of the classrooms and poor teacher qualifications (Ngozi et al., 2021; Sa'ad & Usman, 2014); and in Kenya, it is brought on by lack of in-service training for teachers (Gilbert, 2020) and the blending of teaching with conducting businesses (Wanjiru, 2013). In the Zambian context, teachers' failure to instil competencies and skills in their charges results in underachievement among pupils in the classroom (Chileya, 2016; Mapulanga, 2019). According to Joseph (2019) and Peterson (2016), in the Australian context, teachers' deficiencies that lead to underperformance include an inability to fully implement the curriculum, a lack of planning abilities, a lack of subject knowledge, and behaviours like bad classroom organisation and poor classroom control.

One of the causes of Pakistan's schools' poor academic performance is a lack of properly qualified teachers who can assist learners in achieving their academic goals (Asif et al., 2020; Niqab et al., 2014). According to Agyapong et al. (2022) in Canada and Yariv (2011) in Israel, teachers who lack enthusiasm, have inadequate teaching abilities, have personal illnesses or pathologies, or are experiencing emotional pain are the main causes of educational underperformance. Underperformance in Mexico is a result of teachers' misconduct, criminal activity, tardiness, and unauthorised absences (Mendez, 2009; Tomaszewiski et al., 2022).

2.9.2 Principals' poor leadership and management approaches

The second factor that contributes to learner underperformance relates directly to principals' leadership and management approaches. Various studies (Ertem,2021; Mbele, 2021; Memela & Ramrathan; Onyemuche, 2019) demonstrate that inadequate leadership and management skills of school principals are to blame for the academic underperformance of learners. Maponya (2020) and Ramsey (1999) are of the view that principals should enliven and inspire their institutions and inspire learners and staff to realise their full potential. Casian et al. (2021) in Rwanda, concur with Gumus and Kemal (2013) writing about Turkey, when arguing that principals' low level of education limits

the quality of leadership and management at a school. This scenario results in a compromised quality of educational outcomes at a school. For instance, if the principal lacks a degree, he or she may not support teachers' professional growth, which has a detrimental effect on the quality of instruction at the school and contributes to underperformance (Gumus & Kemal, 2013).

Inadequate leadership by principals' results in educational underperformance in various circumstances. For instance, Memela and Ramrathan (2022) report this in rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Additionally, Vilakazi (2016), from the urban context of Gauteng Province of South Africa claims that underperformance of learners in classrooms is a result of principals' silent denial of the need to establish instructional leadership. According to Gowpall (2015) in South Africa and Mwihaki et al. (2019) in Kenya, principals primarily serve as monitors, supervisors and critics of teachers' work rather than offering support systems like staff development and workshops to help teachers deliver and understand the curriculum.

Principals routinely abandon their instructional leadership roles in favour of administrative tasks, which has a negative impact on academic attainment and instruction at their schools, according to opinions expressed both in rural and urban sectors across nations (Magwaza, 2017; Mestry, 2017; Ngema, 2016; van Wyk, 2020). There is a widespread belief that academic institutions' success is endangered when principals fail to build and maintain strong relationships with their staff (Msila, 2014; Plaatjies, 2019). If their relationship with the principal is not strong enough for them to get along, teachers will not collaborate with the principal, warn Fatima et al. (2020) and Ntombela (2014). Heystek's (2007) model of principal leadership emphasises the importance of connections with teachers, based on communications, motivation and emotional intelligence and is supported by Sunaengsih et al. (2019). Both authors emphasise the importance of connections between principals and staff in different aspects of work, including emotional support.

Literature demonstrates that underperformance in education is a result of principals' lack of leadership abilities on a global scale. For instance, Ogina (2021) in South Africa and Wanjiru (2013) from Kenya, assert that strong relationships between principals and their staff are essential to the success of schools. However, many principals struggle to establish and maintain positive relationships with their teachers and learners and frequently exclude parents from school-related activities, which has a negative impact on secondary school learners' academic performance. According to Oumer (2014), principals in Ethiopia who spend little time in the classrooms and even less time discussing education

with the teachers are to blame for underperformance. According to Oumer (2014), while many principals may schedule time for teachers' meetings and professional development, they hardly ever offer intellectual leadership for improvement in teaching abilities. Therefore, ineffective principal leadership and administration contributes to academic underperformance in schools. According to Feye (2019), in Ethiopia's Sidama Zone and Firmaningsih-Kolu (2016) in Indonesia, underperformance in education occurs because principals today rarely exhibit effective management and leadership skills because they are frequently preoccupied with challenging issues at their institutions. Both of these claims are supported by research.

According to Ossai (2020), poor management practices used by principals are what lead to underperformance in the classroom. Sola et al. (2021) puts forward the view that in order to accomplish a set educational aim, school management should engage in a series of activities that take the form of a cooperative business management process, making use of available resources and management functions to do so. They emphasise that management ideas first used in businesses and industries gave rise to the field of study and practice known as Educational Management. Planning, organising, resourcing, leading, directing, and controlling an organisation, which is a group of one or more people, are all parts of management in business and human organisation activity. Resourcing includes the deployment and manipulation of human, financial, technological, and natural resources (Glover & Levačić, 2020). A lack of adequate management skills, which are underemphasised when hiring principals, have negative consequences. For instance, principals struggle to deliver excellent management (Adaghe, 2021; Leepo, 2015; Maponya, 2015; Ogina, 2021; Seobi & Wood, 2016; Vilakazi, 2016). Many secondary school principals in South Africa lack self-discipline, which causes their institutions to perform poorly (Shaikhnag et al., 2020). Because of their overwhelming schedule, principals do not have time to manage their work (Botha, 2004).

The research consulted emphasises that underperformance in education is a direct result of principals' inadequate management abilities on a continental scale. Underperformance in education is caused by principals not monitoring learners' activities in the classroom (Awuah, 2011). According to Awuah (2011) in Ghana, insufficient administration of instruction by principals in Ghanaian public schools is a contributing factor to low learner achievement in these schools. In Ethiopia Oumer's (2014) study reveals that principals fall short in performing their crucial managerial duties. David (2014) from Morogoro, Tanzania, agrees that ineffective management techniques used by principals are a catastrophe that demoralise teachers and cause poor academic achievement. Wanjiru (2013)

discovered that underperformance in schools is brought on by a lack of thorough management and supervision of education by principals in Kenyan schools. Jared (2011) from the Wakiso District in Uganda affirms that there have been reports from rural schools and in newspaper articles that principals fail to fulfil their management duties. As a result, there are a lot of children running around the villages; teachers misbehave because they frequently skip class or show up inebriated, which negatively affects their ability to do their jobs. These scenarios are ubiquitous in many countries of Africa.

What literature has taught us also, is that such challenges have invited negative attention of other nationalities outside the African continent. For instance, Credit (2020) in America, and Smith (2005) in California, USA, discovered that teachers in those countries discriminate against African American learners because they treat them differently from white learners and are less supportive of African American learners, which contributes to the learners' poor academic achievement**.** Smith (2005) elaborates that although all of this occurs under the control of the principals, it is illegal in California since it encourages economic disparity there. However, the issue of poor leadership and management skills is not a uniquely African problem, but this is experienced in other parts of the world. Israel's schools' low success levels are regarded as a result of the principals' poor administration and monitoring abilities (Yariv, 2011). Secondary school underperformance in Mexico is viewed as a result of principals' inability to successfully control the work of the teachers because there, teachers are afforded considerable legal protection from disciplinary actions (Mendez, 2009). Principals and department heads in Finland are to blame for underperformance since they do not effectively oversee academic performance (Kotola, 2016). Therefore, issues around principals’ leadership and management are universal, and they are associated with inferior learners’ academic achievement.

2.9.3 School working environment as a contributing factor to learner academic underperformance

The third factor relates to the working environment. The studied literature brings up a variety of aspects that may contribute to learners' poor academic performance. These include unproductive leadership (Zondi, 2021); a lack of learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) (Ramala, 2009); entropic cultures, a lack of learner motivation and the promotion of undeserving learners to the next grade (Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014). In their list Bhengu and Mthembu add: low teacher expectations; low staff morale; workplace bullying; a lack of clarity regarding work tasks; cliques and conflicts

among staff; learner indiscipline; a high drop-out rate and a lack of parental involvement. This puts more pressure on school principals to address the issue of the work environment. They are tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that the work environment is conducive to effective teaching and learning. Various models of instructional leadership touch on this important aspect, as indicated in Chapter Three.

2.9.4 Principals’ misunderstanding of education policy as a contributing factor to learner academic underperformance

The fourth factor that contributes to learners’ academic underperformance relates to principals’ lack of understanding of policy issues. This is closely related to what was discussed in the preceding two sections which were about principals’ leadership and management skills and the work environment, respectively. Both those issues are directly connected to the principals’ levels of understanding of policy, or lack thereof. The reviewed literature indicates that inadequate educational performance is a result of principals not fully comprehending educational policy regarding their instructional roles, leading them to neglect or overlook it (Chabalala, & Naidoo, 2021; Goslin, 2009; Kruger, 2003; Mestry, 2017; Moonsammy-Koopasammy, 2012; Msila, 2013). Principals who do not correctly interpret and implement policies (King'aru, 2014; Thajane, 2019) lack a thorough understanding of the instructional leadership role (Maponya, 2020).

The literature suggests that there are diverse views on the issue of principals’ understanding of educational policy. On the one hand, there is literature that contends that there are principals who purposefully disregard or ignore their teaching tasks because of work overload, or other reasons that are to blame for underperformance in schools (Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021; Goslin, 2009; Kgatla, 2013; Mestry, 2017). Clearly, such principals are aware that they should be fully involved in curriculum delivery, including teaching duties, but because they are overwhelmed with other responsibilities, they are unable to maintain a healthy balance. On the other side, literature suggests that there are principals who do not show an awareness of the importance of their instructional leadership responsibilities. Therefore, this view implies that poor performance is caused by the principals' inability to fulfil their responsibilities as instructional leaders because they are unclear about these responsibilities and lack support and direction from the policy to carry them out (Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014; Maponya, 2020; Naidu et al., 2008).

The majority of researchers (Bush & Glover, 2009; Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021; Chiedozie & Victor, 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Mestry, 2017) emphasise that principals, as instructional leaders, should visit classes and gather information that they can use to plan for grade-level and system-wide professional development aimed at promoting learning. This raises another disagreement in the literature. The problem, however, is that in South Africa, the Education Labour Relations Council (ERLC) had not succeeded until 2010 to release a resolution allowing the principals to undertake class visits (Christie, 2010). This implies that because they were not covered by policy against teacher militancy, principals were vulnerable. However, a clear understanding of policy would enable principals to remain instructional leaders even without doing class visits because being an instructional leader is not limited to going to classes to observe teachers teaching, there are other important and effective activities as well.

2.9.5 Teacher unions as a contributing factor to learner academic underperformance

The influence of teacher unions is the fifth factor that contributes to learner underperformance. According to a pattern in the research under review, South African academics concur that the South African Democratic Teachers Union's (SADTU) instructional strategies can occasionally have a negative impact on students' academic attainment (Msila, 2021; Wills, 2020). Zengele (2013) found that SADTU members contribute to academic underperformance in some schools because they go on strike for protracted periods of time in pursuit of their goals, leaving students unattended. Additionally, they frighten devoted teachers who are not SADTU members by using violence, which exacerbates the substandard performance of learners (Zengele, 2013). When teacher unions like SADTU schedule meetings for their members during the school day, they disrupt education in rural areas of the Eastern Cape province. Lazy teachers also avoid going to work altogether, citing transport problems, which results in underachievement among students (Mrali, 2012). Other issues relate to conditions of service.

The issue of salary negotiations and conflicts have had negative effect of teaching and learning. One result of the salary negotiations from 2007 to 2010, which were primarily led by SADTU, was a conflict between the unions and the Department of Education as an employer, which led to a protracted strike that, at the end of the year resulted in academic underperformance (Mahlangu & Pitose, 2011; Msila (2022). In South Africa's rural and township context, despite academic underperformance, teacher unions support incompetent teachers and conceal their incompetence causing enrolment in schools to decline (Mthiyane et al., 2014). Due to their paralysing fear of teacher

unions, many principals withdraw into their shells for fear of being taken advantage of by them (Msila, 2022; Mthiyane et al., 2014).

There is a very real risk that teachers with strong political union affiliations will paralyse school management and leadership, which would have a detrimental effect on the advancement of effective teaching and learning according to Msila (2022), who conducted research on urban schools in South Africa. Wills (2014) demonstrates that academic underperformance in education is partially caused by the SADTU-led strikes, which were responsible for 42% of all working days lost in South African schools between 1995 and 2009. In his assessment of the literature, Kudumo (2011) offers empirical observations on teacher unions in Namibia, as well as a discussion of the effect of teacher unions on academic underperformance in the context of Namibian cities. Kudumo (2011) contends that the Namibian teacher unions are destructive and self-serving. He continues by asserting that they have no positive impact at all on education. They frequently obstruct, infrequently inspire vision, and frequently reward mediocrity.

Sinkala et al. (2022) and Wauben (2011) describe the situation in Zambia, where teacher unions have an effect on the country's educational standards. Zambia's teacher unions are unable to enhance academic standards and have limited influence over positive change, claims Wauben (2011). Wauben (2011) asserts that as a result, Zambia's educational system has deteriorated; there is a severe shortage of information and skills, and it is a ticking time bomb. Too many children are dropping out of education, which supports a rise in street kids and criminal activities. Mohammed and Hammangabdo (2022) and Garvey and Ringim (2017) in Nigeria concur with Wauben (2011) because they assert that the influences of the Nigerian teacher unions are comparable to those of Zambia, as expressed by Wauben (2011) about the Zambian context. But these scholars also note that a right to unionism is abused in Nigeria, and what is worse is that the abuses are combined with labour disputes, which cause academic underperformance in the schools (Garvey & Ringim, 2017; Mohammed & Hammangabdo, 2022).

Internationally, teacher unions have an impact on educational performance in Latin American schools (Gindin & Finger, 2013). This resonates with the narratives that come from South Africa. This happens because policymakers hold the unions accountable for lowering the standard of education in schools because of their stance on policy preferences and their participation in strike activities. While the teacher unions assert that they are actively promoting high-quality education, Indin and Finger

(2013) dispute this claim. Around the world, teacher unions have consistently come under fire for a number of reasons, including elevating their own interests above those of students, ignoring the need of high-quality instruction, and encouraging mediocrity by shielding incompetent members (Ghosn & Akkary, 2020; Ring, 2020). In Wisconsin State, in the United States, Baron (2018) claims that since the 1960s, teacher unions have supported underperforming teachers, which has contributed to academic underperformance in schools. In order to lessen the influence of teacher union authority, the state of Wisconsin passed Act 10 in 2011, which, according to Baron (2018), contributed to improve students' academic progress. To conclude this matter, it is evident that teacher unions globally, have a negative effect that contributes to the underperformance of learners.

2.9.6 Socio-economic and political factors as contributing factors to learner academic underperformance

The sixth factor that contributes to learner underperformance is socio-economic and political conditions in a country. Low socio-economic and unfavourable political variables contribute to learners' poor academic achievement (Leepo, 2015; Ramala, 2009; Shahjahan et al., 2021). Poor academic performance is a result of societal realities such as poverty and political and socio-economic issues (Leepo, 2015; Ramala, 2009). Politics and education coexist because political issues are always raised within the context of education (Baba et al., 2020; Leepo, 2015; Ramala, 2009). Msila (2013) agrees that there are a number of issues, such as family poverty, which are either directly or indirectly related to teacher pessimism and academic underperformance in learners.

Masuku (2011) used observations, interviews, and document analysis in the context of Zimbabwe to find that the country's weak social and political forces contribute to academic underperformance among learners. In Zimbabwe, Marongedza et al. (2023), Mapolisa and Tshabalala (2014) agree with Masuku (2011) and add that the low socioeconomic status of learners in rural areas is a result of the unequal distribution of social amenities between urban and rural areas, coupled with an insufficient supply of LTSM, which results in subpar academic performance. In the Kenyan context, disgruntled community members may become hostile, indifferent and uncooperative towards the school's affairs, either because the school principal does not belong to the same ethnic group as them or because they perceive him or her to have been imposed on them. These are seen as root causes of learner academic underperformance (Wanjiru, 2013). According to Wilberforce (2020) and Catherine (2015) in Kenya, low socio-economic status and families who fail to feed their children are to blame for learners'

academic underperformance. Wanjiru (2013) and Catherine (2015) both agree with David's (2014) analysis of the Tanzanian situation, but add that Child labour at an early age, civil wars and political instability in East African countries including Tanzania disrupt teaching and learning in schools, resulting in learner academic underperformance.

According to the literature review conducted in America, learners who are African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged perform below average (Basurto, 2019; Smith, 2005). Smith (2005) defines poor learners as individuals who have low levels of education and low parental income. Academic underperformance among Californian learners is influenced by the low socio-economic conditions of some of the communities it serves (Evans, 2010; Kim & Nicholson, 2022; Mattar, 2012; Santos, 2007; Smith, 2005) concur that low socio-economic factors cause underperformance. In Pakistan, Farooq and Sardar (2016) discovered that many underperforming schools are situated in underprivileged neighbourhoods with families who have low socioeconomic status and a deplorable social background. Vadivel et al. (2023); Karande and Kulkarni (2014) in Mumbai, India, and AlZoubi (2015) in Jordan, claim that learners from families with lower socio-economic status are more likely to have poor academic performance.

2.9.7 Family issues as contributing factors to learner academic underperformance

The seventh factor that contributes to learner underperformance is about family issues. According to Osman and Omar (2023) and Leepo (2015), learners' substandard academic performance was influenced by their unfavourable family structure, low parental literacy rates, and minimal parental involvement in their academics. According to Ramala (2009), domestic disputes between parents, particularly those who are poor and unemployed, cause children to underperform because they are highly emotional concerns for the children to deal with and cause learners to underperform in their academic work. Simweleba and Serpell (2020) and Osei-Mensah (2012) emphasise that divorced parents have been found to be the cause of their children's slow academic performance in a rural farming community context, which seems to agree with the sentiments echoed by Ramala (2009) and Leepo (2015). They also add that poor parental care with gross deprivation of a child's social and economic needs usually yields poor academic performance by the child.

In Nigeria, according to Chukwu-Etu (2009) and Ella et al. (2015), parents' lack of motivation may have a detrimental effect on their children's performance. According to Chinedu et al. (2021) and Ella

et al. (2015), parents who do not recognise or encourage their children's strengths are to blame for their unfavourable self-concepts. Family sizes affect learner performance because having many children makes parents less likely to provide for them (Ella et al., 2015). Children reared by widows, divorced, separated, and never married parents perform less well academically (Chimienti, 2021; Hezekiah, 2016). Hezekiah (2016) notes that the delayed entry into school is one of the significant scholastic disadvantages that learners from divorced families who overcame early childhood issues still experience. Being raised by a single parent is linked to a number of issues that impair learner's performance and lower their educational attainment (Chimienti, 2021; Hezekiah, 2016). According to research by Morsy and Rothstein (2015) and Naite (2021), parents' reluctance to include and encourage their children in educational activities results in poor academic and behavioural performance. Morsy and Rothstein (2015) claim that African American men frequently fail to fulfil their children's educational needs because they continue to be unfaithful to their female partners. The neglected moms in African American households are less educated, which makes it difficult for them to raise children alone. They also do not provide for their children's educational needs, which causes them to perform poorly on academic tests (Morsy & Rothstein, 2015).

The Centre for Education Policy (2012) in Washington, DC and Watt (2019) found that women who are solely responsible for raising their children talk to them less and are less likely to read to them every day. According to the same studies, single mothers tend to support their children less by using more strict parenting methods and showing less interest in their academic endeavours. The Centre for Education Policy (2012) found that children from single-mother households have fewer possibilities to foster skills, motivate them to discover interest in or value learning, and form social connections that value and support achievement. Therefore, family issues have a direct effect on the performance of learners in schools. This puts more burden on school principals in terms of ensuring that they are aware of each learner's home situation and, perhaps, where feasible, provide relevant support. The seven roles of educators make it clear that this aspect is part of their responsibilities.

2.9.8 Learners' behaviour as a factor in learner academic underperformance

This section provides a discussion on the eighth factor that contributes to learner academic underperformance. Leepo (2015) and Obadile and Sinthumule, (2021) in South Africa reveal that contributing factor of learner academic underperformance are the learners' lack of discipline, which negatively affects their learning settings. Some learners bunk classes and courses while others fail to

finish their homework as anticipated, and some frequently and purposefully come to class late and sometimes, inebriated (Leepo, 2015). Leepo (2015) and Rone et al. (2023) concur that learners' unfavourable attitudes toward learning, along with a lack of intrinsic drive to study, and weak cognitive skills resulted in academic underperformance.

The issue of negative attitudes and poor motivation of learners as a cause of academic underperformance has been raised by different scholars such as Mauliya et al. (2020) in Indonesia, Sa'ad and Usman (2014), Chukwu-Etu (2009) in Nigeria; Negumbo (2016) in Namibia; and Wanjiru (2013) in Kenya. All these scholars express the view that academic underperformance among learners is caused by: negative self-concepts when parents do not acknowledge their children's abilities or fail to support them; learners who experience unique cultural barriers to achievements; learners' delinquency; and learners' depression. Simon et al. (2020), and Jaxa (2016) contend that frequent and intentional student absences are a significant factor in learners' poor academic performance. These findings are comparable to those made by Etsy (2005) in Ghana, Mwenda et al. (2013) in the Tharaka District of Kenya, and Farooq and Sardar (2016) in Pakistan (2016). In the Tanzanian context, Kitambazi and Lyamuya (2022) and David (2014) seems to agree that learner absenteeism and the usage of child labour are factors in their poor academic performance. Dhiman (2022), Karande and Kulkarni (2014) from India, found that too much television viewing among children leads to inadequate study patterns and that inappropriate television viewing among adolescents has been linked to erratic sleep and wake schedules and poor sleep quality, violent or aggressive behaviour, substance abuse, and sexual activity— all of which were found to result in decreased school performance. Sarı and Yüce (2020) and Smith (2005) concur that in some cases, underperformance occurs among learners as a result of their incorrect perceptions, which are expressed through a lack of respect for and acceptance of cultural diversity.

Hobbs (2022) and Williams (2011) both agree that African American learners in the United States achieve academically despite experiencing personal difficulties, and that their poor academic performance is due to a lack of resilience. According to Williams (2011), environmental assets, such as adoring and supporting relationships and outside resources, as well as human attributes, such as intelligence, practical coping strategies and approaches, tactics, a sense of worth, and self-efficacy, all enhance resilience. This factor invites schools, both teachers and principals to pay special attention to each learner's situation to try and identify ways and means of supporting the child.

2.9.9 Learners' lack of competency in English as a contributing factor to learners to academic underperformance

The level of performance of learners is determined by their proficiency in English, according to numerous researchers working in various contexts (Rudd & Honkiss, 2020). Mogano (2022), Leepo (2015), Nel and Muller (2010), and Monyai (2010) for example, all concur that the majority of learners in traditionally black schools are linguistically disadvantaged because they are learning English as a second language, which is not necessarily their mother tongue. They have trouble with assessments because of their poor level of English proficiency; candidates for all subjects showed that they lacked the linguistic abilities needed to express themselves in clear and concise paragraphs. They demonstrated deficiencies in their ability to read, comprehend, analyse, evaluate, and apply information to either make decisions or solve problems; their inability to achieve the results is due to communication issues they encounter in classrooms.

Researchers (Galloway et al., 2020; MacFarlane et al., 2020; Taylor, 2008) agree with the opinions expressed and add that learners who are learning in a language that is not their native tongue are at a severe disadvantage because they have too little meaningful exposure to the language outside of the classroom. As a result, learners must first successfully navigate the language before moving on to the subject matter. The inadequate competency of the language of teaching was the cause of learners' poor academic achievement (David, 2014; Edith, 2021). Both Mogano (2022) in South Africa and Sa'ad and Usman (2014) in the Duse Metropolis of Jigawa State, Nigeria, agree that poor English language acquisition from primary to secondary schools is strongly impacted by the use of the mother tongue as the major medium of instruction at the primary school. Sa'ad and Usman (2014) assert that this circumstance promotes the use of local mother tongue in the bulk of interactions and restricts the use of English outside of the classroom. As a result, when teachers of other subjects attempt to teach learners in their subjects, they are compelled to begin by teaching English. These learners do poorly on national examinations as a result of the inefficient teaching techniques (David & Mogano, 2022; Edith, 2021; Sa'ad & Usman, 2014). To conclude this section, I can highlight that the issue of mother tongue instruction has been the subject of debate for a long time and that it is still raging as I write this thesis. The situation in South Africa is even more complex than in many countries in the world, because of the language policy of 11 official languages and the implementation of this policy in

schooling. That is an issue that is beyond the mandate of this study, but it is worth highlighting as a factor that contributes to learner underperformance.

2.9.10 The lack of resources as a contributing factor to learner academic underperformance

The issue of resources is not a small one considering the role that different kinds of resources play in enhancing teaching and learning opportunities. According to various scholars (Agüero et al., 2021; Murtin, 2013), the number of resources injected into the educational system, as well as the educational settings that constrain the effective use of available resources affect the quality of education as measured by the learners' average performance on test scores. According to Mathebula (2022), inadequate resources, bad teaching methods, anxiety and negative attitudes towards Mathematics are to blame for learners' poor performance in Mathematics in Grade 12 in rural secondary schools. Only 36% of South African learners have access to their own Mathematics textbook (Leepo, 2015), and this has a detrimental effect on learning results. This finding supports Mathebula's (2022) views.

Together with Mgimba and Mwila (2022), David (2014), asserts that Tanzania's substandard infrastructure, such as its crumbling structures and poorly kept play grounds, as well as their frequent absence, demoralises teachers and learners and reduces academic success (Maffea, 2020). Both Maffea (2020) in Pennsylvania and Sa'ad and Usman (2014) in rural Ghana contend that the absence of instructional materials and facilities, which are essential elements of the learning process, are what cause learner underperformance. West and Meier (2020) and Sa'ad and Usman (2014) both state that factors like learners learning under trees, learners learning in classrooms that are overcrowded, learners learning in classrooms that lack science and language labs and learners learning in classrooms that are in disrepair all contribute to learners' poor academic performance. Nndweleni (2020) in the Venda Province in the Republic of South Africa and Leithwood (2010) in America assert that the absence of adequate educational infrastructure results in inferior academic achievement. In the extremely difficult urban elementary school environment in California, USA, Carver-Thomas et al. (2022), together with Evans (2010), emphasise that a number of factors, including poverty, high mobility rates, single-parent households, and so forth made it difficult for school principals to manage their staff pressures which contribute to the academic underperformance of schools. According to Dhakal (2020) and Evans (2010), one of the causes of underperformance in schools is the scarcity of instructional materials. One of the principals' instructional leadership responsibilities is to ensure that

resources that will support effective teaching and learning are provided (Weber, 2009). This is part of the principal's duties of preparing an environment that is conducive to effective curriculum delivery.

2.10 Underperformance pressures that principals endure

There is persistent pressure that is exerted on secondary school principals to increase standards (Katamei & Omwono, 2015; Silulwane, 2015). Paterson (2016), a former school principal, agrees with this viewpoint, claiming that he was stretched and dissatisfied by the demands made on him to address the important reasons for teacher underperformance at his school. Other scholars such as Mbele (2021) and Taole (2013), argue that the DBE exerts significant pressure on academic standards and that there is a need for schools to be accountable; as a result, it calls for principals of underperforming schools to take responsibility for their institutions below par performance in the quest for higher learner achievement. Principals feel under external control and are typically under pressure to have a high pass rate when DBE leadership places an emphasis on rewards, monitoring, control, and punishment during constant departmental official visits to monitor, evaluate and make improvement recommendations. This is according to Vyver and Geduld (2022) and Ntombela (2014). According to Ntombela (2014), secondary school underperformance places such a strain on principals that some of them seek protracted sick leaves from their employment to cope.

2.11 Factors that contribute to the creation of pressure for the principals in schools

According to international research, different elements in different nations contribute to major underperformance pressures. For instance, Abduh and Hermanto (2023) from Indonesia, Evans (2010) from California, USA and Mattar (2012) from Lebanon concur that the pressure that is exerted on school principal is affected by the economic backgrounds of the learners. Because of this factor, one will find that the proportion of white children who are enrolled in a given school and the proportion of higher-income learners pose different pressures on the school. Principals in the United States deal with pressures which come from taxing difficulties such complying with state mandates, a lot of paperwork, financial cuts, increasing accountability, and troublesome pupils and teachers (Boyland, 2011). A deteriorating and overcrowded facility, community dissatisfaction, unfunded mandates, and special interest groups are additional causes of pressure for principals (Evans, 2010; O' Brians, 2008; Osai et al., 2021; Queen & Queen, 2005). What I conclude from this argument is that when conditions in the school are unsatisfactory for the clients, a lot of pressure is put on the

principals to improve the conditions. When funding sources dwindle, the situation does not become better, and a vicious cycle continues as more funding is required to improve infrastructure.

Other factors include time constraints, conflicting desires and different needs for various constituencies, and a deteriorating and overcrowded facility. Baker (2020) and Eshetu (2015) found that principals in schools with higher-income, typically white, high-achieving learners experience less stress and demands. High expectations and a drive for academic success puts pressure on principals (Abreha, 2014; Tshabalala, 2020). It results from the principals' heavy workload, a lack of support from stakeholders and a lack of funding (Mutinda, 2008; Turkoglu & Cansoy, 2020). The changes in the educational system are to blame for the strain on principals (du Plessis, 2020; Nzambi, 2012). Ogalo et al., 2020 together with Kalungwa (2014) all from Kenya, discovered that strikes that take place in schools and demands for academic achievement are what put principals under additional strain. Turkoglu and Cansoy (2020) together with Yambo et al., (2012) found that pressure on principals is brought on by events, circumstances, and experiences that undermine the school's equilibrium. Masuku (2011) from Zimbabwe, Ogalo et al. (2020) from Kenya, Siamoo (2013) from Tanzania, and others all concur that pressure on principals is brought on by a high standard of accountability as a result of inadequate performance.

One of the elements that the literature identifies as the causes of pressure on principals is the implementation of school improvement strategies, which encourage district officials to support schools by exerting pressure on the principals of underperforming schools in order to ensure that resources are not wasted (Fauziah et al., 2021; Mrali, 2012). Other factors include the challenge of mitigation processes in socioeconomically disadvantaged settings (Sarfraz et al., 2020; Sethlodi-Lebeloane, 2014**),** the heavy workload of managing the multi-grade schools (Kgomo, 2017; Rotas & Cahapay, 2020), a failure of the school to meet academic targets, time constraints, conflicting desires, a role overload and a lack of resources (Mafora, 2015; Mathunyane, 2011), and high levels of accountability because of poor results (Jerrim & Sims, 2022; Mafora, 2015). Many of the issues raised above resonate with the schools that participated in this study where external interventions like '*Operation MBO*' were imposed on the schools.

2.12 The impact of underperformance pressures on principals' practices, performances, personalities, wellbeing, behaviours and on principals' instructional leadership

According to research, principals' practices, performances, personalities, wellbeing and behaviours, as well as their ability to lead instruction, are all impacted by underperformance pressures. The first problem was raised by Wilson (2022) and Hussein (2008) who discovered that all forms of tensions put a strain on the connections between individuals that make up an organisation's human resources. Hussein (2008) asserts that tense interpersonal relationships within organisations have a detrimental effect on the operations of those organisations or institutions as well as the principals' practices. In line with Mafora's (2015) argument, Muthobi (2021) endorses the notion that tense interpersonal connections in schools, as a result of underperformance pressures, such as role conflicts, have a negative effect on principals' practices. According to Muthobi (2021), underperformance pressures induce role conflict for principals and some of them sweep this under the rug due to the stigma associated with it, as well as the stigma of uncertainty about how the dispute should be resolved. According to Mafora (2015), role work stress can be caused by underperformance pressure which reduce the principal's efficacy. According to Pont et al. (2008), numerous case studies that were conducted in Belgium, Finland, the United Kingdom and Australia, all support the same perspective. This view is also shared by Australian Riley (2014).

Another problem is that principals respond inconsistently to underperformance demands, depending on the situation. For instance, Ogalo et al. (2020), Wells (2013) and Mitchel (2010) observe that the expectations placed on principals at work have resulted in a shortage of principals in the United States as many of them have planned to change occupations and some have planned to retire early. Colleen and Toni (2022); and Mutinda (2008) found that workload pressure on principals has a negative influence on their work performance because it makes them angry and frustrated, which has a negative impact on their practices and the academic results of their schools. This was revealed in the Gauteng Province in South Africa and in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. According to researchers (Kgomo, 2017; Maponya, 2010; Taole, 2022), principals' academic practices worsen as a result of the stress of supervising multi-grade classes because they become dissatisfied, stressed and overworked. Taole (2022) claims that when principals attend meetings during instructional time or when they must attend to urgent concerns, they occasionally leave their learners unattended in the classroom. As a result, they fall behind on the curriculum, which worsens the learners' academic performance.

According to Wataru et al. (2020); and PricewaterhouseCooper Australia (2014), job pressure has negative effects on productivity and working efficacy, as well as presenteeism and absenteeism, diseases, casualties, psychopathologies, and a breakdown in social and familial bonds in Australia. According to Jasper et al. (2021) and Brown (2010), the pressure that principals face as a result of their workloads has led to a sharp increase in the indirect costs of providing education. This happens as a result of a high number of principals and affected staff members taking sick days due to stress, premature resignations, and subsequent training for new hires.

Underperformance pressure also have an impact on the principals' wellbeing. For instance, scholars like Collie et al. (2020) and Beausaert et al. (2016), argue that the principals' wellbeing can be negatively impacted by excessive job pressure. Das et al. (2020) and the British researcher White (2008) from Bradford describes wellbeing as a notion that is highly varied in different circumstances. For instance, according to White (2008), the welfare of principals is socially and culturally produced. According to Ruggeri et al. (2020) and White (2008), wellness is a feel-good aspect and is concerned with one's happiness or success. According to Abiodan (2022) and PricewaterhouseCooper Australia (2014), a lack of wellbeing may lead to sicknesses, accidents, psychopathologies, and a breakdown in social and familial ties. Fatemeh (2020) and Boyland (2011) discovered that work pressure can cause physical and mental health issues, such as the release of stress hormones that harm cells, tissues, and organs, and that if pressure or stress is left untreated, it can result in exhaustion, burnout, and serious mental illness.

Omer et al. (2020) concur with Queen and Queen (2005) that stress weakens the adrenal system's ability to function, which results in lower energy during the day and disturbed sleep at night. Pressure can also cause tiredness, burnout and major medical illnesses. Belinda et al. (2022) agree with Mitchell (2010) that many principals are thinking about leaving the field because of the demands of their job. Brown (2010) noted that in Britain, the main pressures were causing a significant increase in the indirect costs of schooling, which is due to high rates of stress-related sick leave. Ulfiah and Fanida (2022) in the Indonesian context, Kalungwa (2014) in a Kenyan setting and Mbibi et al. (2013) in a Nigerian context, all concur that the demands placed on principals rob them of their social lives and family time. As a result, principals lament their growing workload and the lack of social life with rage and irritation.

According to Uriel (2021), Kalungwa (2014), excessive stress causes psychological disorders, other emotional strains like fatigue and tension, maladaptive behaviours like aggression, substance abuse, and cognitive impairment, which were exhibited by a lack of concentration and poor memory, and in the long run, deteriorates health conditions like cardiovascular disease or, in the worst cases, leads to death. In Nigeria, high pressure makes teachers experience anxiety, fear, discomfort, rage or depression (Mbibi et al., 2013). Koome (2007) from East Africa discovered that several principals have left their positions as a result of stress related to school management.

Other scholars such as Anna-Maria et al. (2022) agree with Ntombela (2014) and other scholars cited in the paragraph above that underperformance demands drive principals to become ill to the point where they must take temporary leaves of absence, which worsens underperformance in their schools. Siti and Siti (2021) concur with Naidoo et al. (2013) who stress that work pressure impairs principals' capacity to do their jobs and maintain their health while also endangering their ability to function in the workplace. Bhengu and Mthembu (2014) and Chanda (2021) both agree that principals under a lot of strain become irritated and vent their irritability. According to Chanda (2021), principals who are under a lot of stress may choose to leave their positions in order to vent their dissatisfaction. According to Bhengu and Mthembu (2014), the principal of a struggling school became defensive in the face of underperformance and vented his annoyance at everyone, blaming the Department of Education for its policies, misbehaving learners, uncommitted teachers, parents and other parties. Mafora (2015) found that in a rural setting in the Northwest Province of South Africa, work pressure brought on by low performance standards led to principals losing motivation.

2.13 The impact of underperformance pressure on principals' curriculum leadership

Principals' curriculum leadership, also called instructional leadership is badly impacted by underperformance pressure (Bush & Hystek, 2006; Goslin, 2009; Kruger, 2003; Mestry, 2017; Moonsammy-Koopasammy, 2012; Msila, 2013; Taole, 2013; Ulfiah & Fanida, 2022). For instance, studies carried out by the researchers cited show that pressures on principals in both rural and urban contexts cause them to focus more on management issues than on issues of instructional leadership, detracting from their primary responsibilities. They go further to state that the learners' academic performance is impacted by the principals' dispersed focus and attention. Multiple deprivation settings put pressure on the principals, forcing them to disregard the implementation of instructional

leadership as the major remedy for improving dysfunctional schools (Chanda, 2021; Chikoko et al., 2015).

According to Nzimande (2019), in both rural and urban environments in Africa, the strain placed on principals has a detrimental effect on their ability to concentrate on their instructional jobs. According to studies by Baffour-Awuah (2011) in Ghana and Nzambi (2012) in Kenya, principals are under pressure to handle a number of tasks at the detriment of their pedagogical duties. According to Yambo et al. (2012) in Kenya, performance under low pressure and performance under high pressure are both positively and negatively connected with the leader's intelligence. In Botswana, Isaiah and Isaiah (2014) discovered that there are no explicit guidelines for principals' leadership behaviour, which forces them to stray from carrying out their instructional responsibilities. Due to pressure from Worda and the Sub City Education Office interfering with their duties and the fact that principals in Ethiopia are not recognised as professionals, they are unable to fulfil their primary educational responsibilities (Oumer, 2014). According to Katamei and Omwono (2015), public pressure placed on school principals in the Kenyan context to raise academic achievement led to the development of ineffective improvement techniques that did not produce the desired results.

According to research from other countries, principals in deprived contexts struggle to find time to fulfil their responsibilities as instructional leaders (Bays, 2001; Nzimande, 2019; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Prytula et al. (2013) in Canada, Firmaningsih-Kolu (2015) in Indonesia, and Fink and Resnick (2001) in New York, USA, all express similar opinions in urban settings in North America. In Texas**,** also in the USA, Oriveras-Ortiz (2015) found that pressure on principals results in the promotion of teaching to the test, a shift in standard instructional practices made solely to help learners score well on examinations. Because it doesn't care about pupils really learning the material, this teaching is bad for them.

2.14 Strategies used by principals to mitigate underperformance and its effects

After conducting a study in the Canadian province of Quebec, Poirel (2014) found that school principals use a variety of strategies to reduce underperformance pressures, including working longer hours, planning ahead for the future of their schools, delegating tasks to junior teachers, discussing issues with colleagues, and dealing with tense situations by being sympathetic to the teachers involved, listening intently, and demonstrating understanding of their feelings. These results are in

line with those made by Anyanwu et al. (2015) in Nigeria regarding the continent of Africa. In Kenya, Juma and Simatwa (2016) concur with similar findings, but add that some principals utilise humour or laughing, venting, prayer, physical activity (jogging, swimming, cycling), the prioritisation of activities, time management, and a reduction of their workload to buffer the impact of pressure. In rural districts of Missouri State University in the United States, Hawk and Martin (2011) discovered that exercising was one of the best strategies used by principals to deal with pressure. They also discovered that some principals deal with pressure by using artificial methods, such as stimulants and prescribed drugs, while others follow a healthy diet, employ relaxation techniques, or ask for peer mentoring or advice. Some principals decide to take breaks from work to decompress (Hawk & Martin, 2011; Muthalib, 2003; Ntombela, 2014). In Malaysia, Muthalib (2003) adds that some principals choose to use music as a coping mechanism for strain, particularly if they are under a lot of it. In the Kenyan and Nigerian contexts, respectively, Kalungwa (2014) and Mbibi et al. (2013) have expressed similar views.

Different perspectives are stated as tactics used by principals in the South African setting to lessen the effects of stress. For instance, Thenga et al. (2015) from the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province discovered that while the majority of principals did not seek help when they were worried, a small number of them chose to employ prayer as a stress-relieving tactic. Mestry (2017) found that in the Gauteng Province, principals occasionally called communal meetings where people gathered to talk about and share the issues that affected them when they were under a lot of strain. Pelser (2015) found that some principals deal with pressure by setting goals, analysing the competitive environment, and assessing strategies in the City of Mahikeng in the North West Province of South Africa, where schools are perceived and classified as serving a well-established and growing middle and upper class of primarily black people. According to Ozer (2015) in the Metro Central Educational District in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, some principals who are under pressure turn to their families for assistance because it gives them fulfilment, respect, and energy. Johnson (2013) and Johnson (2015) discovered that some principals in the gangland areas of Cape Flats in the Western Cape Province in SA, go to the gym every day, some share their feelings with others, some attend church, some use their minds productively, some seek medical attention, and some engage in sexual activity to cope with pressures. It will be interesting to find out in the current study if principals adopt any of the strategies that have been used by other principals in South Africa and elsewhere in the world.

2.15 Conclusion

The concept of underperformance in education, factors that contribute to underperformance in schools, the pressures that are exerted on principals of underperforming schools, the effects of such pressure on principals' instructional leadership and other related matters, including strategies to mitigate the negative effects of all these factors have been discussed in detail in this chapter. The next chapter focuses on the theoretical framework that was adopted for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL TOOLBOX: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

A review of the relevant literature for this topic was offered in the preceding chapter. The chapter addressed recurrent arguments in the literature. Additionally, it highlighted the contribution of prominent academics in this field of research. One of the issues that the review of literature raised is the importance of instructional leadership responsibilities of school principals. In any case, underperformance of learners in Grade 12 or any other class, has to do with the kind of teaching and learning support that the schools provide. Therefore, the current chapter presents a detailed discussion of the theories that provide a framework for the study, and instructional leadership is one of those theories. Therefore, the theoretical foundation for this inquiry is the main subject of this chapter. Three theories, Identity Theory, Teacher Education and Diversity (ITTED) theory by Olsen (2012); Context Responsive Leadership (CRL) theory by Bredeson, Klar and Johansson (2008) and the Five Domains of Instructional Leadership Model by Weber (1996), were chosen as a theoretical framework for this study. The presentation of this theoretical framework includes a discussion of how the three selected theories are used to frame the current inquiry.

In developing this chapter, I discuss ITTED theory first, followed by CRL theory, and lastly, the Instructional Leadership Model by Weber (1996). The ideas of identity and teacher identity, the development of professional and self-identity, diversity as a component of teacher identity, identity in safe school environments, and the framing of the current study within ITTED are some of the components considered. The elements of the CRL theory will be covered next. Contextual variation, school/district size, organisational culture, community characteristics, geographic location, financial situation, political climate, characteristics of CRL theories and leaders' responses to contextual realities, and the framing of the current study within the CRL theory are some of these variations. The third theory is Weber's (1996) Five Domains of Instructional Leadership Model. The use of this model was imperative given that the majority of scholars emphasised the need for school principals to be instructional leaders if the performance of learners is to improve. The motivation for integrating the three theories to form a theoretical framework is presented before the chapter is concluded.

3.2 Why I chose the three theories

According to Argyris and Schon (1974), all humans, whether consciously or not, function in accordance with thousands of theories to explain their experiences, forecast future events, and control outcomes in diverse contexts. Theories are therefore tools for providing explanations and justifications, as well as forecasts for some of these events. According to Grant and Osanloo (2014), theoretical frameworks serve as lenses through which scholars can see the social world. In view of this assertion about theoretical frameworks, it remains the responsibility of a researcher to apply the selected theory or theories to understanding phenomena they are studying. The phenomenon under scrutiny in this study is the wrestling with underperformance pressure by principals of secondary schools in a rural context of KwaZulu-Natal. In reviewing literature on this subject, the notion of teacher identity came up as one of the important elements. Therefore, I chose Identity Theory, Teacher Education and Diversity (ITTED) theory to better understand the participants' personal and professional selves.

3.3 Identity Theory, Teacher Education and Diversity

The first theory to discuss is Identity Theory, Teacher Education and Diversity (ITTED) theory. In some ways, this theory is made up various concepts or what I can call sub-theories of identity theory, teacher education and diversity which constitute ITTED theory. Identity Theory explores and defines how the self evolves over time in a variety of social circumstances and is connected to theories of social science and social practice (Olsen, 2012). The ITTED theory was developed by Olsen in 2012 with the intention of examining whether educators could foster an environment in the classroom that lessens the threat of stereotypes and, as a result, encourages the minority learners to identify more positively with school and achieve greater academic success (Olsen, 2012).

According to Olsen (2012), identity differs from how it is typically used in education because this entry only considers identity in relation to social sciences and social practises. Identity Theory is a school of thought that holds that mental events experienced by humans are identical to neurochemical events in the brain. According to Olsen (2012), when identity studies are applied to teachers and teacher development, teacher identity, becomes a conceptual tool that is used in both the study and the practice of teaching and teacher education. Olsen (2012) asserts that identity provides the answers to inquiries such as what the self really is. It attempts to tease out what the differences between the self and the other is, and also between me and us, the mind and the body, the person and the situation,

the individuals and their experiences. Identity studies refer to a variety of disciplinary investigations on the formation of human identities. Identity studies look into the changing nature of a person's identity over time and in different social contexts (Castaneda, 2011; Mpungose, 2010; Olsen, 2012; Vokatisa & Zhangb, 2016).

Olsen (2012) further emphasises that Identity Theory contains the idea of teacher identity, which functions as an analytical tool to examine how specific teachers who find themselves in social contexts construct and continually reconstruct an understanding of and for themselves as teachers. Olsen (2012**)** also highlights the various ways in which a teacher or educator might support teacher learning by highlighting holism, personal and professional interrelationships, notions of belonging, and notions of being a whole person. In this study, it is assumed that school principals are also teachers and share some or all these characteristics and dimensions of personal identity and teacher identity. Other concepts that are inextricably linked to the concept of identity are discussed next, beginning with the concept of identity.

3.3.1 The concept identity

It is crucial to define identity at this point because it is one of the fundamental ideas underlying identity theory. According to Naicker (2016**),** the Latin word 'idem', which means 'the same', is the source of the word *identity*. Naicker (2016**)** contends that a person's identity develops through their interactions with social environments. Knowing who we are, who others are, and how they are known by us are all aspects of identity (Naicker, 2016, p. 22). Therefore, as a result of a person's ability to adapt in response to various circumstances, identity is a fluid quality (Gilchrist et al., 2010). Connelly and Clandinin (1989) concur that because of the story construction that occurs as life progresses, identity is not a stable concept but rather a slipping and storied entity. According to this study, identity is seen as a legendary thing that principals of secondary schools that perform poorly create as a narrative while putting practices in place to improve those schools' performances. Olsen (2012) asserts that the fact that the phrase *teacher identity* has been used in so many different contexts over the years, contributes to the difficulty in defining it. According to Olsen (2012), the term *identity* was primarily employed in psychoanalysis throughout the middle decades of the 20th century to refer to the individualised self-image that every person holds. Castaneda (2011) asserts that *identity* has both personal and social dimensions because that concept is influenced by the results of a globalised society

that is increasingly dominated by consumerism and by access to sophisticated informational systems, both of which confirm that the self does not exist in isolation but rather in relation to others.

Castaneda (2011) reiterates that talking about identity in terms of a person indicates that there are psychological, affective and cognitive conceptions since identity involves meanings that surround the individual, as well as his or her experiences as a part of a social community. Many modern educational theorists tend to steer clear of these conventional psychological framings of identity, even if social psychologists have subsequently viewed identity as a more contextual, dynamic process of people gradually building perceptions of themselves as rational beings (Olsen, 2012). According to Olsen (2012), sociology and anthropology began to use *identity* more frequently in the latter half of the 20th century. Many social theorists stressed cultural identification as a response to some psychologists' emphasis on the individual out of concern for the many cultural, gender, or racial/ethnic categories with which any person self-identifies (Olsen, 2012). This definition of identity defines people as primarily shaped or constructed by cultural markers and social positions and considers identity in terms of broad cultural strata including race, class, gender, religious views, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, language, and physical ability (Olsen, 2012).

According to Olsen (2012), identity politics developed in the early 1970s as a way to describe how people strive to increase their own power or representation, as well as that of the social groups to which they belong. This is similar to how most contemporary treatments of teacher identity have developed. Additionally, it emerged as a means of avoiding overly broad structural and cultural framings (Olsen, 2012). Olsen (2012) further asserts that identity notions are present throughout a wide range of disciplines, including literature, philosophy, theology, art, neurology, and linguistics, in addition to psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Identity in contemporary social science is derived from this maze of intellectual traditions (Olsen, 2012). Some researchers have questioned if the concept *identity* has become overused since it has been twisted into so many disciplinary knots.

Appiah (2006), a philosopher who is also a cultural theorist and novelist, asserts that while the term *identity* may not be the most appropriate one; nonetheless many people use it. According to Olsen (2012), the most current social science perspectives on identity are derived from sociocultural theory, a loose collection of recent and occasionally conflicting contributions from social psychology, social anthropology, sociolinguistics, and philosophy that focuses on the self in practice, various interdependencies among people, contexts, histories, and others, as well as the situated, ongoing

nature of self-development. Social theorists and theorists in general, do not overly privilege racial, class or gender positions or the individual self because, according to the sociocultural theory of identity, people are the by-products of their social histories as they shift from one subjectivity to the next and from one aspect of their identity to the next (Olsen, 2012). Viewed this way, it is evident that people have the freedom to act in ways that they feel are consistent with their own understandings.

3.3.2 The concept teacher identity

Since teacher identity is a key notion in ITTED, it was important to explore it in this study to better comprehend this theory. The idea of teacher identity relates to how educators, especially teachers and principals, define themselves as educators, including who they are as people, what they do professionally, and who they are empowered to become as a result of ongoing reflection on their practices and experiences (Vokatisa & Zhangb, 2016). Because teachers constantly create and grow a reflecting sense of who they are as persons by using their teaching practice and lives as a mirror, the concept of teacher identity is not a static entity (Palmer, 1997). Since the identities of the teachers are linked to their specific set of practices, which are entwined with teacher practices (Clandinin & Huber, 2005; Palmer, 2007), teachers impart who they are as professionals through their teaching (Enyedy et al., 2005).

The visible and invisible facets of a teacher's job and life, according to Castaneda (2011), can generally shed light on what it means to be a teacher. The invisible domain of teachers' work and life, includes psychological phenomena such as cognition, beliefs, expectations, and emotions (Castaneda, 2011). Examples of the visible domain of teachers' work and life include classroom interaction, assessment, material design, or task implementation. According to Castaneda (2011), the explanation of teacher identity is based on two intricate dimensions of knowledge and roles. These dimensions include general characteristics and meanings that the selves of teachers may include an understanding of, such as their knowledge, beliefs, emotions, or motivations. The macro-cultural structures implied by the social component are closely related to the professional acts people take to fulfil their duties. The personal and the societal interact, inform, and support one another (Castaneda, 2011).

Castaneda (2011) thinks that the ideas of ‘who I am’ and ‘who are you?’ are connected to teacher identity. This includes the exterior roles and obligations as well as the internal (personal) and external (social) realities, including cognition. According to Castaneda (2011), internal images that teachers

create are crucial in the formation of their professional identities. These images are the result of a protracted process that begins with their experiences as learners; during this time, their professional expectations, motivations, emotions, and fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning emerge. Based on their experiences in the classroom, knowledge of what teaching entails, and capacity to distinguish between models of effective and ineffective instructors, prospective teachers might conduct a predetermined notion of what constitutes a teacher (Castaneda, 2011).

The most important leadership factors that affect principals' abilities and capacities, according to Mpungose (2010), are policy role prescriptions and experiences. However, the principals' main source of influence comes from their professional identity, which is constructed and developed over an extensive period of time, ranging from their entry into the teaching profession to their appointments as school managers and leaders. This argument stems in part from the fact that one of the key elements that greatly influences how principals develop their self-concepts and, in turn, reinforce their leadership style in their organisations is the feedback they receive from interacting with their staff members, whether in formal settings or not (Mpungose, 2010).

School principals utilise their identity as leaders to guide their behaviour in a range of situations. Identity is developed for a certain position or job that one occupies within a group or school (Gergen, 1971). This scholar published his work more than 50 years ago now, but it is abundantly evident that issues of identity and complex interactions of factors such as positions and roles, play a role in influencing how one acts out his or her professional duties. Principals have the freedom to choose how to carry out their responsibilities in a manner that may not always be consistent with the standards associated with their assigned jobs (Mpungose, 2010). Mpungose (2010), goes on to explain that these choices and decisions are founded on the principals' own personal values, interests, beliefs and expectations, and are those that they bring with them. Arguing along similar lines, Gee (2011) contends that the process by which a teacher understands and reinterprets him/her self as a particular kind of person and is, likewise recognised as that kind of person in a given environment constitutes the teacher identity. The teacher's role extends beyond simply responding to learners' inquiries about their current selves; it also includes responding to inquiries about their desired future selves (Vokatisa & Zhangb, 2016). These debates suggest that issues of teacher identity are complex to understand, and may include other issues that people do not regard as relevant.

Teachers must continuously examine and consider how their experiences have shaped who they are as professionals (Antonek et al., 1997; Brooke, 1994). The second characteristic of teacher identity is that it is framed by various contexts of educational practices and contexts, including the larger sociocultural and historical processes that have an impact on teachers' beliefs and values, the culture of their institution, including its history and the values of its administrators and other members (Beijaard et al., 2004; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). The interaction between the theoretical perspective as articulated and how teachers, teaching, and teacher development are currently viewed is expanded by the concept of teacher identity (Olsen, 2012). According to Olsen (2012), recent studies on education have shown that teaching is not only a cognitive or technical process but also a complicated, personal, social, and frequently elusive set of embedded processes and practices that affect the entire person.

In order to emphasise the importance of emotions, personal beliefs, and context in teaching and learning environments, many individuals also agree that the full person has to be taught in teacher development (Olsen, 2012). Teacher identity is a theoretical framework that highlights the unique, dynamic, and social aspects of any teacher's professional growth (Olsen, 2012). A teacher's professional identity is dynamic, not fixed; both a process and a product; an ongoing and situated relationship among person, others, histories, and professional contexts; a political project as much as a philosophical frame; socially situated and thus not traditionally psychological; and clearly distinguished from a teacher's personal identity (Olsen, 2012).

Therefore, teacher identity serves as an assemblage upon which development functions as well as a methodological lens through which teacher development can be studied (Olsen, 2012). Olsen (2012) provides a succinct summary of this topic by stating that teacher identity can be used as a research frame to study a teacher as a whole person in and across social contexts; to understand a teacher as a person who continuously reconstructs his/her views of them self in relation to others, workplace traits, professional purposes, and teaching cultures. Olsen (2012) gives an illustration of how an education researcher may investigate the connections between a teacher's identity and teacher retention or attrition or look at how teachers' professional identities develop and evolve over time.

3.3.3 The construction of professional self-identity

Professional and self-identities are two notions found in the ITTED theory. Education is a profession imbued with and embedded in values and goals and is very demanding in terms of dedication to

human interactions (Abrahao, 2002). This scholar has advanced the idea that we cannot separate the personal self from the professional self in the field of education. Due to the fact that it facilitates the transition from being a student teacher to being a teacher, a teacher education programme is concerned with the development of professional identity (Danielewicz, 2001). Teachers have a deeper awareness of how their self-identities fit into a larger context that includes others and they become more in sync with their sense of self by reflecting on their practices and identities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Day and GU (2010**)** claim that four factors contribute to teachers' professional identity: the teacher's individual knowledge base; their ethical commitments to pupils; their professional duty, and the management of classroom activities.

According to Antikainen et al. (1996), in order for people to explain who they are in a social context, they must first have a strong sense of who they are, who they can become, and where they are going. In other words, they must know who they are and how they came to be who they are. Therefore, identities that principals and teachers create in the course of their regular interactions and interactions in schools have three dimensions; the personal, the professional and the socio-political (Mpungose, 2010). This scholar further adds that the definition of oneself that principals and teachers provide in response to the question 'Who am I?' ultimately affects how they react to their professional and social expectations (Mpungose, 2010).

Identity develops as people engage in social interactions or function as group members because as they do so, they react to the environment and to the challenges that are presented to them by the context, and as they do so, they satisfy the needs of the context (Osborn et al., 2014). This leads to the idea of collective identities, which is the process through which a person develops a sense of belonging to a group by identifying with it (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Knowledge about the principals themselves is accumulated as a result of how they react to their immediate socio-political and cultural environment (Mpungose, 2010**)**. Each principal invests his or her knowledge, values and efforts into forming their unique professional identity during this process (Abrahao, 2002). According to Olsen (2012), joining a community leads to the development of identity. Identity and practice are profoundly interconnected (Wenger, 1999**).** We fundamentally define who we are in terms of how we interact with other group members and how we negotiate our participation in the community. The customs and experiences of a community have a significant impact on who we are, how we feel about ourselves, and how we think about ourselves as individuals **(**Castaneda, 2011).

Since enrolling student teachers in a teacher education programme at a university is a crucial step in the process of creating a professional identity, Johnson (2009) claims that the source of experience knowledge is supplemented by professional or theoretical information. This process then develops further as a part of a lengthy trajectory in terms of development and affiliation or disaffiliation with the teaching profession (Johnson, 2009**)**. Often referred to as the process of learning to teach, this is the time when educators build their individual conceptions of what it means to be a teacher. These ideas are crucial components of one's professional identity (Castaneda, 2011). Castaneda (2011**)** emphasises that there is no boundary to the self, which is unquestionably the outcome of social processes that influence how a person feels, thinks, and has emotional or motivational experiences.

The social dimension of teacher identity, which is the acknowledgment of others, is inextricably tied to the tasks that teachers play (Castaneda, 2011). Although learners who can differentiate between good and terrible teacher models can experience their responsibilities, task effectiveness or assessment goals are largely formed in the experience obtained when members of a teacher community participate in classroom practice (Tsui, 2003). Castaneda (2011) emphasises the importance of the community and the practice in understanding what it means to be a teacher and, accordingly, what professional identity is. According to Castaneda (2011**),** while being a member of a teacher community results in direct engagement and the negotiating of forms of involvement, classroom experience aids teachers in developing a true understanding of the role of the teacher. All of the constructs of teacher identity previously discussed, come together to frame the meaning and identity of teachers, and the general domains of teacher identity emerge as a dynamic process as a result of the experience of being a teacher (Castaneda, 2011). According to Miller (2008), teacher identity is seen as relational, constructed, negotiated, enacted, transformative, and transitional. According to Tsui (2003), the opinions expressed below are not rigid characteristics of a teacher, but rather processes that develop, alter or resist as teachers gain information, solidify it, and implement plans for their own and their learners' professional and personal growth. According to Tsui (2003), the culture and socio-political environment in which teachers live and work has a big impact on this process.

As people change through time and connect with others, teacher identity is constantly being informed, established, and reformed (Cooper & Olson, 1996). Any attempt to view the teacher's identity from a single perspective could result in a very restricted knowledge of teacher identity because the teacher's identity engages multiple complicated dimensions (Castaneda, 2011). Being and becoming a teacher

are two separate ways that the meaning of a teacher and teaching have been viewed in teacher education. While being a teacher may be temporary and role-independent, becoming a teacher entails a more dynamic and long-lasting perspective (Castaneda, 2011). Professional identity incorporates professional socialisation and development, which is a social learning process that includes the formation of new values, attitudes, and self-identity elements as well as the acquisition of specialised knowledge and abilities needed in a professional job (Brott & Kajs, 2001). Castaneda (2011) adds that as it is challenging to determine where the individual ends and the social begins, attention must be paid to the process of their mutual formation.

The sociological dimension of identity also includes designations such as gender, ethnicity, age, and nationality. It is argued that others' contributions to the formation of identity are vital (Hall, 2004). According to Castaneda (2011), learning to teach entails more than just honing teaching techniques. It also entails creating a professional identity. While talents are related to a role, Britzman (1992) argues that displays of identity lead to the voicing of investments and commitments. The meaning of becoming a teacher could either involve reproducing preestablished identities or re-signifying them as an alternative for change and transformation. Castaneda (2011) argues that learning to teach becomes a matter of personal scrutiny when compared to what is already established and what we can become. By contrast, redefining the meaning of a teacher entails understanding his or her role in the context of political and social struggles for voice and recognition (Castaneda, 2011). Drawing from this thinking, it can be argued that a teacher is seen as an expert whose primary function is to accomplish teaching and learning goals. Therefore, a teacher is someone who transforms or gives learners opportunities to critically analyse reality, not just someone who imparts information (Castaneda, 2011).

When student teachers enrol in a teacher training institution, they are not yet teachers, but by the end of their training programme, they will have adopted an identity as teachers (Danielewicz, 2001). This scholar further argues that teacher education is concerned with the formation of professional identity because it facilitates the transition from being a learner to becoming a teacher. A teacher's biography shapes and transforms their identity, which is not fixed (Castaneda, 2011). Having a teacher education programme is important since it grants a teaching degree and imparts pedagogical and subjective information (Castaneda, 2011). This author also emphasises that while teacher education establishes the groundwork for professional identity, it is a more complicated matter how it aids in the

development of teacher identity (Castaneda, 2011). The idea that has been advanced in this discussion is that teacher identity is not fixed, but pliable, slippery and keeps on changing over time.

Schein (1978) argues that people's professional identities are more malleable and changeable early in their careers as a result of the experiences and valuable feedback that helps them understand their core and persistent preferences, talents, and values. Through carefully planned formal education programmes, for instance, through less formal but still planned experiences like working with a mentor, to informal, usually unplanned, on-the-job leadership experiences, an individual may acquire knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to perform the role of a leader (Mpungose, 2010). Depending on how they are organised and presented, identity creation procedures may result in positive or bad outcomes (Leithwood et al., 1992). A system of rules or standards that direct people's behaviour are formed by the meanings and expectations connected to each individual's function (Mpungose, 2010). Principals' professional identity-building processes must be characterised as both a social and a personal product because their leadership jobs need them to interact with people inside of an organisation (Mpungose, 2010).

3. 3. 4 Diversity and teacher identity

Issues of diversity and teacher identity are closely related and need to be explored as part of this theory on identity teachers, teacher education and development. Olsen (2012) asserts that the incorporation of teacher identity in research, teacher preparation, and professional development is especially important in the light of diversity in education. Olsen (2012) explains that this is so for several reasons, including the following; firstly, identity studies are uniquely able to capture and celebrate the numerous, intertwined facets of whole lives in teaching and teacher education, or, in other words, the infinite diversity of teachers. Secondly, identity studies highlight covert and overt ways that culture, socio-historical context and power fundamentally influence teachers, learners and educational practices. Thirdly, teacher identity studies are particularly effective at capturing and celebrating these influences.

Olsen (2012) highlights how research and practice in teacher education have historically tended to view teachers in overly general terms, such as teachers of colour or women in the classroom, or in reductionist terms like ‘all teachers should...’, or ‘an effective teacher will...’; or ’any social justice educator must...’. This scholar argues that teacher identity encourages a view of teachers both as three-

dimensional individuals with specific lived experiences that become personal, and that teacher identity encourages a view of teachers both as two-dimensional individuals with general lived experiences that become personal/professional influences and effects, as well as social beings that are simultaneously constrained and empowered in relation to the groups, structures, and roles in which they participate, and even those in which they do not. In other words, diversity is a concept that captures teacher identity as well. In short, there is not just one way to view and understand a teacher and thus teacher identity because of its complexities as I have indicated in the previous sections.

According to Olsen (2012), the teacher identity focus ensures that academics may examine and effectively utilise the active diversity and complex power of teachers' experiences and the views that come from them. Each teacher should be treated as an individual because each one is unique and active (Olsen, 2012). The identity theory, according to Olsen (2012), highlights the ways in which every person develops within the flow of socio-historically marked actions; hence, each teacher is in some ways a product of the themes, beliefs, and experiences of their lived past, present, and future. These personal histories and social settings are both shared with others and uniquely interpreted by teachers as being components of their identities; in other words, they are continuing parts of the teacher identity (Olsen, 2012). Therefore, according to Olsen (2012), diversity in education necessitates that teachers constantly recognise and adjust the ways in which their lived experiences are implicated in their teacher selves. Olsen (2012) states that teacher identity holds that every teacher will benefit from engaging in critical self-examination and managing the various ways that allow his or her personal, biographical, cultural, and political perspectives to enter his or her teaching self. This is because every teacher, as well as his or her learners, will benefit from doing so.

According to Olsen (2012), teacher identity is regarded by many as being helpful for education research and practice because it promotes a view of teachers as socio-cultural products of their times and places, as well as their being active agents constantly constructing themselves inside the give-and-take of actual educational practises. It highlights a view of teachers as always diverse in their own interesting, complex, but identifiable ways; and it provides a holistic framework.

3.3.5 Identity and the creation of safe-school environments

Identity safety in the educational setting is one of the components of ITTED (Olsen, 2012). This scholar defines identity-safe classrooms as those environments that encourage academic and social

achievement for all children by validating their experiences, histories, and identities (Olsen, 2012). These classrooms, according to Olsen (2012), are free from entropic cultures, harmful relationships, cues and instructional practices that implicitly or openly link learners' identities, such as race, gender or religion, to academic success. According to Olsen (2012**)**, teachers can create these identity-safe classrooms by emphasising a set of behaviours that emphasise students' belonging in a class, favour cooperation over competition, have challenging, diverse teaching materials and learning tasks that consider the interests and experiences of the learners.

This strategy stands in stark contrast to many treatments for underperforming, diverse schools, which, according to Olsen (2012**)**, focus on a limited, remedial curriculum, punitive discipline, and top-down, didactic teaching approaches. Although there is little proof that this strategy enhances learners' academic performance, it nonetheless, dominates discussions about how to improve urban and under-funded schools (Olsen, 2012**).** By design, identity-safe environmental practices encourage learning by emphasising the social character of learning, offering a rigorous curriculum, and utilising the resources that learners bring to the classroom (Olsen, 2012). Furthermore, Olsen (2012) claims that the research that gave rise to the idea of *identity safety* was predicated on the idea that low-income and minority learners' academic underperformance may, at least in part, be caused by the numerous stereotypical threats that affect their school experience. Consequently, the stereotypes that the theory reveals suggest that individuals who are negatively stereotyped in the media may experience a sense of identity safety.

According to Olsen (2012), stereotype threats can be created by the experiences that bind students' academic success to their social identities, which has been proven in countless studies to have a negative impact on performance across a wide range of domains. According to Olsen (2012**)**, an identity safety study that was carried out in 84 urban elementary classrooms was predicated on the idea that learners' classroom experiences differ according to their individual social identities. One weakness of this construction of safety identity is its focus on urban settings which, in the context of South Africa, differs starkly from rural settings, which provide the focus of this study.

3.3.6 The framing of the current study within the Identity Theory, Teacher Education and Diversity

According to this study, the principals of the underperforming schools have interesting and distinctive identities that have evolved over time as a result of their interactions with various social situations. These social settings influence their viewpoints and behaviours in one way or the other. Talking about identity in terms of the individual requires psychological, affective and cognitive concepts since identity involves the meanings that a person attaches to his or her surroundings as well as his or her experiences as a member of a social community (Castaneda, 2011). Mpungose (2010**)** asserts that principals' responses to the question ‘Who am I?’ provide a description of who they are, which in turn, affects how they react to social and professional pressures. Professional socialisation and development, which is a social learning process that includes the acquisition of specialised knowledge and skills necessary in a professional role, as well as the development of new values, attitudes and self-identity components, is a component of professional identity **(**Brott & Kajs, 2001). The behaviours, qualities and attitudes of the principals of struggling schools in this study may thus be understood from the perspective of ITTED Theory. Additionally, ITTED provides an analytic tool to comprehend the concepts and viewpoints that may be involved in shaping the leadership tactics employed by principals to combat underperformance challenges. This takes us to the other important dimension of the study, which is about how principals of underperforming schools respond to the pressures exerted by both formal structures and stakeholders and the public at large; hence, the second theory which forms part of the theoretical framework.

3.4 Context-Responsive Leadership theory

The second theory that forms part of the theoretical framework is Context-Responsive Leadership theory (CRL). This theory offers another lens through which to better understand how school principals engage and participate in contexts in ways that simultaneously influence their behaviour and shape their responses to numerous context-related factors (Bredeson & Klar, 2008**.** This opinion is shared by Bredeson et al. (2011), who note that CRL theory offers a mirror through which leadership practices and behaviours can be examined in relation to context and contextual reality. Many leadership theories do not consider the environmental and organisational settings in leadership processes, thus leaving a gap in the literature that the development of CRL theory was intended to fill

(Bredeson et al., 2008). This viewpoint is shared by Boal and Hooijberg (2001), who claim that many new leadership theories lack context dimension.

In order to explore leaders' behaviours rather than their functions in less favourable situations, CRL theory aims to create a bridge between the intersections of leaders' leadership practices and behaviours as they engage with diverse leadership processes (Bredeson et al., 2008). In order to accomplish organisational goals, CRL theory aims to understand how leaders react to contextual circumstances (Bredeson et al., 2011). According to Bredeson et al. (2008), CRL theory is more interested in how the context affects leaders' behaviours and practises than it is in what leaders should do as a result of their position of authority. Bredeson et al. (2011) claim that CRL theory is a well-balanced application of an intricate blend of knowledge, abilities and character traits that are properly ingrained and discharged by successful leaders and that enable them to engage with the changing situational variables and specific features of their contexts.

This type of leadership, according to researchers (Bredeson et al., 2008; Dempster et al., 2004; Hargrove & Owens, 2002), exhibits a series of behaviours that exercise a degree of constraint or accept certain aspects of a given situation in order to get the desired results. Hoy and Miskel (2007) assert that occasionally, leaders react to conditions and situations that surround them in ways that are not specific to the accepted leadership techniques. The theoretical framework chapter, according to David (2016), examines numerous theories that frame the analysis of data that has been generated in a study. In this study, it was believed that a school's poor academic performance created a stressful environment for the principal, to which the principal was expected to react. In order to comprehend principals' unique lived experiences while overseeing underperforming secondary schools, CRL theory was adopted as a lens through which to analyse principals' responses to these challenges. With the help of CRL theory, I was better positioned to comprehend the context of principal leadership and explain the experiences, routines, and actions of principals who struggled with the pressures of underperformance in secondary schools in the Ilembe District. The goal of CRL theory, according to Bredeson and Klar (2008), is to assist people to understand how leaders engage with and participate in context in ways that affect their practices while also altering or responding to different parts of their context. CRL theory was applied in this study as a framework to make sure that the gathered data related to the context that was framed by the second and third sub-research questions. According to Adom et al. (2018), a theoretical framework directs data production for a specific study. Other scholars describe the function of a theoretical framework in different ways.

According to Hallinger (2003), analysing the principal's leadership without considering the environment in which he or she operates is essentially pointless. Therefore, CRL theory assists in outlining the behaviours and practices of context-responsive leaders, which include managing the school's vision, goal and direction, as well as its resources and coping with internal and external influences (Bredeson et al., 2011). CRL theory, according to Bredeson and Klar (2008), draws on theories already in place in the fields of educational leadership and general leadership studies. The original intent of Context-Responsive Leadership (CRL) theory was to emphasise that effective leaders, such as principals, use a complex combination of knowledge, skills and dispositions that they have identified and that help them advance their organisations with a shared purpose, vision and goals (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). Bredeson and Klar (2008) sought to clarify how leaders interact with one another and with diverse contextual factors by using the CRL theory.

There are five overlapping and interactive components of Context-Responsive Leadership theory, and these are: individualised role, professional expertise, purpose, people and place. These five overlapping components must be understood and effectively integrated by context-responsive leaders, according to the CRL theory (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). Instead of relying on a single preconceived style made up of contextualised traits or leader activities, context-responsive leadership is demonstrated by action or how a leader behaves (Bredeson et al., 2011). Gronn and Robbins (1996) lament that context has not been adequately theorised in connection to leadership in the literature. According to these academics, context should be properly understood as the totality of the situational, cultural and historical variables that limit leadership. CRL theory presented a cogent effort to address this concern by attempting to balance out the observed imbalance in literature (Gronn & Robbins, 1996).

CRL theory emphasises seven important context-related variables as a result. School, district size, organisational culture, neighbourhood context, geographic location, financial context and political context are some examples of these contextual variances. The context-responsive approach pertains to the leaders' anticipatory and proactive involvement with the changing circumstances of their practices in these many locations. However, CRL theory did not investigate the behaviours and practices of school principals working in difficult environments (Bredeson et al., 2011). Below is a fuller explanation of the various circumstances.

3.4.1 Variations in context

Bredeson et al. (2011) assert that CRL theory highlights five crucial context-specific variations: school or district size; organisational culture; community context and geographic location; fiscal context; and political context. These contextual variations describe the various factors that influence how leaders behave in various circumstances (Bredeson et al., 2011). The context-responsive framework connects to the leaders' anticipatory and proactive engagements with dynamic conditions of practise in these many environments (Bredeson et al. 2011).

3.4.2 School/District size

The size of a school or district and the community are the contextual differences that are most commonly mentioned because, according to most leaders, these contextual differences have a significant impact on the nature of their work (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). The size of a school or district can range from being large, medium, or small, and this will have an impact on how leaders behave in terms of their daily tasks, their capacity to engage with the community, and their methods for fostering trust (Bredeson & Klar, 2008).

In general, leaders in smaller organisations exercise more direct involvement in every element of leadership, whereas in larger organisations, leaders frequently create plans to coordinate with others (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). The ability of principals of smaller schools to carry out their teaching duties independently makes it much simpler for them to be held accountable if the academic performance of the school is below par, in contrast to principals of larger schools who must rely on their subordinates.

3.4.3 Organisational culture

Bredeson and Klar (2008) assert that community and institution size make up the second significant contextual variation because they frequently account for the formation of the distinctive organisational and political culture that is rooted in the history, norms, traditions, and symbols of the organisation. Bredeson and Klar (2008) go on to explain that culture is reflected in communication styles. For example, in smaller institutions, communication is based primarily on informal, direct, immediate, frequent, and consequential personal interactions. However, in larger institutions, leaders find ways to communicate through others, such as through circulars, memoranda, and notices. The organisational cultures of the institutions where leaders (principals) operate have an impact on their

practices because they aim to recognise and be sensitive to these cultures while also adapting their methods to the contexts in which they work (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). For instance, since rumours spread quickly and harm an organisation's reputation, it is the responsibility of the leader to uphold the reputation of the organisation in which they are employed (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). Bredeson and Klar (2008) claim that in order to accomplish this, leaders look for chances to connect with and earn the trust of local stakeholders through a variety of engagement and communication activities.

3.4.4 Community characteristics and geographic location

According to Bredeson and Klar (2008), the relationship between context and leadership demonstrates that there is a keen awareness of regional norms and expectations because the differences in the community—whether small, suburban, small town, or university town— account for many of the variations in the behaviours and expectations of the community stakeholders. Bredeson and Klar (2008) expand on this view, arguing that the demographics of each town, as well as the professional and other labour pools that are accessible to the school or district are influenced by the institution's location and the type of community.

3.4.5 The economic situation

Bredeson and Klar (2008) note that one of the obvious differences in contextual variations in institutions focusses on the finances of the schools or districts, as the fiscal context of each school or district necessitates that leaders become careful stewards of resources and architects of organisational transparency in matching resources to needs. They need to be effective communicators, long-range thinkers and planners, and leaders who build relationships and trust both within and beyond their monitoring of the community's ability and desire to fund school initiatives. Emphasising ongoing needs while promoting school success are some specific tactics that leaders use in response to the need to impact the budgetary backdrop (Bredeson & Klar, 2008).

3.4.6 Political environment

In different political contexts, which might be national, local, municipal, or systemic, leaders define the circumstances that highlight the connection between context and leadership (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). Creating leadership teams, acting as a buffer, communicating frequently and directly to various constituencies, building personal and trustworthy relationships with board members and important

community members are additional tactics that education leaders employ to counteract political influences (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). They also assist in fostering a sense of participation in decision-making among the general public.

3.4.7 Characteristics of Context-Responsive Leadership theory and how leaders react to contextual realities.

Bredeson and Klar (2008) state that the characteristics of CRL theory are as follows: context-responsive leaders personalise and construct their leadership roles by bringing their distinct biographies, values and diverse perspectives to the executive leadership position. Context-responsive leaders also have a deep professional knowledge of education, teaching and learning, as well as the processes, policies and politics required to make their child-centred school systems highly successful. They also have an understanding of the importance of diversity in the workplace and an ability to work well with others. It is believed that context-responsive leadership exposes a school leader's ability to push back the challenging circumstances that could make them look unsuccessful (Bredeson et al., 2011). They refuse to back down in the face of obstacles that seek to restrict the objectives and outlook they have for their schools (Bredeson et al., 2011).

According to Bredeson and Klar (2008), context-responsive leaders demonstrate a strong moral commitment to education and are passionate about the value of their schools and the job they do there in a democratic society. Each context-responsive leader, according to Bredeson and Klar (2008), is aware of the greater societal context for education but never loses sight of the significance of children's education, learning and development. Since they feel that it is their crucial role that boosts their success as leaders, context-responsive leaders build trust and long-lasting relationships with individuals both inside and outside the educational system. Because of this, context-responsive leaders have a great understanding of organisational, community and place cultures (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). These scholars assert that effective leaders engage in a fluid discourse of practices in dynamic, interactive contexts and that the practices of context-responsive leaders are founded in a combination of knowledge, skills and dispositions. The training of context-responsive leaders requires a rich combination of authentic material given in a variety of formal and informal learning contexts. Learning environments create the requirement to be more than the restrictions of actual context with real people and events (Eraut, 1994).

Bredeson and Klar (2008) contend that the learning and development required to become such a leader are rooted in a discernible, if not entirely predictable, educational journey of professional socialisation given the complexity of context-responsive leadership and the subtleties of such practical wisdom in action. According to Bredeson and Klar (2008), preparatory and certification programmes at universities only serve to provide a small portion of the learning necessary to become a context-responsive leader. In contrast to admission into training programmes based primarily on self-nomination, undergraduate grade point averages, and standardised test scores, context-responsive leadership includes paying more attention to antecedent circumstances and prior experiences that may be much better predictors of success in leadership preparation programmes and the potential to become context-responsive leaders (Bredeson & Klar, 2008).

According to Bredeson and Klar (2008), leaders can experience a stronger sense of efficacy, work satisfaction, and enhanced longevity in their roles if they comprehend their settings and effectively respond to them. Their inability to comprehend situations and their impact on their leadership might have detrimental effects on the system goals and their individual tenures (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). Bredeson and Klar (2008) further emphasise that for practitioners, school boards, university administrator preparation courses, and policy makers, understanding the confluence of context and a principal's leadership is crucial. The context establishes the limits of what context-responsive leaders may do, yet there is flexibility within those limits, according to Hargrove and Owens (2002).

Bredeson and Klar (2008) state that "contextually literate" leaders are those who are sensitive to and aware of crucial elements of context, purpose, and actions. This is the primary behaviour and characteristic of context-responsive leaders. By recognising the differences in context located in such an interactive dimension as time, a historic moment, place, and people, context-responsive leaders engage in fluid interactions with settings of practice (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). According to Bredeson and Klar (2008), context-responsive leaders are aware that changes in context can both facilitate and constrain their behaviours and practices, which enables them to react to these changes at the right time and in the right way. Whenever necessary, context-responsive leaders react to their environments, but they also take into account activities that have the potential to change their environments and practices.

3.4.8 How Context-Responsive Leadership theory is relevant for the current research.

In this study, the principals of underperforming schools are seen as distinct persons who may react differently to the situations, they find themselves in. The stakeholders who demand that the principals raise the academic performance of their schools employ several strategies to deal with underperformance challenges. Bredeson et al. (2008) claim that leaders who use context-responsive leadership tactics are aware of how different situations influence their behaviour in both positive and negative ways. The purpose of this study was to better understand how hostile environments affected principals' practices and behaviours, as well as how they responded to such environments. CRL theory was used in this study to inform my analysis of the behaviours, characteristics, viewpoints, and practices of the principals of underperforming schools. This puts me in a position where I will be able to comprehend the meanings and understandings that influence the principals' leadership practices.

According to CRL theory, each school principal carries out his or her duties in a unique way based on how he or she responds to the settings around, including district sizes, community demographics, organisational culture, history, political realities, and their own personal characteristics (Bredeson et al., 2011; Bredeson & Kose, 2007). According to Goldring et al. (2008), situations where principals' work is difficult and dynamic and frequently necessitate that the principal acts appropriately. According to Grant and Osanloo (2014), a learner must choose the theory or theories that serve as the foundation for the body of information around the phenomenon under study. In order to carry out their responsibilities effectively, leaders also use a variety of ways that are pertinent and sensitive to their settings (Bredeson et al., 2011). To better understand principals' behaviours and the effects of the contexts that place underperformance pressures in their lives, I analysed the principals' accounts of their experiences in their contexts via the lens of CRL theory.

3.5 Weber's (1996) Five Domains of instructional leadership model

I have highlighted in previous sections of this chapter that most scholars cited in this thesis who foreground the notion of leading teaching and learning, have emphasised the role of principals as instructional leaders. In this section I delve deeper into this discussion about instructional leadership and how it can help support teaching and learning. Instructional leadership as a concept or theory has various versions or dimensions, and different scholars emphasise different elements that constitute instructional leadership. While different scholars emphasise different aspects of instructional leadership, they nevertheless agree that instructional leadership focuses on teaching and learning in

the classroom. They also converge on the idea that instructional leadership should focus on the behaviour of teachers as they work with learners in the classroom, with a view to achieving improved learner academic outcomes. Because of that focus, scholars emphasise that instructional leadership should focus on the principals' role in supporting teaching and learning in the classroom. Therefore, in addition to ITTED and Context-Responsive Leadership theory, I chose Weber's (1996) Five Domains of instructional leadership Model as a third theory to assist in analysing how principals of underperforming schools managed to turn the situation around, and improve teaching and learning in their schools.

Weber (1996) developed five essential domains that constitute instructional leadership. The five domains are: defining the school's mission; managing curriculum and instruction; promoting a positive learning climate; observing and improving instruction; and assessing the instructional programme. *Defining the school's mission* is not an individual action or process, but it is a collective, collaborative process that requires cooperation of all stakeholders within an organisation. It entails all stakeholders within a school, for example, engaging in reflective thinking as they create a school mission that is understood by all in the school. Implied in this collaborative process is that there is buy-in from all stakeholders about where the school should go; which direction the school should take. Therefore, the mission of the school should be viewed as a glue that bind the staff, the learners and the parents to a common vision that the school seeks to achieve (Weber, 1996).

Managing curriculum and instruction is another domain and it involves the principal's instructional practices and classroom supervision processes. These leadership practices entail the principal mobilising resources that teachers need in order to facilitate teaching in ways that provide learners with opportunities to better understand learning materials and succeed academically. School principals have to *promote a positive learning climate* by communicating instructional goals, and establishing high expectations for performance, establishing an orderly learning environment with clear discipline expectations, and working to increase teacher commitment to the school (Weber, 1996). In the review of literature various scholars emphasised that the environment of teaching and learning has to be positive and that learners have to behave in a disciplined manner. All these factors belong to this particular domain of Weber's Instructional Leadership Model.

Observing and improving instruction is the hallmark of quality education provision, and as such, instructional leaders must continuously ensure that instruction is improving. Effective communication

becomes very important if an atmosphere of trust and openness is to be realised and sustained, and this is the main focus of this domain. The principal has to establish a trusting and respectful relationships with the school staff. Weber (1996) proposes that observations should provide opportunities for professional interactions between principals and teachers, and this should always be geared towards supporting improved learners' academic achievement. The fifth factor is about *assessing the instructional programme*, and it entails the instructional leader initiating and contributing to the planning, designing and analysing of assessment tasks that are meant to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning, such that both parties can be confident that teaching and learning goals were achieved by both the learners and the teachers (Weber, 1996). By continuously analysing the instructional programme, teachers are in a better position to meet learners' needs through constant revision and refinement. This model enabled me to analyse the extent to which principals of underperforming were able to effectively interact with staff and learners in a way that supported endeavours to facilitate effective teaching.

3.6 Integrating the three theories

This study assumed and understood the principals of the underperforming schools to be people who identified as teachers, including who they were as individuals and as professionals. It also assumed that they strove for a constant process of reflecting on their practices and lived experiences, which is the first issue that is highlighted in this section (Vokatisa & Zhangb, 2016). I used the ITTED to help me better comprehend the identities of principals and the suggested solutions that principals of schools with low test scores believe could offset low test scores in their own institution. Additionally, because there is a strong correlation between a person's identity and his practices, it was assumed in this study that the principals' ideas, actions, behaviours, and practices were influenced by these identities (Wenger, 1999).

The second topic covered in this section is the fact that the principals of the underperforming schools in this study operated in hostile environments, which posed some difficulties for them. Principals were required to respond to these hostile environments by giving instructors and students clear leadership so they could get out of their sticky circumstances. As a result, I thought it was important to comprehend how the context and principals' leadership interacted in this study. Context-responsive leadership theory was adopted to achieve this. According to Hallinger (2003), analysing the principal's leadership without considering the environment in which he or she operates is essentially pointless.

The personal, social and professional identities that principals developed as they continuously examined their actions and practices, along with the leadership responses that they adopted in response to the pressures of underperformance, both made it possible for me to comprehend and articulate the dispositions of the principals in their work contexts. Each individual school principal was seen in this study as a sensitive, thoughtful professional who was continually forming and refining both his or and her personal and professional identities. Each school principal was also seen as a person whose actions and practices were shaped by the situation in which he or she was engaged. This made it easier for me to comprehend how these leaders responded to their current situations to form their leadership practices. This demonstrates the convergence of context and leadership (Osborn et al., 2015).

The Five Domains of Instructional Leadership model helps to focus on specific elements of the teaching and learning environment and how school leaders can intervene to support the teachers in their teaching. This model fits well with Context-Responsive Leadership in many ways. For instance, understanding the environment within and beyond the school is helpful for the principals as they attempt to organise the LTSM to support teachers' teaching. More importantly, the first domain assists in ensuring that everybody within the school is able to agree on the way forward for the school. Therefore, there is likely to be more commitment from the teachers to ensure that their school moves out of the danger zone of underperformance to a comfortable zone of normalcy and even excellence.

3.6 Conclusion

The three ideas that make up the theoretical foundation of this inquiry were covered in this chapter. I was able to establish a framework through which the principals of underperforming schools were perceived and their practices comprehended during the course of the study by using these three theories. The three theories put me in a better position to understand from the participants' narratives, how they constructed their identity and how they wrestled with underperformance pressures exerted on them by both the officials of the department and members of society.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework for this study. Three theories that constitute a framework are Identity Theory, Teacher Education, and Diversity (ITTED) by Olsen (2012), Context-Responsive Leadership (CRL) theory by Bredeson et al. (2008) and the Five Domains of Instructional Leadership Model by Weber (1996). I first discussed ITTED, a theory that influenced how I perceived the participants' identities. Second, I talked about the CRL theory, which I used as a frame of reference to understand how principals responded to underperformance pressures in the environments where they work. I then discussed Five Domains Model and indicated how it is suited for this study.

The research design and methodological issues are discussed in this chapter. In order to better understand how the six secondary school principals who were identified as dealing with underperformance pressures, this qualitative exploration used a narrative inquiry research methodology. Previous research had shown that school principals have been under tremendous pressure as a result of learners' poor academic performance (Abreha, 2014; Dangara, 2015; Evans, 2010; Ntombela, 2014; Wicher, 2017). The related literature review revealed the paucity of research that looked at underperforming school principals' actual experiences because so little was known about their struggles with underperformance pressures in terms of their experiences, knowledge, attitudes and beliefs.

This chapter introduces and described the exploration's positioning within the research paradigm. The research methodology I used to examine the lived experiences of the principals of underperforming schools is then addressed. Thirdly, it describes a narrative inquiry as the methodology that served as the direction for this exploration. The function of the researcher in this exploration was debated since Naseri (2022) and Clandinin (2013) emphasise that a Narrative Inquiry technique is a study of experience, nothing more and nothing less, thus this methodology was selected to connect with the lived experiences of principals who led and managed underperforming schools. Fourthly, this chapter discusses the sampling plan, participant selection, sample size, data gathering, recruiting and access

to the study locations, a pilot, one-on-one open-ended interviews, as well as artefact exploration. Fifth, the chapter presents data analysis that included a narrative analysis of the stories. The chapter concludes with a thorough assessment of the validity and moral implications of this exploration.

4.2 Positioning of this enquiry within a paradigm

The paradigmatic positioning of this research is described in this part. Not all research texts cover paradigms; they are instead given varying degrees of attention and perhaps competing definitions by different scholars (Tshabalala, 2015). According to Kumatongo and Muzata (2021) and Tshabalala (2015), some research theses and dissertations discuss paradigms along with the research design at the beginning of their chapters, while other researchers just briefly mention paradigms at far later stages of their research, or do not mention them at all. According to Tshabalala (2015), the omission or late mention of a paradigm in a dissertation might cause new or early researchers to wonder where the concept of paradigm fits into the research process and to doubt its applicability to certain research. In order to highlight the various methodological positions that Kumatongo and Muzata (2021) and Mavuso (2013) claim have been produced by various researchers based on their ontological and epistemological orientations, this study discusses the paradigmatic positioning of this enquiry at this early stage of the methodology chapter. Moller and Halinen (2022) and Van Ransburg (2001) argue that these paradigmatic positions have evolved into a number of traditions that characterise the research enterprise today.

The paradigm chosen for this study represented my beliefs and the values that guided me on how to solve problems within the education system. It affected how I think about the principals who were grappling with Grade 12 learner underperformance in their schools and how they went about investigating their problems. The paradigm had an impact on how knowledge was explored and perceived (Biklen, 1998; Ganiyul, et al., 2022; Mertens, 2005). The research's purpose, motivation and expectations were established by the paradigm choice (Tshabalala, 2015). Rehman and Alharthi (2016) define a paradigm as a fundamental belief system and a theoretical framework that makes assumptions regarding ontology, epistemology, methodology and procedures, in agreement with Guba and Lincoln (1985), Mertens and Biklen (1998) and Tshabalala (2015). According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016), a paradigm is how we comprehended the reality of the world we are exploring because it serves as the fundamental tenets of the entire structure. Ontology and epistemology are to research what foundations are to a house (Grix, 2004).

According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016), understanding the ontological and epistemological perspectives of researchers would enable us to fully appreciate their significance and applicability in a study. According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016), someone who had ideological roots in a research paradigm was not well equipped to comprehend in-depth research that had been done in a different paradigm. As I read through the literature, I came across various perspectives, including positivism, which held that there was an observable reality that was governed by undeniable natural laws (Tshabalala, 2015). According to Richards (2003), the early nineteenth-century writings of a French philosopher by the name of Auguste Comte gave rise to the positivist school of philosophy. Realism was the positivists' ontological stance (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). According to the positivist paradigm, reality exists independent of people (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016), and the researcher and the items under study were seen as distinct entities that were unable to influence one another (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Positivist researchers want to understand social reality as they do the natural world (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The positivists used the same idea in the social sphere, since there was a cause-and-effect relationship between events in nature, and once these correlations were established, they could be anticipated with certainty in the future (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Siegen (2020) and Richards (2003) criticised positivist presumptions that using scientific methods to study social phenomena will result in the discovery of rules governing such phenomena. Richards (2003) went so far as to claim that positivism was dead, that it had long since gone bad and was starting to smell, and that it had evolved into more than just a pejorative phrase.

The post-positivist paradigm, which incorporates both the positivist and interpretivist paradigms, was created in response to criticism of the positivist paradigm (Grix, 2004). Post-ontology-Positives was based on critical realism. According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016), post-positivism held that reality existed independently of the observer but was only partially perceptible due to fundamentally human intellectual procedures (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Although objectivity still served as a guiding principle, post-positivism altered the interaction between the researcher and the investigated object to enable a critical analysis of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I also encountered the critical paradigm, which held that the researcher and the phenomenon being examined were interactively linked and that the investigation was inexorably influenced by the investigator's views (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Additionally, I learned about the transformative paradigm, which contends that any enquiry should

be tied to politics and political objectives (Creswell, 2003). A transformative paradigm employs mixed methods to gather data, giving transformative researchers a framework for the creation of more comprehensive and full portraits of our social world through the use of numerous perspectives and lenses (Somekh & Lewin, 2005), enabling a greater understanding of diversity in values, stances, and dispositions (Somekh & Lewin, 2005).

Additionally, I learned about the pragmatic paradigm, which matches methodologies to specific issues and employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Pragmatic researchers concentrate on the how of the study problem (Creswell, 2003). The paradigm that offered the fundamental philosophical basis for mixed-methods research was thought to be pragmatism (Somekh & Lewin, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddle, 2003). I noticed that positivism and post-positivism were speaking a foreign language to me since they spoke of and emphasised objective fact, which went against my nature as a researcher to comprehend people's viewpoints. Additionally, I felt that neither the transformative nor the pragmatic paradigms adequately accounted for my aims. A transformative paradigm's requirement that an enquiry be tied to politics led me to realise that it was inappropriate for me (Creswell, 2003), because it provided the basic conceptual framework for mixed methods research, the pragmatic paradigm was inappropriate for me (Somekh & Lewin, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). I noted that the critical paradigm, which asserts an interactive relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon being studied, partially accommodated me (Lincoln & Guba, 1994).

Finally, after learning that the interpretive paradigm presupposes that the researcher and the phenomenon being researched have an interactive relationship, I felt completely at ease. I also learnt that the interpretivist strives to comprehend what Pervin and Mokhtar (2022) and Schwandt (1998) refer to as a subjective experience—the genuine world of the first person. The interpretivist paradigm proposes that reality is socially produced (Mertens, 2005). According to Grix (2004), interpretivism originated as a reaction to positivism's supremacy and opposes the idea that there is a single verifiable reality that exists apart from our senses as humans. Ontological interpretivism was anti-foundationalist because it rejected the adoption of any lasting, unchanging norms by which truth might be recognised by everyone (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Because truth and reality are formed, not discovered, and because reality is always mediated by our senses, Interpretivists hold that there are various realities that are socially manufactured (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

Mertens (2005) advances the hypothesis that the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and the study of interpretative understanding known as hermeneutics by Wilhem Dilthey and other German philosophers were the philosophical roots of the interpretivist paradigm. The goal of interpretivist or constructivist research methodologies, according to Pervin and Mokhtar (2022), and Cohen and Manion (1994), is to comprehend the realm of human experience. Interpretivist researchers recognise the influence of the participant's background and experiences on the research and frequently rely on their perceptions of the situation under study (Creswell, 2008). As I wished to comprehend the experiences of principals of underperforming schools in this study, it became evident to me after reading about the interpretivist paradigm that it fully accommodated the nature of my interpreting reality. According to Lawson (2019) and Crotty (1998), social reality and natural reality require different methods of investigation. The foundation of interpretivism is the idea that there are various realities (ontologies). This study aimed to explore how principals of underperforming schools actually dealt with the expectations put on them by stakeholders to perform good.

Rehman and Alharthi (2016) contended that an interpretive epistemology was arbitrary and that observers could directly access external facts without having their worldviews, conceptions, and backgrounds tainted. Researchers that employed an interpretivist paradigm were intrinsically linked to the social reality they were examining; therefore, they were not disassociated from the topic they were researching (Grix, 2004; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). Interpretive research seeks to comprehend how people see the social phenomena they engage with, rather than seeking out universal, contextual, and value-free knowledge and truth (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Understanding the principals' perceptions of reality and their shared social constructs in their respective universes was the goal of this study (Dogde et al., 2005). Pervin and Mokhtar (2022), and Crotty (1998) asserted that the interpretivist paradigm concentrates on the unique ‘idios’ scenario to comprehend people's individualised interpretations of their experiences. Because of my position, I was able to fully comprehend each participant's lived experiences from the perspective of a researcher.

The interpretivist paradigm, according to Pervin and Mokhtar (2022) and Creswell (2008), acknowledges the circumstances in which people live and work since doing so enables researchers to comprehend the participants' historical and cultural backgrounds. This idea is supported by Clandinin (2006), who asserts that people had to be viewed not only as unique individuals but also as persons who constantly interact with and function within social situations. In contrast to positivism and post-positivist paradigms, which view behaviour as predictable and potentially generalisable,

interpretivism, according to Blose (2018), views behaviour as an intentional action because Interpretivists consider how people's beliefs are influenced by their normative social practises and how they are culturally situated (Taylor et al., 2012). Assuming that their behaviours and practices are influenced by the many environments to which they have been exposed, including the schools in which they work, this study considered the lived experiences of principals who were grappling with underperformance pressures. Pervin and Mokhtar (2022) and Morgan (1980) emphasise how the subjective and intersubjective experiences of individuals create the social reality in the interpretivist paradigm. Due to this expressed viewpoint, I tried to understand the participants on a deeper level by entering their minds. I moved back and forth, or in and out of negotiations, during this process as I attempted to come alongside my participants in order to understand their experiences, while also attempting to comprehend their experiences as participants in research. I was able to achieve a balance between the etic and emic perspectives while accomplishing this (Olive, 2015). According to Blose (2018), etic perspectives refer to the framework constructed outside the culture as a means of studying the culture, whereas emic perspectives refer to viewing the culture through the eyes of an insider in the culture being researched.

The nature of our views about reality is referred to as ontology (Richards, 2003; Tola & dos Santos, 2020). Rehman and Alharthi (2016) claim that there may be implicit assumptions made by researchers about reality, specifically how it exists and what can be understood about it. A researcher is prompted by the ontological question to think about the different categories of reality (Otoo, 2020; Patton, 2002). The philosophical subfield known as epistemology investigates the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired and verified (Gall et al., 2003; Kapatika, 2022). The nature and the form of knowledge, or how knowledge can be obtained and shared with other people, is the subject of epistemology (Cohen et al., 2007). The researcher debates the viability and acceptability of objectivity, subjectivity, causation, validity, and generalisability in response to the epistemological question (Patton, 2002).

The methodology used in this study is a defined and theoretically informed approach to the data production of a study (Ellen, 1984). A methodology is described by different scholars in so many different ways. Some define it as a study and evaluation of data producing methods (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Some define methodology as a strategy, a plan of action, a process, or a design that directs the use of research methods (Crotty, 1998; Dawadi et al., 2021). The discussion of how a certain piece of research should be conducted falls under the category of methodology (Grix, 2004). I was guided by methodology when determining the type of data needed for this study, and it was the

methodological question that prompted me to consider how the world should be researched (Kapatika, 2022; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Before moving on to discuss research methods, I should highlight that methods will be discussed next, and that research methods were like babies of research methodologies.

Methods are particular techniques for gathering and analysing data (Dawadi et al, 2021; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). These methods include, for instance, surveys, open-ended interviews, document analysis, focus groups and questionnaires (Kapatika, 2022; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Tola & dos Santos, 2020). The project's design and the researcher's theoretical perspective influence the methodologies employed to generate data, but the choice of a particular approach does not imply any ontological or epistemological presumptions (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Tola & dos Santos, 2020). According to Kapatika, (2022) and Tshabalala (2015), there is no foundation for selecting a research technique, methods, literature or study design once a paradigm is not nominated as the initial step of an enquiry. The term paradigm could be used to refer to the philosophical purpose or driving force behind doing a study, or it could refer to a loose collection of logically connected assumptions, notions, or propositions that guide thought and research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Cohen & Manion, 1994; Peel, 2020).

4.3 Research design

The research design did not escape the notion of multiple definitions by various scholars as different scholars define it differently as well. A research design could be viewed as a strategy used in research to choose participants, locations and methods for gathering data to address the study questions (Asenahabi, 2019; Kapatika, 2022; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Asenahabi (2019) and Terre-Blanche and Durrheim (1999) conceptualise the research design as a strategic framework for action that acts as a link between the research questions and the execution or implementation of research, and Cohen et al. (2007) supports this idea. Sileyew (2019), Mouton (2001) and Berg (2004) concur with this position since they claim that the research design provides an answer to the question of what kind of study should be conducted in order to produce satisfactory solutions to research difficulties or research questions. The identification of variables, the development of a hypothesis, and execution of experiments that provide numerical data that is statistically analysed are all examples of quantitative research methodologies (Creswell, 2003). Comparatively, qualitative research was the preferred approach for gaining a profound insight into society or human nature (Asenahabi, 2019; Nugent,

2007). An in-depth, complicated and detailed understanding of meanings, actions, observable and non-observable events, attitudes, intents, and behaviours can be obtained, according to Cohen et al. (2011), when using a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research, according to Asenahabi (2019) and Denzin and Lincoln (1994), is interpretive in nature, employs a variety of methodologies, and is also reflective. According to Pervin and Mokhtar (2022) and de Gialdino (2009), qualitative research is relational since it is based on communication, depends on meaning, interpretations, contexts, understanding, and a reflection-oriented conception, and it is grounded in the interpretative paradigm, which gives qualitative approaches their coherence. In a qualitative approach, many realities are created by people who encounter things that are interesting to them (Busetto et al., 2020; Krauss, 2005).

According to Ugwu Eze (2023) and Creswell (1998), because naturalistic enquiry is conducted in natural settings, the researcher in qualitative research develops a rich and comprehensive picture of the phenomena. The researcher also analyses participants' words and recounts their in-depth perspectives. According to Ugwu and Eze (2023); Guba and Lincoln (1985), and Creswell (1998), a naturalistic enquiry of qualitative research focuses on the various realities that occur in natural environments. According to Guba and Lincoln (1985) and Kapatika (2022) these many realities are similar to the layers of an onion and either nest inside one another or work well together. The layers of an onion were used by Guba and Lincoln (1985) to illustrate the several realities, with the idea being that each layer offers a unique view of reality, neither of which is more accurate than the other. According to the interpretivist paradigm, the phenomena split into various forms and truths instead of converging into a single form or truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Ugwu & Eze, 2023). The layers of reality cannot be comprehended or articulated in terms of distinct independent and dependent variables, but rather they are intimately interrelated to produce a pattern of truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Following from this perspective, it is suggested that reality is not simple but rather complicated, and that it is the pattern of truths that have to be sought out in order to comprehend reality rather than just predict and control it (Busetto et al., 2020; Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

I concluded that a qualitative research design approach harmonised with the interpretive paradigm because, when viewed through the lenses of Ugwu and Eze (2023) and Creswell (2008), the experiences of principals of underperforming schools might only be explored qualitatively. As a result, this study focused more on the words of the principals than the numbers to explore their perceptions and their lived experiences of wrestling with underperformance pressures. This aspect

convinced me that a qualitative research approach would be the most suitable for this subject. Additionally, the phenomena in this exploration included oral contacts, such as the talks that I, the researcher, had with the principals of the underperforming secondary schools in the iLembe District during unstructured interviews. Because of this, my participants in this inquiry were able to tell their rich stories about the realities of leading underperforming schools in a recursive and natural way thanks to the use of the Narrative Inquiry Framework as a research design and the use of life story interviews and artefacts as data generation procedures.

I noted five different types of qualitative research approaches from the methodology literature I reviewed (Busetto et al, 2020; Cohen et al., 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Nugent, 2007; Ugwu & Eze, 2023), and I also learnt that each approach has a unique method for examining participants' values, beliefs, or attitudes. I noticed that every special technique is used in a particular situation with a certain goal. For instance, I learnt that ethnography is the study of society or culture and that Creswell's (2003) description of it as a long-term research strategy is accurate. In order to comprehend and define the behaviour of a group or organisation, I also learnt that ethnography focuses on the participants' views, values and attitudes (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). I learnt that a phenomenological approach to research examines the effects of frequent occurrences using participants' first-hand accounts (Busetto et al., 2020; Creswell, 2003). In phenomenology, the diverse interpretations and understandings of participants define the essence of events (Creswell, 2003; Kapatika, 2022).

In order to identify categories of differences and similarities from the data generated, a grounded theory research approach uses many data gathering stages to build a theory based on common processes, activities or interactions (Busetto et al., 2020; Creswell, 2003). The derivable theory is built on this sort of information (Creswell, 2003; Ugwu & Eze, 2023). A case study is a comprehensive examination of a single scenario (Cohen et al., 2007; Gambhira et al., 2019). Gambhira et al. (2019) and Merriam (1998) asserts that the case study's interest lies in the context's process rather than its results, in the context as a whole rather than a particular variable within it, and in the discovery rather than the validation of an already held belief. In policy-making procedures, case study approaches are typically utilised for decision-making; they are also used to identify best practises or for future research (Merriam, 1998; Peel, 2020).

By merging the researcher's experience with that of the participants, a narrative inquiry research approach gathers the participants' tales and retells their perspectives to create what could be called a joint narrative (Creswell, 2023; Gambhira, et al., 2019). This study used a narrative inquiry methodology to elicit the stories of the principals. A narrative is both a phenomenon and a method, according to Asenahabi (2019) and Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) description of the Narrative Inquiry methodology.

Narrative enquiry identifies the structured aspect of the experience that need to be studied and the lines of enquiry that should be used to do so (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Nugent, 2007). People by nature lead storied lives, and they tell stories about those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives by collecting and retelling stories about them and by writing the narratives of their experiences. In order to maintain this distinction, a phenomenon is called a story, and the inquiry is called a narrative (Nugent, 2007; Ntinda, 2020). The narrative enquiry approach, according to Gambhira et al. (2019) and Zhang (2019), is used to examine life events and experiences, as well as to make sense of and interpret these stories. The Narrative Inquiry plays a crucial role in navigating individuals' experiences in the world and in education, such that teachers and learners are viewed as storytellers of their own stories as well as those of others, according to Zhang (2019). Humans are storytellers who lead storied lives. Because of this, narrative inquiry was emphasised as being the most effective method for examining educational experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Simanjuntak, 2023).

Simanjuntak (2023), Connelly and Clandinin (1990) define narrative enquiry as a collaborative process that involves mutual storytelling and re-storying, in which the stories of the participants and those of the researchers are exchanged and the voices of both sides are heard and understood. While narrative enquiry shares some characteristics with other qualitative research methods such as phenomenology and ethnography, it also has a distinctive characteristic that set it apart from those approaches. Those facts made it challenging for narrative inquirers to distance themselves from their research. According to Zhang (2019) and Simanjuntak (2023), the basic structure of time in narrative enquiry is past-present-and-future, with examination of past experiences and their impact on current and future experiences and actions. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990) and Simanjuntak (2023), history reveals the significance of the phenomenon under study, the present reveals its worth, and the future reveals its goals. Following that point of view, researchers are advised to be cautious of story continuity because earlier tales might be reinterpreted in the light of present and upcoming events (Zhang, 2019).

According to Zhang (2019), another distinctive feature of narrative enquiry is that it pays attention to three universals, often known as the “commonplaces” or "dimensions" of a narrative enquiry. These common places are: temporality, sociality and place; narrative enquiry differs from other qualitative research in that it simultaneously explores those three commonplaces (Ntinda, 2020; Zhang, 2019). Because narrative inquiry is temporally oriented, the events being studied are typically in a state of temporal transition (Zhang, 2019). In order to comprehend the identities of the principals who oversaw the underperforming secondary schools, a narrative inquiry was also required in this study. In this study, the narrative inquiry was also necessary to comprehend the techniques that principals of underperforming schools believed could help them further evade underperformance challenges in the classroom. The principals' personal accounts provided insight into their values in relation to the challenges surrounding wrestling with underperformance. The principals' personal narratives also reveal their perspectives on who they are, which influenced how they responded to difficulties they encountered at their respective schools. The principals' perspectives on how to handle the stress caused by underperformance in their schools were also revealed through these narratives.

4.4 Narrative research tradition as a methodology

The narrative research tradition is presented in this section. Clandinin and Connelly were the inventors of narrative enquiry in general education, particularly in the area of teacher education (Craig, 2011; Ntinda, 2020). Many researchers in the field of education have been inspired by Clandinin and Connelly's work to adopt narrative inquiries for their research studies. According to Pervin and Mokhtar (2022), Conley (2000), as well as Connelly and Clandinin (1990), narrative enquiry has developed into a broad field that has drawn the interest of more academics and is currently a useful instrument for professional growth. The narrative approach, according to Saisa (2017) and Ntinda (2020) enables the generation of data using words or texts that are told through the experiences of the participants regarding occasions or deeds that affect their capacity to comprehend their roles in carrying out educational interventions. The ability of the researcher to interpret data obtained through a narrative approach is stressed by Creswell (2007) and (Holmes, 2020). This interpretation enabled me to draw inferences about the participants' complex sense-making process.

Gibson (2003) and Holmes (2020) conclude that narrative inquiry could aid teacher education researchers in gaining a better understanding of teachers' growth and development after examining preservice teachers' professional development, which allows them accentuated a number of the

advantages of using the narrative inquiry in teacher education research. Chan (2012) uses her own experience teaching a narrative curriculum in early childhood education to highlight the pedagogical role of narrative enquiry. Chan (2012) and Simanjuntak (2023,) concur that narrative enquiry was an effective pedagogical tool that transformed learners from being passive learners into active learners who constantly and consciously reflected on their past experiences, which influenced their future actions.

A narrative research study examines how people perceive the world (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; van der Spuy & Jayakrishnan, 2021). Additionally, a narrative research methodology offered me an insight into the topic that I am studying (Creswell, 2012; Ntinda, 2020). According to Creswell (2012) and Ntinda (2020), narrative research provides particular and useful insights for educators who are looking for personal experiences in actual educational settings. According to Ching-Jung Yang (2011) and Simanjuntak (2023), a narrative enquiry, like other approaches employed by social science researchers pose questions about and seeks a thorough knowledge of the specific facets of life experiences. A narrative enquiry, according to Lefever et al. (2014) and van der Spuy and Jayakrishnan (2021). is founded on the idea that tales helped us understand problems and give our lives significance. According to Lefever et al. (2014) and van der Spuy and Jayakrishnan (2021), narrative enquiry is a technique for comprehending and exploring experience by working together with participants. Teachers' narratives could demonstrate the connections between their knowledge, environments, and identities (Lefever et al., 2014). Because they are flexible and allowed participants to explore and express their opinions in relation to the teachers' real-life experiences, narrative techniques are helpful in teacher research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Ntinda, 2020).

In order to understand people's experiences, Kumatongo and Muzata (2021), Clandinin (2013) and Zhang (2019) define a narrative inquiry approach as an investigation that pays attention to three commonplaces: temporality, sociality and place. Clandinin (2013; Ntinda, 2020) and Zhang (2019) define *temporality* as paying attention to the past, present and future of the subjects of one's research. Taking care of someone's personal and social circumstances at the same time is referred to as sociality as a commonplace (Blose, 2018). According to Blose (2018), social circumstances are the context in which people's experiences take place, such as cultural, social, institutional, family, and linguistic settings, whereas the personal conditions are people's thoughts, feelings, and wishes. According to Clandinin (2013; Ntinda, 2020; van der Spuy & Jayakrishnan, 2021), a place is a location or series of locations where an inquiry takes place. According to Kumatongo and Muzata (2021) and Clandinin

(2006), qualitative inquiries offer an account of a person or event that is independent of time, and narrative inquirers are required to think narratively and comprehend the participants' past, present, and future temporal histories. To examine the participants' past, present, and future experiences and activities, it is advised that the narrative inquirers plan their interview questions in advance (Zhang, 2019).

According to Zhang (2019) and Ntinda (2020), when it comes to the second commonplace, the storytellers have to consider both the social and personal conditions. The social conditions include things like the environment, external pressures and situations. This suggests that because sociality is prevalent, narrative research is highly positioned and contextualised (Zhang, 2019). Zhang (2019) claims that because of the sociality, there was an ethical dilemma regarding the interaction between the participants and the researchers. As a result, the narrative researchers were unable to distance themselves from the participants' relationships, and narrative inquiries included themselves as part of the investigation. Clandinin (2013; van der Spuy & Jayakrishnan, 2021) claim that in addition to the issue of paying attention to the commonplaces, the narrative enquiry employs narrative methods of data generation, which are referred to as field texts in this approach (Blose, 2018).

In narrative inquiry, individuals can also pick the stories they want to tell (Clandinin, 2013; Ntinda, 2020). Mara (2009), cited by Blose (2018) highlights how the narrative enquiry approach is free and unrestricted in contrast to a case study technique, which may be constrained. My perspective had led me to believe that the narrative inquiry methodology was the best approach for this investigation since it allowed me to engage with the participants' lived experiences in an unrestricted and limitless way, as Mara underlines (2009). It was both a phenomenon and a way to use the narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Similar opinions were expressed by Kumatongo and Muzata (2021) and Nugent (2007), who assert that narrative inquiry methods are investigations into narratives. Inquiring into experience narratively and closely observing people across time and in places are key components of the methodology of narrative inquiry, which is a phenomenon that helped me understand how people perceive the world (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Simanjuntak, 2020).

According to Blose (2018), social, cultural, linguistic and institutional narratives are only a few of the many influences that form people's experiences. The narrative inquiry methodology was used in this study because it focused on the identities and experiences of the principals of secondary schools that were underperforming. To analyse the numerous circumstances that shaped the identities and lived

experiences of principals who were in charge of underperforming schools, the narrative view of experience was employed in this study. According to Clandinin (2013) and Ntinda (2020), the narrative perspective on experience helps us comprehend people both as individuals and in connection to their social environments. According to Clandinin (2006) and van der Spuy and Jayakrishnan (2021), narrative inquirers have to engage with participants over time, over a location or set of places, and in social interaction with settings in order to understand their experiences.

The ontological stance of narrative inquiry is based on the continuity of experience, according to narrative inquirers (Caine et al., 2013; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Ntinda, 2020). From this perspective, Caine et al. (2013) emphasises the fact that experience in narrative inquiries is a fundamental ontological category from which every narrative inquiry proceeds. Clandinin (2006) claims that experiences evolved from prior experiences and give rise to subsequent experiences, which shed more light on the idea that experience is continuously evolving. Because experiences are seen as a source of significant knowledge and understanding that can be attained through listening, observing, living alongside another, writing and interpreting texts, the results of this view are that the knowledge that forms an epistemological commitment in narrative enquiry is derived from experiences (Caine et al., 2013; Clandinin, 2006, 2013; Ntinda, 2020). Narratives are regarded as actual life and as a depiction of experience as a phenomenon in narrative enquiry (Blose, 2018). Contrarily, according to Allen and Mayer (2022) and Caine et al. (2013) narratives are the only means through which people can use their meaning and their comprehension of other people's experiences. Clandinin (2006) echoes similar ideas when he claims that stories are all we had and that, without stories, we have nothing.

Stories, according to Allen and Mayer (2022) and Clandinin (2013), are essential to narrative inquiry studies because, in this technique, experiences are seen as recounted phenomena. According to Clandinin (2013), narrative enquiry makes the assumption that events are lived before they are recounted. According to Naicker (2016), the stories used in narrative inquiry are life itself, as well as a means of learning, growth, and transformation. Because South Africans are naturally storytellers, the study's activity of having participants narrate stories was fascinating (Boateng, 1983; Qwelane, 2022; Wieder, 2004). The participants in this study highlighted their worries, annoyances, and thoughts regarding specific topics using their bodies as tools. Some participants highlighted key details and expressed thoughts about their personal experiences using their hands and facial expressions. According to Boateng (1983), Qwelane (2022) and Wieder (2004), Africans have long

utilised stories as a tradition and a potent teaching tool, using them to teach children about their values, moral principles, life lessons, and significant responsibilities. Africans have employed a variety of story genres, including fables, folktales, legends, and myths (Boateng, 1983).

My study's participants were open to sharing their personal experiences, and in my opinion, they provided rich accounts of those events. Clandinin (2013) and Taherdoost (2022) contend that the main challenge in narrative inquiry is for the researcher to collaborate with the participants since doing so might allow the inquirer to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. As a result, I tried to develop a strong connection and relationship with each participant in my study to encourage story-telling. I developed enduring bonds with my participants by drawing on my experience as a principal. Following that, this relationship gave the participants and me a good platform to discuss our experiences of living fearlessly. As stated by both Allen and Mayer (2022) and Clandinin (2013), narrative inquiry is people in relation; it is the research of people in relation, and this was crucial to me in this work.

4.5 The researcher's role

Since the researcher was the main data generator, the researcher was crucial to the qualitative research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Norman et al. 2020). Creswell (2013) and Taherdoost (2022) assert that because they generated their own data through the analysis of documents, observation of behaviour, and participant interviews, qualitative researchers were the most important tools. Creswell (2013) makes it clear that although qualitative researchers might occasionally utilise an instrument, it was one that the researchers had created themselves utilising open-ended questions. They did not frequently rely on or employ instruments or questionnaires created by other researchers (Creswell, 2013; Taherdoost, 2022). My job as a researcher in this study was to gather the tales of the principals who oversaw the struggling schools and weave them together into a compelling narrative.

My other responsibility was to create a rich setting that might influence a larger educational community (Saisa, 2017). A further responsibility was also to explore the participants' life stories, either directly from them or with the aid of objects like artefacts that helped them remember. Brian et al. (2019) and Saisa (2017) assert that it was the duty of the researcher to create the conditions necessary for the participants to tell and repeat their tales in a way that made sense in the context of the sense-making process. In fact, the researcher was able to provide readers with background

knowledge that was essential to the sense-making process by gathering biographical data on the participants (Frankel et al., 2012; Holmes, 2020). It was my obligation as a researcher to become familiar with each participant so that I could better understand how they saw their duties and how they carried out and assessed their educational interventions (Saisa, 2017).

In this study, the creation of a relationship between myself and the participant became an essential task as I was the major data generator in this qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Ntinda, 2020). As a result, I developed a strong bond with my participants. I was able to relate to the participants' tales, build rapport with my participants, and analyse the results correctly because of my background in education and my leadership skills as a principal in my school. I shared details about my past with participants to help them understand the idea of personal identity. This made it simple for me to describe myself as a male principal working in the primary school industry before an interview began. In order to create and analyse narrative data, the researcher's and participants' cooperation was essential (Creswell, 2012; Taherdoost, 2022). I actively interacted with participants and attentively listened to their tales in the hope of making them feel valued and heard (Creswell, 2012), as well as working with them to close the gap between their accounts and the narrative presented (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Snyder, 2019). From developing the main phenomenon to selecting the field texts that would provide useful information, to creating the final retold story of individual experiences, I worked in conjunction with the participants throughout the whole study process (Busetto et al., 2020; Creswell, 2012). While collaborating and building relationships with participants was crucial for this qualitative study, as previously mentioned, I made sure to be cautious about the data's veracity because distortion may have happened when participants withheld information for one or more reasons, such as fear of disclosing the truth or simple memory errors (Creswell, 2012; Taherdoost, 2022). In order to find the stories that had been told, I had to be careful not to tamper with the data.

I scheduled an initial fifteen-minute interview with each participant before the actual interview to get to know them better and ensure that they would give honest and genuine answers. I informed the participants at the initial interview that they could decline to answer questions during the actual interview and that they could leave the study at any moment. I also let the participants know that their identities would remain anonymous. I also told the participants how the research findings would be helpful to other principals who might be dealing with underperformance challenges.

4.6 Sampling methods and sample size

In this section I outline the sampling technique or method that I used. The technique that was used to sample the participants is viewed by Subedi (2021) and Lavrakas (2008) as a framework or road map that serves as the foundation for choosing a survey sample and influences a number of other crucial components of a survey as well. A researcher has to constantly keep in mind that, unlike quantitative research, qualitative research often explores a small number of people or a small number of situations since the goal of qualitative research is to get an in-depth understanding of each person or place, not to generalise (Creswell, 2012; Subedi, 2021).

Instead of generalising to a population, the aim of qualitative research is to develop a thorough exploration of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2012; Ntinda, 2020; Subedi (2021). Since random sampling, choosing individuals, and generalising to a population are the foci of quantitative sampling approaches, discovering insights and learning from individuals are the foci of qualitative sampling approaches. (Creswell, 2012; Ntinda, 2020). As a result, a deliberate sampling was performed because the study's participant pool was too tiny to provide insights into the phenomenon being studied.

When defining a sample as a group of individuals selected from a larger group to which the research findings were supposed to apply, Leepo (2015) quotes Slavin (2007). The goal of a qualitative study is not to generalise the findings but to understand the participants' insights and to learn from them, therefore the number of participants is typically lower than that of quantitative studies (Busetto, 2020; Ritchie et al., 2003). Therefore, the inclusion of more participants in one's sample did not imply that one had a superior study because qualitative researchers were not in the business of making generalisations but rather of establishing a thorough knowledge (Busetto et al., 2020; Watson, 2014). Because producing and analysing qualitative data requires a lot of labour, using a large sample in a qualitative study is time-consuming, expensive, and impracticable (Busetto, 2020; Komolthiti, 2016). The sample size for this study consisted of a total of six participants. The principals who met the requirements outlined in the recruitment procedure were the group from which the chosen participants were drawn.

Having explained what the sampling technique was and how big the size of the sample for this study was, I now turn to elaborating on how those six participants were selected for participation in the study. Probability sampling and non-probability sampling are two forms of sampling (Bhardwaj,

2019; Merriam, 2009). Non-probability sampling uses deliberate sampling strategies to choose participants with a wealth of information, whereas probability sampling uses randomising techniques to generalise the results to a larger population (Bhardwaj, 2019; Patton, 1990). Therefore, quantitative research utilises probability sampling whereas, qualitative research only uses non-probability sampling approaches, within which are numerous sampling techniques. The research problem will influence the choice of the sampling technique to be utilised (Creswell, 2012; Snyder, 2019).

The purpose of this study was to comprehend how principals of underperforming secondary schools coped with underperformance pressures from all different quarters. As part of understanding how they managed such underperformance pressures, I also sought to understand their identities in terms of how they constructed them. This study adopted purposive selection within this broad category of non-probability sampling. I thought that purposive sampling was the most appropriate sampling technique because the study sought to identify a specific category of participants who were affected by this phenomenon of underperformance pressure. In other words, the principle of equal chances of being selected to the sample that is usually adopted in quantitative studies (random sampling) would not be appropriate here. It would have enabled everybody, including those principals who were not experiencing and handling underperformance pressures. Purposive sampling entails a researcher hand picking the participants based on their typicality for the characteristics that the researcher is looking for (Bhardwaj, 2019; Cohen et al., 2018).

Some of the criteria that were used for selecting the participants were the following. The participants had to be principals of secondary schools in the iLembe District. Their schools had to have been scoring low percentages in the National Senior Certificate Examinations. Specifically, the average pass percentage in Grade 12 had to have been below 60% for the past three years. The schools must have been categorised as Quintile 1 to Quintile 3. In the context of South Africa, Quintile 1 schools are those that are located in poverty-stricken communities and thus, these schools do not charge school fees and are known as No-fee schools (Myende, 2014; Van Dyk & White, 2019). Therefore, the participants in this study were those principals whose schools met the characteristics mentioned above.

4.7 Recruitment of the participants and access to the research sites

The notion of recruiting the participants into the study was an important and arduous task that involved a lot of patience. I say this because it might be easy to identify potential participants in a study, but it was a completely new game to have them agree to participate in a study, particularly, given the number of ethical issues relating to autonomy and voluntary participation. I explained more on these issues under the ethical considerations heading. To recruit the participants to the study, I sought the assistance of the circuit manager whose support was double fold. Firstly, the circuit manager assisted in identifying those schools that had this recurring challenge of underperformance, and secondly, the circuit manager assisted in terms of writing formal letters informing them of the purpose of the study.

(Appendix A), along with the informed consent form (Appendix B), explained the participants' right to participate voluntarily and also to withdraw at any moment throughout the study period. I asked them to indicate if they would be interested in participating in the study. For those who showed interest to participate, I set up appointments so that I could provide more details about the study and also for them to ask further questions. I then visited them in their respective schools. Our conversations lasted for about 15 minutes. I wanted them to have a comprehensive understanding of what they were getting into and thus, be aware of the whole process that would unfold. I clarified the interview process, received the consent form, gave an outline of the study, confirmed that the candidates had no trouble describing their experiences, and we established the interview dates.

4.8 Data generation methods

A researcher should specify the kinds of data that will answer research questions (I call them puzzles in this study) during the data generation phase (Bhardwaj, 2019; Komolthiti, 2016). In order to address the study's research puzzles which were stated in Chapter One, this study generated data using a narrative inquiry methodology that involved gathering and repeating participants' tales (Brian et al., 2019; Nugent, 2007; van der Spuy & Jayakrishnan, 2021). Creswell (2003) identifies four main methods of generating qualitative data, namely, observations, interviews, document analysis, and audio-visual sources. The most popular and advised way to get data via gathering participant narratives was through interviews (Nugent, 2007; Taherdoost, 2021). To encourage the participants to share their unique perspectives, interviews for narrative inquiries were always done in an informal,

conversational style, as highlighted by Nugent (2007). Successful unstructured interviews, in the opinion of Nugent (2007), are the source of the meaning and rich emotional tales used in narrative inquiry research. Roberts (2020) and Kvale (1996) asserts that during a narrative interview, the researcher listens to what the participants have to say about their lived worlds. As the participants expressed their views and opinions in their own worlds, I learned about their views as well as their work situation, family life, dreams, and hopes.

The narrative approach worked best for this study since it allowed me to compile my own ideas about how to handle principals' pressure about underperformance. In the light of this, narrative data was produced using the manner of the interviewees. When the participants were reluctant to freely express themselves during our conversation, and told the truth as they knew it, the results might be distorted (Creswell, 2012; Snyder, 2019). This study used a personal interview rather than a focus group interview to help reduce the problem of data distortion. It also used the artefact inquiry approach to jog participants' recollections. More details about these methods are provided below.

4.9 Conducting the pilot study

Before I delve into the methods of data generation methods that I used, I thought that it was important to explain that I conducted a pilot study to assess the techniques that I would be using during the study. Therefore, this section theorises this important aspect of research. Shakir and Rahman (2022) concur with Teijlingen and Hundley (2002) when defining pilot studies as a pre-testing of a specific research instrument, such as a questionnaire or interview schedule, as well as the miniature form of a full-scale study, also known as feasibility studies. According to Shakir and Rahman (2022, Teijlingen and Hundley (2002), completing pilot research is an essential component of an effective study design. Doing so does not ensure the success of the main study, but it does raise the possibility. Pilot studies serve a variety of crucial purposes and can give other researchers insightful data (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002).

The following justifications are provided by Malmqvist et al. (2019), Teijlingen and Hundley (2002) for performing pilot studies. According to these academics, pilot studies are carried out to create and evaluate the suitability of research tools. They evaluate whether a comprehensive study or survey is feasible. Pilot studies help in the creation of research procedures and determined whether the protocol is practical and feasible. Pilot studies determine the efficacy of the sample frame and methods. Pilot

studies help determine the logical issues that might arise when utilising the suggested procedures as well as the likelihood that the recommended recruitment approaches would be successful. The purpose of the pilot study conducted for this research was to almost entirely satisfy Shakir and Rahman (2022) and Teijlingen and Hundley's (2002) justifications for doing so. According to Shakir and Rahman (2022) and Teijlingen and Hundley (2002), pilot studies help in estimating variability in outcomes and help in determining the sample size and in collecting preliminary data. They help in determining what resources such as finances and staff are needed for a planned study. They assess the proposed data analysis techniques to uncover potential problems. They develop a research question and research plan. They trained me as a researcher in as many elements of the research process as possible.

After considering all the opinions expressed regarding pilot studies, I concluded that pilot testing was crucial for interview preparation (Malmqvist et al., 2019; Turner, 2010). Pilot studies aided in the discovery of interview design problems, constraints, and weaknesses (Komolthiti, 2016; Ntinda, 2020). In this study, I tested the interview procedure with a male colleague who was a principal of one of the secondary schools in my area during the piloting stage. The process used for the interview protocol was the same as what was used for the research interviews. The pilot research helped me to plan my time with each participant, tested the interview questions and my recording equipment, got me ready for a genuine interview, and confirm the precision and clarity of the interview questions. Thereafter, I went over the instruments and improved my interview questions.

4.10 Conducting life story interviews

The life story interview method was deemed the most appropriate for this research inquiry and served as the primary method of data generation because it gave me access to phenomena that could not be observed, such as the participants' thoughts, feelings, intentions, perspectives, experiences and meanings (Patton, 1990; Roberts, 2020). Since the subjects of a narrative inquiry are free to speak candidly about their experiences and use their own words, life story interview was an effective way to produce field texts for this kind of research (Bhardwaj, 2019; Olive, 2014). Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2015) claim that narrative interviews put the subjects at the centre of the study and aid in the researchers' understanding of the subjects' experiences and behaviours. According to Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2015), researchers that use narrative techniques to gather data typically let the subject determine the interview's direction, topic and pace rather than starting out with a predetermined

purpose. Being able to build rapport and trust early on in the interview and then being a very excellent listener throughout by avoiding interruptions are necessary qualities for a strong narrative interviewer (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015; Roberts, 2020).

According to Ntinda (2020) and Clandinin (2013), the process of creating field texts is one in which a person chooses a narrative to share about their lived experience. Pervin and Mokhtar (2022), and Lia (2010), argue that narratives are crucial in making our implicit lives plain. Pervin and Mokhtar (2022) further attest to the importance of creating stories as field texts. Without stories, we have nothing because stories are all we have (Clandinin, 2006; King, 2022). An interview method involves more than just creating interview questions; it also entails a number of procedures, such as selecting the interviewees who would be able to respond to the questions in the best way, deciding whether a telephone, focus group, or one-on-one interview was practical, setting up a recording procedure, and creating the interview protocol (Bhardwaj, 2019; Creswell, 2013).

I used nonverbal cues to encourage the interviewees when they started to share their stories throughout the interview phase, such as smiles and "hmms", to help them feel comfortable about speaking freely (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015; McGratha et al., 2019). I made certain that there were no interruptions until each participant's story was clearly concluded (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015; Taherdoost, 2022). In addition, I screened out unguarded comments that were irrelevant, kept track of the entire interview process, and I became sensitive to nonverbal indications, as suggested by Holmes (2020) and Seidman (2006). I chose the day and time for a 40–60-minute one-on-one interview based on each participant's availability and preferences. I informed my interview subjects about the statement regarding the recording of the interview in the consent form before the interview began and requested their consent to digitally record the interview using my voice recorder. I also told the participants that they might ask for the interview to end at any point. I also emphasised to them that they were free to quit the study whenever they felt the need to do so.

The interview questions may be structured or unstructured (Merriam, 2009; Robert, 2020). According to Robert (2020) and Merriam (2009), an unstructured interview includes open-ended questions since the researcher is insufficiently knowledgeable about the phenomenon to craft effective questions. Unstructured interview questions were employed in this study. The purpose of the interview was to elicit the principals' meaning-making experiences related to dealing with underperformance challenges in secondary schools in the iLembe District. In addition to these interviewing procedures,

I also focused on the three listening levels when conducting interviews. I paid attention to what was being stated. I met each participant in this study one-on-one, and they willingly decided to share the stories from their own experiences. This took place in settings where people felt at ease discussing their personal histories.

My participants favoured places like their homes, offices and local libraries. Because field texts in narrative inquiry technique were believed to be a representation of the researcher participant relationship, I had to be extremely selective while choosing venues for text development (Mara, 2009; Robert, 2020). In addition to all of this, as the interview went on, I focused on the three common places—temporality, sociality and place—during the process of creating the field text. Through this technique, individuals' experiences might be understood more thoroughly than through the stories they told (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Taherdoost, 2021). I issued a thank you email to the participants within 24 hours of the interviews being finished. An expert transcribing service transcribed the interviews. Within three days, the transcription process was finished. I sent the transcripts to the interviewees via email a week after the interview so they could verify the veracity of the information. The stories were the only source of field texts in this study, therefore, as a researcher, I used techniques to jog participants' memories in order to extract more stories. The artefact inquiry approach was then applied to produce more field texts. This approach is covered in more detail below.

4.11 Artefact Inquiry

According to Stukenberg (2021) and Tuan (2003), an artefact was anything that was created via the application of a skill that required knowledge and practice, such as a poem, an axe, or a house. According to Wallwey and Kajfez (2023) and Tuan (2003), a modern definition of an artefact includes anything created by human hands, including tools, weaponry, sculptured, and engraved items. Artefacts were defined by Loganayaje (2016) as anything with cultural or historical importance. Pithouse-Morgan and van Laren (2012) claim that artefact inquiry is a visual approach that gives us different perspectives on data gathering because an artefact is a physical object that has meaning for the participants from their culture or history. According to Musoni (2020). Pithouse-Morgan and van Laren (2012), artefacts are things that have personal, temporal and geographic implications that allow participants to place them and have a conversation about them.

The object is merely a tool that inspires the speaker to express inner or private speech to an audience in order to receive criticism and support (Musoni, 2020; Samaras, 2011). Pedagogically, an artefact helps a researcher articulate a question that is related to their work (Musoni, 2020; Samaras, 2011). According to Blose (2018), artefact inquiry technique are utilised to elicit memories from the participants by using items. Hagan (2007) and Wallwey and Kajfez (2023) define an artefact as a fragile remnant of memory that is sculpted into a mental representation by individuals, evoking memories of experiences and serving as the means by which we as individuals share the actions of making meaning.

I asked the department head at my school to act as an interviewer by letting me identify an artefact and tell the story of my experiences growing up through the identified artefact before asking my participants to identify artefacts that could bring into their minds the memories of their experiences in a way that could help them in telling their stories. I had assumed it would be simple, but it turned out to be challenging for me, teaching me that this activity was not simple. I thus anticipated that my participants would also find the activity challenging. I made the decision to give my participants enough time to consider the artefact they would utilise when sharing their personal tales with me. In this study, I asked each participant to choose a memento from their home or place of employment that contained a story about their experiences as principals of underperforming schools. I then asked each principal to explain how the selected artefact helped him or her tell a story about running a school under pressure. To my surprise, the majority of my participants expressed that they found this activity to be very fascinating and that using artefacts facilitated the sharing of interesting experiences. Most of the principals who took part in my study were able to show that the artefacts they selected had cultural and historical significance to their experiences.

Most participants found this activity enjoyable because they each brought artefacts that served as their main inspiration for coming up with metaphorical stories about their daily lives and portrayals of their roles and responsibilities. Those stories provided the answers to the first and second sub-research puzzles. Additionally, each participant related fascinating tales that were inspired by the selected artefacts. A deeper meaning associated with the artefact was explored from both the personal and social viewpoints as the participants shared the experiences that were inspired by their artefacts. The majority of the participants reflected on and assigned meanings to the items in order to transmit their lived experiences, and they typically had strong emotional ties to the things they chose.

Pictures of the participants' artefacts were inserted into Chapter Five to show how the participants interpreted their experiences. As the participants were able to go back and forth in time as they recalled the gems that lay buried in their memories, I noted that there was a reflection during the discourse. As the conversations turned reflective, I also observed that there were internal feelings and thoughts that were prompted, and I observed that these were both positive and negative feelings that were associated with the chosen objects because the positive and negative connotations were expressed in the dialogues.

4.12 Data analysis

According to Brailas et al. (2023) and LeCompte and Schensul (1999), data analysis is a process that a researcher engages in to interpret and condense the gathered data into a narrative. Data analysis, according to Mattimoe et al. (2021) and LeCompte and Schensul (1999), is the act of condensing a lot of created data in order to make sense of it. The three steps of data analysis, according to Brailas et al. (2023) and Patton (1987), are data organisation, data reduction through summarisation and categorisation, and pattern and theme identification and linking. In this study, narrative analysis and the analysis of the narratives were the two levels at which field texts were analysed. According to Blose (2018), narrative analysis is the process of applying different types of plots to arrange events into an explanation. In order to conceptualise the analysis of narratives as an analysis that employs a paradigmatic process to analyse field texts generated through stories, Blose (2018) drew on Mara (2009), and Polkinghorne (2002). This conceptualisation led to descriptions of themes that were common to all of the stories. The analytic method in this study thus went as follows: at the first level, each participant's field-text occurrences were organised into an explanation or a narrative. The participant narratives were then further examined using the paradigmatic analysis (Mara, 2009; Mattimoe et al. 2021; Polkinghorne, 2002). Below is a more thorough explanation of these techniques.

4.13 Narrative analysis

This study's initial level of data analysis was narrative analysis. Ntinda (2020) and Clandinin (2013) assert that the goal of narrative analysis is to retell participant stories. The output of narrative analysis, according to Ntinda (2020) and Polkinghorne (2002), is a retrospective explanation that links earlier events to explain how a particular conclusion might have come about. In this study there were three steps to the narrative analysis (Mattimoe et al. 2021; Polkinghorne, 2002). First, field texts' events needed to be arranged chronologically. Second, stories were structured using plots that were

constructed. Thirdly, data events were merged with the goal of creating compelling narratives or explanations.

The process of merging events demanded a retrospective approach since the researcher had to hunt for data items that fit in the narrative of participants (Brailas et al., 2023; Polkinghorne, 2002). In order to create narratives about the principals of the underperforming schools in this study, I employed the storyboard method, which was a technique used in the film business (Blose, 2018). In the field of video production, a storyboard is a visual layout consisting of sketches, each of which represents a single scene or camera shot (Mitchell et al., 2011; Naicker et al., 2020). The storyboard helped me make the storylines I created from the transcribed field texts more engaging. I made the decision to document each scenario of the participants' experiences using photographs. After that, I returned to the field texts' transcripts to select text passages that related to each scene.

4.14 Analysis of narrative

As a secondary level of analysis, the analysis of the narrative, also known as paradigmatic analysis, was applied. The goal of the analysis of the narratives was to identify specifics and instances of abstract ideas or concepts in field texts (Naicker et al. 2020; Polkinghorne, 2002). I did not look at the field texts because the analysis of narratives method was used as a second level of analysis in this study. Instead, I examined the rebuilt narratives in more detail (first level of analysis). This level of analysis therefore, entailed a detailed assessment of the participant's retold narratives with the goal of noting topics or themes that appeared throughout all the participant's stories (Brailas et al., 2023; Polkinghorne, 2002). I utilised concept mapping to examine narratives. When field text interpretations first started to develop, qualitative researchers utilised the concept mapping technique to make sense of them and keep track of them (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010; Ntinda, 2020). I created schematic illustrations that depicted the formation of basic concepts while concept mapping (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010; Ntinda, 2020). Through this procedure, I was able to identify themes that appeared in the participant narratives; as a result, both typical and unusual themes are provided in the following two chapters (Mattimoe et al., 2021; Polkinghorne, 2002).

4.15 Trustworthiness

Since this is a qualitative study, the difficulties of validity and reliability were substituted by the study's credibility (Golafshani, 2003; Ntinda, 2020). A research study's credibility is used to evaluate

its quality as a qualitative research study (Loh, 2013; Naicker et al., 2020). Wallwey and Kajfez (2023) and Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest that because the terminology and standards for a narrative inquiry are still being created, each narrative researcher should look for and defend the standards that are most applicable to his or her work (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Musoni, 2020). Researchers in narrative inquiry have outlined various criteria for judging the calibre of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Musoni, 2020). These standards were provided by Taylor and Wallace (2007): verisimilitude, adequacy, plausibility, fidelity and believability. It is crucial to avoid trying to fit the terminology developed for other types of study into the Narrative Inquiry, so there was a specific language that was appropriate (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Ntinda, 2020). This narrative study's credibility was supported by its apparency and verisimilitude.

4.16 Apparency

According to Hayashi et al. (2019) and Van Maanen (1988), perceived validity is a valid substitute for dependability. A plausible story is one that is likely to ring true; hence, apparency aims to address the plausibility being provided (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Leventi, 2022). According to Gordon (2022) and France (2010), apparency is a sign of how complicated the stories being told and repeated are. According to Taylor and Wallace (2007), a narrative inquiry focuses on how people make sense of what happens, which is a complex process (Creswell, 2007: Ntinda, 2020). In this study, apparentness was achieved by producing thick and rich field texts. Secondly to achieve apparency, I set aside the occasional inquiry by linking phrases that enriched the narrative, and my voice as the researcher was kept to a minimum. Collaboration, which required the participation of the participants to build a strong relationship of trust, allowed for the further achievement of apparency (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Metz et al., 2022).

I made sure that the participants freely shared their stories by building trust. By explaining to them up front how they could gain from this study by having their opinions heard by the education stakeholders who had expressed interest in the current environment of underperformance in schools, I was able to ensure that the participants perceived themselves as co-researchers. I made it clear to the participants that this study was giving them the best opportunity to communicate how they felt about the situations they were in.

4.17 Verisimilitude

Verisimilitude, according to Black (2019) and Loh (2013), is the attribute of appearing true or real. In this study, verisimilitude was enhanced by carefully crafting the narratives to allow for insights, deepened empathy and sympathy and aided in understanding the participants' subjective worlds (Loh, 2013; Randall, 2020). The validity of this study was also ensured by using a member-checking technique. This was achieved by returning the plots of field notes (that had been analysed) to the participants as part of member checking which gave them the chance to confirm the interpretations and offer different ones as necessary (McKim, 2023; Patton, 2002). In this study, member-checking as a trustworthiness technique was used since it was crucial and specifically peer validation and audience validation were used (Loh, 2013; Randall, 2020). I used a peer reviewer who was knowledgeable about the subject and who supported me by playing the role of the devil's advocate and by pressing me to make difficult methodological decisions and asking probing questions regarding the interpretations and techniques utilised in the study (Lehtinen, 2023; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.18 Ethical considerations

This research focused on people and attempted to comprehend their private lives. So, in this narrative research, moral awareness was crucial. My moral duty as a narrative researcher was to uphold the dignity and privacy of my subjects (Josselson, 2007; Taquette et al., 2022). I treated the participants with respect as a result. Participants' information was used exclusively for the study and was not utilised for any other reason. Additionally, I adopted a relational ethical stance toward this narrative research by noting the following ethical considerations. In line with this approach, I started by getting everyone's consent to take part. Secondly, I made sure to get approval from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education to conduct the research. Thirdly, I utilised pseudonyms to try to maintain anonymity and made sure that all participants were guaranteed the confidentiality of their names, organisations, and documents. Fourthly, I applied for ethical clearance at the Human and Social Science Research Ethics Committee based in the College of Humanities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. When my application for ethical clearance was approved, I received an Ethical Clearance Certificate. Finally, I assured the participants that they would be safe from any harm (Barrow, et al., 2022; Josselson, 2007). It was crucial that I intruded respectfully because narrative enquirers are viewed as persons who intrude into people's private lives (Horton, 2022; Josselson, 2007). Some of the key ethical considerations that I observed include the participants' autonomy,

voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the study at any phase of the study and protection from any harm. All these principles were promised to the participants and were fully observed.

4.19 Conclusion

This chapter described the methodology used to carry out this narrative investigation. I announced the paradigmatic positioning and research design used at the beginning of this chapter. Through the reflection that resulted in the paradigmatic stance, this chapter has improved my understanding of myself beyond words from the literature. The methodology that served as the foundation for this narrative inquiry was discussed in further detail in this chapter. My dedication to the technique was a great experience. In addition, the research procedures, which include the selection of participants and the creation and analysis of field texts, were discussed. This strategy made me understand and learn from other people's lived experiences because it required me to live alongside them. The first level of analysis, or the narrative analysis, is presented in the next chapter. To address the research sub-puzzles of this exploration, the narrative analysis gathers the re-storied narratives of the principals of secondary schools with low test scores.

CHAPTER FIVE

NARRATIVES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a detailed discussion about issues of research design and methodology. The chapter discussed the interpretivist paradigm which is a paradigm within which this study is located. Narrative inquiry as a methodology and its constituent components were discussed. Two levels of analysis – narrative analysis and analysis of narratives was presented, and this chapter is the actual implementation of that analysis framework. Therefore, the current chapter presents the first level of analysis which is called narrative analysis. The narrative analysis presents 'restoried' narratives of the principals that lead underperforming secondary schools in the rural communities within the iLembe District. The names of the participants and their institutions that are used here are not their real names, but they are pseudonyms. This chapter begins with Mr Smith's narrative, followed by Miss Zuma's narrative, Mr Moroka's narrative, Miss Govender's narrative, Mr McDonald's narrative, and lastly Dr Sikhakhane's narrative.

5.2 Narrative of Paul Smith

This section on Paul Smith's narratives is presented using the following themes: My humble beginnings; Swelling the ranks of the working class; Joining the teaching fraternity; Bittersweet moments and becoming a breadwinner; Climbing the leadership ladder; Ascending to the office of the principal; Making a difference and an envisaged future.

5.2.1 My humble beginnings

I am Paul Smith, the Principal of Sunshine Secondary School (Pseudonym). I was born at KwaMangqaklaza at Gingindlovu Village in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal in 1975. I come from a family of ten children. I am the last born. My father was a farmer who supported his family by growing sugar cane. He passed on while I was four years old. I was raised with love by my mother who was a hardworking, caring, persevering and a patient woman. My elder brothers and sisters quitted school to look for jobs in order to support our family. As a family, we could not afford much because of poverty such that on some days, we went to bed without food. Worsening our situation was 'ubabaomdala' (my father's elder brother) who used different dirty tricks to dispossess my mother of her belongings. He dispossessed her of a tractor that was left by our father. He also took away huge

part of her land. My mother was left with a small tract of land in which she grew sugar cane in order to support her family as she was unemployed. As a result, my mother became ill.

I grew up looking after cattle, playing soccer with other boys until I enrolled at a primary school like other children of my age did. I started the school a year later than my age group because there was no money to buy me school needs. After completing my primary education, I proceeded to Sunshine Secondary School where I did Grade 8 up to Grade 12. That is where I was inspired to go further with education. My earlier plans had been to quit school and start looking for employment. However, the motivation that I got from the teachers made me change my mind. I started to work harder to get the best results. From that time onwards, I got first position until I finished matric in 1990. I led a study group of boys who shared the same interest with me about education. We mainly did Mathematics together. My matric results were very good. I had a vision of becoming a teacher. I had been inspired by the secondary school teachers who were passionate about education.

5.2.2 Swelling the ranks of the working class

The biggest barrier to achieving my dream of becoming a teacher after matric was a lack of money to pay for my tertiary education. I decided to look for work. Fortunately, I got a clerical job in a construction company in Durban. After working for two years, I lost a pen that the company had given me. That was my first fault in the company, but the employer dismissed me. That incident taught me that it was hard to survive in a work environment if you are without a qualification. Fortunately, I had saved enough money to register at a college of education to pursue my studies to become a teacher. In 1994, I registered at
Eshowe College of Education for a Secondary Teachers' Diploma (STD). After admission all new students were subjected to an initiation process which incorporated a lot of ill-treatment by older and senior learners. At times I felt like returning home due to irritation. I did not have difficulties in passing my courses from Level 1 up to Level 3 which was the highest level.

5.2.3 Joining the teaching fraternity

I started teaching in 1997 at Ntwezinhle Secondary School (pseudonym) in Ndulemnyama (pseudonyms) under Mandeni Municipality in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. I taught Mathematics in Grades 10, 11and 12. Each grade had four sections which meant that I taught
12 sections. This created pressure for me. The school's matric class obtained 30% and Mathematics was the worst subject as most learners failed it. My principal motivated and supported us as young

teachers to improve the performance of our subjects. I, as Mathematics teacher was given a target to achieve more than 60% pass rate in the subject in matric Mathematics. This was a difficult task to achieve because the school's Mathematics pass rate in matric was 17% those days. As Post Level 1 educators, also known as teachers, we formed a formidable team which was led by Mr Phungwayo (pseudonym) who is our Circuit Manager today. We started teaching together in the same school. He was a very influential person, and still is. He motivated us to go to class to teach even when our principal was not there. We were self-motivated. We worked very hard and Mathematics pass rate improved from 17% to 83% within in the year 2000. I was able to produce learners who got distinctions in Mathematics.

After getting married in 2008, I wanted to be closer to my home. Then, I applied for a single transfer to Isinyamana Secondary School (pseudonyms) which was halfway through to Ntwezinhle Secondary School. Unfortunately, Dr James (pseudonym) the Principal of Ntwezinhle was reluctant to release me. He called me into his office to persuade me to not leave his school. He said, "You see Mr Smith, all these learners in our school premises are wearing shoes but some of them had to put papers inside their shoes to fit them. In other words, it is not all the teachers that teach Mathematics who are fit to teach it. Some are taking chances but you are very fit to teach it" To me, it sounded like he was saying that I was irreplaceable. Those comments meant a lot to me because they described how I was identified by my senior at work. Those words meant to me that I was good. Despite those kind words, I persisted that I wanted to leave. Finally, he released me, but I became proud of myself. I assumed duties at a new school oozing with confidence. I wanted my new principal to notice that I was not just an ordinary Mathematics teacher, but a special one.

5.2.4 Bittersweet moments and becoming a breadwinner

I will never forget that on my first pay day as a teacher I came back home carrying food items which I knew my mother loved. My plans were to make her happy. But to my absolute shock and dismay, when I arrived at home, I found that she had passed on the very same day. It became a saddest moment of my life. In addition to this loss, all my siblings also lost their jobs. This resulted in me supporting my siblings and their families for a period of five years. That was indeed, an arduous task.

5.2.5 Climbing the leadership ladder

I continued with the good performance of scoring above 80% in Mathematics in matric. My principal encouraged me to apply for a vacant Departmental Head (DH) post. I was invited to the interviews

that were held at school and I got the DH post. After assuming a role as a DH in 2010, I began to experience pressure because I was responsible for the performance of the other teachers as well. There was a huge demand for accountability from the District Director of that time. The number of learners in who were performing poorly in Mathematics in my department had increased. I had a challenge of making learners pass Mathematics. I introduced extra classes for all learners in my department. Unfortunately, there was no buy in from learners as they missed classes. I conducted workshops which capacitated my teachers in Mathematics methodology. I ensured that my teachers completed the syllabi. As a result of those interventions, slight improvement was observed. Mathematics results improved from 13% to 55%. My colleagues in the School Management Team (SMT) became jealous of me. I noticed that the principal had developed negative attitude towards me. In fact, I suspected that he hated me. I learned through reliable sources that he was convinced that I was a bad and ambitious person who wanted to overthrow him from a principalship position. He began to ill-treat me. I escaped death several times. In one incident, I was robbed of my car at gunpoint. To save my life, I took a single transfer to Sunshine Secondary School which is the closest to my home.

Sunshine Secondary school was identified as a T60 school. A T60 school means that such a school is underperforming at matric by obtaining below 60% pass rate. In the first SMT meeting that I attended at Sunshine Secondary School, we unpacked the content of the Section58 B letter from the Head of Department (HoD) which was informing the principals that the school had underperformed, and it required the SMT to provide a detailed plan of how it was going to improve its academic performance. In our response, we mentioned strategies that we intended to implement. I assisted the principal in implementing programmes that were directed at improving the performance of the school.

In 2013, I became a deputy principal (DP) of Sunshine Secondary School, and I was responsible for both academics and administration issues. To deal with underperformance as a DP of Sunshine Secondary School, I conducted class visits and provided classroom support to the teachers. I controlled absenteeism and late coming. I held extra classes on weekly basis. Unfortunately, underperformance continued because some teachers did not take me seriously as our principal was too lenient. The principal allowed teachers to do their work as they pleased. There was too much pressure from the stakeholders to the principal to improve performance which was 30%. Eventually, he took early retirement as he could no longer take the pressure.

5.2.6 Elevation to the office of the principal

In 2016, I became a principal after the departure of our principal. The pressure which led to his departure remained because I also felt the same pressure as he did. The first matric results under my leadership were 35%. My observations were that underperformance in this school was caused by different factors. Firstly, my predecessor viewed himself as a manager and not a leader of classroom activities. He was not in touch with what was happening in the classroom and, as a result, he was unable to identify and mitigate the challenges that teachers and learners faced. He rarely supported teachers.

Secondly, most of our matric teachers were inexperienced; therefore, they lacked knowledge of preparing learners for matric examinations. Thirdly, some of my teachers lacked competency when it came to content knowledge of the subject and methodology. Fourthly, some of our teachers came to this school through a process called Compulsory Temporary Transfers (CTT). This process refers to those educators who had to be transferred from one school to another in compliance with staffing policy framework. In the context of our school, it happened that most of the CTT educators bunked classes, absented themselves from work without valid reasons, and they concealed their incompetences by hiding behind teacher unions' protection.

Fifthly, teachers at this school had a very strong teacher militancy which disregarded school rules and, as a result, our former principal was paralysed with fear, and indecisiveness dominated his leadership. Because of all these issues, he did not put pressure on the teachers to go to classes to teach; he could not conduct class visits because they threatened him with the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU). The SADTU branch leadership held a strong view that it was unlawful to conduct class visits. This resulted in the creation of a huge knowledge gap to the Grade 12 learners. They did not receive sufficient support from their teachers.

Sixthly, the current teacher recruitment procedure denies principals their right to recruit suitable teachers for their schools. This system forces us as principals to accept incompetent teachers because we have limited control on the recruitment processes. It imposes the removal of competent teachers from our school to other schools through CTT process I have described previously. Both the current recruitment procedure and Post Provisioning Norm (PPN) policy negatively affects the functioning of the school but, there is absolutely nothing that I can do except to tolerate it. PPN is the policy which the Department of Basic Education (DBE) applies to determine teacher-learner ratio in schools. It has

implications of either losing educators in one school or getting additional educators. I know a lot of principals who could not handle the underperformance pressure because of these realities, and they opted to exit the system early. Some have even died due to such pressures.

When I took over as a principal, I was aware of all these challenges. I understood that I was required to lead a school under difficult conditions and that was causing pressure for me. I told myself that I had to be strong. I had to know the policies very well. I confronted the rebellious teachers and through negotiations, I managed to convince them to obey the school rules. I ensured that each teacher finished the syllabi. I ensured that all teachers used different previous question papers to revise for matric examinations. The photo of my mother reminds me that I lead the underperforming school. It also reminds me that my mother raised us under the difficult conditions which caused her pressure. She never allowed the pressure from the challenging experiences to change her focus but she persisted. I changed the procedure of doing things to force lazy teachers to take their work seriously. I emphasised the notion of time on task and task on time. I changed the procedure of doing things to force lazy teachers to take their work seriously. I emphasised the notion of time on task and task on time.

Figure 5.1 Smith's artefact

I was hands on in leading Grade 12 classroom activities. I motivated matric learners to attend all extra classes. I ensured that all the teachers complete their syllabi timeously. Since 2017, our matric academic results improved steadily because we scored 35% in 2017, 43% in 2018, and 58% in 2019. My target for this year 2020, is 75% pass rate. As you can see in my table, I have collected the written tests which have been marked by the teachers and moderated by the DHs. I am gathering evidence that serves as performance indicators that shows me where we are going in terms of performance. The evidence that I have gathered so far convinces me that we will achieve my target.

5.2.7 Making a difference

To improve the matric academic performance in my school, I had to evaluate classroom teaching and learning practices at this school. I discovered that my teachers were spending most of their teaching

periods imparting the learning content. They rarely assessed learners. As a result, our learners were not well trained to answer the examination question papers. I decided to change this practice. I introduced an assessment informed teaching. In this new system of teaching, teachers are required to use 33% of the teaching period to impart knowledge. They spend the rest of the period giving learners the assessment activities which they are expected to take from the previous examination question papers. I made it a requirement to the teachers that whenever they are drawing lesson plans, they should state the year of the question paper from which the assessment tasks had been taken. A lesson plan is not approved if it does not meet this requirement.

After discovering that most of our learners do not study at their homes but they concentrate on social networks/media, I decided to subject them to a compulsory supervised study which starts at six o' clock in the evening and end at ten o'clock at night. The teachers attend these compulsory supervised study sessions, and they assist learners to do their homework. The educators who are behind with their syllabi get a chance to catch up during this time. We do the revision of the past examinations question papers as well. Most of my matric teachers are inexperienced. They lack skills of preparing the learners for final examinations. As a result, we network with high performing schools in our circuit. Before the start of a final examination, we invite the experienced teachers to come to our school to prepare our learners for the final examinations. My teachers and learners benefit from this programme because the experienced teachers train them on how to tackle the examination question papers. I have started a group called Sunshine Secondary School Alumnus which comprises our former brilliant learners. These learners come with good ideas. We meet with them every term to analyse the results. They are currently raising funds to build the kitchen for this school.

5.2.8 Perceived solutions

I am of the view that the DBE should review the PPN policy. As an underperforming small school, we lose learners to high performing schools. We also lose teachers through PPN. To improve performance, we need competent teachers and learners. When applying PPN, some competent teachers are lost through the application of the principle known as Last in First out (LIFO). LIFO means that the last teacher to be employed in the DBE should be the first one to be taken out of the school if a need arises. Learners want to be enrolled in high performing schools. So, the PPN reduces chances for small schools to get competent teachers who may make learners to pass well. If small schools continue to get poor results; they will continue to lose learners. If a school continues to lose

learners, it will ultimately die. If the PPN policy is not reviewed the small schools will eventually shut down because for them to stabilise they need competent teachers.

I am also of the view that the community leaders as stakeholders could play a big role in the upliftment of the school performance. They could use their influence to educate members of the community about the importance of education in their learners. This can cause the parents to make the education of their learners a priority. The community needs to give 100% support to the school programmes. Politicians, traditional leaders and influential people in the community could work in collaboration with the school leaders in order to combine their efforts in the upliftment of education in our society. If we are going to achieve this objective, the relationship between the community leaders and education leaders to support the education initiatives should be strengthened.

I am also of the view that it counts to the school's favour if its principal is a member of the community where he/she is leading a school. If it happens that he/she is not a member of the community, but he /she must be prepared to stay in the community during the week and only go home on weekends. This is important because it could cause him/her to understand the values and aspirations of the community that he/she is serving. It is important that when the School Governing Body (SGB) selects a candidate that they are going to recommend to be a principal, they should consider this factor. A local person feels the pain if the parents are complaining about the poor performance of the school which he is leading. As a result, he/she will ensure that the school does not underperform. My former principal was travelling daily from Esikhaleni (former Esikhawini) which is almost seventy kilometres away from this school. He did not understand how the community felt about his leadership as the school was underperforming. Eventually, he became sad when the community rejected him.

5.3 Narrative of Miss Zuma

Miss Zuma's narrative is presented under the following themes: Who am I? A turning point in my life; Joining the mother of all professions; Growing within the ranks of the noble profession; Assuming the highest office at school; The demise and resurrection of Mayemaye Secondary School (pseudonym); Taking punches as a leader, and the proposed solutions to eliminate underperformance.

5.3.1 Who am I?

I am Jabu Zuma the Principal of Mayemaye Secondary School. I was born in 1967 in Ndabazakhe (pseudonym) near Empangeni in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. My parents were well to do because my father was a farmer and a taxi boss, while my mother was a housewife. My father introduced the taxi business in Ndabazakhe area and founded the Masakhane Taxi Rank (pseudonym) at Empangeni. We loved him; hence, we voluntarily worked on his farm during the school holidays. I developed love for a business from him and I wanted to be a businesswoman. Besides corporal punishment, which was very rife at primary school, my primary school life was easy as I passed my subjects very well.

After finishing at primary school, I commuted by bus to Hambindlela Secondary School (pseudonym) which was far from home. Commuting by bus denied me an opportunity to participate in extra mural activities such as sports and music which I loved. It took me time to acclimatise at a secondary school because it had a big learner enrolment. I chose the Commerce Stream because I wanted to pursue my business interests plus, I wanted to become a Chartered Accountant.

5.3.2 A turning point in my life

In 1984, I passed matric but failed Mathematics. Failing Mathematics shattered my dream of becoming a Chartered Accountant. Instead of getting admitted into a Bachelor of Commerce (B Com) degree, the university offered me a space in a bridging course which meant that I was supposed to spend the whole year doing Mathematics before admitting me for a B Com degree. I rejected the university offer because I was young and ill-advised. Today, I regret my decision because if I had agreed to do a bridging course, I could have achieved my dream of becoming a Chartered Accountant. I spent the whole of 1986 doing nothing.

It was in 1986 when my mother persuaded me to do teaching. Initially, I rejected her idea because it had never crossed my mind that I could become a teacher. My mother pressurised me to do teaching. Finally, I agreed to become a teacher only on condition that I was going to be a commercial subject's teacher. I trained to become a teacher at the then Indumiso College of Education from 1987 and I completed in 1989. I studied Business Economics, Accounting, and Economics and obtained my STD. At the college, I joined a study group of student teachers who were passionate about the teaching profession. Their behaviour influenced me to love the teaching profession. At the end of my training period, I discovered that I had developed love for teaching.

5.3.3 Joining the mother of all professions

I started teaching at Magnum Secondary School (pseudonym) in 1990 at Richards Bay in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. I loved teaching because it was an exciting career to me. When I started teaching there was good work ethic. There was no pressure from stakeholders to produce high percentage pass rate because we were already producing good results. Our high work ethic was accompanied by high professionalism and accepting being disciplined by colleagues. There was unity and collegiality among us as teachers. Our Grade 12 class obtained above 80% pass rate most of the time. I produced 100% pass rate in my subjects. We had enough time to do extra mural activities. I was a successful sports organiser. I organised educational excursions. We never taught on weekends and on holidays yet, our school passed well. What I found so special when I joined the teaching profession, was seeing myself as a lifelong learner because of what the teaching profession presented. I also realised that it is so fulfilling and a great feeling to see your own learners reaching the greater heights.

5.3.4 Growing within the ranks of the noble profession

In 1995, my principal appointed me to act as a DH of commercial subjects. I motivated teachers to love their work. I capacitated the unqualified teachers to master the basic teaching skills by providing them with a generic pedagogical mentoring which included classroom management strategies, lesson planning and preparation, assessment strategies, teaching strategies and technical aspects like chalkboard work. I also organised workshops to capacitate and familiarise them with relevant policies of the DBE. I monitored teachers' work and provided them with support. Educators loved and respected me. My principal motivated me to apply for the advertised DH vacant posts which I did. In 1997, I was appointed to a permanent post of a DH at Masisizane Secondary School (pseudonym) where I had applied. On my departure day from Magnum Secondary School, my principal praised me for good work that I had done for his school. That was the day I learnt that I had a nickname 'Ntombikayiphuthi' that had been given to me by learners. The name meant that I was the lady who was never absent from work.

For more than 5 years, Masisizane Secondary School had been underperforming because its matric was performing below 30%. I began to feel underperformance pressure. I found that the reasons for underperformance were educational deficits that were acquired by learners in primary schools as most learners did not master the skills of numeracy and literacy. The educational deficits become a barrier

for learners to assimilate new information and in acquiring new skills. To overcome this challenge, we collaborated with feeder schools in creating programmes that assisted us in eliminating the educational deficits in our learners.

There was another problem, that of late-coming and absenteeism which was rife on the part of both the educators and learners. This problem resulted in considerably reduced time for teaching and learning. To overcome the late coming and absenteeism, I assisted my principal to apply the learners' code of conduct that incorporated various sanctions for misdemeanours like both absenteeism and late coming. This assisted us in ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in terms of available time.

There was an inadequate coverage of the curriculum. I introduced a system where each DH checked the curriculum coverage at the end of each cycle to motivate all educators to finish the syllabi. After checking the curriculum coverage, all educators were subjected to accountability sessions. This assisted us to deliberate on issues that negatively affected curriculum coverage. This enabled us to create programmes that assisted us to complete our tasks in each cycle. As a result, we overcame the problem of failure to complete the syllabi. The educators had a poor content knowledge, out-dated teaching practices and low expectations. To overcome this challenge, we introduced the professional staff development programme that capacitated our teachers in content knowledge.

5.3.5 Assuming the highest office at school

In February 2000, I assumed duties as the Principal of Mayemaye Secondary School (pseudonym). I faced these challenges: work overload, lack of funds and other resources, and insufficient teachers. The school was far from my home yet, I had a three months old child. I was discouraged by those challenges to a point where, I wanted to resign as a principal but my husband persuaded me not to quit.

My first task at Mayemaye Secondary School was to get chalkboards. The school had no money. I decided to use my own money to buy five chalkboards at R400.00 each. The SGB Chairperson thanked me and promised to refund my money in the following year after the learners had paid the school fees. I assisted the SGB chairperson to fundraise in order to develop the school. We got R90000.00 as a donation from the local game reserve. Unfortunately, the Inkosi (Senior Traditional leader) of this area took it for his own use. The rule in this area is that when the school gets a donation, it must be introduced to the Inkosi first before using it. We were hurt by what the Inkosi did but there

was nothing that we could do because the Inkosi used force to address issues plus he was an aggressive and a violent politician.

We received another donation to the tune of one million rand from Hullets. The Inkosi allowed us to use it to build additional classrooms. We further received another one million rands from the former KwaZulu Government which was called Rand for Rand. The rule of the former KwaZulu Government was that if a school produced proof that it had spent money to develop itself, the government refunded the school. We used our rand for Rand to complete the unfinished classrooms. I began to handle the school's first matric examinations in 2003. Our matric class had fifteen learners. The first matric pass percentage of this school was 45%. We were applauded for this pass rate because it was our start, but I did experience underperformance pressure because we had scored less than 60% which is a requirement. To deal with the underperformance pressure, I worked collaboratively with Mr Damdam (pseudonym) who was a DH at this school. He was also a SADTU branch leader. He was a competent English teacher. He recruited other competent teachers from the neighbouring schools to come to teach our learners different subjects during weekends and in winter classes. Thereafter, our matric learners performed above sixty 60% until the year 2012.

5.3.6 The demise and resurrection of Mayemaye Secondary School

In 2013, our performance dropped to 21% pass rate. That performance introduced me to the accountability sessions for the first time in my life. The accountability sessions were attended by the principals of schools that had underperformed to account for the poor performance of their schools. The principals were also required to provide intervention strategies for improving performance in their schools. My analysis indicated that the poor performance was caused by the fact that we had accepted new learners from other schools who came to do matric. We did this to boost our enrolment because it was low; however, those learners had behavioural problems, which negatively affected our academic performance. We began to deal with underperformance pressure by ensuring that syllabi were completed in July. We organised study camps for Grade 12 learners which started a week before examinations commenced. It continued right through until the examination ended. Parents contributed funds to the school to cater for meals and other learner needs during the study camps.

In the study camps we did the revision in all subjects. The programme gave learners 40 minutes after school to relax. Thereafter, it was revision until 7 o' clock in the evening when we had supper. After supper, we worked with learners until 12 midnight. Thereafter, male teachers and male learners went

to sleep in the classrooms reserved for them while female teachers and female learners also slept in classrooms reserved for them. Every morning during the camps, we began with the final revision until the examination paper was written. Thereafter, we started to prepare for the next examination question paper.

I am very passionate about being in class. In collaboration with my colleagues, we did the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis to identify each learner's strengths and weaknesses. We created programmes which targeted low performing learners. I invited former learners who had passed matric at this school to provide individualised attention and support. I requested our SGB chairperson who is Induna to support us because he is very passionate about education. He always motivates parents to support school programmes. The other strategy that we used to improve performance was to make sure that the syllabi were completed early in July. Our Physical Science DH motivated all educators to conduct extra classes. Now, every educator is motivated to conduct extra classes daily.

Our teachers compete to use Saturdays and Sundays to cover the syllabi. I check teachers' files and learners' exercise books to check if teachers are moving at the right pace or not. This helped my teachers to be on their toes with respect to curriculum coverage. Our performance improved dramatically such that in 2019 we scored one hundred percent pass rate.

5.3.7 Taking punches as a leader

Figure 5.2 Miss Zuma's artefact

The photo of my father reminds me that he led a taxi association. Despite his good work, he escaped death several times from his colleagues in the taxi industry. He remained brave and he never gave up his tasks that he was elected to perform. I learnt from my father that a leader takes punches. My efforts to improve performance brought a lot of difficulties for me. I received several death threats through telephones from unknown people who were demanding that evening classes should stop because they interfered with their free time. Some learners held strikes against me because they were against the

extra classes. Later, I learnt that the learners were influenced by adults in the school community that were against the idea of working extra hours to improve the performance of the school. I remembered how my father dealt with violent attacks in the taxi industry and then I ignored my attackers. I continued to encourage teachers and learners to attend extra classes and I supervised them. Some parents supported me. Later, the teachers who were behind the strikes took transfers to other schools.

5.3.8 Proposed solutions to eliminate underperformance

In my view, workshops and principals' meetings which take place during the teaching hours disrupt the teaching and learning at school. In small schools like ours, the principal has a full teaching load. If I attend principal's meetings during teaching hours, curriculum coverage is compromised. I propose that principals' meetings should be held in the evenings or during weekends. I have a feeling that as a principal, I must not teach at all because my days are filled with diverse administrative and management functions such as procuring resources, managing learner discipline, resolving conflicts with parents and dealing with unexpected teacher and learner crisis which I cannot avoid. Therefore, I find it difficult to perform my roles as a leader of teaching and learning.

I also wish that the DBE could review the Post-Provisioning Model (PPM). The PPM is a formula driven model which is used by the DBE to allocate educators as human capital to public schools based on total learner enrolment. After using PPM formula to calculate the number of teachers a school qualifies for, the DBE comes up with the PPN certificate which is issued to principals of schools to inform them about the number of teachers that a particular school qualify for in its staff establishment. In most cases, the circular which accompanies the PPN certificates instruct principals to identify educators that are surplus to their staff establishments. In terms of PPM policy, the surplus educators are subjected to CTT. The PPN presents various challenges for the principals of public schools because the process of distributing educators from the pool of the surplus educators does not consider the qualifications of teachers.

My school was once allocated under-qualified and unqualified educators. I had a difficulty of working with those teachers and the DBE did not assist me to remove those teachers. The DBE implored me to be patient with them until they became qualified because they were temporary protected educators. The DBE argued that it had a responsibility to place them in any public school. It said that it had identified my school as a suitable school to place them. The outcomes of distributing surplus educators disrupt the morale of teachers because most teachers are placed in schools which are not their choices.

My school once received teachers who are a product of a CTT process. Those teachers were troublesome because they were always absent from school; they bunked classes; they failed to finish the syllabi and they did not conduct assessments properly as a result our school performance in Grade 12 was negatively affected. This is how my school was disadvantaged by the PPM policy. The PPM is unable to promote the needs of a diverse curriculum in rural areas. It is unable to factor in and balance for the variables that some public schools raise millions of rand in school fees which enables them to employ additional educators. It could assist if the South African Schools Act (Act 86 of 1996) could be amended to allow the Provincial HoD to appoint and deploy qualified teachers to public schools.

I am also of the view that *Operation MBO* should be reviewed. *Operation MBO* is a systematic school visit which is conducted by the iLembe District officials for collecting, analysing and using information to track the underlying root cause of underperformance by each school. As it unfolded, I discovered that such visits eventually instil fear among teachers and unsettle them. This is contrary to what the District Director is hoping to achieve through *Operation MBO*. My analysis suggested to me that *Operation MBO* is a fault-finding activity because the officials who conduct it, only look for faults at school and they offer very little to support teachers. *Operation MBO* left teachers demotivated because officials who conduct it give unconstructive feedback to teachers. In many cases, after *Operation MBO*, I remained with a task of motivating teachers in order to heal their wounds which were opened by the district officials during *Operation MBO*.

Operation MBO visit is unannounced; therefore, it disrupts teachers from their teaching activities. Teachers are moved out of their classes to attend officials in separate rooms in which they discuss curriculum issues. Teaching and learning get suspended on that day. I wish that as a principal I could be informed beforehand about the day of my school visit so that I could organise the unemployed qualified educators in our area to come to teach learners while subject educators are busy with the *Operation MBO* officials.

My other proposal for the future is that examinations and assessments in primary schools should be standardised so that underperforming primary schools could be identified. I wish to see the principals of primary schools accounting for the poor performance of their schools because they feed us with learners who cannot read and write. They feed us with learners who can neither count nor construct a simple sentence. They are relaxed yet they are part of the problems that we the secondary school principals are facing. I also wish that there could be national certificates in all exit points which are

Grades 3, 6, and 9. I wish to see all the things such as accountability sessions, team visits and standardisation that are done in matric in secondary schools to be done in Grade 7 in primary schools. The jurisdiction of Umalusi should be extended to all other levels including primary schools. Umalusi refers to the national examination board that is responsible for quality assurance in the administration of examination and assessment in the DBE. The application of the educational policies in examinations and assessment quality assurance should not discriminate between primary and secondary schools.

5.4 Samson Moroka's narrative

This section is presented under the follow's themes: Hailing from rural Hluhluwe; My primary school education; My principal's rescue mission; Emerged victorious despite adversities; Dealing with underperformance as an unqualified educator; Joining Turfloop Secondary School as a professionally qualified educator; Unprecedented appointment to chief accounting officer post; Tackling underperformance head on, and solutions to mitigate underperformance.

5.4.1 Hailing from rural Hluhluwe

I am Samson Stambu Moroka, the Principal of Turfloop Secondary School. I am the eldest son in a family of five children. I was born and bred at Hluhluwe, a rural area in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. Mainly, I lived with my mother since our father lived at Gingindlovu. Life was difficult at Hluhluwe because of poverty at home. We had no money to buy food because our father was not supporting us financially and my mother earned very little as a farm worker. We relied on subsistence farming; we planted crops for our own consumption.

As an eldest son at home, I was trained to be responsible for looking after my siblings. I also learned different responsibilities at a young age such as cooking, cleaning, thatching huts, and different household chores. As a young growing boy, I saw myself as a farmer in my adult life. My mother was a farm worker who supplemented her meagre income by making grass mats which she sold to make extra cash. She used a stone to grind maize to make maize meal and samp that she cooked. I thank my mother for sending me to school at the right age even though she was not educated.

5.4.2 My primary school education and principal's rescue mission

At school, I felt threatened, confused and inferior because it was my first time to be away from home. My academic performance was greatly affected by fear. I regained my confidence in Grade 4 where I managed to obtain position 2 in class. In Grade 7, I got position 1. My principal praised me and gave me a present which was a Mathematics book. It was wrapped and contained a lot of money inside. I was extremely excited. There was no secondary school in my area. Most learners who passed Grade 7 in our area did not continue with education because of poverty. The few that continued were those whose parents could afford to send them to the boarding schools. The principal understood my financial background from an English essay that I had written. He requested my mother to allow me to come to stay with him at his house so that he could take me to secondary school. My mother agreed.

On my arrival, he introduced me to his family and informed them that I had come to join them because he wanted to help me get education. They all accepted me. He bought me the school uniform and paid my school fees. I thanked God for sending my principal to intervene in my life. My principal was a successful farmer. He taught me farming skills. He supported me from Grade 8 (former Standard 6) until I passed Grade 10 (former Standard 8). Unfortunately, at that point there were no funds to support me because most of his children were at tertiary institutions. He was therefore, unable to continue supporting me.

5.4.3 Emerged victorious despite adversities

When my principal informed me that he was no longer going to support me, it became a cul- de-sac for me. Thereafter, I decided to go to Gingindlovu to meet my biological father. Upon my arrival, he welcomed and enrolled me at Mathubathuba Secondary School. My father was unmarried and that made him an irresponsible father because he had many girlfriends. Most of his girlfriends that came home with him showed with their facial expression that they did not like me.

When I was doing Grade 11 and 12, I suffered emotionally because my father subjected me to starvation as he did not provide me with food. I was partially supported by our neighbour. My father left me alone at home for more than two months without coming home. He did not pay my school fees. He did not attend school meetings when he was called to discuss his financial obligations with the principal. The principal once called me into his office to discuss the issue of my father's failure to pay the school fees. I was a shy person; therefore, I did not reveal the real story about myself. The

principal was humbled by the fact that I was doing very well in my studies. He allowed me to continue with my studies. The other learners who had not paid school fees like me were suspended from attending school. They were only allowed to come back to school after they had paid the school fees.

I always felt inferior as other learners undermined me because the only trouser, I wore was too old. My trouser had become small. I had added an additional piece of cloth to enlarge it to make it fit me. The additional cloth did not match the original colour of the trouser. The sewing was not neatly done. As a result, the other learners were laughing at me and I felt the pain. It consoled me when I eventually obtained the best results in matric. I was one of the only two learners who got a bachelor pass (formerly known as matric exemption).

5.4.4 Dealing with underperformance as an unqualified educator

My goal was to become a teacher but there was no money to take me to the university. I decided to look for a job. I spent the whole year of 1985 looking for a job with no success. Towards the end of the year, I was advised by a friend to go to Obonjeni District to look for a teaching job as there were job opportunities for people who had passed matric there. Indeed in 1986, I got a teaching job at Duduzane Primary School (pseudonym) in Obonjeni. I taught all subjects in Grade 7 (former Standard 5). Teaching was an enticing career for me. I taught there for three consecutive years.

The Grade 7 learners were writing external papers then. Schools were ranked by the circuit office as per their Grade 7 academic performance. Out of 29 primary schools, Duduzane Primary School was ranked position 3 from the bottom because of its poor performance. I took the challenge of improving its results seriously. I discovered that the major problem that had led to underperformance was the previous teachers' inability to complete the syllabi and implementation of comprehensive revision programmes to prepare learners for final examinations. Therefore, learners found it difficult to answer the external questions papers during the examinations.

I taught for 2 extra hours each day as I added 1 hour in the morning before the school started and I added another 1 hour in the afternoon after the school had ended. I also taught on Saturdays. I used the old question papers to revise for the final examinations. The school performance improved as it moved from position 26 in the ranking of schools in the district to position 16. The school was awarded a certificate for being the most improved school in the circuit. Unfortunately, I left the school because I wanted to continue with my studies at the university. I had used part of the little money that

I earned as an unqualified teacher to support my mother and I saved some money in order to pay for university tuition. In 1989, I registered at a university for a teaching qualification. I majored in Life Sciences (the then Biology) and Mathematics. My savings were inadequate for my first-year university fees. My friend advised me to apply for a bursary at Ulundi where the former KwaZulu Government was based which I did. Thereafter, I got a bursary which paid for all my study expenses. I passed very well and finished my studies in record time in 1992.

5.4.5 Joining Turfloop Secondary School as a professionally qualified educator

I started teaching at Turfloop Secondary School (pseudonym) at Mandeni in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal in 1993. The school was underperforming because since it started in 1985 its matric performance was always below 30%. I was teaching Mathematics in the lower grades while the principal taught Mathematics at matric. I did not feel the pressure because learners did well in my subjects. After serving for one year as a teacher, our principal resigned to join a university as a lecturer. The reasons for his resignation were not disclosed to us. Later we learnt that he was forced by underperformance pressure to quit his principalship position.

A new principal of Turfloop Secondary school was introduced. He came to school only for two days; thereafter, he never came back. We learnt through the circuit manager that our new principal had turned down his appointment. He claimed that he was threatened by the violence between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) which was rife then. The other reason that he told the SEM was that he did not want to travel long distance to school on daily basis.

5.4.6 Unprecedented appointment to chief accounting officer post

The circuit manager then appointed me to act in the principalship position although there were senior teachers whom I felt, deserved to get the acting position. I was overwhelmed by the responsibility that was placed on my shoulders. I began to lead the school at an early age of my career. I had to take Mathematics at matric because there were no other Mathematics teachers at school. The older teachers challenged my appointment. I struggled to handle their challenges as they threw all sorts of missiles at me. I failed to strike the balance between administrative duties and teaching activities. I rarely provided professional leadership to teachers regarding teaching and learning.

My major test was to handle matric examinations. The matric results were poor. Even in my own subject Mathematics performance was poor because my concentration was in the office rather than in the classroom. I had pressure to improve the results. I introduced the changes that were aimed at improving the results. As part of improvement strategies, I conducted class visits and compiled notes during the class visits. I used those notes to plan for each grade and wide professional development that focused on supporting teaching and learning. My leadership as a principal was weakened by the following challenges: many learners were old and they did not respect me; some learners protested against my leadership; they demanded that their class teacher should become the principal because he was older than me. The rate of absenteeism was high; the school was not fenced; as a result, it became difficult for me to control late coming and the bunking of classes; the classrooms were dilapidated; the window panes were broken and some doors were broken. Some classrooms did not have doors at all because they were stolen. All these challenges affected the school's functionality.

The challenges that I faced affected teaching and learning at school. They became a driving force behind the exodus of learners to affluent schools. I was frustrated and I even contemplated resigning as an acting principal but the circuit manager encouraged me to keep on trying to restore order at the school. The principalship post was advertised and I went for interviews. Fortunately, I got the post and became a principal in 1995.

5.4.7 Tackling underperformance heads on

After my assumption of the principalship position, I felt confident and I got the powers and courage to confront the unprofessional behaviours among some educators. Some of them failed to honour their teaching obligations and at some stage, they arrived to school very late.

Figure 5.3 Mr Moroka's artefact

This set of stones (my artefact) is called 'itshe lokugaya' (grinding stone). It is used to grind the hard-maize corns and groundnuts so that it becomes easy to cook it for human consumption. The stone was used at my homestead in Hluhluwe. It reminds me about how I should deal with the

underperformance pressure that I am facing at this school. This stone reminds me that as a new principal who is fighting underperformance pressure, I must be mentally strong like a stone. I must be mentally strong like "itshe lokugaya" and remain strong despite adversities.

I noticed that after confronting the educators' unprofessional behaviours, most of them began to respect me. Almost all staff members began to co-operate with me. I assumed that they changed their attitudes towards me because they had realised that I had been placed there as their permanent principal. They began to accept that there were no more chances to change me as their leader. I identified this as a suitable opportunity to implement strategies that I had to improve the academic performance. My first target was to improve school's functionality.

I influenced the creation of strong team teaching by making educators come together to work regularly, and help all our learners understand their subjects. I motivated teachers to work together when setting goals, designing Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) and when designing individual lesson plans and assessment of lessons. I also influenced them to evaluate the learners' results together. I improved learner attendance by implementing the 'code of conduct for learners. I allocated more resources to teaching and learning. I also initiated the establishment of a Physical Sciences laboratory. I procured more teaching and learning aids. I did staff development programmes, focusing on the drawing and presentations of lesson plans. I provided guidance to teachers on doing continuous assessments. I recruited student teachers from the University of Zululand to assist us to cover the syllabi during weekends. I emphasised the notion of meeting each learner's unique emotional, social, and cognitive needs because I believed that for learners to succeed in school, teachers needed to be sensitive to their needs and be responsive. I shared my vision of learner-centred learning to teachers, modelled positive personal relationships with learners, and intentionally organised school activities to support individual learner success.

We also organised study camps during matric examinations in which we invited competent teachers from our neighbouring schools to train our learners to answer external question papers. We did this during the evenings and during weekends. I sponsored the transportation of the invited teachers out of my own pocket because our school had no funds. I encouraged learners to attend extra classes that were provided by non-profit organisations at Mandeni. I motivated my teachers to network with other teachers from high performing schools to get tips on how they do well in examinations. Experience has taught me that as a principal of an underperforming school I need to own a school where I am

leading. I need to behave as if the school is my business which needs my entire time and attention. As a result, I have worked on weekends and during holidays.

5.4.8 Solutions to mitigate underperformance

Operation MBO should be conducted differently from how it is conducted presently. *Operation MBO* refers to a team of district officials who visit schools unannounced pretending as if they have come to give support to the school yet, they come to look for faults and provide very little support to the school. The manner in which *Operation MBO* is conducted currently irritates me because it always comes with a pressure and tensions on the side of educators. This is because the officials who conduct *Operation MBO* come with their own expectations and attitudes which are not made known to the teachers. Even the use of the term *MBO* suggests that 'bazosimboza lababantu' (these officials have come to put us in a tight corner to annihilate us).

Most officials who are entrusted with conducting *Operation MBO* have similar tendency of being armchair critics, and this discredits the whole exercise. Presently, the visiting teams comprise individuals who do not know the subjects that they have come to check. In my school, it happened that an official from a governance section came to check English including its assessment task. He failed to pick up simple grammatical mistakes on the paper; he also failed to pick up that the paper did not cater for all expected cognitive levels. The other official was a Mathematics Subject Advisor and he checked Mathematics. He managed to pick up the mistakes and he gave advice on how to correct them. We noticed that there was an inconsistence which was displayed by officials who were conducting *Operation MBO*. We thought that the inconsistency was caused by the fact that the official from governance section did not know the subject that he had come to check. This inconsistency casts doubts amongst the educators whether there is something worth about *Operation MBO*.

My submission is that the district could refine *Operation MBO* by making it to focus on subjects whose Subject Advisors are able to form teams that are going to visit a school so that educators could be developed. The visiting teams must focus on curriculum coverage with educators in terms of the volume of work covered against time already utilised and that is still available. The discussions between the visited teachers and the subject advisors should be based on CAPS Policy. I am also of the view that the Subject Advisor must develop a teacher who is found to need development. In addition, it could benefit the underperforming school if the Subject Advisors who visit schools could inform a school to be visited timeously about the intended visit and their expectations. The feedback

must be constructively given to the school. After the feedback has been given, teachers must be allowed to tell their specific challenges regarding the delivery of curriculum and competence levels in a particular subject. Subject Advisors must share strategies with educators on how to overcome such challenges.

The district needs to design and implement a programme of identifying underperforming primary schools in Grade 7. The identification of underperforming schools in Grade 7 can lead to the introduction of accountability sessions to the principals of primary schools so that they take their teaching and learning roles seriously. It can motivate the primary school teachers to focus on completing their syllabi. Furthermore, to minimise knowledge gaps among matric learners, Subject Advisors should pay attention to all grades. All grades must be forced to enter Mathematics and Science Olympiads Competitions because that can push all the teachers to finish the syllabi in those subjects. Lastly, the current promotion and progression system must change from what it is right now because it allows incompetent learners to be promoted to the next grades even though they are not ready.

5.5 Jane Govender's narrative

This section is presented under the following themes: The early beginning, Decision making when it matters most; Radio experience at the university; Being roped into teaching fraternity; Growing up within the ranks of a noble profession; Imminent underperformance pressures; Underperformance, accountability sessions and tragedy; Addressing underperformance, co-ordinator of underperforming schools and the perceived solutions to underperformance.

5.5.1 The early beginnings

I am Jane Govender, the Principal of Rise Secondary School. I was born and bred at eThembeni outside Stanger (today KwaDukuza) in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Education was a priority amongst the people of eThembeni. My mother was a teacher. I stayed with her at the Inanda Seminary School cottages where she was teaching. I went to crèche there. I started school at Shiyane (pseudonym) Primary School at eThembeni. I passed well until I finished Grade 7. I did Grade 8 up to Grade 11 at Montebello Secondary School (pseudonym) which was a boarding school. I did matric at Myeni Secondary School (pseudonym) at Amatikulu for two consecutive years because my first matric results were not good. My mother persuaded me to repeat matric. That became a

blessing in disguise because if I did not repeat matric, I would not be where I am today. When I was doing matric, I told my parents that I wanted to work in a radio. Unfortunately, they did not accept my career choice. After a long cogent discussion with them they decided that I had to get a teaching qualification first before joining a radio.

5.5.2 University experience and early exploration

I studied teaching at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) from 1990 to 1994. Initially, I wanted to work on radio because I was a reserved person. I found comfort or consolation in time of distress or sadness on radio and I felt that I could provide such service to others who are experiencing difficulties. I viewed a radio as an object that held a magnetic power to connect with people and that make them to always remember and have good feelings about what had been said to them. I felt that by working on a radio, I could connect with people and make them to always remember and have good feelings when they are distressed. I was addicted to radio. I loved it because of its magnetic power to influence, educate and to entertain people. I joined a media office of the Student Representative Council (SRC). I focused on electronic media. I explored my love for radio. Most of the radio activities took place behind the scenes. I was a news reader, a presenter, a producer and a programmer for shows. I got a space to think, plan, and to be creative. I wrote reports, proposals and did presentations. We negotiated with the University Management to transform the Student Campus Radio into a Youth Community Radio Station. The radio taught me to deliberate on issues, reason logically and to be diplomatic in my approach.

5.5.3 How my career took off and the ascension trajectory

I started teaching at KwaMashu in1995. I taught English and Geography in Grade 8 and 9. The matric class obtained 38% pass rate. In 1995, matric educators were subjected to underperformance pressure as they were required to account for poor performance and they were forced to teach during weekends to complete the syllabi. I was one of the 8 educators that left the school due to a reduced PPN. The school had lost learners due to poor performance. I was placed at Jikuyise Secondary School (pseudonym) at Hlabisa in the

Province of KwaZulu-Natal in the year 2000. I taught Geography in Grade 12. The pass rate in Geography was 20%. I felt the pressure to improve performance. I began to teach on weekends to improve matric results. I wanted to move away from Hlabisa because of the underperformance

pressure. In August 2001, I applied for a departmental head (DH) post at Rise Secondary School in the iLembe District in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. After the interviews, I was appointed as a DH in February 2002.

In 2003, I registered for the honours degree which I completed in 2004. I taught Geography in Grade 12. Geography obtained 54% pass rate. As a DH, I planned, motivated and gave directions to teachers to complete their syllabi. I supervised learning. We began to draw lessons plans together. I conducted class visits in my department to ensure that learners were given quality classroom activities and home works. I promoted teachers' growth through journal writing because I encouraged all teachers in my department to keep journals which helped them to reflect upon their own teaching. Effective journal keeping ensured that each teacher had an ongoing professional introspection, constant dialogue with oneself, self-critical awareness of one's practices and each began to search for best practices. I discussed assessment policies with my colleagues. Academic performance in my department improved to 89% and I gained confidence to apply for a deputy principalship post in September 2008. I went to the interviews and I became a deputy principal in 2009.

5.5.4 Accountability sessions and ensuing tragedy

My principal suffered severely from underperformance pressures. He suffered from myriad of physical symptoms which included headaches, upset stomach, elevated blood pressure, chest pains, depression, anxiety and sleeping problems. Our matric class of 2009 had obtained 40% pass rate. To curb underperformance, he instructed teachers to tell learners answers during examinations. He expressed that he was tired of attending accountability sessions. He had a hope that the school was going to obtain a good pass rate. The matric results were withheld. The DBE suspected that learners had copied during examinations. The principal was called in Durban to attend an investigation for the alleged group copying. He got sick and was hospitalised. I had to go to account on the school's behalf.

All the matric teachers and the learners that had written the examination came with us to account in Durban. In the accounting session, we were asked to explain why our learners had answered the same way. We failed to explain. Learners spoke the truth. We were all embarrassed. We learnt on our way back through cell phones that our principal had passed on. It became a sad moment for us to lose our principal. Together with all the educators, we agreed in principle that going forward, we will never tell answers to learners during examinations. After the passing away of the principal, I became the acting principal.

My first matric results as an acting principal were a 30% pass rate. This pass rate made us to be at the bottom of the circuit. We all got sick because the results brought us huge shame and pressure. Part of the factors that led to underperformance were absenteeism on month ends which was mostly by girl learners who collected social grants, learner pregnancies, lack of learner commitments, overcrowding due to a lack of classrooms, a shortage of resources like text books, teaching aids, electricity and photocopy machines. There was a lack of staff cohesion because the existence of different teacher unions caused staff divisions. Some teachers did not cover the prescribed content and they also failed to do thorough revision because they were always absent from school due to taking sick leaves. Some of the teachers were struggling to teach some sections of the prescribed content because they did not understand it and the parents did not support school programmes. As a result, our learners went to examination room ill prepared.

5.5.5 Addressing underperformance as a school principal

Figure 5.4 Miss Govender's artefact

In the radio, I worked as a manager. I acquired some management skills which are planning, communication, decision-making, delegation, problem-solving, and motivation. The radio reminds me the skills that I acquired while working in the university radio. The radio taught me that if you want to be a successful manager, you must work behind the scene. I work behind the scene to do planning, time management, communicate with my colleagues through the use of circulars and to reflect on my practices.

5.5.6 Co-ordinator of underperforming schools

In February 2013, I was elected to work with the District Director to co-ordinate underperforming schools. I was elected in the meeting which was attended only by the principals of the underperforming secondary schools. One of the resolutions was that there was a need to elect a committee which was going to work with the District Director to coordinate the activities that affected

the underperforming secondary school. As co-ordinators, we had to co-ordinate underperforming schools to work together as clusters to generate funds that were used to transport and to pay for people who were invited to teach English, Mathematics, Physical Science, Accounting and Economics in clusters during weekends. We also encouraged principals of the underperforming secondary schools to bring learners to the venues where tuition took place. I became the chairperson of the committee.

Every Saturday, I attended the meetings with the District Director. Before a meeting with the District Director, I met the principals of underperforming schools where we shared ideas on how we felt about his interventions. I took ideas from this meeting and shared them with the District Director. One of our suggestions to him was to make teachers to account to the District Director for poor performance during the accountability sessions. I found that the District Director is a good listener. He accepted our ideas because he began to call teachers to the accountability sessions. He made each teacher to account for poor performance. He says to a teacher 'out of all professions you chose to become a teacher. Out of all subjects you chose to specialise in Maths, but now Mathematics is being failed. Why?' Teachers find it difficult to respond to the District Director's questions. Teachers' attitudes towards their work changed.

Our suggestion is bearing fruits now because teachers began to take their work seriously. Previously, underperformance pressure and accounting for underperformance was the principal's responsibility but today educators are also accounting for the underperformance too. Today our teachers understand that they have to achieve 60% and above performance in their subjects. They know that if they fail learners there will be consequences where they will account to the principal at school level and that they will account to the District Director as well. Accountability of teachers by the district director motivates teachers to conduct extra classes to improve performance.

5.5.7 Crafting the way forward regarding underperformance

Number of strategies are recommended in order to successfully tackle underperformance in secondary schools that affected by this phenomenon. The DBE should stop holding workshops and meetings during the teaching hours. Currently, as a principal of a small school, I have a full teaching load. I am expected to complete the syllabus for each year. If I attend meetings and workshops during the teaching hours, I fall behind with my classroom work. This practice compromises curriculum coverage and leads to poor performance. My SGB must be allocated the Section 21 function (c) which could allow us to procure our own Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM). My school does

not have this function; hence, we fail to get the required LTSM. We do order the LTSM through the DBE as required by law, but the process has many disadvantages which outweigh advantages by far. When the ordered items are delivered their invoice shows that prices are inflated because an item which costs R3000.00 ends up costing R12000.00 and we cannot challenge it. This makes us as a school to get few items compared to the number of items that we were going to get if we were buying direct from the suppliers. The other disadvantage is that last time we ordered a Science Kit. It was not delivered, instead the DBE supplied us with learner chairs which we did not procure, which we also did not need because we had a surplus of chairs. I did make a follow up with the DBE at the district office. I was asked to write a letter which explained what had happened and I supplied the supporting documents like copies of order forms which are called Ef72. It ended there because nothing happened afterwards; we still have those chairs in our storeroom. My school suffers because of not having this function.

The SGB's term of office should be extended. The new office could be more than 10 years. This could allow the elected members to use their first year in the term to study and to analyse the challenges that cause a school to underperform. They could use their second year to strengthen their relationship as members of the SGB and show interest in the nature of the curriculum and standards of achievements. They could begin to monitor those standards. They could support plans to meet development pertaining to the curriculum. In their third year, the elected members of the SGB get more united and they understand each other well.

That is when they begin to cater for and meet the parents' needs and expectations on how the school should educate their children. They review learners' code of conduct and ensure that there are sound financial management of school funds. They may encourage parents' involvement in all school aspects which indirectly or directly enhance school performance. From the fourth year onwards, the elected SGB members understand most of their roles and responsibilities. That is when they could begin to offer meaningful support to the principal, educators and other staff members in carrying out their professional duties. After adopting policies, they give it to the principal and teachers to implement, but they remain in the background as watchdogs. The teachers decide on how to implement policies but as governors of the school and parents' representatives, the onus is on the SGB members to promote and complement the work of the educators. The longer they serve in the SGB the more they gain courage to get involved in more issues at the school such as engaging in encouraging learners to learn. They may show high level of commitments children education through direct and indirect involvement in teaching. To enhance school performance, the SGB may solicit the

voluntary services of parents who have expertise in particular problematic subjects such as Mathematics and Physical Science.

The other submission that I want to make is that the DBE must stop paying too much focus on matric results only. All Grades results must be given attention like those of the matric learners. The lower grades performances have been ignored too much. Too much focus on matric results put pressure on schools to pay more attention to matric only. This promotes the issue of channelling all the school resources to matric and smaller grades receive too little or no attention at all. This kills education because the neglected learners would come to matric one day with gaps in their understanding concepts. This practice causes learners to be progressed to the next grade until they reach Grade 12 which has a detrimental effect in terms of matric performance. I also wish that the circuit managers could establish circuit professional learning communities (PLCs). These PLCs could provide platforms for teachers to reflect on their own practices to develop them. The development could involve a focus on specific teaching and learning problems, opportunities for teachers to reflect on what they know and already do, opportunities for teachers to understand and the rationale behind new ideas and approaches to see theory demonstrated in practice and to be exposed to new expertise and to be exposed to new expertise, a collaborative culture including shared belief, values, vision and atmosphere of trust and respect.

I also believe that the introduction of twinning of schools at circuit level could assist to improve performance in our school. Twinning of schools could make it easier for the teachers to create and share knowledge about what works in the classroom, it could make them learn from each other experiences and find solutions to common problems. Twinning could assist principals, departmental heads, and deputy principals to share good management and leadership practices. It could inculcate the spirit of working together and reduce unhealthy competitions amongst schools. Twinning has a potential of bringing about an agreed upon schedules that could include interchanging of teachers, sharing of expertise in curricular and extra-curricular activities and sharing of education facilities for the benefit of the participating schools.

5.6 Jackson McDonald’s narrative

Jackson McDonald’s narrative is presented under the following themes: My early life memories; Maturing during adolescence stage; Paving the career path to the future; Working as a qualified

teacher and additional responsibilities; School leadership and underperformance pressure; Occupying the apex position in school leadership; Dealing with underperformance; Suggested solutions to eliminate underperformance.

5.6.1 My early life memories

I am Jackson McDonald, the Principal of Oxford Secondary School who was born outside wedlock in July 1968. I grew up in Macambini a rural area in the Province of KwaZulu- Natal. I am the only child to my mother. Growing up without a father made me to see myself as a useless person. I saw myself as a person who had no bright future, no identity, just an outcast. I was full of resentment because my father had deserted me. I was raised by my grandmother. I grew up looking after the cattle. As I drove the cattle to the cattle dipping tank in winter, I felt like nobody loved and cared for me. I fought the other boys in the veld during cattle herding; fighting made me feel strong, courageous and fearless. I felt like a hero after fighting.

I started school at Sky Primary School (pseudonym) outside Stanger (now called KwaDukuza) in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. I went there because the nearest school rejected me as they thought that I was young because of my small body. There was a lot of reading and recitation at school. My school results were good in primary school classes. In 1982, I joined Mathubathuba Secondary School (pseudonym) at Macambini which is a rural area in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. I joined karate group which was trained by the principal. Karate taught me to be resilient and disciplined. I learnt teamwork, taking responsibility and not to hold grudges. When I absented myself from school, I was subjected to severe punishment by peers in the karate training. Thereafter, I decided to not absent myself from school. I joined the school choir. I sang tenor. Singing in the school choir required a lot of discipline. I learnt to endure long hours of standing learning to sing music notes. I enjoyed singing. I ended up becoming a choir master. The choristers stayed behind when the school closed to practise singing music notes with our teacher. I learnt to go an extra mile and to sacrifice as a person.

5.6.2 Maturing during adolescence stage

In the secondary school, I did Biology which is called Life Science today, Mathematics, Business Economics which is called Business Study today and 3 languages which were English, Afrikaans and IsiZulu. I was passing my subjects well, but I remember one day we were writing final examination

and the Business Economics teacher made a mistake of dropping a copy of a Business Economics question paper which was going to be written the following day. I picked the question paper with no one noticing me. I went home to write it as if I was in the examination room. I cheated because I was using my book to answer the paper. The following day, I wrote the examination like other learners but when submitting, I submitted both papers to the invigilator and when the teacher was marking; he was surprised that I had two different scripts. In one script, I obtained 60% and the second script I obtained 100 %. The teacher called me to check what was going on. I literally told him the truth and told him that my intention was to alert them about the poor standard of invigilation that was in place. He was shocked that I chose to accept the score sheet with lower marks yet, there was a possibility to choose the one with 100% marks.

5.6.3 Paving the career path to the future

After passing matric, I had no idea of what to do next. I visited my aunt in Pietermaritzburg. She persuaded me to apply for a teaching course at Indumiso College of Education in Pietermaritzburg in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal which I did. I applied to specialise in English and Biology but the college offered to accept me only if I majored in Mathematics and Technical Drawing (TD). TD was a new course to me. They told me that it was going to be introduced to schools. I accepted the offer. They asked for R800 registration fee. My mother did not have money, so, I approached a local shop owner for help. He gave me the money. I finalised my registration. Thereafter, I was offered a bursary which paid for my studies until I finished my Secondary Teachers' Diploma (STD) in 1989.

5.6.4 Working as a qualified teacher and additional responsibilities

I started teaching at Sakhumuntu Secondary School (pseudonym) at Ulundi in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal in 1996. My principal was Eileen Ka Nkosi-Shandu, the former MEC for Education in KZN. The matric class of 1990 obtained 60% pass rate. The TD stream was new to the school. My goal was to make the TD pass rate reach above 60%. I worked hard to achieve my goal. I networked with teachers in schools that offered TD. I conducted weekend classes. I ensured that the syllabi were completed early in the year. My first matric results were 72% in TD. My stay at Ulundi was cut short because in 1999, my aunt who stayed at home passed on. My own mother was staying in Pietermaritzburg and my grandmother had passed on. Thereafter, there was no one at home. My family called me to come back to look for a teaching post near our home so that I could look after our

home. Fortunately, I got a teaching post at Esikhaleni Secondary School (pseudonym). I applied for a single transfer and it was approved in November 1991. I joined Esikhaleni Secondary School in January 1992.

After two years of teaching at Esikhaleni, my principal at Sakhumuntu Secondary School at Ulundi called and begged me to come back because she had failed to get a suitable replacement to teach TD. Thereafter, I considered their request and I organised someone to become a caretaker at home. Then, in 2000, I applied for a single transfer to go back to Sakhumuntu Secondary School at Ulundi. Upon my arrival, the principal informed me that even though she had a deputy principal and departmental head, she had identified some skills in me which she wanted to use in the SMT. She gave me a letter which co-opted me into the SMT. She persuaded me to accept the offer. I was given new responsibilities. I drew the school time tables. I procured the LTSM and I was elected to serve on the SGB. I was appointed to be a finance officer. As a finance officer, I assisted my principal to collect the school fees. I was also given a task to organise sports and to be a choir manager. I negotiated with the bus company in case there were school trips. The choir master was outstanding, however, he needed someone to assist him. I became his assistant in training the choir. I communicated the choir issues with parents. I made provisions for the choir to eat during competitions.

5.6.5 School leadership and underperformance pressure

In 2005, I applied for a DH post at Mathubathuba Secondary School (pseudonym) which is located at Macambini which is a rural area in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. I was called for interviews in September in 2005. In December 2005, I received an appointment letter which informed me that in January 2006, I must assume as a DH at Mathubathuba Secondary school. In 2006, I became a Languages DH. I led a team of 20 teachers and I also had an oversight on the Science Department as TD had no DH. Both departments were underperforming. I motivated teachers to conduct extra classes. I dealt with a troublesome male teacher. One day, he attacked a female teacher in the departmental meeting. I jumped over the desk rushing towards him. He ran away shouting all sorts of insults. Fortunately, I controlled my temper. In another incident, the same teacher chased a learner carrying a brick. I came out of my office to stop him. I experienced underperformance pressures as a DH because the matric class of 2006 matric had obtained 30% pass rate. My own subjects English and TD were sitting at 90%.

We were visited by the Provincial Legislature delegation led by the former MEC for Education in the KZN Province Honourable Peggy Nkonyeni. They held a meeting with the entire SMT. We were asked to explain why learners were failing. We failed to respond to this question. My own good performance did not help me because the Legislature wanted us to account for the underperformance of the entire school and not for an individual subject. This became a tough experience for us all.

After the meeting with the Legislature, we came up with a strategy to organise study camps at school before examinations in which we revised the previous examination question papers. We prepared learners for the final examinations. The entire management team was hands on in this programme. We worked hard. We motivated our learners to commit themselves. Some parents supported us. All of us carried sponges for sleeping after intensive work at night. Male teachers slept with boys in the classrooms designated for them and female teachers also slept in their own classrooms that were designated for this purpose. Our efforts brought improvement to the performance of the school as we moved from 30% to 58% pass rate. We continued to hold study camps in the following years. Our performance improved to 70% in 2009.

5.6. 6 Occupying the apex position in school leadership

In 2013, I applied for a vacant principalship post at Oxford Secondary School (OSS) (pseudonym) which is at Dwangu (pseudonym) outside Mandeni in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. After the interviews, I was appointed for the principalship position in 2014. OSS was underperforming as it had been obtaining 32% for the past 3 consecutive years. So, I began to deal with underperformance pressure. I evaluated the schools' programmes of teaching and learning to understand the causes of underperformance. The results revealed that most teachers were partially qualified and inexperienced; therefore, they lacked competency in pedagogical skills. They held academic qualifications which were designed for other careers such as music, administration and so forth. They failed to draw proper lesson plans. Their teaching practices reflected numerous deficiencies. Some of the teachers were new to the profession; therefore, they took time to find their rhythms. The poorly motivated learners also presented discipline challenges for teachers as well. Most learners did not pass from their previous classes because they were progressed. This was caused by the fact that some parents forced the school to progress their learners to the next grades even if they had a below-average performance because they seemed not to appreciate the fact that repeating a grade was a second opportunity for learners to progress in their education. Some parents interfered negatively in the reinforcement of learner discipline.

Later, I learnt that the school's former principal resigned prematurely because of the matric underperformance pressure. I said to myself, "Mr McDonalds, you are a fighter. You have fought and won many battles before; so, this one too you are going to win". The photo of the two boys (my artefact) who are fighting reminds me that in my early life as a young boy I fought a lot. Now that I am a school principal, I am drawing from my early life fighting spirit and experience. This photo also reminds me that I influenced the militant teachers to do team teaching. I conducted school-based workshops to capacitate the teachers.

Figure 5.5 McDonalds' artefact

OSS had only six teachers to teach 12 subjects from Grade 8 to Grade 12. I influenced teachers to form a team of fighters. The teachers accepted huge workloads. They taught as if the school had enough teachers. We completed the syllabi early in the year. OSS also faced a problem of vandalism and theft of critical resources like electricity. This photo also reminds me that I took a risk of trying to catch the criminals that were ravaging the school. I worked as school security at night. I did it alone because I feared no one. This stopped theft at school.

5.6.7 Dealing with underperformance

I organised and implemented staff development programmes which focused on training teachers on alternative ways of preparing and presenting their lessons. I motivated teachers to commit themselves in our matric intervention programme. I influenced teachers to go an extra mile. The teachers pledged to obtain 90% at the end of the year. I kept on reminding them about their pledges. Each teacher was then asked to give details of how he/she was going to get the 90% pass rate that was promised. I supported all of them. For instance, if a teacher taught on Sunday, I came to school to support that teacher by coming early to school to open for him/her, to control criminals that might want to disturb teaching and learning. Sometimes, I allocate transport money for the teacher because it is not his/her normal working day. I also provide refreshments as a way to motivate both teachers and learners.

We agreed to learners' request of coming to school in the evenings to study. We supervised them. The study started at 7 o' clock and ended at 10 o' clock in the evenings. We assisted them to do their homework. Some educators used this opportunity to consolidate difficult concepts. We revised the past examination question papers. Furthermore, diagnostic assessments were used to identify shortfalls. Gaps in learners' knowledge were identified. Extra classes were conducted to bridge the identified knowledge gaps. Before allowing extra classes to be conducted, educators had to indicate to me the gaps that were intended to be bridged by extra classes. After the extra classes, learners were given tests to check if the gaps have been bridged because to us extra classes are like training and a practice before a tough match.

I ensured that the syllabi were completed timeously. At this school, teaching and learning activities are planned and designed to take place for a period of 2 weeks which is called a cycle. This means that each teacher is supposed to complete a certain portion of the prescribed content in a cycle. If he/she fails to achieve this, it means he/she is behind with work. Therefore, as a principal I managed the curriculum coverage for each and every teacher on cycle basis. If it happened that a teacher failed to complete the planned work in the cycle, a recovery plan should be put in place to cover the work that fell behind. I called parents to a meeting to account for absenteeism and late coming of their learners. I also subjected teachers to accountability sessions to account for the performance in their subjects. By strictly applying the learners' code of conduct, and teachers' professional code of ethics, I managed to decrease the rate of absenteeism and late coming among both learners and teachers. In addition, I ensured that all tests were pre-moderated and post-moderated and that feedback was given timeously to the learners. I ensured that all formal assessments were conducted as per CAPS policy. For the purpose of developing teachers professionally, I conducted class visits and gave feedback to teachers so that they reflected, introspected and possibly improved their teaching methods.

Moreover, there were fewer teachers that were available because some had resigned and some were on long sick leaves. To address the shortages of teachers I introduced team teaching by dividing teachers into two teams. I asked them to accept the huge workloads. There was Team A and Team B. Team A was responsible for teaching Grades 8 and 9. This team decided to collapse the four classes into 2 classes i.e., 2 Grade 8 classes were combined in 1 classroom and 2 Grade 9 classes were also combined in 1 classroom. The team of teachers worked co-operatively, regularly, and purposely to assist learners to learn. They worked together to design the annual teaching plans (ATPs), lesson plans, taught learners and evaluated learners' results together. There was Team B which focused on Grades 10, 11 and 12. They kept learners in their classrooms but they ensured that all subjects received proper

attention. This strategy assisted me to make the few available teachers afford to carry huge work load while we were waiting for the staffing problems to normalise in our school which took the DBE 8 months to address. At the end of each school term, we called the parents to a meeting to discuss the academic learner performance. We reminded parents about their responsibilities in their learners' education. We signed a pledge with them that they were going to support all school programmes that were aimed at improving performance. Part of the pledge was that parents were going to ensure that learners regularly did their homework, further; we networked with neighbouring schools to share pockets of excellence. For instance, in Mathematics, we had identified that our teacher was good in teaching Algebra but he needed help in Trigonometry and Geometry. We invited a competent teacher from the other school who excelled in Trigonometry and Geometry sections and he exchanged with our teacher who was also competent in Algebra.

5.6.8 Suggested solutions to eliminate underperformance

When there are vacancies at school, a principal must be allowed to recruit a teacher of his/her choice. Currently, the district has recruited teachers for me that failed to meet the minimum standards for effective teaching. Those standards are; learner development, content knowledge, assessment, application of content and planning for instruction. The DBE unfairly blames me as a principal for learners' poor performance yet, they gave me incompetent teachers whom they have failed to develop. They should support me as a principal and my teachers instead of criticising me. If for instance, Mathematics has been failed by learners, the DBE must capacitate the Mathematics educator instead of blaming me as a principal. The DBE refused to employ a Mathematics qualified educator that I had recruited and recommended to it to employ for me, but instead, it gave me a Mathematics teacher who was a surplus educator from a worse performing secondary school. My school OSS is continuing to underperform because most learners failed Mathematics. The problem lies with the Mathematics teacher's pedagogical skills and content knowledge which I am not capacitated to address. The DBE fails to address this educator's problem which is a school's problem yet they recruited this teacher for me.

The DBE should review PPN because it presents problems for my school. For instance, we lost the only isiZulu teacher due to reduced PPN. I informed the DBE that if the teacher went, no one was going to teach isiZulu, but they transferred her anyway. Parents expect a principal to overcome all the challenges that make learners not to pass. It is my submission that the PPN must be reviewed because it does not consider the school's contextual factors. I strongly believe that the DBE should revise the

PPN policy by adding the section which says that a principal and a circuit manager should consider the school's contextual factors when implementing PPN. If the principal and a circuit manager see that a school would be negatively affected by the movement of a surplus educator, they may delay the movement of a surplus teacher until the school's context is normal. Currently, a principal and a circuit manager cannot address shortfalls that are caused by PPN. The reduced PPN causes a school to underperform because it leaves some classes without teachers.

The DBE must empower the SGBs to play an active role in the improvement of academic performance in their schools, especially rural schools. I say this because my understanding is that SGB as a concept and praxis emanated from the view that there is a need to involve communities especially parents to the education of their children. This assumption was underpinned by a view that school improvement is depended on the responsibilities that are delegated to the parents to deal with the affairs of a public school. Therefore, the DBE must through conducting workshops and meetings make parents, caregivers and guardians to see themselves as equal partners with educators in education of their learners. These community stakeholders must realise that the performance of learners is a co-responsibility of the home and school. Parents, caregivers and guardians must be empowered with all relevant skills such as motivation to assist learners to thrive in education.

5.7 Dr Simangaliso Sikhakhane's narrative

This section is presented under the following themes: My childhood background and memories; My secondary school education and becoming a licenced teacher; The beginning of my teaching journey; Elevated to a principalship position; Making a mark in a principalship position; and charting the way forward into the future.

5.7.1 My childhood background and memories

I am Dr Simangaliso Sikhakhane, the Principal of Dabula Secondary School. I was born and bred outside of wedlock in Lambothi, an area between Gingindlovu and Mandeni in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. My mother was an unmarried teacher. I am the only child to my mother. I never saw my father; I only heard that he was living in Durban. My mother only came home on weekends. I was raised by my grandmother who was devoted in the Holiness Union Christian ways of life. She instilled faith and taught me to pray. She started grooming me at Sunday school classes. She instilled love for music in me. She trained me to sing very well. She taught me many songs. She influenced me to trust

God. My grandmother worked very closely with a pastor's wife. The white lady was so influential to my family especially my grandmother. She influenced my family to embrace education. As a result, my mother became an educator. So, a white woman's influence in my parents filtered down to us as children because we also became teachers.

I learnt to look after the cattle. I played different games including stick fighting. As I grew up, my dream was to own a large herd of cattle and a big farm. I started school at Lamonti Primary School. I enjoyed the lessons at school. I learnt how to read a book called 'Masihambisane' very fast. Our teacher gave me a responsibility to assist learners that were struggling to read; as a result, I assisted a lot of young learners of my age who were struggling. I passed all classes at a primary school very well. My grandmother and my mother were very proud of me.

5.7.2 My secondary school education and becoming a licenced teacher

I received my secondary education at Howick. I did Grade 8 up to Grade 10 and I obtained a Junior Certificate (JC). I had a choice to exit school with a JC or to continue until I finished matric. My mother influenced me to exit school and to go to do teaching at Endaleni Missionary Institute at Richmond which I did. There was an outbreak of Pink Eyes at the college. I organised boys to pray. With God's intervention, most boys were healed. They realised the power of prayer. Some called me a prophet. Some were saved. I realised that God had created faith in me. As a boy who had no father, I felt as if God was saying to me "My son I am your father don't worry".

I trained as a teacher from 1980 to 1981. I was a role model to most boys because I did things differently from other boys of my age. I could speak so eloquently about the Bible. People loved me. I can say that I am a person who was able to observe and emulate. I carried a good character wherever I went. After completing training at the college, I did Grade 11 and 12 at Vukuzenzele Secondary School (pseudonym) Umlazi in KwaZulu-Natal Province. My parents selected Vukuzenzele Secondary School for me because it was a missionary institution. Most learners respected me. The principal knew that I was a trained teacher then he gave me a responsibility to be a choir master as the school had no choir master. After completing matric, my mother influenced me to register at the University of Zululand. Although I had initially wanted to become a medical doctor, but I changed the career because my interest had changed. I had met Professor Khabi Mngoma, Dr Nzimande, and Ziyaduma who had influenced me to love music. So, I ended up doing a Bachelor of Music degree.

5.7.3 The beginning of my teaching journey

I started teaching at Khulani (pseudonyms) Secondary School at Esikhaleni (previously known as Esikhawini) Township in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. I won trophies as a choir master. I taught Mathematics. Before my arrival, most learners were failing Mathematics in Grade 12. The Mathematics pass rate was 36%. I discovered that the reason for learners to fail Mathematics was that it was taught by an unqualified educator. I used the constructivism approach which maintains that Mathematics should be taught by using problem solving method because it provides the opportunity to solidify and extend what they know and can stimulate learners' Mathematical learning. It helps learners to learn Mathematics concepts and skills that are rich with meaning and connections. It allowed learners to work at their own paces and make decisions about the way they explore the problem. I was marking their exercise books daily. I conducted extra classes to close the identified gaps. The Mathematics pass rate improved from 36% to 88%.

My success in teaching Mathematics impressed my principal because he recommended me to the rector of the then Ezakheni College of Education who desperately needed a Mathematics teacher. The learners at his college were not passing Mathematics well especially the external examination papers. Then, I joined the college as a Mathematics lecturer. I used different teaching methods to teach my learners which included lecture, inductive, deductive, heuristic, analytic, synthetic, problem solving, laboratory, and project method. I adopted any of these methods according to the specific unit of the syllabus. I used the available resources and number of learners in a class. I encouraged learners to have a positive attitude towards Mathematics. I ensured that they regularly revised what had been taught. I exposed learners to more Mathematics practice. We revised the past examination papers to sharpen their answering skills. The pass rate improved to 83% pass rate in 1992.

5.7.4 Elevated to a principalship position

In 1999, I applied for a principalship position. After an interview, I was appointed to a principalship position. I assumed duty as a principal of Dabula Secondary School (pseudonym) in 1999. This school was underperforming because its matric pass rate had been below 22% for the past 3 years. It faced a problem of learner migration which is a phenomenon where learners were leaving in numbers to Mandeni. The impetus for a learner migration was a poor matric academic performance. Learner migration crippled the school's organisation which refers to the way which involves how the school

organises itself to function in order to achieves its objectives. So, on my arrival I had pressure to improve the school performance in order to stop the learner migration. I realised that the school had a potential to pass better but it needed time to unlock its potential.

Underperformance created a lot of pressure and stress for me. The pressure encompassed a feeling of being overwhelmed by the workload and a lack of time to complete work tasks. I felt a pressure because: I had a fear of facing a negative stigma of being labelled as a leader of an underperforming school. I feared the future consequences such as reduced PPN and a reduced financial allocation that were going to come if the school continued to underperform and I feared to attend the accountability sessions. I learnt that underperformance was caused by a number of factors, including a lack of parental support, poor school infrastructure such as a lack of electricity connection because equipment such as computers, projectors, photocopying machines and printers work with electricity. If teachers cannot use these resources due to lack of electricity connection, quality education is compromised which results in poor academic performance. Underperformance was also caused by the presence of unqualified teachers, a shortage LTSM, low socio-economic factors, a low motivation on the side of teachers and learners. To address some of these challenges, I planned for the future. I led the teaching and learning activities. I ran the professional development activities. I provided intellectual leadership for growth in the teaching skills. I set targets for teachers and I allowed them to do their parts. I supported them by providing the resources that they requested. I ensured that there was quality teaching and learning and this led to the improvement of our school performance.

5.7.5 Making a mark in the principalship position

Figure 5.6 Dr Sikhakhane 's artefact

This tree reminds me that in the veld we sat around a tree like this. I was taught to fight other boys under a tree like this. This tree reminds me that at my young age I learnt to be a fighter. I learnt that when pressure mounts, I must fight it and never allow myself to go down. This tree also reminds me

that the former circuit manager assembled us as SMT members under this tree to discuss the underperformance of our school. He made each one of us to account to him for poor performance. He demanded that we provided him with a school improvement plan which we did not have. I felt like I wanted to resign. When assembling under this tree, the SMT took a resolution to do study camps that assisted us to prepare learners to answer question papers in the examinations. It was under this tree where we committed ourselves to go through as much past examination question papers as we could. Those resolutions helped us to improve the matric pass rate from 40% to 62%.

It was under this tree where I reminded my teachers about the aims and objectives of education. I always call teachers under this tree to motivate them because I feel motivated if I am under this tree. This tree reminds me that I must fight underperformance because its pressure is a thorn in my fresh. I locked the school gate during the teaching hours in order to prevent the drug dealers entering the school to give drugs to the learners. This assisted us as SMT to create good environment for effective teaching and learning. Some educators were abusing leave by absenting themselves without valid reasons and without reporting. To stop leave abuse by teachers, I practised effective leave management.

I organised motivation sessions for the teachers. I invited different motivational speakers to come to motivate learners to love their school work and to work hard to pass their subjects. Learners were also motivated to attend school regularly. I also invited motivators for teachers to motivate them to commit themselves to their work despite the personal challenges that they were facing. After those motivation sessions my teachers' attitudes towards their work changed. I noticed that their level of commitment improved. They started to offer extra classes after school hours which they were previously reluctant to do.

The shortage of books and teaching aids such as Science Kit, caused teachers fail to achieve learning objectives in different learning areas. To address this challenge, we prioritised LTSM when allocating funds in our budgeting by putting more funds to procure the LTSM. When identifying school needs, we involved teachers. We asked them to tell us their classroom needs. Teachers were happy to be involved in this process. They assisted us as SMT members to purchase all the resources that were aimed at improving teaching and learning in our school.

5.7.6 Charting the way forward into the future

The PPN policy must be reviewed in such a way that it can permits a principal who has a vacancy at his/her school to select a teacher whom he/she feels is suitable to teach at a school. The practice where the DBE decides to select and send a teacher to a school should be stopped. Surplus educators should be made to apply to schools that have posts and the school's SGB must conduct interviews so that a principal and the members of SGB can have a choice to select a best teacher for their school. The PPN can also be reviewed in such a way that it can allow a school to recommend that the teacher who has been placed in the surplus register of a school that has lost learners be allowed to continue with his/her services if its enrolment has increased. Currently, the PPN implementation has presented challenges to my school. It failed to accommodate learners who were registered late. It negatively impacted on teaching and learning as it did not cater for school failure rates, learner transfers, and subject changes. The PPN brought a lot of impediments to me as a principal because it negatively affected my planning, organising, leading and supervising to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. I recommend that there should be a new policy which prescribes the number of educators that are supposed to be employed in public schools irrespective of learner enrolments to ensure that a school is properly managed and all subjects have teachers to teach.

I am also of the view that the high rate of grade progression despite a generally low quality of schooling in the primary and early secondary phases should be stopped because it leads to a substantially high failure rate during the standardised matric examinations. It also leads to a failure to achieve a university endorsement. The DBE should give urgent attention to the issue of quality education at primary school level and even in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) because numeracy and literacy testing within the National School Effectiveness demonstrated that the Grades 5 learners in the historically black schools are performing considerably worse on average than the Grade 3 learners in historically white schools. This means that the teachers in historically black schools already carry educational backlogs which are equivalent to well over two years' worth of learning.

My other view is that the DBE could address the shortages of good teachers by developing an institutional structure which could encompass a good teacher pay, bursary programmes and other interventions that could target the existing teachers to promote good teaching and learning in order to attract and retain good teachers. The institutional structure could also work to eliminate a breakdown in the implementation of policy due to a lack of capacity link in the chain and also enables capacity

to build up at the level of authority that are deemed to have an important role in the long run. The effective institutional structure could require a better alignment of the interests and incentives of stakeholders around the common goal of educational improvement. The structure that I am proposing could target support to improve practices within schools. It could facilitate communication and information sharing between the authorities and schools. It could also facilitate the sharing of best practices between schools.

5.8 Conclusion

To address the first research sub-puzzle, I have included the re-storied narratives of the participating secondary school principals in this chapter. Who are the Ilembe District principals who struggle with underperformance pressures? These retold stories show the characters' personalities and professional backgrounds. The participants' stories covered a variety of topics, including their upbringing, religious views, self-construction, tragedies, relationships, participation in sports and other activities, their experiences in school, and management and leadership. In addition, the participants' narratives showed that they had several identities, which complicated their identification. Additionally, it became clear from their accounts that the participants found some inspiration in the artefact inquiry portion of the narrative inquiry as they dealt with various difficulties caused by the poor performance of their individual schools. I discuss the second level of analysis, often known as the analysis of the narratives, in the following chapter. To address the second study sub-puzzle, the restoried narratives were analysed in this way. The principals of underperforming schools are the subject of this chapter, which focuses on their leadership techniques.

CHAPTER SIX

LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES USED BY THE PRINCIPALS TO LEAD UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the narratives of Mr Smith, Miss Zuma, Mr Moroka, Miss Govender, Mr McDonald and Dr Sikhakhane's narrative. This was the first level of analysis, which is known as narrative analysis. The restoried narratives responded to the first research sub-puzzle of this study, namely, *who are the principals that wrestle with underperformance pressures at schools in the iLembe Districts' secondary schools?* This chapter focuses on the leadership strategies that the participants used to lead their schools in the context of wrestling with underperformance pressures. I present the second level of analysis, which is known as the analysis of narratives. The second level of analysis will be presented in two chapters in this study, namely Chapter Six and Chapter Seven. This chapter responds to the second research sub-puzzle, namely, *how do principals of underperforming secondary schools lead their secondary schools in the iLembe District?* As I construct the participants' responses to this research sub-puzzle, I draw from both the Context Responsive Leadership (CRL) theory by Bredeson et al. (2008) and the Identity Theory, Teacher, Education and Diversity (ITTED) by Olsen (2012). The CRL theory emphasises that context-responsive leaders are not necessarily specific to a particular style or leadership theory, but rather, exhibit a set of behaviours that exert a certain level of restraint or reception of qualities of a particular context in order to achieve the expected results (Bredeson et al., 2008; Dempster et al., 2004; Hargrove & Owens, 2002; 2003). As I analysed the participants' narratives, I realised that participants understood the contextual realities of their schools and that they used such understandings to create the strategies of turning around their underperforming schools.

Through artefacts, the participants' identities reflected who they have been and who they are right now. As themes emerged after considering all the participants' narratives, it became clear that the strategies that the participants used to lead their underperforming schools displayed who they were (Clandinin & Huber, 2005; Palmer, 2007). After engaging with individual participants' narratives, and following discussion of each participant's narrative, it dawned on me that the participants enacted leadership strategies which were informed by who they are personally and professionally (which is their identities). The leadership strategies that principals used to lead their

underperforming secondary schools are presented, using headings that speak to commonalities of experience and particularities of their experiences. Dwyer and Emerald (2017) conceptualise the themes that are common among many of the participants in a study as "commonalities of experience" and those themes that may be particular to one or two participants in a study as particularities of experience. Out of ten themes that emerged from the participants' narratives, five constituted commonalities of experience and five, particularities of experience. This chapter commences with commonalities of experience and is followed by the particularities of experience.

6.2 Commonalities of experience among the participants

The commonalities of experience among the participants are organising extra classes, convening of study camps, promoting networking with local schools, conducting professional staff development, close monitoring, and evaluation of the school's core business.

6.2.1 Organising of extra classes

Mr Smith, Miss Zuma, Mr Moroka, Miss Govender and Mr McDonald organised extra classes to boost academic performance of their Grade 12 learners. How these classes are organised and structured vary from one school to another. From the outset, some of these classes are organised from Monday to Sunday and they involve hours before the school starts officially during the weekdays and hours after the normal school day ends. Targets for these classes include amongst others, completing the prescribed content early to allow enough time for revision, closing the existing gaps in knowledge, consolidating themes covered in each subject as well as remedial work. Given the above, it is clear that principals may choose to lead underperformance in ways that are consistent with what they believe *vis-à-vis,* the realities of their schools (Olsen, 2012). Further, key amongst the participants' responsibilities during the conduct of extra classes was to maintain a record of attendance for both learners and teachers. To that end, Mr Smith had this to say:

> *We intended to finish the syllabi as soon as possible this year. As a result, we added more lessons from January until the end of May, and I persuaded teachers to teach during those extra classes. The extra classes run Monday through Friday from 16:00 to 20:00, with a 30-minute break in between. Matric learners were persuaded to attend the extra classes*

> *after I urged them. I extended the additional classes to Saturdays and Sundays. I persuaded parents to contribute funds to the extra classes. I kept track of teachers' and learners' attendance at extra classes and assessed their influence on curriculum coverage.*

The initiative of extra classes embraced the stakeholder synergy as it involved parents, teachers and learners. Given the extended hours, parents needed to contribute funds to sustain this initiative which suggests that it involved, amongst others, money to buy food supplies for their children beyond the confines of the prescribed school hours. School principals' leadership roles in ensuring the success of extra classes matter the most (Sempe, 2021). The artefact that Mr Smith used to tell his narrative, afforded him an opportunity to speak out about his experiences and feelings around underperformance pressures at his school. As he persuaded his teachers to teach in the extra classes, he also encouraged Grade 12 learners to take part in the extra classes and begged the parents for financial support for these classes. Mr Smith's practices are reflective of the essence of the roles of principals, which are crucial in ensuring that extra classes became a success.

Miss Zuma believed that the extra classes she organised at her own school would be more successful than those that were organised by the education district outside of her school. She preferred that her Grade 12 learners attend the extra classes that were organised by her school rather than the ones that were organised by the district. She called the parents of every learner in Grade 12 at the start of the school year to explain to them the value of enabling their learners to attend extra classes. At the parents' meeting, Miss Zuma emphasised the need for allowing learners to attend extra classes on weekends, such as on Saturdays, Sundays, weekday evenings and on public holidays. The extra classes on the weekdays ran for two hours each day and on weekends and public holidays, they lasted for 8 hours with breaks in between. By creating a timetable that all teachers agreed to, Miss Zuma made sure that all the Grade 12 subjects received adequate attention. Miss Zuma's preferences or beliefs regarding extra tuition show that extra classes can be set up at different levels of the DBE. Some are managed and funded by education districts at locations where learners from different schools are sent, while other principals decide to manage their own school-based extra classes that are funded by parent contributions (Leepo, 2015; Sempe, 2021). Miss Zuma stated the following:

> *I prefer school-organised matric extra classes to those organised by the district as part of the Matric Intervention Programme (MIP) because they are more successful. That is why, early in the year, we invite matric parents to a meeting to emphasise the necessity of attending extra classes. During*

the discussion, I requested that parents enable their matric learners to attend extra classes on weekends, such as Saturdays and Sundays, weekday evenings, and public holidays. The extra classes in the evenings lasted only 2 hours per day and those on weekends, lasted for 8hours with two breaks in between. I made certain that all subjects were taught in accordance with the time allotted to them in the timetable. As an extra mile, I use my family time to take care of extra classes. I went above board by compromising my family time to supervise extra classes to ensure that they become successful.

Miss Zuma assumed control of all school efforts because it was her responsibility to oversee the operation of extra classes at her school (Kadariah, 2019). This included starting projects, providing support and ensuring that more class projects were finished as expected. Miss Zuma was in charge of facilitating the scheduling of extra classes. Miss Zuma was in charge of organising, leading and monitoring every extra school activity at her school, including the assessment (Mahlangu, 2005). Given the above, it was clear that Miss Zuma started a project of providing extra-tuition to Grade 12 learners and the level of commitment to the project is reflected in the sacrifice she made, depriving herself opportunities of spending time with her family.

To encourage and to push learners to attend extra classes, Mr Moroka conducted accountability sessions for the parents whose children did not attend extra classes. He summoned them and demanded an explanation for their learner's absence. Eventually, this practice encouraged parents to send their learners to school to attend extra classes. One of the keys to learners' academic success is through attending extra classes meant to assist all of them (Selamat & Ahmad, 2012). Less than 100% learner attendance may mean that there are learners who are left behind, which then defeats the ends of the rationale for extra classes. Such a scenario may render the school stuck in the underperformance categorisation, thereby prompting the DBE in the province to implement punitive measures, including tight monitoring and evaluation, which in some instances results in some principals resigning (Subramoney, 2016). Faced with learner attendance issues, principals could use their positions of power as their schools' accounting officials (Bhujel, 2021) to encourage a high degree of compliance among their learners in attending extra classes. They can accomplish this objective by pressuring parents to send their learners to school to attend extra classes (Selamat et al., 2012). In his own words, Mr Moroka said:

I organise extra classes, but it's challenging because some learners don't show up, especially on Saturdays. It is a struggle to get them, but I need evidence to establish that I conduct extra classes. Therefore, I'm holding accountability sessions for parents whose children do not attend extra classes. I have a running battle with the parents of learners who do not attend extra classes. Perhaps you would like to inquire as to why I do this.

The response is that I battle them because I am obligated to provide evidence that I performed the extra classes during the accountability sessions, and if I fail to do so, the officials can punish me. The other challenge is that I could face if the school continues to underperform, the DBE could apply punitive measures to me. As a result, I collect learner attendance registrations, the names of educators who were teaching, and the names of SGB members who monitored the extra classes on each day during the extra classes since all of these things help me verify that extra classes were held at school.

In this study, Mr Moroka provided extra classes in accordance with the DBE regulations, though he also contended with learner attendance that was less than 100%. In order to account and provide evidence to the DBE, he kept track of the names of the learners who attended, the names of the teachers who taught, the identities of the SGB members who oversaw, the topics addressed, and the subjects that were taught on that specific day. Extra classes, in Miss Govender's experience, are the lifeblood of her institution. She organised extra classes such that she added 4 hours a day involving 2 hours in the morning from 6 to 8 and 2 hours in the afternoon from 16 to 18 hours. This was done to make sure that extra classes at her school met the school's goals of raising the academic performance of the learners. Evidently, times may vary as some school principals choose to have extra classes in the morning, when learners are alert and able to learn (Santhi, 2011), while others may choose both morning and afternoon time slots. From Monday to Friday, they held extra classes where they taught English, Mathematics, Physical Science, Accounting, and Economics. Principals typically assist schools in carrying out their major task of teaching and learning because they have the administrative power and negotiating prowess to decide how and when activities can be carried out to achieve the institution's educational goals (Mshololo, 2014). To this end, principals must plan how they will organise, direct, regulate and manage extra classes as part of the schedule for their school improvement projects. What Miss Govender said is as follows:

To better my matric academic achievement, I organised extra classes. I arranged for the Grade 12 teachers to begin teaching as early as possible in the morning. Instead of commencing work at 18:00 they begin at 06:00 and work until 18:00. From April till the end of the semester, we focus on teaching: English, Mathematics, Physical Science, Accounting, and Economics from Monday to Friday. Because I finished my subject, Economics, in July and began revising till the day of the exam, I set an example. Because they accept cross-transfers, some of the lazy teachers are unable to come to my school, while others resign. Their argument is that there is no reason to teach extra classes because there is nothing that a learner would learn in an extra class that they could not learn during regular class hours.

Given the above, it becomes clear that Miss Govender does not share the sentiments that extra classes are unnecessary. She suggests that some of the teachers have resigned from her school because they believe that what is taught during extra classes could be taught during prescribed hours. This may reflect the pressure that this programme brings to the teacher's life and work (Castaneda, 2011). Contrarily, Miss Govender believes in the efficacy of extra classes as she even set an example by teaching economics and finishing it before her colleagues. She leads from the front in terms of ensuring that this local intervention strategy becomes a success.

Extra classes are a worldwide common practice that provides various benefits to schools around the world because they provide an extended opportunity for teachers to transfer knowledge or concepts to learners with the primary goal of developing learners to achieve the best results during examinations (Bukaliya, 2019). It is in this vein that Mr McDonald, employed extra classes at his school to help Grade 12 learners grasp difficult topics that they had trouble with during the regular school day to improve their performance on the Grade 12 examinations. He believed that extra classes could help Grade 12 learners build competence in their subjects, allowing them to enhance learner academic performance during the examinations. Mr McDonald expressed the following in his own words:

From January to September, the evening supplementary lessons began at 19:00 in the evening and ended at 22:00 at night, Monday to Friday. Some teachers used the night-time extra classes to clarify tough concepts that learners had struggled with during the regular school day. To familiarise

learners with the calibre of external examination papers, some teachers revised former examination question papers. Diagnostic evaluations were also used to identify shortcomings. Gaps in the knowledge of the learners were discovered. Evening extra classes were also held to fill in the knowledge gaps that had been found. The primary purpose of extra classes is to improve learner performance on the Grade 12 examinations. Extra classes are like an intensive gym before a tough football match.

To fill in any gaps, address challenging concepts and revise previous examination papers, Mr McDonald planned extra classes from 19:00 until 22:00 from Mondays to Fridays. The learners took diagnostic tests that revealed areas of knowledge they lacked as Mr McDonald believes that one of the objectives of extra classes was to fill in the knowledge gaps the learners experienced. In his own words, he likens extra classes to going to the gym in preparation for a soccer match. It is evident that a principal and his/her teachers might decide to operate in specific ways that they believe are consistent with their own understandings of the situation while executing actions to improve learners' academic results through extra classes (Olsen, 2012). This suggests that it is important to develop interventions that speaks to the unique school reality.

6.2.2 Convening of study camps

In their respective schools, Mr Smith, Miss Zuma, Mr Moroka and Mr McDonald organised study camps to provide remedial teaching and to revise various subjects to get learners ready for the Grade 12 final examinations. One of the various remedial education programmes that public and private schools utilise to assist low-achieving learners is study camps (Hvdman et al., 2020). They set up rooms in their schools where learners and their teachers could sleep, using their own bedding. Learners had to study all day long and continued studying at night while taking breaks and they were not allowed to leave the camp. During the day, teachers taught some subjects, assisted progressed learners, and encouraged Grade 12 learners to study all subjects equally. Furthermore, parents of Grade 12 learners contributed camp fees, which were used to pay for the food that camp attendees consumed. For security reasons, some members of the SGB became involved especially at night. Mr Smith stated the following about organising the study camps:

We held study camps to prepare Grade 12 learners for exams by providing them with remedial teaching and revisions. During the formal evaluation, each teacher conducted remedial classes with the goal of upgrading all

> *progressed learners to at least level 4 achievement in their topic. For the camping sessions, learners packed their own bedding. At night, the male SGB members arrived to monitor the study camps to make sure there were no disruptions. Grade 12 teachers came to provide remedial teaching. Parents contributed camp fees and the school's fundraising committee organised events to gather funds for meals for learners and staff during the camping season. During study camps, the school cooks were in charge of preparing food, and no learner was allowed to leave the school grounds during that time.*

Study camps as part of remedial education are essential since they support learners who are intellectually unprepared for examinations or assessments and aim to provide them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in school (Tenora, 2016). The study camps at Mr Smith's school were open to all learners, but the major emphasis was on the learners who were performing at level three and below. His intentions were to raise their performance to at least level four and above in order to raise school's overall performance. It is evident that he planned the camps for his school with the purpose of addressing his school's underperformance. If the school is underperforming, the principal needs to make efforts to improve it by exposing learners to study programmes which may include study camps (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Camp attendees were requested to bring along their own bedding to sleep on after studies. Mr Smith's belief in using study camps as a strategy to improve learners' performance, encouraged him to convince his teachers to come to work at night even though they were not going to be remunerated because he wanted the study camps to be successful. As a result, he talked with the parents and got them to come to school at night to provide security for both teachers and learners. He also organised for meals to be prepared for all camps attendees.

The study camps at Miss Zuma's school were opened for all learners but the major focus was on assisting learners who had physical disabilities such as poor eyesight, hearing, or reading that prevented them from learning in class during regular school hours. Teachers urged learners to speak up about concepts that they did not grasp. They gave each learner individual attention. According to KaplanSayi (2017), study camps come in a variety of shapes and sizes, with varying goals and content, some are set up for learners with medical issues, while others are set up for learners with poor academic performance, poor writing skills, poor disciplinary issues, and for a specific group of learners. In Miss Zuma's context, the goal of study camps was to assist learners to achieve an adequate level of examination readiness. After school, learners had 40 minutes to relax. After that, there was

an intense revision of the specific subjects that were going to be written on the following day. The revision continued till 21:00, with 40-minute intervals in between. In addition, learners were urged to give each subject their full attention to balance their academic success. The following is what she had to say about study camps.

> *We usually hold study camps for all learners, but our major focus is on learner that have medical issues or who are having difficulty understanding the subject matter during regular class hours. We also hold study camps to help learners prepare for formal assessments or examinations. We put them in a situation where they have to study for long periods of time without being interrupted. They begin their studies immediately after normal school hours. They relax for 40 minutes, and they begin with revision until 21:00. After every three hours of revision, they take 40minutes breaks. In the morning, they wake up early at about 04:30 and begin with the final revision until 07:00 where they have breakfast and then get ready for exam. Teachers who want to perform remedial teaching will have plenty of time during the study camp. Learners, particularly those in Grade 12, are encouraged to study all topics equally. Parents pay a portion of the camp price to cover meals and other educational needs.*

Study camps can be organised by a school to provide remedial work for learners who did not grasp the learning content during the regular contact time and to prepare learners for final examinations. Remedial work is a form of cooperative and supportive teaching that is done by teachers to help learners who fall behind in grasping lessons during average learning time (Musongole & Chipindi, 2021). Learners can be assisted to go through a variety of sessions during the study camps, including uninterrupted long periods of study, revision sessions led by subject teachers that highlight key concepts. Teachers can do remedial teaching to fill in the gaps in their learners' understanding. The chosen artefact in the case of Miss Zuma served as inspiration for her to tell fascinating stories about study camps at her school. She stated that in her school, after a short period of sleep at night, learners were woken to begin final revision before examinations. At 07:00 in the morning, they ate breakfast and got ready for their examinations. After a brief night-time, learners were woken to start their final examination preparations. Miss Zuma enlisted the support of the parents as they provided funds for meals during the study camps. It is evident that Miss Zuma used many modes of engagement and

communication to establish relationships that helped her earn the trust of parents and other stakeholders in order to obtain this level of parental collaboration (Bredeson & Klar, 2008).

Study camps, according to Mr McDonald, provide a platform for high-quality teaching and learning because everyone involved—teachers and learners alike—arrive at school eager to work hard (Wilson & Sibthorp, 2018). Mr McDonalds believed that instruction given outside of regular class hours was the most memorable; he organised study camps for his learners to help them develop their study skills so they could recall what they had learned. Approximately 87% of the participants in research by the Council for Learning after the Normal Teaching Hours, said that learning that took place outside the normal teaching hours was remembered better than normal classroom-based learning (William, 2010). Study camps provide a variety of chances for excellent experience learning (Bialeschki et al., 2016). He was successful in convincing his teachers to go to the study camps. In order for the kids to succeed academically, teachers helped them develop their study abilities. He stated his thoughts as follows:

> *I learned at my previous school that most teachers believe that teaching outside of regular classroom hours makes teachings more memorable than traditional classroom learning. I wanted to improve Grade 12 learners' study abilities so that they could remember everything they had learned. As a result, I established study camps at our school so that all teachers who wish to improve their learners' skills and help them flourish academically can take advantage of this chance. The majority of teachers embraced the concept and actively engaged in the study camps, teaching additional subject information that they had missed during their regular teaching hours. I also organised revision sessions where experienced teachers from neighbouring schools' taught learners how to answer past examination question papers.*

Given the foregoing, it is evident that Mr McDonald builds and cultivates a reflective sense of who he is as a person by using his practices and his life of teaching and leading as a mirror (Palmer, 1997). Mr McDonald used his ontological perspective of study camps to persuade his school community to accept the technique as a mean of enhancing the learners' academic performance. His teachers consented to put in extra time without pay to assist learners. They created and opportunity to start remedial teaching and cover the material they had missed during the usual teaching hours. Mr McDonald invited seasoned teachers to analyse old examination question papers during the camping sessions.

Notwithstanding the above discussion which reflects that some parents are willing to get their hands dirty in the quest to be involved in the education of their learners, some principals have expressed concerns about the attitudes of some parents who refuse to support and engage in their learners' education (Shezi, 2012). Some principals, like Mr Moroka, did not receive 100% support from parents or learners. Mr Moroka was unable to persuade parents to pay the camp fees for their Grade 12 learners to attend the arranged study camp. As a result, the study camp was postponed. He would advise learners to sign up for study camps offered by the district, but they would ignore him. However, Mr Moroka collaborated with another school to secure spaces for some of his learners in the study camp. Moroka explains his thoughts as follows:

> *Learners in my school lack educational ambitions and are unconcerned about their future. They do not prepare for exams. I attempted to organise matric study camps prior to the final examinations as they consolidate learning activities and keep learners focused on their studies to ensure that no time is wasted but ran into difficulties because most parents did not contribute the required financial contributions to fund the camp expenses, which included paying for experienced teachers who should assist learners in mastering the necessary knowledge and skills, food, security, and electricity. As a result, the study camps were postponed. Even if I pay for them out of my own wallet, the learners do not show up. They also refuse to attend district-sponsored study camps. Last year, I worked out a deal with the principal of Mehlesizwe Secondary School (pseudonym) to allow 13 out of 58 of my learners who were willing to attend to attend study camps at their school.*

Some principals try hard to make learners pass but they do not cooperate with teachers, they display that they lack interest to study. Mr Moroka's learners show a lack of interest by refusing to attend activities that were aimed at preparing them for examinations. Despite the challenges, Mr Moroka was adamant that study camps were necessary to aid his Grade 12 learners in performing well on their final examinations studies to ensure that no time was wasted (Mbokazi & Mkhasibe, 2021). He experienced difficulties because he believed that they could consolidate learning activities and keep learners focused on their studies because most parents did not pay the required financial contribution to fund the camp's expenses; but what made matters worse was that despite paying the camp expenses out of his own wallet, learners still refused to attend. Thirteen out of 58 learners paid the camp costs.

He collaborated with the principal of a local school to arrange for the 13 learners to attend a study camp at a nearby school. He also went to the study camps at the local school to help his colleague supervise the learners' study camps.

6.2.3 Promoting networking with neighbouring schools

The majority of the participants used networking as a strategy to enhance the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. Neale and Cone (2013) assert that networking promotes growth on both a personal and professional level. The principal of a high performing secondary school was chosen by the participants to host regular sessions to review teaching practices with the aim of improving them. They also organised the teachers of Grade 12 into a cluster that met frequently to talk about how to improve their teaching methods. They asked the more experienced teachers to share their expertise with a sample of Grade 12 learners in order to assist the less experienced teachers in learning how to approach some difficult concepts. The participants demonstrated their strong emotional connection to the artefact they picked, by meditating on it and giving it significance in order to communicate their lived experiences. Their connections to their artefact were demonstrated through their practices which were characterised by the collaborative effort of teachers who met to share ideas on curriculum issues and talk about how to teach the Grade 12 learners in the best way possible. This reflects features of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), (Fountain, 2019). The following is what Mr Smith said:

> *Because most of my matric teachers are inexperienced and prefer to work alone, I organised networking events with teachers from our neighbouring school to empower them as they lack the ability to prepare learners for final exams. I met the Principal of Khayalethu Secondary School, which is the best performing school in our circuit. We began to hold meetings to reflect on our revision methods and make meaning of our schools' results in the Grade 12 examinations. We talked about the learners that we teach, and we identified their strengths, flaws, opportunities, and threats. We discussed ways to improve our schools' capacities, devised action plans, and put them into action. We gathered our teachers and gave them the opportunities to discuss and make suggestions on how to help our learners succeed in their Grade 12 exams. We also invited the experienced teachers from the best performing schools to share ideas with our inexperienced teachers. This technique benefited both my teachers and my learners because the*

experienced teachers trained everyone in attendance on how to approach exam question papers.

From the excerpt above, it can be inferred that Mr Smith holds the opinion that teachers' knowledge and views are formed through the experiences that they have when engaging in collaborative meetings with other teachers (Okas et al., 2014). In order to equip his teachers with the knowledge and resources they needed to get learners ready for final examinations, he organised networking activities because he held the view that it is the responsibility of the principals within a district to group their schools together to assist one another by discussing their challenges and developing one another (Sithole, 2019). Mr Smith negotiated with the principal of a neighbouring school with good performance to permit the Grade 12 teachers to meet with his teachers on a regular basis so that they could share ideas on how to prepare for the final examinations. In the networking sessions, educators talked about how to evaluate their revision strategies, how to deal with the deficiencies of their learners and create and implement action plans. Mr Smith claimed that by using this method, both his teachers and learners' academic performance improved.

During Miss Zuma's networking meetings, which she started by involving the principal of her high performing neighbouring school, the services of seasoned teachers were enlisted in order to equip novice teachers with strategies necessary to enhance learners' understanding in subjects like Mathematics, Physical Science, Life Science, English and Accounting. Miss Zuma and her neighbouring counterparts strengthened their networking initiative as they decided to combine resources like overhead projectors and laptops for the benefit of their learners. To help novice teachers transition into and remain in the teaching profession, Miss Zuma emphasised the importance of experienced teachers sharing their teaching strategies with them because without mentoring and support, many novice teachers find the challenges too overwhelming and decide to leave the profession after only a few years in the system (Lambson, 2010). Miss Zuma attended networking meetings in which Accounting concepts were unpacked. After attending those networking meetings, she gained more insight on how to teach this subject which she teaches at Grade 12. Below are Miss Zuma's own comments:

Networking with the Principal of Sikhulile Secondary School, one of the top schools in our circuit, was another notion I had for enhancing Grade 12 performance at this school. We decided to use the experienced teachers of subjects like Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Life Sciences, English, and Accounting to share ideas on how to make learners

understand these subjects. We decided to pool our resources and form a network in order to support our teachers in these fields. We also decided that experienced teachers should offer demonstration lessons to show novice teachers how to help Grade 12 learners understand these concepts. The necessary equipment, including laptops and overhead projectors, was provided by us, as the principals of the individual schools, to help teach the subject matter to the learners. Attending the network events that discussed Accounting, which is my area of expertise, allowed me to gain additional insights.

In order to help teachers, come up with innovative ways to teach the gateway subjects, the principal can organise for them to attend networking events because teachers can utilise networking as a method to spread knowledge and to promote a cooperative learning environment (Yassin et al., 2018). Teachers who engage in professional networking in the field of education build a network of friends who have similar interests and skills (Yassin et al., 2018). Miss Zuma persuaded her neighbouring counterpart that demonstration lessons should be conducted in front of inexperienced teachers to help them understand their subjects better. Demonstration lessons can be used in networking meetings to show novice educators how to teach complicated concepts because they increase learners' interest as they use methods other than the typical visual aids or other forms of teaching to illustrate a lesson's point (Basheer et al., 2016). They are a good way to ensure that learners understand the learning content while the lesson is in progress (Indriani et al., 2021). To ensure that networking engagements become successful, school leaders can bring their school resources such as laptops and overhead projectors to be used during the demonstration lessons. Being an Accounting teacher herself, Miss Zuma attended Accounting networking sessions which enhanced her understandings of the subject.

As a result of its incapacity to collaborate with other institutions, a school may be unable to meet its diversified needs (Bidandu et al., 2022). It could be in this context that Miss Govender organised networking meetings so that her teachers could share ideas and learn how to use teaching resources like laptops, Wi-Fi, iPads, YouTube videos and overhead projectors in their own classrooms. This was done in an effort to increase the ability of her school to meet its needs. The YouTube videos provided a variety of lessons on how to simplify and explain complex concepts. The goal was to raise the academic performance of the Grade 12 learners. It is evident that she believed in networking as a strategy that could expose her teachers to technological tools, and the professional learning opportunities needed to turn the school around from underperforming into an envisioned productive

institution. As a result, Miss Govender put networking in place to play an increasingly significant role in raising the standard of education (Poortman & Brown, 2018). One of the initiatives Principals were successful in putting into place was to persuade seasoned teachers to lead demonstration lessons for the inexperienced teachers to demonstrate approaches or strategies in gateway subjects like Mathematics, English and Physical Science. With the help of this initiative, Miss Govender's school was able to quickly finish the curriculum and have adequate time for revision before Grade 12 examinations. Miss Govender said the following to describe herself:

> *I set up a networking meeting with a high-performing school to allow my teachers and those from the other school to share ideas in order to improve Grade 12 academic performances. I wanted my teachers to learn good practices and how to use new resources they were unfamiliar with, such as laptops, overhead projectors, and iPads to access lessons presented in the YouTube videos, in order to learn and improve their practices and their Grade 12 performance. I believe that networking could provide my teachers with better ideas to create comprehensive lesson plans and technology tools and provide the professional learning opportunities that are needed to transform a school like this one which is underperforming into a high productive school which we all want. Mathunzi Secondary School was chosen as a partner because they have experienced teachers who can mentor my teachers in subjects like Mathematics, English, and Physical Sciences. My teachers sat in on demonstration lessons as observers so that they could learn how to communicate the challenging concepts. This technique aided my school in completing our syllabi and to do revisions before examination started.*

Olson (2012) asserts that a lot of individuals are aware that in teacher development interactions, the whole teacher must be taught how to teach. It could be for this reason that Miss Govender organised networking meetings so that her teachers could attend to learn good practices and how to use cutting edge tools like laptops, projectors, and YouTube videos so that they could turn around their matric learners' performance. Additionally, Miss Govender believed that networking might give her teachers new and improved ideas for thorough lesson plans that, if properly followed, could turn her school into a fruitful one. Lesson planning, a crucial component of teachers' responsibilities that directly affects what and how learners acquire the necessary material and everyday interactions with learners allow teachers to have a direct impact on learners' achievement (Straessle, 2014). Miss Govender

tracked down the principal of a school in the circuit that was performing well, and she approached him about partnering with them to teach "gateway" subjects like Mathematics, English and Physical Sciences. She did this because she thought that educational partnerships provide teachers with a setting where theory and practice may collide to assist learners prepare to be teachers and to help teachers hone their craft (Smith, 2016).

Mr McDonald visited the principal of the best school in his circuit. He told her that he wanted to do better in his school's Grade 12 academics. He explained why he thought networking could help him achieve his goals. Then he convinced her and urged her to become a network partner. He called network meetings for his three Grade 12 teachers after they agreed that they were experiencing difficulties with parts of their lessons. Teachers from the top-performing school in their circuit shared novel teaching strategies in the network professional development workshops for Accounting, Economics, isiZulu, Mathematics and English, the subjects that were the most challenging for the school. Mr McDonald's actions reflect his beliefs in networking, which includes the possibility that it could improve learners' academic performance on the national senior certificate examinations and the idea that being a part of a network positively correlated with success, particularly in networks of both strong and weak schools (Muijs, 2015). The claims made by Mr McDonalds are as follows:

> *I paid a visit to my colleague, the Principal of Ekuthuleni Secondary School, one of our top-performing secondary schools in our circuit. I told her about my worries regarding my schools below par performance and my belief that networking could offer a solution. She agreed when I suggested that we join forces in a networking effort to raise the performance of my school. Since their Matric Math, English, Economics, isiZulu and Accounting teachers are among the best in the district, as evidenced by their placement at the district awards ceremony, we organised networking meetings between our teachers and those of our Ekuthuleni Secondary School teachers close to the start of the examinations. I asked the experienced Ekuthuleni Secondary school teachers to share their revision strategies with our inexperienced teachers. My teachers had admitted to me that they would like to observe more seasoned teachers teaching the identical subjects they are now teaching. So, I asked them whether they would do the demonstration lessons in the aforementioned subjects. When necessary, the Ekuthuleni*

teachers gave demonstrations of how to teach the various topical themes. Learners were also taught how to remember what they had learnt in class.

If the principal notices that his/her school continues to underperform because of the teachers' inexperience, he/she could ask the principal of the best performing school in the neighbourhood to permit his experienced teachers to attend a networking conference and conduct demonstration lessons with his inexperienced teachers prior to the examinations (Mphojane & Rambuda, 2021). The experienced educators from the best performing schools could be identified to be mentors for the novice educators from poor performing schools with an intention to help them upgrade their teaching skills to improve their school's pass rate (Fantilli & McDougal, 2009). One of the most effective strategies that can be shared by teachers in the networking meetings proves to be demonstration lessons because it has the potential to make teaching clearer and more concrete (Thahir et al., 2019). The benefits of adopting demonstrative methods, according to Indriani et al. (2021), are that it makes teaching clearer and more concrete, reduces verbalism, and makes it easier for learners to understand what they are learning. In addition to this, learners were empowered by their memory abilities, which were designed to aid their retention of the material for the examinations.

6.2.4 Conducting professional staff development workshops

Miss Zuma, Miss Govender, Mr McDonalds and Dr Sikhakhane wanted to improve their teachers' knowledge of various concepts in the areas they were teaching by setting up school-based professional development in their institutions. Professional staff development seminars were held in all the participants' schools for up to 1hour 30minutes after regular school hours. To help teachers comprehend CAPS policy, each school placed a lot of attention on assessment methods. All the participants invited the veteran teachers from the top-performing schools to lead professional staff development sessions at their respective institutions. The participants improved their professional development by including several activities that were dissimilar from one another to achieve their goals. Professional staff development workshops, follow-ups, reflections, observations and assessments were carried out in a manner where teachers were treated as learners who attended learning that was likely to improve their practices as professionals (Muthivhi, 2019). Professional staff development sessions could include several activities. It was to this end that Ms Zuma asked her teachers to identify areas where they needed development support. This suggests that professional staff development was aligned with the needs of each school. Miss Zuma expressed the following about professional staff development:

> *Poor material knowledge, antiquated teaching methods, and low expectations were all characteristics of my teachers. To address this issue, I implemented professional staff development seminars in the form of workshops, short courses and conferences that gave our teachers innovative teaching techniques that empowered them to enhance their comprehension of their subject-matter expertise. The workshops took place at our school, were led by DH in each department, and some of them were guided by outside unemployed university graduates, Subject Advisors and experienced teachers who were invited from the best performing schools in our circuit. On average, each professional staff development workshop lasted for about an hour and a half each day after school. Each subject's teachers were asked to list their areas for improvement. These developments helped my teachers develop better teaching techniques and have an awareness of the CAPS policy about assessment strategies and improved learning outcomes. Additionally, teachers were developed to enhance their organisational strategies and planning abilities. My teachers' presentations and assessment procedures were enhanced.*

As professional staff development is necessary to provide diversity in education (Olson, 2012), Miss Zuma's approach to professional staff development was all-encompassing as she also invited unemployed university graduates and occasionally, Subject Advisors to provide a range of skills when facilitating the workshops that equipped her teachers with subject knowledge. This perspective backs up the idea that teachers are unique people who operate in a diverse industry, necessitating ongoing professional staff development activities for them to stay current with necessary knowledge and abilities. According to Miss Zuma, each professional staff development session had to address the needs of the subject teachers' curricula. She did this by making a list of their requirements. She then organised the needs into lists based on their importance. For each session, she then invited appropriate facilitators. As a result, all the concepts and skills required by CAPS regulations could be taught by her teachers. Teachers received specialised staff development so they could carry out assessments in the classroom correctly.

To expose her teachers to the essentials of teaching, Miss Govender initiated home-grown professional staff development to increase their knowledge and equip them to become proficient in

fundamental teaching techniques, including the creation and preparation of lesson plans, mastery of teaching and assessment strategies, and technical elements like chalkboard summaries. Miss Govender invited principals and experienced teachers from other schools to facilitate professional staff development sessions for her teachers. Additionally, it educated her teachers with relevant CAPS issues, which aimed to improve their assessment methods. It is in the above context that policymakers, academics and educators all concur that encouraging professional staff development among all in-service teachers is one of the keys to the academic success of all schools today because even the most seasoned educators must constantly update their knowledge and skills by participating in life-long learning (Bautsta & Ortego, 2015). What Miss Govender said is as follows:

> *In order to enable the inexperienced unqualified teachers to master the fundamentals of teaching, I organised school-based staff development programmes in which I invited experienced educators and principals from other institutions to facilitate. The facilitators gave the inexperienced teachers general pedagogical mentoring, which included classroom management strategies, lesson planning and preparation, assessment strategies, teaching strategies, and technical aspects like chalkboard work. The two-hour workshops were held shortly after school and were catered for the teachers and workshop organisers. Additionally, the training equipped and orientated teachers with the CAPS pertinent policies to enhance assessment practises. The sessions also gave teachers the chance to broaden their subject-specific knowledge. My teachers learned how to conduct daily reflections on their classroom practises with the help of the school-based professional development seminars.*

Castaneda (2011) posits that the act of belonging to a teacher community translates into direct interaction, negotiations, participation and classroom practices which help teachers to get a real sense of the role that they must play as teachers in their classes. It is in this vein that Miss Govender believed that the day-to-day reflections of her teachers under the guidance of professional staff development facilitators could forge a deeper understanding of their teaching and learning practices (Perry & Booth, 2021). This suggests that unqualified teachers that Miss Govender had in her school, as members of a teacher community, are able to share or acquire the repertoire of practices that could play a meaningful role in their classrooms. In order to bridge the gap in her teachers' inability to do effective lesson planning, preparation and evaluation techniques, as well as their chalkboard summaries, Miss Govender organised professional staff development in her school. Azhar and Kayani

(2016) state that whenever a teachers' ability to perform his/her job lacks knowledge or skill, the gap is bridged by providing the required instruction through professional staff development. Each professional staff development event, which took place after school for under two hours, strengthened teachers' abilities to carry out CAPS policy. It increased her teachers' ability to reflect on their teaching methods and widened their specialised knowledge which assisted them to improve teaching and learning. Reflective practice expands the opportunity for teachers to develop a clear understanding of how they are going to support teaching and learning in their schools (Connelly et al., 2020).

By requesting his teachers to stay behind after school and introducing the teachers to the idea of professional learning communities (PLCs), where they participated in reflective practices on a weekly basis with the aim of enhancing their classroom practises, Mr McDonalds implemented a professional staff development strategy at his school to improve the teachers' knowledge, skills and practices. For his Grade 12 teachers to advance their teaching techniques and raise the performance of their learners on the year-end examination, he placed a strong focus on reflection. He urged his teachers to gather, document, analyse and reflect on all the activities that took place throughout their lessons in addition to making brief recordings of their classroom activities. They played a brief video recordings of each teacher's classroom procedures and invited feedback from other teachers. Mr McDonald stated the following:

> *I started the school-based professional staff development programme as an ongoing teacher development programme to enhance my teachers' knowledge, abilities and practices by introducing them to the concept of professional learning communities (PLCs), where they engaged in reflective practices on a weekly basis with the aim of enhancing their classroom practices. I organised and inspired teachers to remain behind after school for two hours to attend the development, which was intended to improve their subject approaches, at the first professional staff development I facilitated. The seminars that followed were led by knowledgeable educators from other top-performing institutions. I videotaped my teachers' classroom lessons in order to introduce reflective practice to them. Teachers were urged to read CAPS materials in order to become familiar with the policy requirements and to match their practices with them. By doing this, I helped them gather, document and analyse their ideas regarding a specific teaching and learning experience that had*

occurred in one of their classrooms as reported by another educator. I challenged the other educators to consider modifications that may be made to the current teaching and learning environment to make it more engaging and meaningful.

A teacher is viewed as an authority whose primary responsibility is to carry out teaching and learning objectives (Castaneda, 2011). Therefore, to achieve educational objectives and to become experts in their fields', teachers' professional needs, must be identified and addressed through consistently engaging them in professional staff development activities (Ngema, 2016). Mr McDonald coupled this professional staff development strategy with an emphasis on teachers being well conversant with the CAPS provisions so that their practices are aligned with the policy context. Additionally, Mr McDonald enhanced this approach by incorporating the PLC concept, emphasising the growth of reflective practises, which Gheith and Aljaberi (2018) claim is one of the most significant sources of professional staff development and improvement in education as effective teachers are the first to acknowledge that, regardless of how well a lesson is executed, their practices can always be improved. Additionally, Mr McDonald was able to persuade his teachers to participate in professional staff development sessions that were held after school, when they had the opportunity to address their concerns. It should be emphasised that Mr McDonald used competent and responsible facilitators to make each professional staff development session interesting and relevant to the participants.

Professional staff development is important for colleagueship and development of shared standards of practice; it also builds the foundation of the profession and the need to sustain professional growth by encouraging both state of the art practice and an inquiry ethic. Dr Sikhakhane, who was motivated by the idea of creating a common standard of practice, bounced back and forth in time as he recalled the tensions that his artefact had sparked in his memories, which made me recognise that reflection was taking place while we were talking. He recognised professional staff development as a crucial tactic to bring about the desired transformation at his school and help his teachers comprehend the curriculum materials, concepts and abilities as outlined in the CAPS policy. Dr Sikhakhane sought to increase the performance of Grade 12 learners at his school through professional staff development, so he made sure that his teachers had the necessary training and support. For all professional staff development programmes not to interfere with regular teaching time, Dr Sikhakhane ensured that they commenced after schools, and they lasted for two and a half hours with a 30miutes break in between where he served refreshments to assist teachers' attention. Dr Sikhakhane emphasised the importance of aligning professional staff development activities to CAPS policies and by focusing on managing

learner diversity in the classroom, access to resources, classroom management and parental involvement. Dr Sikhakhane also organised coaching sessions to cultivate the culture of collaborative classroom practice and reflection. Dr Sikhakhane stated his views as follows:

> *To make sure that my teachers achieved the common standard of teaching practice and understood the content of the CAPS policy problems in terms of the materials, concepts and skills, I organised a PD practice to put critical reflection into action. The workshops took place after school and lasted 2.5 hours, including a break for refreshments that lasted 30 minutes. I stressed to the external facilitators the need to empower my teachers by involving them in coaching sessions and collaborative classroom practices because I had discovered that the majority of my teachers lacked the capacity to critically evaluate their own practices or to test out novel solutions to typical teaching and learning challenges, they also lacked the patience to tolerate learners who face different set of personal challenges. The basis for the staff's professional development is the promotion of reflective practices and the awakening of each teacher's awareness of their own potential or ambitions. PD of teachers can help them to acquire relevant knowledge, new skills, ideas to develop teaching and learning of their subjects and a sense of empathy and a desire for growth and adaptations.*

Critical self-reflection will be beneficial to both teachers and the learners they are teaching (Olson, 2012). In this spirit, Dr Sikhakhane recognised that it is in the best interests of both teachers and learners that they regularly engage in the process of critical self-reflection with the aim of improving their practices and approaches in the classroom. I was able to note that there were internal sensations and thoughts that were prompted as the dialogues grew more contemplative. Due to the expression of both positive and negative implications in the dialogues, I also saw that these were sentiments that were tied to the chosen artefacts in both positive and negative ways. Zaky (2018) put forward that teachers' critical reflection equips educators with the teaching methods to disseminate information on where to go for the required teaching resources, classroom management, and parental participation. PD can offer coaching sessions in which experienced educators assist the inexperienced ones to critically evaluate their own practices or to test out novel solutions to typical teaching and learning challenges. Furthermore, professional staff development is important to quality education because it equips teachers through various development activities and effective knowledge, skills, values and

attitude that promote academic excellence in teaching and learning in school systems (Ajani, 2018). Staff professional development promotes teachers' reflective practice and the management of diversity in the classroom, the development of concise annual teaching plans, teaching methodologies, information dissemination skills, classroom management and parental involvement in the education of their learners (Azhar & Kayani, 2016). Professional staff development could incorporate coaching sessions and collaborative classroom practice. Staff professional development helps teachers to acquire relevant new skills, ideas and knowledge that helps to develop teaching and learning of their subjects (Ajani, 2018).

6.2.5 Close monitoring and evaluation of the school's core business

It is generally accepted that classroom visits, teacher observation, and feedback are all part of monitoring teaching and learning (Bush et al., 2010). Evaluation involves judging, figuring out the value of, or the quality of a teaching and learning programme (Ndwangu, 2015). Mr Smith, Miss Zuma, Miss Govender and Dr Sikhakhane applied close monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning as a strategy to raise pupils' academic progress. To ensure that everyone was present for class, they carefully monitored teachers' and learners' attendance at their schools. The participants also utilised a variety of strategies to monitor how much of the curriculum was being covered in lessons, particularly in Grade 12 classes where passing the external examination required knowledge of the entire syllabus. Monitoring and evaluation varied from school to school, depending on the principal's preferences. Mr Smith used his preferences for monitoring and evaluating how teachers taught what they were expected to teach. He checked if learners cooperated with their teachers. He evaluated teachers' curriculum coverage to ensure that teachers completed the syllabi. He controlled learners' attendance by collecting class daily attendance. If a learner was absent, he took the matter up with parents and let them account for the learners' absence. Mr Smith stated the following:

> *I use my preferences on how to monitor and evaluate teachers' classroom work to ensure that each teacher is actually teaching what he/she is required to teach. I also monitor learners' work to check if they are doing part of their work because I feel that it is useless for the teachers to teach if learners are not playing their roles to learn the content that is imparted to them. I also evaluate teachers' curriculum coverage in each class to ensure that teachers cover all the prescribed content. I also control the Grade 12 learners' attendance at school. I also ensure that attendance in other grades is*

> *monitored. Daily, I collect learner attendance statistics in each class to ensure that learners attend school. If a learner is absent, I make a follow up to minimise the learner's absence. I take the matter up with the parents. I also evaluate the impact of each intervention programme that we implement to improve the level of performance in our school. Because the buzz word is performance, performance, and performance.*

From the above discussion, all the participants understood they had a responsibility to monitor the adequacy of service that was provided to the learners through the implementation of monitoring and evaluation of teachers' effectiveness in the classroom which is essential (Vipene & Kerene, 2021). Mr Smith led his school forward with a shared purpose, vision and goals by keeping an eye on how learners were performing in class because, in his opinion, it is useless for teachers to put in extra effort while learners are not equally reciprocating (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). Furthermore, Mr Smith's posture was invitational towards parents. This posture was reflected when he followed up on learner non-attendance with the concerned parents. Despite the focus being on Grade 12 learners, Mr Smith also oversees the attendance records for each class. In South Africa, there is an increasing level of monitoring curriculum coverage in response to research showing that teachers frequently do not cover the official curriculum , which results in the learners' subpar performance (Bertram et al., 2021). In this manner, Mr Smith evaluated the curriculum coverage in each class at his school to make sure that his teachers were teaching the required material to completion, thereby enabling learners' performance to be improved to the necessary level. Mr Smith also evaluated each intervention strategy's effectiveness before deciding if it should be used again in the future.

Miss Zuma made the decision to assess curriculum delivery utilising ATPs which she in turn corroborates against what is contained in the workbooks of learners. She conducts monitoring and evaluation once every two weeks. She checks the teachers' ATPs and educators' files to establish if the prescribed concepts and skills are taught to completion as expected in the CAPS policy. Miss Zuma checks if there is corresponding evidence in learners' exercise books and workbooks. She checks schools' improvement plans and teachers' compliance to the programmes of actions. The information gathered from this practice informs her day-to-day decisions about the intervention strategies to be applied by a teacher to complete the prescribed tasks. This is coupled with the monitoring of learner attendance and how teachers do this. She invited teachers who were found to be flouting the policy provisions to accounting sessions. Miss Zuma placed great value on the observation and evaluation of the effectiveness of teacher and learner attendance. She emphasised the

importance of regular attendance of both teachers and learners as she believed it was a key ingredient for enhancing learner academic performance. Following is how Miss Zuma voiced her opinions:

> *I evaluate and monitor teachers' records of curriculum implementation. I have to sit down and do monitoring and evaluation once in 2 weeks. I check the teachers' ATPs and educators' files to establish if the prescribed concepts and skills are taught to completion as expected in the CAPS policy. I check the corresponding evidence in learners' exercise books and workbooks. I check schools' improvement plans and teachers' compliance to our programmes of actions. The information gathered from this practice informs my day-to-day decisions about the intervention strategies to be applied by a teacher to complete the prescribed tasks. I also check learner attendance to establish if teachers are controlling learner attendance in their classes. If the teacher's class register is not properly marked, such a teacher is called to the office to account for failure to perform his/her duties. I try my level best to encourage teachers and learners to attend school regularly because that is where we can make the difference in learner's' achievement.*

The above discussion displays that a principal who leads the instructional activities directly makes it easier for him/her to account if the schools' academic performance is undesirable (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning could form part of the principal's leadership because they create an opportunity to determine the effectiveness and impact of the advice and recommendations given to teachers. As a result, the principal must have plan through which teachers' work could be monitored (Laska, 2016). The principal could also check the learners' exercise books to find out if there is corresponding evidence to prove that teachers had completed their work. The information gathered in these practices, could be used to provide positive feedback to teachers. Observation and evaluation of teaching and learning, and learner attendance play a huge role in enhancing learner's academic performance (Vipene & Kerene, 2021). The principal may also monitor learner attendance in classes so that effective teaching can take place. If teachers are not following the agreed procedure, they must be disciplined appropriately by following due processes. Miss Zuma seems to be a principal who leads from the front because she prioritises teaching learners at her school, which sends a message to other teachers that they must also teach learners. Along with setting an example, Miss Zuma always makes time to monitor and evaluate teachers' efforts to cover the curriculum. Miss Zuma checks the teachers' marching orders from the ATP and compares what

appears in learners' exercise books and workbooks to that which the ATP prescribes to determine whether each teacher is doing what he or she is supposed to do or not. Nhlanzi (2018) asserts that it is the responsibility of the principal to oversee appropriate implementation of the curriculum and to verify the credentials of teachers by examining the actual coverage of the syllabus and making sure they show up to class. Miss Zuma tries to aid her teachers when she sees gaps in their work by doing all of this. She monitors learner attendance and implores them to attend every day so that teachers can teach them what is required.

To monitor and evaluate teachers' efficiency in the classrooms, Miss Govender pleaded with the SMT members who were in cliques to abandon them and focus on monitoring the school’s core business. She convinced her SMT members to begin observing and assessing the teaching and learning activities that were taking place in all classrooms. She also asked the SMT members to set up a one-on-one session with the teachers to provide them with a positive, regular performance feedback. To close learners' knowledge gaps, Miss Govender monitored teachers' coverage of the curriculum. This technique enabled her to recognise her teachers’ areas of vulnerability. Through these practices, she came to understand that if they as SMT members did nothing to address their school's persistent absence of teachers and learners, underperformance would persist since it would widen knowledge gaps among the learners, which would never be eliminated. To alleviate absenteeism, she enforced leave policies for teachers and learners’ code of conduct. What Miss Govender said is as follows:

> *I found that one of the factors contributing to the learners' poor performance was that no one was checking the teachers' work since everyone was bickering and the SMT members were divided. The teachers chose to go slowly, confident that no one would object and call them to order because SMT members were fighting. I convinced the SMT members to put an end to their conflict and begin observing and assessing the teaching and learning activities taking place in the classrooms. I also asked them to set up one-on-one sessions with the teachers to provide regular performance feedback. In order to close learners' knowledge gaps, I monitored teachers' coverage of the curriculum. This technique enabled me to recognise their areas of vulnerability. I came to understand that if we did nothing to address our school's persistent absence of teachers and learners, underperformance would persist since it would widen knowledge gaps among the learners, which would never be*

eliminated. I therefore began attempting to control it for both the teachers and learners through leave policies for the former and a learner conduct code for the latter.

It is clear from the discussion above that Miss Govender's monitoring embraces supervision, which has been adopted by the public sector, especially in education, as the main pillar of increasing productivity as is the case in the corporate world (Kamotho et al., 2019). In this regard, there is a strong belief that feedback after monitoring and evaluating teachers' instructional techniques might lead to improved learners' performance (Du Plessis, 2013; Gamlen & Smith, 2013; Hattie & Gan, 2011). Bredeson and Klar (2008) contend that since bad news spreads quickly and brings an organisation into disrepute, it is the responsibility of the leader to uphold the reputation of the organisation where he or she works by looking for opportunities to forge connections and foster trust among stakeholders through various forms of participation and communication. This emphasises that a principal's responsibility is to eliminate infighting that compromises the school's core business and sow the seeds of collective responsibility instead. Miss Govender persuaded the SMT to redirect their focus to the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning processes. This involved organising one on one meetings with the teachers to ascertain updates regarding the execution of their mandates.

Monitoring of teaching and learning gives the SMT members indications of the extent of progress and achievement of the anticipated academic results. This would also indicate the progress regarding allocated funds that could help a principal collect data that is related to specific indicators in a systematic manner (Marriot & Goyder, 2009). In an effort to raise the performance of his school, Dr Sikhakhane used a monitoring system to look for early signs of progress or a lack thereof in the achievement of the desired Grade 12 results. The deputy principal compiled a report which shows whether what is being taught and learned in the classroom correlates with what is reflected in the Annual Teaching Plans (ATP), DBE workbooks, and learners' exercise books. Dr Sikhakhane analyses the compiled teaching and learning reports provided by the deputy principal, and then advises teachers to modify their teaching strategies to better meet the school's-goals of increasing the learners' ability to perform well in their Grade 12 final examinations. As Senior SMT members, they distributed the monitoring and evaluation responsibilities among themselves. Both Deputy Principals turned in weekly reports and recommendations to the principal. This system helped them as a school to create well-informed school improvement plans which, amongst others, included the initiative of a mandatory study session after school hours. The SMT at Dr Sikhakhane's school used monitoring as a tool to track their progress toward achieving the school's educational goals and to determine what

was successful or ineffective, while they also used evaluation to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of their goals, policies, plans and organisation (Ferdaus, 2016). The following was said by Dr Sikhakhane:

> *You know, one of the most important things I do is implement a monitoring system that entails the routine collection of documents containing data on teaching and learning, such as learners' exercise books, Annual Teaching Plans (ATP), DBE workbooks, and Jikimfundo curriculum trackers to track the curriculum coverage. Monitoring and evaluation indicate education progress with respect to allocated funds. I used monitoring and evaluation to track early signs of progress or lack thereof towards the achievement of the desired Grade 12 results. Every week, each deputy principal provides me a report outlining the improvements each teacher has achieved in terms of curriculum coverage. I use the gathered information about teachers' performance to address the staff meetings with an intention to persuade teachers to modify their teaching strategies. Dr Sikhakhane and his deputy principal distributed among themselves the monitoring and evaluation responsibilities. As a result, we executed the well-informed school improvement plans. I used monitoring to track teachers' progress in achieving the school's educational goals and to determine what was successful or ineffective. I used the gaps that I got after monitoring and evaluation to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the schools' teaching strategies.*

The discussion above shows that the principal's ability to lead effectively depends significantly on the SMT and its capacities, which can adjust teachers' practices in relation to the situations in which they find themselves (Khanyi & Naidoo, 2020). Additionally, their chances of success depend on their comprehension of the fundamental reasons for the issues they run into and how they handle school issues (Bredeson et al., 2011). The principal and the SMT members must monitor the performance of teachers by compiling and keeping a track record of the academic progress of all Grade 12 learners so that they can develop programmes to assist each learner to improve his/her performance. Nkuzana (2021) states that the SMT members need to monitor the performance of teachers to provide interventions to improve the performance of Grade 12 learners. There must be a constant discussion of the academic progress report between the SMT members and the educators with an intention to improve the school performance. The content for Dr Sikhakhane's staff development meetings was

informed by the data that he gathered and from the reports that were compiled by the deputy principals. The subsequent changes regarding teaching approaches should be based on the identified gaps within the school (Marral & Lodhi, 2022).

6.3 Particularities of experience among the participants

In this section I present the particularities of experience that emerged in this study. These experiences are presented under the following themes: Assessment-informed teaching and learning; Recruitment of suitably qualified educators and individualised attention for underperforming learners.

6.3.1 Assessment informed teaching and learning

Implementing assessment-informed teaching to prepare learners to respond to examination questions is one of Mr Smith's tactics for improving learners' academic achievement. He urged his teachers to reconfigure their teaching approaches so that a variety of formal and informal assessment tasks could be adapted from the previous national senior certificate examination papers and administered to learners during the course of the teaching and learning process. This was done to counteract the reality of inadequate exposure to the skills and techniques of tackling different questions in the examination. It was through this approach that teachers were required to review previous question papers with the intention of compiling item banks that would assist in the teaching of particular concepts. Consequently, lesson plans that were not aligned to this strategy were not accepted. The strategy initiated by Mr Smith is a formative assessment technique (Umar, 2018). This method is known as data informed teaching which is employed to influence decisions about teaching and learning in order to improve learners' achievement (Niemeyer et al., 2016). The data was generated from observing how learners responded to questions during examinations and the review of previous examination papers to find questions that can best equip learners for the examination. As stated by Mr Smith:

> *I found that my teachers infrequently evaluated learners' progress. Because of this, our learners were poorly prepared to respond to the exam questions. I started teaching in accordance with assessment. I pleaded with teachers in this new method of teaching and learning to use past examination question papers to create a variety of informal and formal evaluation procedures throughout the teaching and learning process in order to change teaching and learning activities and raise learners'*

achievement. When creating lesson plans and other preparations, I made it a compulsory for the teachers to gather specific data from previous exam question papers to inform the teaching and learning that should take place in class. A teacher should use the years of the previous question papers in the lesson plan to help students understand a certain idea. The lesson plan is not accepted if it does not demonstrate this.

Given the aforementioned, a principal may direct teachers' actions in a school based on their own personal values, interests and expectations—what is referred to as personal or private knowledge—that they bring with them (Mpungose, 2010); hence, the assessment-informed teaching to improve the academic performance of learners. This demonstrates that principals have the authority to influence what teachers must do to raise the academic achievement of their learners (Mngomezulu, 2018). In order to familiarise learners with the calibre of the questions they might encounter in the examination at the end of the year, a principal could instruct his or her teachers to use past examination question papers to create various assessment tasks that could be used in classes throughout the teaching and learning process. He could make it mandatory for teachers to specify the years of question papers from which they extracted questions that they would use to train learners to be exam-ready. The principal must be directly involved in teaching activities to ensure that his good practices are followed by all teachers in all subjects. The principal can put mechanisms in place to ensure that lesson plans comply with his directives, if not it should not be accepted. According to Mngomezulu (2015), direct involvement of principals in teaching and learning activities contributes significantly to learner success.

6.3.2 Recruitment of suitably qualified educators

Miss Zuma identified, attracted, and appointed the educators with the necessary credentials to teach the gateway subjects at her school. Miss Zuma contacted universities to find the top learner teachers who would join her school as teachers as soon as they received their degrees. This method helped her hire the most qualified teachers, who are now completely supportive of her efforts to raise the academic achievement of Grade 12 learners in her school. In cases where this strategy did not yield the envisaged results, Miss Zuma approached the best-performing schools to negotiate with principals to allow their teachers assist in her extra tuition programmes in the evenings. These teachers who have helped learners enhance proficiency in different subjects were paid from the funds that the school raised. Miss Zuma’s strategy resonates with the notion that competent teachers become the vehicle

through which quality education can be achieved and subsequently create sustainable societies (Jan-Ole et al., 2019). Miss Zuma said:

> *I realised that there are not enough skilled teachers available to teach subjects like Maths, Physics, English and Accounting in my school. The majority of the teachers disliked working in rural areas because of the risk of sickness, the poor housing conditions for teachers, and the inadequate roads. I started looking for teachers who were qualified to teach these subjects. I found and attracted teachers who were both skilfully and academically equipped to work at my school. When a teaching position opened up, I visited the university to speak with the faculty dean about getting in touch with the top student teachers so that I could convince them to start working at my school as soon as they were qualified. Since I hired the majority of the teachers who are currently part of my staff, they are enthusiastically in favour of my ideas. When I could not find a suitable teacher at the university, in some cases, I went to the top-performing schools and negotiated with the principals to have their teachers come and teach at my school in the evenings. We then raised money to pay them privately so that our Grade 12 learners would be proficient in those subjects.*

Given the above, principals contend with the reality of how they currently see their schools and how they want them to look in the future (Vokatisa & Zhangb, 2016). This emphasises the vision that a principal need to have for the school. It is in this vein that a principal whose school is underperforming because of, amongst others, a lack of qualified teachers would resolve to take steps to recruit such teachers who could improve academic performance at the school. It is evident that Miss Zuma considered qualified or competent teachers essential to the quest of achieving high-quality matric results since how much learning occurs in a classroom largely depends on the effectiveness and competence of the teachers (Mngomezulu, 2021).

6.3.3 Individualised attention to the underperforming learners

Miss Govender claims to have a natural talent for spotting learners who are struggling academically but could do better. After identifying these learners, she paired them up to receive personalised teaching and learning from each teacher. Upon investigation of the learners' family backgrounds, as

mandated by the principal, they discovered that some learners come from poverty-stricken households therefore, instead of focusing on their studies, they focus on satisfying their basic needs. Together with the teachers, Miss Govender set up a support framework to cater for the basic needs and provide individualised attention. This strategy embraced varied approaches in response to the learners' needs. These learners were constantly evaluated with the intention to augment their academic performance. Miss Govender realised that personalised instruction was required to meet learners' demands since it was to be tailored to their preferences and unique interests (Nguyen et al., 2022). What Miss Govender said is as follows:

> *I am the type of person who has the personal gift of being able to spot learners who are performing poorly but who have the capacity to do better. Such learners are ones who I always spot early on and put in groups so that teachers can help them reach their full potential. I mandate that each teacher give at least two learners personalised attention. The learner's background should be investigated in order to determine any contributing factors to their underperformance. As a staff, we meet to discuss how to assist each learner in overcoming personal obstacles. We discovered that learners frequently struggle with poverty at home, devoting a lot of their time to obtaining food and other necessities rather than concentrating on their education. We set up a supportive environment for them near the school where we can meet their needs and keep an eye on them as they focus intently on their studies, improving their performance. They receive individualised private instruction, and their performance is continually evaluated to move them from their low previous level of performance in terms of pass percentage to a higher level. I sincerely asked my teachers to provide learners with academic support based on their choices by creating checklists of what learners should do to meet their learning objectives. The checklists covered the tasks that needed to be finished as well as the knowledge and abilities that learners needed to adhere to. Individualised teaching was given by the teachers, and it is linked to other teaching methods including independent learning, personalised learning, self-directed learning, self-paced learning, or self-regulating learning.*

The above theme and the other before it, emerged from the narratives of the three participants; hence, they are unique to them. Nonetheless, they remain important and contain lessons that could not be elicited from the other participants. It is clear that Miss Govender resolved to boost academic accomplishment in her school through the use of a different set of leadership techniques. Principals of underperforming schools may employ a variety of tactics and procedures to raise academic performance levels among their learners (Leithwood et al., 2008). Evidently, the tactics that Miss Govender employed are unique to the realities of her school and they need a buy in, *inter alia*, from the teachers.

6.4 Discussion

The discussion draws on all the three theories which are teacher identity, and construction of identity on one side and leadership theories on the other. There are two leadership theories, namely, Context-Responsive Leadership and the Five Domains of Instructional Leadership. I am also drawing from the techniques that I used to generate data. In particular, I draw from Artefacts Inquiry because it is precisely this inquiry that all the participants drew from to articulate their identities or take inspiration for what they were doing as leaders and managers of schools. The discussion is integrated. I do not separate a discussion of the findings in relation to theories as one section from how the findings resonate with Artefacts Inquiry. The discussion flows in an integrated fashion.

When I analysed the participant's narratives, it became abundantly clear to me that the leadership strategies they developed and put into practice in their schools to improve underwhelming performance were influenced by a variety of factors, including their identities and the contextual realities of those schools. For instance, those participants who held successful study camps where both the teachers and the learners stayed in the camps over night until the examinations were finished, managed to do that through their understanding of the community. It is through that insight of the community that they were able to obtain support from the members of the community in terms of providing security. It is also their insightful understanding of the parents and the trust that they had earned amongst the parents that supported their efforts to solicit extra funds for provisions.

Furthermore, it is evident from the participant's testimonies that the majority of them experienced difficult upbringings. They gained the fortitude to face the hard truths of life thanks to these circumstances. One participant, for instance, lost his father when he was a very young child, just before starting school. He left his mother to care for the family alone. Things worsened when one of

the relatives tormented his mother and caused her to fall ill. Because they had to leave school early, his elder siblings started working on farms to help their mother. He discovered the importance of being strong in the face of adversity from his mother's determination. That is who he individually developed into. He formed a personality to persevere in trying circumstances. As a result, when the underperformance in Grade 12 presented a challenge to his leadership, he did not give up but instead developed leadership tactics that assisted his school in improving its subpar Grade 12 performance. Currently, his school Grade 12 performance has improved to an 87% pass rate, thanks to these strategies.

The accounts of the other participants make it evident that they developed self-concepts as children, that they should be resilient in life. I discovered that their leadership techniques were influenced by their identity in their efforts to improve the mediocre performance of their schools. I also discovered the identities of the participants, as well as the fact that the context of their schools had an impact on the majority of the leadership tactics they developed and implemented. For instance, one participant's former principal had employed shady methods to raise the school's low performance. For the Grade 12 examinations, the old principal had let learners to copy in order to score well. Learners did receive good grades, but the DBE ultimately discovered that they had copied because they consistently provided the same responses. The principal was therefore, summoned to account at the DBE regional office. Sadly, he was terrified by this call, got sick, and eventually passed away. The participant was required to participate in an accountability session because she was the deputy principal. She spoke on behalf of the teachers, and a group of Grade 12 learners spoke on their behalf. When learners admitted to copying, the results were halted. As a result, rather than employing dishonest methods, when the participant took over as principal, she drew on the contextual realities of the school to develop and implement the leadership practices that would raise learners' performance in Grade 12.

These narratives speak to this participant’s identity formation and character that has evolved over the years. It is therefore, clear that all the participants performed their leadership, drawing from their upbringing and from the identities they had constructed. Similarly, their narratives are ably captured in the Artefacts Inquiry. Therefore, identity theory adopted for this study has enabled me to look at the participants’ narratives with understanding. Similarly, their leadership practices suggest that their focus was on supporting teaching and learning efforts. Where teachers showed teaching skills deficits, external help was solicited and these efforts were successfully integrated with the schools’ plans, with a mission in mind, the improvement of curriculum delivery, supervision of teaching activities and providing support. They all made efforts to improve the environment of teaching and learning. All the

activities they embarked on resonate with Weber’s (1996) Five Domains of Instructional Leadership Model.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter, as has been explained in the introduction, presented a second level of analysis where the narratives from the participants are analysed with the assistance of literature. It is evident from the participants' descriptions of their leadership approaches for managing their struggling secondary schools that they experienced difficulties raising the academic performance of Grade 12 in their schools. In response to their current predicament, they developed and implemented various leadership techniques in efforts to enhance the below par performance of their schools. Additionally, I have discovered that it is crucial for these principals to create and put into practice leadership techniques that help raise Grade 12 learners' academic achievements because low performance puts a lot of strain on them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY THE PARTICIPANTS TO COMBAT UNDERPERFORMANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

7.1 Introduction

Chapter Six focused on leadership strategies that principals of underperforming schools used to improve performance in their secondary schools. In addressing the second research sub-puzzle, there were some strategies to address underperformance that were similar while others differed. In this chapter, I discuss the solutions that were proposed by the participants to combat underperformance in their schools to answer the third research sub-puzzle: *What do the principals of underperforming schools consider as solutions to outwrestle underperformance in iLembe District secondary schools?*

7.2 Solutions proposed by the participants to combat underperformance in their secondary schools

The participants propose six solutions to combat underperformance in their schools. These solutions are: Reconfiguration of the Post Provisioning Model (PPM); The timing of teachers' workshop and principals' meetings; Preventing out-of-field phenomena through principals' active participation in teacher recruitment processes; Principal must lead teaching and learning; Principal must lead the teacher professional development; Strengthening school-community partnership.

7.2.1 Reconfiguration of Post Provisioning Model

The PPM is a resource allocation model (RAM) that is used by the DBE to distribute educators as human capital among public schools depending on the total number of enrolled learners (Ntuli, 2012). Similar sentiments were echoed by three out of six participants, who blamed the PPM rules for the poor performance in their schools. Those participants are Mr Smith, Miss Zuma, and Mr McDonald. They suggested that the PPM policy as it stands needs to be reconfigured to address the plight of underperforming schools. The outcome of the PPM is called the Post Provisioning Norm (PPN) certificate, which contains the total number of teachers that a school qualifies to have on its staff establishment in a particular year. In this study, the two acronyms, PPM and PPN are used interchangeably. If the school's learner enrolment drops substantially, the school's PPN certificate

shows that the number of teachers should drop. However, if enrolment has increased, the PPN certificate shows that the number of teachers must also increase. If the school's PPN has decreased by four teachers, it means that the school is compelled to declare four teachers' surpluses to its staff establishment. Surplus educators are the ones that are re-deployed to other schools that require more teachers due to their increased PPN. The three cited principals lamented the current dictates of PPM policy. They claimed and complained that the current dictates of the PPM policy put their schools at a disadvantage because they cause them to lose competent teachers through compulsory temporary transfers (CTT). Typically, learners leave low-performing schools in large numbers to enrol in high-performing ones. The three cited participants said that the DBE needs to rethink or rearrange the rules of PPM. Mr Smith expressed that the reduced PPN hindered his school's attempts to successfully produce a good Grade 12 pass rate. He said that his school's PPN was substantially reduced and he was ordered to declare four teacher's surplus in the school establishment. When declaring surplus educators, he applied different PPM principles to make the process free and fair. Out of four declared educators, one was the only isiZulu-qualified teacher. All four teachers were eventually transferred to other schools through CTT. Mr Smith stated the following:

> *The DBE uses the Post Provisioning Model (PPM) policy, which is a resource allocation model (RAM) to distribute educators among public schools depending on the total number of enrolled learners. Learners leave low-performing schools in large numbers to enrol in high performing ones. PPM is a formula that the DBE uses to calculate the number of educators that a school qualifies to have in its enrolment. The outcome of the calculation is called the Post Provisioning Norm (PPN). We normally use the terms PPM and PPN interchangeably. When PPN certificates are issued out to schools, it tells principals two things: to declare open vacancies at their schools if the enrolment has substantially increased, or to declare surplus educators at their schools if the enrolment has drastically dropped. Surplus educators are redeployed to schools that require additional educators due to the increased PPN. This redeployment is known as "compulsory temporary teacher transfer" (CTT). In 2019, I received a PPN certificate which instructed me to declare four educators as surplus. I applied all the PPM principles to make the process free and fair. Among the teachers that were declared, my only IsiZulu qualified educator was declared as well, and they were subsequently moved to other schools through CTT.*

Mr Smith decried the fact that after the CTT had taken place at his school in 2019, his Grade 12 learners remained without an isiZulu teacher until the examinations were written. Unfortunately, most of his Grade 12 learners performed below the expected 50% pass rate in isiZulu. This caused them to fail Grade 12 altogether because the pass requirement stipulates that in addition to passing other subjects well, a learner must also pass isiZulu at a 50% pass rate or more (UMALUSI, 2013). Mr Smith is suggesting that the DBE needs to amend the PPM policy by adding a clause that could cater for contextual problems that are created after the implementation of the PPM to address the plight of the learners who fail unnecessarily. For instance, it could add that if the school is set to lose the only home language teacher, it must be allowed to retain that teacher for the benefits of the learners. The continuity of underperformance aggravates the plummeting of learner enrolments because learners want to enrol in a well performing school. It is in this vein that Mr Smith claims that the decreased PPN served as a further catalyst for learner migration to affluent schools to escape underperformance in the current schools. Learner migration is dangerous as it has a negative impact on school organisation, such as the disruption of teaching and learning, reduction of resource acquisitions and the crippling of school budgets. Mr Smith stated the following:

> *The departure of my isiZulu teacher left my Grade 12 learners without a teacher. Grade 12 learners in 2020 were forced to write their final examinations without going through sufficient preparation. That is why most of them scored below 50% in isiZulu, which is their Home Language. This caused them to fail Grade 12 because the law stipulates that one of the requirements to pass, a learner needs to pass by 50% his/her Home Language to pass the grade. It could be better if the DBE amended the PPM policy by adding a clause which says that if the only Home Language teacher at a school becomes a surplus educator, the school must keep him/her so that learners may not fail unnecessarily. An underperforming school needs teachers and other resources to improve its academic performance. Resources are allocated to a school based on its learner enrolment. So, if the school continues to underperform, it would continue to lose resources including teachers. When learners move in numbers from a school to other schools, the phenomenon is normally called learner migration. Learner migration has a negative impact on school organisation, such as: disruption of teaching and learning, reduction of resource acquisitions, and crippling of school budgets. To protect rural*

> *school children's rights to education, the DBE has a responsibility to fulfil, and one of them is through changing policies regarding the PPM.*

In Mr Smith's assertion, it is noted that the PPM policy is failing to address the issue of the equitably distribution of qualified teachers to public schools (Ntuli, 2012). Mr Smith reiterated that the DBE has a responsibility to fix problems that interfere with the learners' rights to education. He said this includes that it must change the aspects of PPM that seek to undermine learners' rights to education. This means that it must make a rule which stops the removal of the Home Language teacher through PPN when he/she is needed the most. This proves that the implementation of PPM has not benefited the township and rural schools (Magwaza, 2022). Mr Smith elaborated, saying that the decreased PPN leads to a phenomenon of learner migration, which has a negative impact on school organisation, such as disruption of teaching and learning, reduction of resource acquisitions, and crippling of school budgets (Ntuli, 2012).

The sentiments revealed by Mr Smith were also echoed by Miss Zuma, who also expressed a belief that the DBE should revisit the PPM policy in order to better address the shortage of teachers in her underperforming school. She stated that underperformance caused her school to continue losing learners to high-performing schools and teachers to other schools through CTT. She decried the fact that the schools' loss of learners in this fashion reduced the PPN allocation of her school. This led to decreased PPN, which ultimately led to CTT. In her view, for a school to improve its Grade 12 performance, it requires qualified teachers. She saw the reduced PPN as a huge threat to the resurrection of her school performance. Her school required qualified teachers to improve Grade 12 performance, but it continued to lose them through CTT. As the school loses qualified teachers, its Grade 12 performance further deteriorates. Therefore, when Grade 12 performance further deteriorates, learners continue to leave the school. She viewed this as a vicious cycle, which causes her to fear that her school will eventually shut down in her own hands. As a result, she requested that the DBE address the shortage of qualified teachers in underperforming schools by amending the PPM policy. She requested that the DBE should amend the PPM policy by adding a clause that could allow the schools that run short of teachers due to the reduced PPN to get temporary additional teachers. Those teachers could be deployed to the underperforming schools for a specified period to help them improve their academic performance in Grade 12. After the expiration of the specified period, an assessment of school performance could be conducted to check if the school had improved or not. If it did not, a decision could be made on how to further assist the school. Miss Zuma stated the following in her own words:

The PPN policy plays a huge role in how a school is staffed and performs. Our Grade 12 performance dropped drastically in 2017 after the death of our former principal in a road accident. We began to lose learners to high performing schools and then suffered from decreased PPN and the implementation of CTT year after year, further aggravating our Grade 12 performance. In 2019, our Grade 12 performance declined further, and our PPN was reduced by three teachers. The reduced PPN has become a huge threat to the resurrection of our school's performance. The loss of teachers through PPN in 2019 left subjects like Mathematics and English without teachers. Grade 12 learners ended up failing these subjects. If this vicious cycle continues unabated, this school will shut down. In my opinion, the DBE ought to amend the PPM policy by adding a clause that allows schools whose Grade 12 learners are without teachers in certain subjects to temporarily hire additional teachers. Those teachers could work in a school for a specified period of time to assist a school improve its Grade 12 performance. After three years, the school's performance could be assessed to check whether it has improved or not. If it has not, then another alternative of support could be given to help the school improve its performance.

From the excerpt above, it is evident that if a school underperforms, it loses learners to high performing schools. If the school loses learners who enrol at other schools, it suffers from a decreased PPN. The decreased PPN leads to the compulsory transfer of teachers through CTT. This CTT process reduces the number of teachers, which causes a school to have fewer teachers than it did before (Ntuli, 2012). If the number of teachers is reduced from what the school needs, it means that its performance is going to deteriorate further because the remaining teachers get overburdened and fail to provide quality education that would make learners pass. This becomes a vicious cycle because it means underperformance begets underperformance, and it can lead to the total shutdown of a school if it continues unabated. To support this view, Magwaza (2022) states that the fewer teachers that remain at a school after the decreased PPN has been implemented, are expected to teach the subjects that they do not understand, which causes a further deterioration of school performance. Miss Zuma suggests that this is the time for the DBE to amend the PPN policy by adding a clause which states that rural schools that need teachers due to the decreased PPN should be allowed to hire additional teachers. Magwaza (2022) avers that schools in rural areas that have unfavourable learner enrolments and

where there is evidence that learners' families have relocated or are relocating, must automatically receive redress posts. Magwaza (2022) suggests that the decreased PPN causes some schools to close down due to the decrease in the number of learners and teachers.

The PPM ignores the real situations of schools because some schools have community members who are unable to pay high school fees to hire additional teachers, while other schools are able to generate funds to hire additional teachers, but the DBE, through the PPM, treats these schools as if they are the same, which is unfair (Ntuli, 2012). Generally, the loss of teachers culminates in poor learner academic performance (Subair & Talabi, 2015). Miss Zuma calls for the DBE to review the PPN because it causes unequal opportunities for learners of the same school, as it led to the Grade 12 learners at her school studying for the whole year without teachers for Mathematics and English, and as a result, they failed. Magwaza (2022) states that the PPN policy needs to be reviewed because it allows the DBE to reduce the number of teachers in some schools through CTT until they become non-viable and end up closing down. Thaba-Nkadimene (2020) supports the notion that PPN, including infrastructure, needs to be reviewed because it negatively affects teaching and learning. The PPN policy not only affects low-performing schools, which lose learners and teachers, but it also has an adverse effect on high-performing schools. The successful schools draw more learners to their rosters. When the number of learners increases at a school, vacant teaching posts are created. Once the increased PPN certificate arrives at school before the end of the year, the principal becomes responsible for advertising those posts through the circuit office immediately. It takes too long to fill the vacant posts because the teachers who are redeployed do not accept their redeployment easily. They spent a lot of time resisting the move from the schools where they were working. As a result of this, while waiting for new teachers to arrive, teaching and learning gets compromised.

Some of the surplus educators who are transferred to a new school through CTT behave well, but most of them misbehave. They become troublesome as they complain about the new school being too far from their homes, the gravel roads in rural areas, which destroy their cars, and the high cost of travelling. The misbehaving educators who are transferred through CTT lead to instability and uncertainty, and they eventually produce poor Grade 12 results in the subjects that they were allocated to teach. They lack commitment to work because they are always absent without valid reasons. They keep applying for sick leave on a regular basis. They are not honest when filing in leave forms, as they keep on supporting their sick leave with fake sick notes from their dishonest doctors. When a teacher takes leave for less than a month, the school does not qualify for a substitute educator, and

therefore, the quality of teaching and learning gets compromised at a school. Mr McDonald stated the following:

> *Our Grade 12 performance had been steadily improving over the past two years compared to our neighbouring schools. As a result, our learner enrolment increased. Thereafter, three teachers' posts became vacant. As a procedure, I advertised those posts before the end of the year through the circuit office to fill them. I waited for six months to receive the three teachers from the circuit office. This is a long waiting period. It compromises teaching and learning. After their arrival, one of them behaved and worked perfectly well while the other two became troublesome. They complained that our school was too far from where they came from, our gravel roads were bad for their cars, it was expensive for them to come to work, and that they did not have the money to pay for accommodation near the school. They caused instability, uncertainty, and eventually produced poor results in their subjects at the end of the year. They lacked commitment to work because they were always absent from work without valid reasons. They kept on falling sick on regular basis and they were not honest in filing in leave forms as they kept on submitting fake sick notes from their dishonest doctors. I say that their sick notes are fake because when we walk around during weekends, we meet those teachers socialising in the towns and sharing stories to their friends that they are not sick but they are fixing the DBE.*

Mr McDonald also raised his concerns about the problems that come with PPN implementation. He indicated that of three teachers who had been transferred to his school through CTT, two gave him a hard time. It took them six months to assume duties at his school. After arriving they presented problems, which included high levels of absenteeism. When he engaged them as to why they misbehaved, they divulged to him that they were not happy with the way they were declared surplus at the school where they came from. They believed that their principal declared them surplus because he hated them for confronting him in staff meetings. They also believed that he used PPN policy to get rid of them from the school. So, the teachers indicated that they misbehaved to deal with being declared surplus unfairly. They thought that by misbehaving, they were going to attract the attention of circuit management so that they could address their plight. They expressed the opinion that if they misbehaved in this fashion in the new school, their concern was going to be identified and addressed.

After Mr McDonald explained how his school was disadvantaged by their misbehaviour, they apologised. He forgave them and he organised counselling sessions for them. Mr McDonald suggests that to overcome the problems caused by PPN, the DBE should amend the PPM policy. In his view, this could be done by adding a clause to the PPM policy which says that the declaration of surplus educators should be done at the district office by the human resource management department under the control of the District Director. It must also be said that the identification of teachers to fill vacant posts should be done at the district office. The letters instructing teachers to assume new posts should be generated at the district office. He also suggested that the DBE needs to introduce a one-time relocation allowance that could assist the transferred teachers with their relocation expenses. Mr McDonald also expressed the following:

> *Later, I decided to talk to them individually by visiting them at their homes. I explained to them that it was worrying me that their absenteeism was destroying the school. I asked them to tell me why they were misbehaving. They confided to me that they were dissatisfied with the way they were declared surplus from their previous school. They felt that their principal declared them surplus because he hated them as they challenged him in staff meetings. They felt that he used PPN to get rid of them from the school. In their view, PPN is the principals' tool to attack innocent teachers. They claimed that they are misbehaving to draw attention so that their concern was going to be identified and addressed. I explained to them how much damage they cause at his school by these misbehaviours. They apologised for their behaviour. I forgave them and I then counselled them one by one to stop this as it was destroying my school. They accepted my plea. I then realised that it could be better if the DBE at the district office change the PPN policy by identifying schools that have surplus educators itself. It must not involve principals in doing this process. It could be better if after identifying the surplus educators, it could also write him/her a letter instructing the teacher to assume at a new school or if he/she does not want to move must resign. It could be better if the DBE introduces a once of relocation allowance that can be paid to the teacher to sort out his/her relocation expenses.*

Finding suitable teachers to fill the unfilled positions in the schools with enhanced PPN certificates is a challenge. This is partly due to the teachers' resistance to transferring to new schools once their

positions are declared surplus by their principals. It takes too long (approximately six months) to fill the vacancies. These teachers reject the declaration made by their principals, whom they accuse of punishing them via PPN, out of dislike for them and a desire to get rid of them (Magwaza, 2022). Surplus educators that end up assuming post at the new school through CTT bring a lot of problems, which include that the travelling distance between the new school and the places where they stay is too long; bad gravel roads that damage their cars and incur huge travel expenses. As a result, they cause instability and uncertainty at school and produce poor results because they lack commitment to work, which they display by their continuous absenteeism without valid reasons (Mthiyane et al., 2014). According to Mr McDonald, to prolong their leave, they submit false medical certificates from dishonest doctors. Mr McDonald justifies this claim by stating, *"we frequently run across those teachers out and about in towns after school and on weekends, which is why we refer to illness notes as fakes".* When those educators socialise with their pals, they tell them various anecdotes. They claim that while they are taking extended leave to fix the DBE for PPM, they are genuinely not unwell. They contend that PPN gives principals who dislike them the authority to use it as a tool of punishment.

Many teachers' fake illness and can be seen roaming around the village (Mothibeli, 2017). Teaching and learning are compromised during this fighting process. Mothibeli (2017) puts forward that absenteeism can have serious repercussions which include a decrease in productivity. Mr McDonald took the initiative and asked to have a private conversation with these troublesome teachers at their homes. One of them confided to him during their conversation that their behaviour is brought on by their feeling of injustice. They were not pleased with how their former schools had deemed them surplus. They were convinced that the principal made them unnecessary because he detested them for constantly opposing him in staff meetings and defending teachers' rights as SADTU branch executive members. Because PPN has been used by principals to harass innocent teachers, they felt compelled to fight it in this way. They believed that it was their duty as teacher leaders to fight this PPN practise because if they did not fight it, they might be displaced again in this new school. They claimed that they were misbehaving to draw attention so that their concern should be identified and addressed. After Mr McDonald explained how much their bad behaviour negatively affected his school performance and how much it affects him personally as a principal, they both apologised for their misbehaviour.

To address these concerns, Mr McDonald suggests that the DBE could amend the PPM policy by removing the current procedure of identifying superfluous educators, which is currently done by the

principals. He expresses that it must be replaced by adding a new clause which states that surplus teachers must be identified at district offices by the district office's human resources management (HRM) team under the control of the District Director. This could bail out the school principals who are continuously getting attacks from superfluous educators (Magwaza, 2022). In addition to this, it must add another clause which stipulates that the allotment of the surplus teachers to new schools must be done by the same team at the district office. The same district HRM team must write letters to surplus educators who have been allocated to a new school, advising them to quickly assume duties at new schools.

The district HRM team must deal with challenges such as the surplus teachers' resistance that come out of PPN implementations. Magwaza (2022) states that the implementation of PPN poses serious problems to quality teaching and learning, and to the management of schools. Surplus teachers must be given the option to resign if they are not interested in complying with PPN requirements instead of troubling the principals of new schools. Mr McDonald further suggests that the DBE must introduce a one-time relocation allowance that could help the displaced educators pay their relocation expenses.

7.2.2 The timing of teachers' workshops and principals' meetings

The participants had constructive proposals about the timing of teachers' workshops as well as meetings for school principals. For instance, Miss Zuma expressed a concern that the DBE tended to schedule a lot of principals' meetings and teacher workshops during school teaching time. She lamented the fact that she had administrative responsibilities to perform, which involve travelling to different delivery points to make circuit submissions. It becomes impossible for her to perform all the responsibilities that are placed on her shoulders if she has to execute them simultaneously. The scheduling of meetings and workshops during teaching time causes her to miss her teaching periods unintentionally because she teaches two subjects in Grade 12. Principals are also teachers, they must prepare lessons, teach and assess learners just like Post-Level 1 educators. Therefore, meetings that principals attend interfere with their roles as teacher-principals. Miss Zuma found it hard to keep track of the curriculum coverage at her school. She suggested that instead of organising meetings and workshops during teaching time, it would be better if the DBE could arrange for the meetings to take place during weekends or after school hours. Miss Zuma stated that, in her view, when she missed classes to attend seminars or principals' meetings during teaching time, she fell behind in her classroom work, thus jeopardising the learners' academic chances for success.

The DBE officials at district and circuit levels invited school principals to different meetings at least three times a week; as a result, principals spend a lot of time in meetings and fail to devote a minimum of 5% of their time to teaching as expected. Miss Zuma bemoaned the fact that during contact time, subject teachers are also required to attend a number of empowering workshops. Sometimes, a teacher is asked to attend workshops for eight consecutive days. As a result, the curriculum delivery is affected negatively. To maintain uninterrupted teaching and learning in classrooms, Miss Zuma suggested that these workshops for teacher empowerment should be held on weekends, in the evenings, or during school breaks. Miss Zuma remarked:

> *There are Department's meetings every day. This DBE through district and circuit offices holds meetings which we are expected to attend from Monday to Fridays. On top of those commitments, we are expected to submit numerous items either at Mandeni Academy and Khululekani Primary Schools, and there are things we need to fetch from the circuit office. As a result, I find myself running around like chickens with their heads cut off. In Grade 12, I teach two subjects. I teach Economics, which is a national exam, as well as Business Studies, so this is a major source of concern for me. The DBE officials calls principals to meetings three or four times a week which makes them fail to at least teach 5% of their time as required. Yesterday, I taught up to 17:00 trying to recover the teaching time that I lost when attending the principals' meetings. I believe that the DBE should reduce the number of meetings and workshops that require teachers to attend during the teaching hours. The teacher empowering workshops could be organised to take place over weekends, evenings or on public holidays to allow teaching and learning to continue uninterrupted in schools. I am also of the view that the DBE's meetings should be held after school or on weekends. I also think that it can also help if instead of calling a principal's meetings, the DBE could use WhatsApp to inform or to distribute circulars to principals and allow them to submit documents through WhatsApp.*

Miss Zuma lamented the fact that the number of meetings and workshops that happen during school time interfere with principals' and teachers' teaching obligations. Mngomezulu (2015) complains that school principals in South Africa spend too much time attending meetings rather than leading

curriculum delivery. Some principals have classroom teaching responsibilities on top of their management, leadership, and administration duties; therefore, if they regularly attend meetings and workshops during their teaching hours, they fail to fulfil their responsibilities. Therefore, continuing to attend meetings and workshops during school teaching hours conflicts with teachers' teaching duties (Chang, 2019). These principals end up running behind the syllabus, which makes them teach in the afternoons, trying to recover the time that was lost while they were away attending the principals' meetings. Miss Zuma suggested that the DBE could introduce three things to stop the loss of time due to meetings and workshops that happen during teaching hours. The first thing is that the DBE must reduce the number of meetings and workshops that take place during teaching time. This is not a new proposal as Ntombela (2014) makes the same suggestion. The second thing is that the meetings and workshops could be conducted after school hours or during the weekends. The same suggestion is also made by other scholars like Ntombela (2014). Lastly, the district officials and circuit managers could use WhatsApp instead of calling meetings to distribute circulars; they must also allow the principals to do submissions via WhatsApp.

7.2.3 Preventing out-of-field appointments through principals' active participation in teacher recruitment processes

The findings from the narratives have indicated that, for various reasons, the participating schools found themselves in a situation where improperly qualified teachers were teaching subjects that are not their specialisation. In other words, teachers teach subjects in which they are not qualified. Mr McDonald expressed dissatisfaction with the procedures that the DBE followed when appointing new teachers for his school. He indicated that the DBE tends to apply CTT to transfer teachers from overstaffed schools to those that need teachers without affording the SGBs a chance to select the teacher that they want in relation to the schools' needs. There was an open position at his school as the previous Economics teacher had left. The DBE transferred an Economic Management Sciences (EMS) teacher from a list of surplus teachers to fill their vacancy. The DBE did not involve the principal and the SGB in the appointment process, but the principal was ordered to sign an assumption of duty form to accept the new teacher. Later, Mr McDonald discovered that the teacher that he had accepted from the DBE was not able to teach the subject Economics in Grade 12. He, together with the SGB, made numerous attempts to request the DBE to change the teacher and replace him by a properly qualified one, the DBE failed to do so. Through the involvement of the SGBs in the appointment of teachers, principals of schools that need teachers get an opportunity to satisfy themselves about new teachers' credentials. So, the DBE's practice of implementing CTT when filling

vacant posts with inadequately qualified teachers compromises the quality of teaching in schools because the transferred educators end up failing to teach what they are expected to teach. As things stand, Mr McDonald's school has an inadequately qualified teacher who is unable to produce the required Grade 12 results. When the Grade 12 learners fail the subject Economics, the DBE puts pressure on the principal to improve the results. This, according to Mr McDonald, is unfair. That is why he is recommending that the DBE should consider giving principals a voice when appointing teachers in their schools. Mr McDonald stated the following:

> *The SGB is in charge of hiring new teachers for the school, which involves advertising positions, holding interviews, selecting the best candidates, and then recommending those candidates to the DBE for appointment to the positions. In reality, when there are open positions in schools, the DBE ignores this method. A teacher who had been labelled excess by his underperforming school was moved to fill a vacant post by the DBE at our school. We required a new Economics teacher because the previous one had left. To fill our position, the DBE decided to transfer an Economics and Management Sciences (EMS) teacher to our school. Because he lacked the credentials to teach Economics in Grade 12, the teacher was unable to do so. I spoke with the DBE to have this teacher replaced because he was failing learners, but the DBE ignored me. As a result, learners failed Economics, and the DBE put pressure on me to improve results. My problem is that the SGB and I were not involved in the appointment of this teacher. I was only compelled by my supervisor to sign the assumption of duty form to accept this teacher. That is why I say that the DBE must give us as school leaders, strong voices when hiring new teachers at our school. I wish that if the school has a vacant post, it could be allowed to conduct the recruitment process on its own instead of getting a surplus educator.*

From Mr McDonald's narrative, it can be concluded that the quality of teaching and learning at a school could be compromised by the challenges that occur when teachers are appointed. Section 6, subsection 3 subparagraph (a) of the Educators' Employment Act, No. 76 of 1998, stipulates that the appointment of educators in public schools may only be made on the recommendation of the SGB (Republic of South Africa, 1998). Other scholars such as Mngomezulu (2021) highlight this important point. This means that one of the SGB's duties is to hire new teachers by recommending candidates

that the SGB thinks would be a good fit at the school (Khumalo, 2021). The SGB must go by specific rules when suggesting an educator for appointment, including advertising the open position; conducting interviews; nominating the qualified candidates and sending the names of the recommended candidates to the DBE for final appointment (Khumalo, 2021).

The issue of inappropriate recommendations for teacher appointments are counterproductive to the quality of education, therefore, they need to be addressed (Ramontsha, 2019). In South Africa, SASA gives clear direction that the SGB is responsible for conducting the appointment process before making a recommendation for the teacher that must be appointed (Ramontsha, 2019). When open vacancies are filled through CTT, which is a PPN process, teacher qualifications are not considered (Ntuli, 2012). This practice perpetuates underperformance in schools. The other issue that leads to the appointment of inadequately qualified teachers is that there is strong competition for power to recommend teachers to posts between the SGBs and traditional leaders and teacher unions in rural schools (Ramontsha, 2019). This disagreement may lead to the appointment of inadequately qualified teachers that ends up compromising the quality of teaching and learning in rural schools (Ramontsha, 2019). If structures such as the DBE, traditional leaders, or any structure other than the SGBs use their powers to supress the SGBs by appointing the teachers, or if they recommend the appointment of teachers where they exclude the SGB, inadequately qualified teachers may be appointed at a school. The exclusion of the SGBs from making recommendations to appoint new teachers at schools also means excluding the principal, who is a key member of the SGB, from participating in the teacher appointment process. Through working with the SGB, the principals must be involved in the appointment of teachers at their schools because the primary objective of every school's existence is to teach learners so that they can learn (Mngomezulu, Lawrence, Mabusela, 2021). For a school objective to be achieved, the principal must satisfy himself that the educators that are employed at the school are adequately qualified (Mabida, 2018). This view emphasises that principals, as individuals who are accountable if their schools' achievements drop, deserve a chance to exercise their influence in the selection of teachers that they believe are going to be effective when teaching in classes.

As key members of the SGB, principals must select qualified teachers from a pool of applicants during the recruiting process. If the principals are satisfied with the quality of teachers that they have at their disposal, they could raise the educational quality of their schools because effective teachers could have a significant influence on learners' short- and long-term goals in education (Mayness & Hatt, 2015). When the post becomes vacant at a school, the principal must be at the forefront of the hiring process for a new teacher because he or she is the one who understands the credentials that a new

teacher must have. This further supports the view that principals must be given an opportunity to make the final choice about the teacher that they want. Even if the DBE wants to redeploy teachers from schools with surplus educators due to decreased PPN, the DBE must allow principals and SGBs to choose which surplus educators to recommend for filling vacant posts, through district offices. To do this, the DBE could send a list of at least five surplus educators to the school who match the school's requirements. The SGB must be allowed to conduct interviews and choose their preferred candidate for appointment. Mr McDonald prefers that if the school has a vacant post, the school's SGB be allowed to follow the hiring process of a new teacher on its own. This is very important because sometimes, the choice of transferring surplus educators to fill vacant posts in schools presents challenges that deepen underperformance in schools.

7.2.4 Principals must lead teaching and learning

According to Miss Govender, learners could perform better academically in Grade 12 if principals adopt instructional leadership to support effective teaching and learning practices in their classrooms. Principals must make sure that they are aware of what teachers are teaching in each class and how they are teaching by periodically reviewing teachers' teaching files. Miss Govender suggested that principals should visit classes to check how teaching is taking place, and they must make notes so they may provide teachers with feedback. To set an example for their teachers, principals could teach one or two subjects. According to Miss Govender, each principal need proof that teachers are imparting the curriculum-aligned material to learners. A supportive environment for teaching and learning must be created by the principal at school. Principals should give teachers guidance on how to run their classes in their capacity as leaders of teaching. Miss Govender advised that principals should set clear expectations for their staff, they must lead by example; they must look for and promote constructive teacher feedback, and they must collaborate with SMT members to give staff professional development. They must acknowledge the contributions of others in order to inspire the following generation of educators. Miss Govender indicated that she could not perform some of her instructional duties such as the conduction of class visits because some teachers in her school were against this practice. They claimed that the law does not allow it. This practice can only be performed during the IQMS process only. In her own words, Miss Govender said:

> *All schools exist to provide quality teaching to all learners. So, the principal's main duty is to ensure that teaching and learning happen in the school. All principals must regularly check teachers' teaching files to*

make sure that teachers are teaching what the CAPS policy instructs them to teach. The principal must not only hope that teachers are teaching what they are expected to teach, but each principal must have evidence that teachers are really teaching the appropriate content and that learners are indeed learning. Principals must also teach at Grade 12 to influence what occurs in each of their school's classrooms. It is unfair to demand that teachers must complete the syllabus, yet, you as a principal cannot show them that it is doable. To put it another way, principals must take on the role of instructional leaders in their schools. They could accomplish this goal by advising teachers on what they should do in their classrooms. They must visit classrooms and provide comments to teachers. To establish effective directions, they must set a good example. They must seek out and support positive feedback from teachers. They must work together and give possibilities for professional advancement. They need to give credit where it is due for good teaching. Currently, I cannot conduct classroom visits because the militant teachers have attacked and accused me of intruding in their classrooms as there is no law in SA which allows for this practice.

Miss Govender suggests that principals must be able to favourably impact what teachers plan to teach in classes by regularly checking their teaching files to ensure that what teachers intend to teach in classes complies with the dictates of the CAPS policy. According to Miss Govender, the following are the primary duties and responsibilities of the principal: guiding, supervising, mentoring staff, teaching, and taking a more active role in curriculum development (Republic of South Africa, 1998). The principals must gather evidence which proves that teachers teach what they are expected to teach in terms of the CAPS policy (Tshabalala, 2020). Instructional leadership can be conceptualised as the principal's influence or effect on the teaching and learning process and ultimately on learner accomplishment (Heaven & Borne, 2016; Jita & Mokhele, 2013; Mafuwane, 2011; Moonsammy-Koopansammy, 2012; Ntombela, 2014). Principals must have subject(s) which they teach in Grade 12 classes so that they can lead by example. According to Miss Govender, it is not fair for the principal to pressurise teachers to complete the syllabus, if he or she does not show them that it is doable. Miss Govender suggested that principals need to provide teachers with acceptable teaching methods and resources that teachers can employ in classes to achieve the lessons' objectives (Tshabalala, 2020). As instructional leaders, principals need to conduct class visits and provide comments to teachers

(Mngomezulu, 2015). They must provide effective directions to be followed by the teachers. Nene (2019) states that principals play a significant and multifaceted role in setting the direction of the school. They must work together with SMT members to create possibilities for professional staff development. One of the principal's roles is to provide support and professional development for teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Miss Govender is also of the view that principals need to give credit to educators who are doing their work excellently. However, Miss Govender is facing difficulties in performing some of her instructional duties because the militant teachers in her school who refuse to allow class visits to be conducted in their schools, claiming that it was not allowed by law because out of all resolutions that have been passed in SA, there is no resolution which allows for education officials to conduct class visits (Christie, 2010). It is evident that this section advocates that school principals should be instructional leaders.

7.2.5 Principal must lead the teacher professional development

Teacher professional development is one of the duties that school principals must carry out. According to Mr Moroka, staff professional development workshops are necessary because they are professional activities that empower teachers who are treated as learners in a learning environment which is likely to improve their teaching practice as professionals. Mr Moroka is of the view that the principals of underperforming schools in different circuits need to acknowledge the role of professional staff development activities in their quest to turn around the academic performance of their schools. Mr Moroka claimed that, based on his experience, there is currently no proof that the principals of low-performing schools oversee professional staff development initiatives in their institutions. Although Mr Moroka believed that professional staff development activities can help his teachers improve their teaching skills, he had not started implementing them, partly because he is facing teacher militancy which accuses him of interfering with their time. He is also of the view that before implementing professional staff development, he should conduct a needs analysis for his teachers to identify and develop their professional needs. He is of the view that professional staff development activities should address teachers' needs. He is currently in the process of conducting interviews regarding his teachers' teaching practices and observing them while in practice and in interaction with their colleagues, parents and learners, as these are some of the strategies, he believes should be used to discover teachers' needs. According to Mr Moroka, principals could use the results of the needs analysis to plan and guide professional staff development activities that intend to improve learners' academic performance. He is currently planning that once the needs analysis at his school is over, he will start implementing professional staff development activities for his teachers. Mr Moroka

underlined the need to meet teachers' professional development requirements to support them in executing their key responsibilities effectively. He believed that professional staff development activities linked to teachers' professional needs can help improve the students' academic performance in Grade 12. Mr Moroka stated the following:

> *In our meeting all principals accepted that we, as principals of underperforming schools must organise professional staff development activities in our schools to help our teachers improve their teaching skills. From my observation, currently, there is no evidence that principals of low-performing schools are running professional staff development programmes in their schools. I noticed this when I invite them to organise these activities together. According to my observations, there is currently no proof that the principals of underperforming schools are managing expert staff development programmes in their institutions. When I asked them to plan these events jointly, I, myself have not implemented this. My problem is the teacher militancy. Some teachers always accuse me of consuming their leisure time if I try to implement this. I believe that to improve teachers' skills, we must conduct needs analysis for our teachers to identify their professional needs and address them. To identify teachers' needs, principals could use interviews regarding teachers' teaching practices. They could also use observation of teachers while teaching, interacting with colleagues, parents, and learners because these are the strategies to discover teachers' needs. We can use the results of the needs analysis to plan the professional staff developments activities because the professional staff development must address teachers' needs. We cannot improve learners' academic performance unless we meet teachers' professional development requirements for them to execute their responsibilities effectively. Needs analysis can identify performance gaps in our teachers, which can be addressed through staff professional development.*

The principals of underperforming secondary schools must conduct a needs analysis for teachers in their schools to identify their professional needs and thereafter, they must organise teachers' professional staff development activities to help teachers improve their teaching skills. What I am learning is that, in some instances, participating principals encountered different challenges that may

counteract their efforts of providing teacher development activities. For example, Mr Moroka is facing a challenge of teacher militancy which accuse him of interfering with their rights, as the professional staff developments happens after school hours. In some instances, it is the principals themselves who lack skills and confidence to face their teaching staff regarding their professional development needs. Nonetheless, what has emerged from the participants is that there is a need for schools to do a needs analysis to establish what different individuals within their schools require in terms of professional development and the type of professional staff development each individual requires to increase their productivity.

Ngema (2016) adds that teachers need to undergo individual needs analysis for the purpose of identifying performance gaps to develop their professional skills and acquire new teaching skills. Needs analysis should be an ongoing process at school to generate data that will assist in establishing professional staff development needs so that professional staff development activities can be developed to help teachers achieve the school's objectives (Yenen & Yˆntem, 2020). This suggests that the issue of needs analysis and professional staff development activities should be part of the school's life. To identify teachers' needs, the principals could conduct interviews with different teachers at their schools to find out how they might want to be assisted. Principals could also conduct classroom observations of teachers to learn how they interact with their colleagues and learners. They could also observe how teachers interact with parents in teacher-parents' meetings. These are all strategies that principals may use to identify teachers' needs. The results of the needs analysis can be used to plan the school's professional staff development activities because their aim is to address teachers' professional needs. Learners' academic performance cannot be improved if teachers' professional requirements are not met. The needs analysis helps identify gaps in our teachers, which can be addressed through professional staff development. The needs analysis programme assists the school to wisely spend its money by determining the benchmark for evaluation of professional staff development activities (Blanchard & Thacker, 2013).

7.2.6 Strengthening school-community partnership

There was a strong view that schools and communities must work together. The notion of strengthening school-community partnerships as a solution to school underperformance emerged differently in different schools. There are those schools that identify the lack of school-community partnership as a weak link that exacerbates underperformance but offer no solution to enhancing it. Those participants are Miss Govender and Dr Sikhakhane while Mr Moroka and Mr Smith provide a

solution on how to build these partnerships. Miss Govender wishes that she could build a strong school community partnership in her school. She believed that these partnerships are the way to go in improving the learner academic achievements because they address the social, emotional and academic needs of the school. She was of the view that when teachers work in partnership with parents and the community, such a collaboration can play an essential role in providing support and mobilising resources that are needed to meet the staff, family and learners' needs. She hoped that the existing school-community partnership in her school could create a caring community that could improve the school's intervention programmes. Miss Govender also believed that school-community partnerships can improve learner behaviour and school attendance which are problems that face her school. Miss Govender said the following:

> *I am running short of ideas on how to create strong school-community partnerships. In my view, the best solution to improve Grade 12 performance in our school is that, we need to increase the achievement of our learners by ensuring that our teachers work together with parents and community members to address the social, emotional and academic needs of our school. Teachers, parents and community partnership can play an essential role in our school because it can help our teachers by providing them with support and resources that they need to meet the staff, family, and learner needs that go beyond what is typically available at our school. It can also create a caring community that can improve the school's intervention programmes and climate. It can enhance learner achievement because it can improve learner behaviour and school attendance which are the problems that this school is facing.*

Miss Govender had an understanding that the school-community partnership could help her school to improve Grade 12 performance, but she did not have a clue how to create these partnerships at her school. She believed that school-community partnerships are one of the solutions that can be used to improve the Grade 12 performance in many secondary schools. She is currently networking with other principals to find out from those who have an idea on how to build these partnerships. She expressed a high hope that one day she would find an individual who could share with her the skills to build school-community partnerships. These partnerships may lead to many benefits such as a creation of a caring community, improving the schools' programmes and climate which supports the learner achievement, improving behaviour, increasing attendance and graduation rates and helping learners to succeed both in school and later in life (Shana et al., 2015). School-community partnerships can

help teachers by providing them with the support and resources that they need to meet the staff, family and learner needs that are not available at school (Gross et al, 2015). These partnerships can enhance learner achievement because they can improve learner behaviour and school attendance (Willems & De Hass, 2012).

Dr Sikhakhane expressed a view that collaborations between his school and the community could prevent the current destruction of his school. Dr Sikhakhane claimed that his school had difficulties providing learners with a high-quality education because it lacked basic supplies like electricity, sufficient books, food, furniture and photocopying machines, all of which have been damaged or stolen by thugs who break into the school from the neighbourhood. Criminals break into and vandalise his school each month. They stole electrical lines, which they later sold to companies who buy scrap metal. In addition to destroying the learners' textbooks, they also took the school supplies and food that was meant for the learners.

All of these make it challenging for the school to raise learner academic performance. The Police department open cases, but no one has been taken into custody. Dr Sikhakhane has tried a variety of strategies to engage the community in resolving school-related concerns, but the community has not been cooperative. He criticised the lack of collaboration between parents, community members and law enforcement agencies in an effort to reduce the high crime rate in the neighbourhood, which disrupted the efficient operation of his school. The community was shielding the crooks (the police claimed), who are also upset that no arrests have been made because of this. To curb vandalism of his school, Dr Sikhakhane believes that partnerships between the school and the community must be formed and strengthened. However, he is unsure of how to go about doing this. If his school could forge these alliances and partnerships to halt the ongoing crime enveloping his school, he was convinced that high Grade 12 academic performance rates might return. Dr Sikhakhane elaborated:

> *Due to a lack of essential resources like electricity, enough books, food, furniture, and photocopy machines, all of which were destroyed and some of which were stolen by the criminals who break into the school from the neighbourhood, my school is struggling to provide learners with a high-quality education. Every month without fail, thieves break into this school and vandalise it. The energy wires that power the classrooms were stolen. These wires are sold to organisations that collect metal. The books of the learners were damaged, and the chairs were taken. They snatched the food*

that was meant for the learners. Although I filed reports with the police, nobody has been taken into custody. I've tried a variety of strategies to get the community involved in helping me solve school-related problems, but I'm not succeeding since I can't get their participation. The normal operation of his school is disrupted by a lack of cooperation between parents, community members, and law enforcement authorities in an effort to reduce the high crime rate in the neighbourhood. The community is shielding the crooks, according to the police, who are also upset that no arrests have been made because of this. I think that creating a collaboration between the school and the community will help to solve the issues at this school, but I'm not sure what has to be done to do that in order to stop the vandalism there. If this issue is resolved, this institution might resume having high academic performance rates for Grade 12.

The difficulties Dr Sikhakhane's school is currently experiencing are brought about by frequent burglaries that take place there. The thieves take the school's supplies, which include food for the kids, energy wires that power the classrooms, books, and other things, making it impossible for the school to run efficiently. Because criminals hide in the community, which protects them, no arrests have been made out of all the cases that have been opened at the police station. According to Dr Sikhakhane, school-community cooperation may be able to help the school deal with these issues. To successfully apprehend the culprits, it might work with the police. In other words, the existence of a strong school-community partnership would not only benefit the school but could benefit the community as well (Sanders & Lewis, 2005, cited in Myende, 2013). If the community can participate in solving the school's problems, it can solve the issue of crime, which ravages both the school and the community. Dr Sikhakhane thinks that school-community relationships can help prevent crime at both the school and community levels and can play a significant role in students' academic success (Shana et al., 2015).

Mr Moroka proposed that circuit mangers and traditional leaders could assist the principals in establishing these partnerships. He came up with this proposal after he tried to organise study camps to prepare learners for examinations where he influenced his teachers to take part in these study camps. He also persuaded local businesspeople to provide resources like food. He also organised neighbouring experienced teachers to come to assist in the revision process. His efforts failed because parents refused to allow learners to attend. They stated that they do not trust that their female learners

will be safe from the sexual abuse by the teachers. They feared that they will get pregnant at night because some teachers are having love affairs with their learners. Mr Moroka's efforts to make the school-community partnerships strong failed. The parties that had agreed to support study camps were disappointed and stopped their participation. The proposed programme did not continue. Mr Moroka remained disappointed and not knowing how to strengthen the school-community partnership; nonetheless he believed that such partnerships could help his school do better in Grade 12 results. This is what Mr Moroka said:

> *I wanted to build and strengthen school-community partnerships in order to make them support the study camps before Grade 12 examinations. This initiative failed because parents did not support my efforts even though the other stakeholders had agreed. I influenced my teachers to use their time after school to take part in study camps and they agreed. I then approached business people and organisations to support us with resources and food, some of them agreed. My problem arose when I requested parents to release learners for this programme; they refused. They criticised the programme claiming that it can cause their female learners to get pregnant at night because some teachers have love affairs with some of the learners. The stakeholders that had agreed to support the school programme withdrew. I was disappointed. Until today, I am still thinking about how to make this partnership works at my school because I know that it can help us.*

Mr Moroka believed that community leaders are in the best position to influence parents to attend parents' meetings and to support schools' programmes that are aimed at improving Grade 12 results. This belief emanated from the view that traditional leaders are effective at engaging communities in rural areas, which culminates in people-centred decisions being made. Traditional leaders plan and hold regular and well-attended meetings that involve residents who live under their jurisdiction (Tshitangoni & Francis, 2014). Traditional leaders have a strong influence on people's lives, and their presence is always felt; therefore, for effective delivery to happen, they cannot be ignored (Ramontsha, 2019). Some schools struggle to coordinate Grade 12 intervention programmes because parents fail to take part in the parents' meetings that are organised to discuss how to help Grade 12 learners improve their academic performances. Drawing from the view that traditional leaders have a strong influence on people's lives and that their presence is always felt, it can be inferred that if the school requests that traditional leaders invite parents to meetings where school issues are going to be

discussed, parents will show up in force. The decisions that would be taken in meetings that involve traditional leaders would be honoured by the people. Mr Moroka was motivated to build school-community partnerships in order to improve their Grade 12 performance but was discouraged by parents who failed to support them. As a result, his efforts failed. Mr Moroka organised stakeholders such as businesspeople and teachers to get involved in Grade 12 study camps. School-community partnerships are meaningful relationships with community members, organisations and businesses that are committed to working cooperatively with a shared responsibility to advance the development of learners' intellectual, social and emotional well-being (Willems & Gonzalez-Dehass, 2012).

It is one of the strategies to achieve quality education (Dopson-Blake, 2010) amid the challenges that lower the quality of education in South African schools such as poverty related issues like learner dropouts, crime, shortage of educational resources (Myende, 2013). School-community partnerships are formed by more components than parents (Myende, 2013). Mr Moroka's efforts to make these partnership work failed because the parents did not support it; they feared that some of the male teachers would use this opportunity to have sex with their female learners whom they have love affairs with. They feared that their learners might get pregnant when they sleep at school. Mr Moroka believes in school-community partnerships; he wants them to be strengthened at his school, but he is not sure how to make them strong and working. School-community partnerships have the potential to solve the school's challenges which hinder school's success (Myende, 2013).

Mr Smith thought that the creation of a school-community relationship could help his institution raise the academic standing of its learners. He describes the current situation at his school, where the principal and the teachers are under fire from the locals for the poor Grade 12 results. Even though their children frequently skipped classes, they did nothing to stop this. Girls who spent more time with their boyfriends missed a lot of teaching and learning time, the same applied to the boy learners. Boys who had started to drink also spent more time in public bars enjoying alcoholic beverages and other intoxicating substances. All these misdemeanours occurred in the presence of community members and leaders, and no action was taken to stop it. According to Mr Smith, learners who frequently skipped class were unable to pass because they missed most of the lessons. When the principal confronted those learners, some of them became aggressive toward him and threatened to wreck his car in front of the neighbours on the road leading to the school. He asserted that he had used every available tactic to address the disruptive behaviour of the learners.

In addition, Mr Smith asserted that guardians and parents were reluctant to deal with their children's' unruly behaviour out of fear. He, therefore, suggested that it would be better if traditional leaders, community members and the circuit manager were to work together to support him. He believed that if the community elected strict members to collaborate with the traditional leadership councils to create a strong school-community alliance that could effectively address the learners' misbehaviour at his school, the situation could be remedied. Mr Smith elaborated as follows:

> *The development of ties between my school and the community might assist me in enhancing academic performance of Grade 12 learners. The community at this school criticises me and my teachers for not getting strong Grade 12 scores, but they do nothing when their learners frequently skip class. Girls who attend school miss a lot of time since they are at their boyfriends' houses. Boys who are learning to drink also spend time using substances, including alcohol, in bars. The community watch while this occurs in front of them and do nothing to stop it. The majority of lessons are missed by learners who frequently skip school, making it impossible for them to pass. When I engage those learners as the principal, they get hostile toward me and threaten to wreck my car in front of neighbours on the road leading to the school. I currently believe that I have used every available strategy to curb this scourge. I think that parents and other adult carers are frightened to deal with their children's misbehaviour. I suggest that in order to create school-community relationship, the circuit manager, the traditional leaders, and community people must work together. If the community chooses its stringent members to collaborate with the traditional leadership councils and the school leaders to aid the teachers in reducing learners' absence, this could help to address the situation. Traditional leaders have the authority to penalise members of the community, especially learners, who act inappropriately. At this school, absence among learners is a serious problem.*

The key issue that was raised by Mr Smith is that learner absenteeism was a major contributor to their poor performance at his school. Amongst other things, boys and girls disregarded some of the school rules such as learner attendance. For example, girls enjoyed life with their partners at home throughout the school day in front of their parents in some instances. Boys also engaged in drug and alcohol abuse during school hours in front of the community; the community did nothing to stop it; instead,

it criticised the school principal and teachers. Even though Mr Smith said that he had tried everything to change the learners' conduct, he was not succeeding. He believed that creating school-community collaboration that could involve traditional leaders was a good idea since it could give the school principals and teachers the support, they needed to deliver high-quality education (Gross et al., 2015). In rural parts of South Africa, traditional leaders (chiefs) can be seen as the fourth sphere of governance (Tshitangoni & Francis, 2014). Mr Smith believed that traditional leaders were more effective in fostering community participation; their connection with community members can make it difficult for the learners to breach school rules (Tshitangoni & Francis, 2014).

7.3 A synthesis of the suggestions for addressing school underperformance

This section provides a synthesis of the suggestions for addressing school underperformance issues. As indicated in the preceding section, there are six suggestions that the participants proposed. This synthesis suggests that such suggestions can be divided into two broad categories. The first three suggestions are what I call policy issues that fall beyond the scope of the school principals. Therefore, these may be unlikely to be achieved through their leadership as they entail a national dialogue that involves all key stakeholders or social partners that are usually involved when national education policies are being developed. The other dimension to this discussion is the fact that this is a small-scale qualitative study that took place in one district and involved only six principals of underperforming secondary schools. Viewed from that perspective, the study cannot make any policy pronouncement that are likely to be listened to. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the arguments advanced by these participants are themselves less important.

The first suggestion is about the reconfiguration of PPN policy in such a way that schools that lose teachers are not adversely affected in terms of their having no teacher at all to teach certain subjects. As I have highlighted in the opening paragraph of this section, the whole notion of the district office or even the provincial DBE considering adjustments to the policy is beyond the scope of this study, and the participating principals have no capacity to influence policy debates beyond their respective schools and, perhaps, at circuit level. Even at circuit level, it is the view of this thesis that the fact that schools are not homogenous renders such debates insignificant. The second and the third suggestions seem also to be policy related in the sense that the timing of meetings and the allocation of posts and the distribution of teachers who are declared in excess in one school, lies beyond the powers of the school principals. In other words, these two issues are regulated through either national or provincial regulations. Therefore, the principals do not have the capacity to influence the changes in that regard.

Nonetheless, this is not to take away the agency of the principals at circuit and district level to argue certain views that are likely to help advance the cause of providing quality education in schools and the district. The second category of proposals are discussed next, and these are closer to the sphere of influence of school principals.

The fourth proposal is about principals leading teaching and learning. This is an important issue that the participants are raising. School principals are expected to operate as curriculum leaders, and thus, should be in the forefront of leading teaching and learning. There is nothing I can add to their proposals other than that the participants seem to have forgotten that their proposals do not necessarily require the provincial DBE to act on it; they as school principals can and should do it. They need to see themselves as instructional leaders and need to act as such. This is within their powers to do. The fifth suggestion is about principals leading teacher professional development. Like the previous suggestion, it is one of their duties to expose their teaching staff to various professional development opportunities and programmes. This is within their powers to do. The only issue they could complain in this regard could be about the support that they receive or do not receive from their immediate seniors in the circuit or district level. The issue of fostering and strengthening school-community partnership is one of their responsibilities.

Context-Responsive Leadership theory speaks precisely about these issues and principals, rather than the DBE, are better placed to understand and respond to local conditions where their schools are located. Bredeson et al. (2008) claim that context-responsive leaders are concerned with knowing when, why, and how to reorganise or push back on the elements of their environment to provide a more favourable backdrop for achieving their goals and objectives. This component of CRL theory is appropriate in explaining why, and perhaps, how school principals can identify those members in the immediate community that should be more involved in the activities of the school. Burglary and theft of school property are some of the ills in the communities that compromise the quality of the provision of effective teaching and learning. Similarly, this study has indicated that already there are schools that have worked successfully with parents and ensured that study camps were held and security was provided. This is the agency of school principals that can and should be highlighted and strengthened.

The review of literature in Chapter Two has generated numerous themes that speak directly to the principals' instructional leadership and the benefits of such an approach to leadership that supports curriculum delivery. That was not just limited to the review of literature, the narratives of the participants have clearly shown that their efforts at improving Grade 12 examinations results were

consistent with instructional leadership theory broadly. The analysis of the narratives also shows that of the five domains of Weber's Five Domains of Instructional Leadership, almost all of them were reflected in the improvement plans of the participating principals. For example, they devised new mechanisms for monitoring the work of the learners and teachers. Principals mobilised support systems, working with parents and SGB members to either raise funds or setting up study camps and actually run those camps. In a nutshell, the improvement that is written about in this and the next chapter reflects instructional leadership practices that the participants adopted, and which resulted in their schools getting out the category of underperforming schools.

7.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the second level of the analysis of the narratives to address the third research sub-puzzle: *what do principals of underperforming schools believe to be practical strategies for addressing underperformance in secondary schools in the ILembe District?* The chapter discussed the theme of a reconsideration of PPM which featured in four out of six participants' narratives. Thereafter, I discussed six themes which provide the participants' suggestions that can be used to overcome underperformance in schools. Both theories that constitute the theoretical framework were injected to enhance the discussion. In the next chapter, I present and discuss the conclusions that emerge from the findings that were discussed in this and the preceding analysis chapters.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EMERGING UNDERSTANDINGS FROM THE STUDY

8.1 Introduction

The primary focus of the previous chapter was the principals' proposed solutions for enhancing the academic performance of secondary schools. It addressed the third research sub-puzzle, which posed the following question: *What do secondary school principals perceive as a solution to outwrestle underperformance in iLembe district?* The six suggested solutions to deal with underperformance can be divided into two main categories; the first three deal directly with policy issues while the other three have to do with leadership practices at school level and they are within the scope of each school principal to enact. This chapter presents the emerging understandings from the study. In presenting these understandings, I begin by summarising all the preceding chapters. This is followed by the conclusions of the study which are presented around each research sub-puzzle. Thereafter, I present the methodological and theoretical reflections on the study. The chapter then provides theoretical contributions of the study and concludes by highlighting implications of this study for future research.

8.2 Recapping the study

In this section, I present a summary of the key issues in each chapter.

<u>Chapter One</u>

Chapter One presented the introduction and background to the study. Amongst the issues highlighted include the fact that the iLembe District has a high rate of Grade 12 underperformance. The district performs so poorly because schools in the district are performing poorly. Principals of underperforming schools are under pressure to improve Grade 12 performance. The chapter presented the research problem, the main research puzzle and the research sub-puzzles. This chapter also provided the operational concepts of the study and the chapter outline. After reflecting on my own personal, practical and social justifications, I was better equipped to engage the principals regarding the phenomenon under study.

Chapter Two

This chapter presented the review of related literature. The main issues emerging from literature include learner underperformance; the causes of underperformance of schools which include the school working environment; the influence of policy misunderstanding; the teacher union influence; teachers' incompetence and bad practices and principals' poor leadership and management approaches; the pressures that principals face due to underperformance; the effects of these pressures on principals and the strategies used by principals to reduce underperformance pressures. I present discourses on the pressures that principals of underperforming schools experience in response to underperformance pressures.

Chapter Three

Identity theory of teacher education and diversity, Context-Responsive Leadership theory, and Five Domains of Instructional Leadership Model combined, constituted a theoretical framework underpinning this study. My main takeaway from this theoretical framework is that it offers a useful lens through which to view the identities of principals who lead underperforming schools. It provides a lens to understand the strategies that principals of underperforming schools design and put into action to address underperformance. It also provides a lens to understand the solutions that principals are putting forward to outwrestle underperformance in their schools.

Chapter Four

This study presented the research design and methodology. It presented the research approach and the paradigm within which the study is positioned. The chapter also presented the selection of research sites and participants, as well as methods of field text generation which involved life story interviews and artefact inquiry. The method of data analysis was explained. This chapter also addressed the trustworthiness issues and ethical considerations. There are two important items to highlight; first, the entire data generation process was time consuming, and given the principals' busy and everchanging day to day schedules, I, as the researcher, needed to be flexible and adjust my scheduled interview appointments based on their availability. Secondly, data generation process involved principals narrating their personal histories, and how they related to the manner in which they led their schools, or coped with pressures relating to underperformance of their schools in Grade 12. Closely related to

this is the fact that they took their time to generate and speak to their artefacts. That process alone is highly appreciated.

Chapter Five

This chapter presented the narratives of the participant principals. This is referred to as narrative analysis, which is the initial level of analysis. I developed plots to organise the narratives into a coherent whole. The participants' narratives were generated through life-history narrative interviews and artefact inquiry. I learnt that since the participants' narratives presented their experiences as a phenomenon, one could consider them to be true accounts of their life from their perspectives and gave meaning to their lived experiences. I also noticed that narratives are the way by which people employ their understandings of the experiences of other people. As a result, some of the experiences that the participants in the artefact inquiry sessions related to events that were not discussed during the narrative interview sessions. I also learned that the participants' artefacts served as memory triggers that also provided some insights about their present life situations.

Chapter Six

This chapter dealt with the strategies that principals of secondary employed to outwrestle underperformance pressure. These strategies were classified into commonalities of experience and particularities of experience. The former refers to those experiences that were shared by all or most participants while the latter focused on the experiences of one or a few participants. I have learnt from the narratives that the participants' tactics of dealing with underperformance were influenced by their personal and professional identities and their awareness of the contextual conditions in which their schools operated. Most of the participant's schools have improved their Grade 12 results as a result, several have even done away with the label of underperforming schools.

Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven presented the proposed solutions that the participants suggested to address underperformance of secondary schools in the iLembe District. These solutions included the reconfiguration of the Post Provisioning Model (PPM); the timing of the teachers' workshop and the principals' meetings; preventing out of field phenomena through principals' active participation in teacher recruitment; the principal must lead teaching and learning; the principal must lead teacher

professional development and strengthen school-community partnerships. My key learning in this chapter was that some solutions require structural educational changes in the Department and collaborative engagements with principals as key stakeholders while some require responsive individual principal agency. This chapter presents the conclusions that are drawn from the findings that were generated from the data analysis chapters – Chapter Five, Chapter Six and Chapter Seven.

8.3 Conclusions of the study

The main research-puzzle was about exploring the secondary school principals' lived experiences of wrestling with underperformance pressures in the iLembe District. This main research-puzzle was addressed by the three research sub-puzzles. As a result, the conclusions are drawn around each research sub-puzzle. Flowing from this, this section is presented under the following themes: Identities of principals that wrestle with underperformance pressures; Leadership strategies that are used by the principals to lead underperforming schools and proposed solutions to outwrestle underperformance in secondary schools.

8.3.1 Identities of principals that wrestle with underperformance pressures

As I re-storied the principals' narratives presented in Chapter Five, it became crystal clear to me that the participants' identity constructions began before they even started school. I learnt that the participants' experiences impacted on how they constructed their identities. I noted that the participants' leadership practices were reflective of their personal and professional identities. This is ably captured in the respective artefacts and explained by the ITTED theory. Also, I realised that the participants' identities have evolved through time in various social circumstances such as churches, schools and families, which affects how they behave as leaders. For example, most participants initially did not think about becoming teachers when they were younger. They later selected teaching because of certain early life experiences. Participants developed their identities as they attempted to make sense of their experiences. The participants' accounts indicated that they had started to handle the pressures brought by their underperforming schools even before they ascended to principalship. One participant experienced underperformance pressure as a teacher (Post Level 1educator), and he continued to experience this type of pressure after being appointed to departmental head and deputy principal posts (see Chapter Five). While serving as departmental heads, they gained experience on how to deal with Grade 12 underperformance which prepared them to handle it when serving as principals. The identities that each participant adopts explain and impose expectations on how they

should feel, think and, perhaps, behave. The participants' experiences appear to have inspired a variety of strategies, including scheduling extra classes, holding study camps, encouraging networking with nearby schools, conducting professional staff development, and closely monitoring and evaluating the school's core operations (see Chapter Six). Based on these strategies, I have learnt that the identities of the participants shaped them into strategic, forward-thinking, and resilient leaders who fought for an improvement in Grade 12 performance in their institutions. The participants are not afraid to take risks in order to put new ideas into practice and improve academic performance in their schools.

8.3.2 Leadership strategies used by the principals to lead their underperforming schools

The analysis has indicated that all the participants used a variety of strategies to lead their schools to the extent that they stopped being known as underperforming schools and become performing schools. To that end, the participants came up with various leadership strategies to deal with underperformance including setting up extra classes which embraced stakeholder synergy by bringing in parents, teachers and learners. Parents were urged to donate money so that it might be utilised to purchase food supplies for their learners because of the longer hours required. I am learning from the participants' practices that the strategies they devised needed the cooperation of the stakeholders to be successful. A principal need to communicate the school vision clearly to all the stakeholders so that it becomes a shared vision within the school community, and that direction is provided and maximum support is galvanised.

As the participants tried to ameliorate the performance of their Grade 12 learners, they became more conscious of the context of their schools and used this consciousness to create plans for enhancing performance in their underperforming schools. The participants' leadership tactics were reflective of the unique contextual realities in their schools. These contextual realities included, among others: their schools underperformed because they had not finished the curricula, some teachers had difficulties in teaching certain concepts and skills, there was a high rate of absenteeism among learners, and some teachers lacked experience in teaching Grade 12 learners (see Chapter Six). For them to devise responsive strategies to deal with underperformance, the participants had to analyse the contextual realities of their schools.

It is in this vein that the participants introduced strategies which included scheduling additional classes, hosting study camps, and encouraging networking with neighbouring schools, conducting

professional staff development, identifying and profiling all struggling learners and carefully observing and evaluating the school's core business (see Chapter Six). Given the above, principals engage and participate in contexts in ways that simultaneously influence their behaviour and shape their responses to numerous context-related factors (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). Consequently, I echo Hellinger's (2003) assertion that it is essentially useless to analyse the principal's leadership without also considering the context in which he or she functions.

8.3.3 Participants' proposed solutions to outwrestle underperformance in their secondary schools

The participants have proposed six solutions that they believed could outwrestle underperformance in their schools, and these are as follows; Reconfiguration of the Post Provisioning Norms (PPN); the timing of the teachers' workshop and principals' meetings; preventing out of field teacher appointments through principals' active participation in teacher recruitment; Principals must lead teaching and learning; Principal must lead the teacher professional development; Strengthening school-community partnership. The participants had not implemented these ideas because they thought that some of them had ramifications for policy, therefore, they needed the DBE's approval in order to put them into action. They contended that in order to put these ideas into practice, they needed support from a variety of stakeholders including the circuit management and traditional leaders. I noticed that two participants' suggestions for improving performance in Grade 12 were different from the ones they presently employ. These suggestions are that the PPN needs to be reconfigured in such a way that small schools that have lost teachers through CTT and PPN processes for example, are not adversely affected. I have explained these processes in the preceding two chapters. The timing of the teachers' workshop and principals' meetings is another suggestion made by the participants. The difference is that these two suggested solutions, are remedies that indirectly seek to address the Grade 12 underperformance by requesting that the DBE change the policy in order to improve the environment for teaching and learning. Whether or not these solutions are successful will depend on how the DBE responds to the advice. In other words, even while it might take some time for the DBE to think about these strategies, they might not be beneficial to the school at the present moment. As a result, these two ideas are not the same as practical solutions that a participant could apply in their school. I have learned that the participants now see the two proposals as obstacles to raising Grade 12 performance in their schools. I am also learning from the suggestions made by the participants that their suggested solutions are an addition to the causes of Grade 12 underperformance mentioned in the literature.

I have also noted that the participants were sometimes not aware of the complexities that are involved in changing or inserting some adjustments in policy documents. Thinking about the whole education system is not the same as thinking about what each school requires. It may well be that what each school requires is completely different from what most of the schools require. Nevertheless, I have noted that the suggestions made by the participants make sense and can assist in providing effective support to rural schools, especially those that have relatively smaller learner enrolment. In the preceding two chapters, I have reflected on these suggestions and their implications for their schools.

One of the suggested solutions put forward by the participants is the need for principals to actively participate in teacher recruiting to prevent out-of-field phenomena. This assertion implies that hiring teachers of their choice may be restricted in some way for principals. According to policy, the SGB of a school, of which the principal is a member, should be in charge of filling any teaching vacancies. The participants' accounts show that CTT in schools currently allows surplus educators to fill the majority of open positions. The participants claim that the CTT teachers bring a lot of issues and complaints, such as the excessive travel distance between their homes and the new school, poor gravel roads that damage their automobiles and the high costs of travel. As a result, they create unpredictability and uncertainty at school and, in some instances, they do shoddy work due to a lack of dedication, which they demonstrate by being absent frequently and for no good reason. This assertion leads me to believe that some principals believe that their authority to hire and fire teachers has been revoked because of the PPM policy, which permits the CTT of teachers.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, this is an area where school principals in a circuit or district can mobilise and make a collective proposal to the District Director to have a say on this matter in such a way that their schools are not adversely affected. Having said this, I have also noted that such a suggestion still belongs to a policy issue which may slightly fall outside of the mandate of school principals. This is not to say that they cannot practice their leadership and agency. It does, however, show the complexity of working within the education system, and principals being representative of the provincial Head of Department, while, simultaneously, representing local stakeholders and being expected to articulate their aspirations as well.

The participants also recommended that school-community partnerships need to be strengthened, that the principal has to take the lead in staff development and teaching and learning, and that there is a need to deepen those relationships. There is nothing legally prohibiting a principal from employing

these strategies because they are the agency of the principal. However, other participants admitted that they had no idea how to put these concepts into practice in their classrooms. When it comes to the first suggestion, for instance, some people complain that every month, thieves break into and vandalise their schools and steel electrical wires, which they then sell to businesses that acquire scrap metal. They steal photocopiers, steal meals intended for learners, steal school materials, and destroy books. Even though schools had reported these incidents to the police, and actually opened cases for investigation, very little had been achieved through such processes. The data in the form of narratives from the participants indicates that nobody has been detained. Therefore, school-community partnerships, according to the participants, have not worked in any effective manner. It appeared that members of the communities had not been cooperative despite their attempts at a range of community engagement initiatives to address issues relating to the school. The participants claimed that they had attempted various methods but have been unsuccessful in putting the other two suggestions into practice. They were thus, advocating that when these ideas are put into practice, stakeholders including circuit managers and traditional leaders must come to their aid. I have learned that some principals of struggling schools deal with problems that seem straightforward to those outside their roles. They asserted that, despite trying various strategies to overcome these obstacles, they have largely been unsuccessful. They say that they need someone to listen to them and help them figure things out, but unfortunately for them, they end up with individuals who makes things difficult by criticising them.

In addition, I noted that the participants acknowledged the role that traditional leaders play or can play in strengthening school-community partnerships. Unfortunately, it does not appear that these participants sufficiently capitalised on this community capital, and the influence that they have on the communities under their care. In some ways, I am learning that although Context-Responsive Leadership theory does explain how leaders who demonstrate acute awareness of the local environment work, its application in this study suggests mixed fortunes. I say this mainly because, it is clear that the participants demonstrated awareness of the environment around their schools. They could organise study camps that were actively supported by the local stakeholders; for instance, SGB members provided security for learners and teachers who organised and conducted such camps. On the other hand, the role and influence of traditional leaders does not seem to have been sufficiently exploited by the participants in the study. That may be the reason they relied on the circuit managers and the district director to assist them establish and strengthen school-community partnerships This is an issue that calls for them to play an agency role in facilitating.

8.4 Reflections of the study

In this section, I provide the theoretical and methodological reflections of this study.

8.4.1 Theoretical reflections

Three theories—ITTED by Olson (2012), CRL theory by Bredeson et al. (2008), and Five Domains of Instructional Leadership by Webber (1996) —made up the theoretical framework for this study. To gain a deeper understanding of the participants' identities, I drew on ITTED theory. The three constructs of ITTED namely identity theory, teacher education and diversity, teacher identity, and the formation of professional and self-identity are consistent with elements like commitment to working overtime without expecting more compensation. In a nutshell, this theory enabled me to understand how the participants constructed their identities and also why they may have chosen the artefacts that they produced. My interactions with them enabled them to share their views about who they are and how they feel about such identities.

I also applied CRL theory to comprehend how the contexts impacted the leadership approaches and remedies that the participants currently use to address underperformance in their schools. I also used CRL to comprehend solutions that participants are also suggesting addressing underperformance pressures in their schools. The CRL idea gave me a fresh perspective to see how the participants responded to situations brought forth by their schools' poor performance. The CRL theory aims to create a bridge of understanding about how leaders' practices and behaviours intersect when they are dealing with leadership processes in unfavourable contexts and how the participants created and put into practice leadership strategies to improve Grade 12 performances in their schools.

The theoretical lens allowed me to comprehend the participants' leadership styles, identities, and the remedies they proposed to address the underperformance of Grade 12 learners in their respective schools. While the ITTED offers a lens through which to grasp the identities of the participants, one of its components claims that it is also a conceptual instrument that can be utilised to comprehend teachers' capacities for adaptation in response to diverse situations and their pedagogical practises (Olsen, 2012). As a result, it gave me a lens through which to view how the participants created and reinvented their identities, which gave rise to the techniques they employ to deal with the poor performance of Grade 12 learners in their schools. CRL theory, aids in understanding how leaders interact with followers in ways that influence a leader's practices while also changing or reacting to

various context-specific factors (Bredeson & Klar, 2008). Strategies that principals adopted to reverse their schools' poor performance were consistent with the Five Domains of Instructional Leadership Model as advocated by Weber (1996). I was able to comprehend the participants' leadership styles, as well as the solutions they offered to address underperformance in their schools because to this framework.

8.4.2 Methodological reflections

This study used narrative inquiry as a methodology to understand the participants' experiences. It used narrative interviews and artefact inquiry to produce rich field texts regarding the participants' personal and professional lived experiences. The participants did not give their memories in chronological sequence, and some would only touch the surface. So, I had to keep asking questions to understand the cohesive whole. Some participants deviated from the questions at hand. To keep them focused, I strategically nudged them back in the right direction. The volume of field text that was produced in the process intimidated me. The quantity of pages in the subsequent interview transcripts also puzzled me. Through this experience, I learnt that the participants in the life story interviews were more at ease because the sessions more closely resembled casual chats. The advantages of adopting narrative inquiry are that it enabled me to comprehend the participants' experiences as a phenomenon that was retold since their stories represented life itself and a vehicle for learning, growth, and transformation.

In contrast to a case study technique, where the data is generated in a controlled atmosphere, narrative inquiry allowed me to generate massive field texts told via the experience of the participants in a free and unfettered environment. I was able to understand the data that was produced and make deductions about the participants' intricate sense-making processes thanks to the narrative inquiry. I was able to simultaneously explore temporality, sociality and place thanks to the narrative inquiry. The flexibility of the narrative inquiry allowed my participants to convey their perspectives in regard to their own experiences about underperformance pressures, which was beneficial for this study. Before using artefact inquiry to generate data with my participants, I used my own artefact with all of them to demonstrate how to tell a story using an artefact. Mixed narratives, pleasant and unpleasant, were elicited by the participants' artefacts, some of which came from personal and others from professional experiences. Artefacts elicited both new narratives and what has been addressed in the narrative interviews. Through artefacts, participants' identities reflected who they have been and who they are right now.

The only drawback I noticed with this inquiry was that some participants had trouble choosing the right artefact since they were not sure, among other things, if it could capture what they wanted it to capture in regard to this study. Some participants brought multiple artefacts, and they questioned me about which one they could use. I advised them to select the option they felt would most aid in their ability to recall their past.

I can comprehend the meanings of the participants' culture and history thanks to the artefacts. The artefact afforded the participants the opportunity to speak out loud about their feelings around underperformance pressures. The participants could demonstrate their meaning making activities by using an artefact to arouse memories of past experiences. The first, second, and third research sub-puzzles were addressed by the participants' stories using artefacts. The chosen artefacts served as inspiration for each participant to tell fascinating stories. The artefacts' deeper significance was explored from both personal and social perspectives. Since most participants had a strong emotional connection to the artefact they picked, they reflected on it and gave it significance to communicate their lived experiences. By allowing the participants to jump back and forth in time as they remembered the treasures that are hidden in their memories, the artefact also helped me to realise that there was reflection occurring during the dialogue. As the conversations became more reflective, they also enabled me to notice that there were internal feelings and thoughts that were prompted. I also noticed that these were feelings that were connected to the selected objects in both positive and negative ways because the dialogues expressed both positive and negative connotations.

8.5 Theoretical contributions of the study

This section discusses the theoretical and methodological contributions of this study.

8.5.1 Theoretical contributions of the study: How principals wrestle with underperformance pressures

Theoretical contributions of this study specifically relate to the theoretical constructs which explains how principals in this study wrestled with underperformance pressures. Drawing from the study's findings, I propose what I call a "Multi-stage Underperformance Pressure Coping Mechanism (MUPCM)" Model as a theoretical construct that captures the essence of their strategies of wrestling with underperformance pressures. This model is outlined below.

8.5.2 Multi-stage Underperformance Pressure Coping Mechanism (MUPPM) Model

I thought it prudent to begin the discussion of this model by giving a short background to the need for the study and the model. In South Africa, schools that obtain less than 65% in the Senior Certificate examination, also known as Grade 12, are categorised as underperforming schools or T60 schools. This categorisation invites both the public and the DBE's attention as well as indicating external intervention by the provincial education departments' officials. This attention and external intervention exert immense pressure on the affected schools as they are expected to turn around their plight regarding performance in Grade 12. The DBE has its own underperformance turnaround strategy that schools should implement in order to escape the underperformance zone. It is this reality and being classified as an underperforming school that gives birth to underperformance pressure for the principals of the affected schools. For these principals, it becomes a relentless quest to improve the Grade 12 results. On a day-to-day basis, they practically wrestle with underperformance pressures. Given the above submission, in essence, these principals contend with pressure emanating from external context, intra-school context, and intra-principal context.

Principals of underperforming schools go through a dynamic, multi-stage, underperformance pressure journey. Initially, principals respond to this underperformance pressure because, by policy, they are obliged to, but they are also full of resentment and pessimism about it. They resent what they consider to be parachuted external interventions from the department, and they feel that they cannot bring about any substantial changes since they are not grounded in their unique school realities. On the other hand, the department exerts unwavering and unrelenting pressure on the underperforming secondary school principals to change their underperformance trajectory. It is this unrelenting pressure from the department through the district and circuit management officials that gradually drives these principals to the transition stage in terms of how they take underperformance pressure. This constitutes the first stage of this multi-stage underperformance pressure coping mechanism model. It is at this stage that they realise that they cannot escape the pressure of the department; it remains with them.

The transition stage (second stage) embraces intra-principal change. At this point, the principals realise that they cannot wish away the pressure exerted by the DBE, and neither can they change or avoid it, at least until they are out of the underperformance zone. Consequently, if they cannot change that reality, the only option is to change themselves (intra-principal change). This change involves changing how they receive and deal with underperformance pressure, embracing the spirit of the pressure exerted by the department, and thereby, subsequently, embracing the turnaround efforts.

Embracing and adopting turnaround strategies constitutes the third stage of this model. This is the ultimate stage since, at this point, principals, together with other stakeholders, initiate strategies to outwrestle underperformance. Other than the strategies that are imposed by the DBE, principals devise their own strategies that respond to their unique school contexts, and they take ownership of them. This is called assimilation. This appears to have worked since these schools have improved in the 2022 Senior Certificate examinations and are out of the underperformance zone. For instance, Sunshine Secondary School obtained a 95.9% pass rate in 2021 and 88.7% in 2022; Mayemaye Secondary School achieved a 92.9% pass rate in 2021 and 100% in 2022; Turfloop Secondary School obtained a 59.6% pass rate in 2021 and 76.9% in 2022; Rise Secondary School achieved a 68.3% pass rate in 2021 and 81% in 2022; Oxford Secondary School obtained an 84.2% pass rate in 2021 and 87.5% in 2022; and Dabula Secondary School scored a 75% pass rate in 2021 and 96.8% in 2022. How the principals dealt with underperformance is referred to as the "Multi-stage Underperformance Pressure Coping Mechanism (MUPCM). The figure below summarises this model.

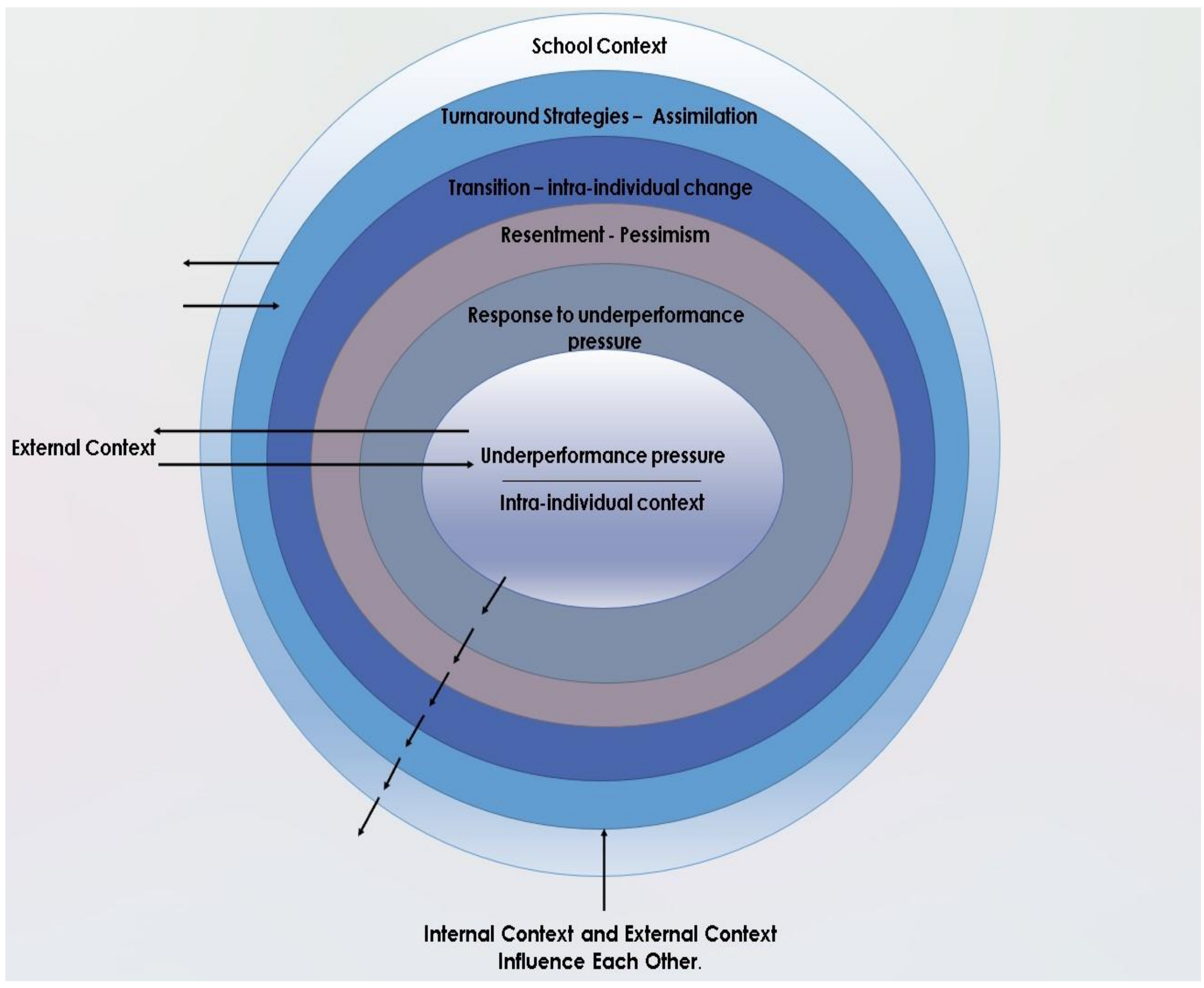

Figure: 8.1 MUPCM Model

8.5.3 A summary for this model

The Multi-stage Underperformance Pressure Coping Mechanism (MUPCM) is a model used to deal with underperformance pressures. It involves intra-principal change, adopting turnaround strategies, and assimilation. Schools have improved in the 2022 Senior Certificate examinations and are out of the underperformance zone, such as Sunshine Secondary School, Mayemaye Secondary School, Turfloop Secondary School, Rise Secondary School, Oxford Secondary School, and Dabula Secondary School. The dearth of studies that cover the principals' experiences of coping with underperformance pressures, which was highlighted as a gap in the literature, led to the need for this study and the model. By filling the existing gap in the literature, MUPCM can be seen as a new body of information that adds to the body of knowledge already available on dealing with underperformance pressures. MUPCM offers a new viewpoint on the management of underperforming schools by observing that their principals go through multi-stages as they wrestle with the underperformance pressures in their schools. This construct is supported by the evidence that the schools that were at the underperforming zone have moved out of this zone. All the successes can be attributed to the approaches they adopted to wrestle underperformance and the pressures that went with such pressures. The model only serves as a tool to help us as readers and researchers understand and explain how the participating school principals in the study managed to cope with underperformance pressures. What we have also learned from this model is that the participants managed to turn around the situation that was undesirable to a positive one.

8.5.4 Implications of my study for further research

The study reported in this thesis is qualitative and adopted a narrative inquiry as a methodology. As a narrative study involving only six school principals, its findings cannot provide a broad picture about how principals wrestle with underperformance pressures, yet there are many principals who experience this kind of pressures nationally. In addition, this study has produced a model which captures how principals in the study wrestle with underperformance pressures. Given this scenario, a replication of this study might shed additional light onto how some principals handle this phenomenon. Drawing from this study, other scholars may conduct large-scale research which can produce results that are generalisable across the province or even across the country.

8.6 Conclusion

The thesis on understanding how principals of underperforming secondary schools in the iLembe District wrestle with underperformance has come to an end. The study has assisted me grow in terms of understanding what they were going through emotionally and otherwise as they wrestled with the problem. This study has highlighted some suggestions for improving Grade 12 performance, particularly, in some rural communities where this study was conducted. More importantly, this study has developed a model that I think better describes how some school principals wrestle with underperformance pressures.

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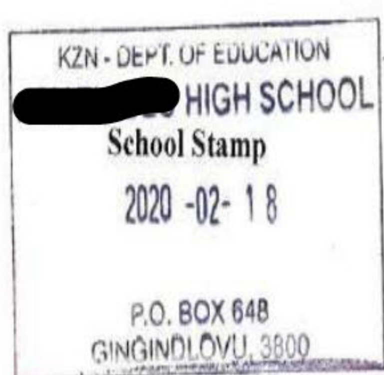
Appendix A – Declaration by The Participants

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SECTION FOR CONSENT OF PARTICIPATION

I ______________________________ (Full names of the participant) hereby confirm that I understand the nature and the purpose of the study titled 'wresting the underperformance pressures: narratives of six secondary school principals in Ilembe District'. I agree to participate in this study. I am also fully aware that I have a right to withdraw from the study at any point if I wish to do so, without any negative or undesirable consequences. I am also aware that there are neither any foreseeable direct benefits nor direct risk associated with my participation in this study. I therefore understand the content of this letter fully, and **I** do GIVE **CONSENT**/ ~~**DO NOT GIVE CONSENT**~~ for the interviews to be digitally recorded.

______________________ 18/02/2020

Signature **Date**



Appendix A – Declaration by The Participants

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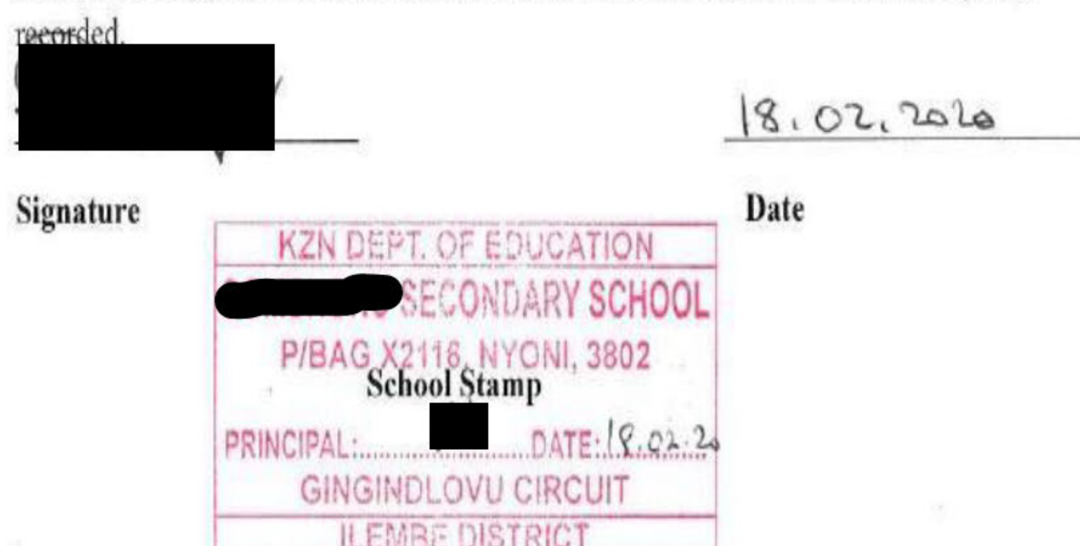


18.02.2020

Signature **Date**

KZN DEPT. OF EDUCATION
SECONDARY SCHOOL
P/BAG X2116, NYONI, 3802
School Stamp
PRINCIPAL:............ DATE: 18.02.20
GINGINDLOVU CIRCUIT
ILEMBE DISTRICT

Appendix A – Declaration by The Participants

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SECTION FOR CONSENT OF PARTICIPATION

I ______________________ (Full names of the participant) hereby confirm that I understand the nature and the purpose of the study titled 'wresting the underperformance pressures: narratives of six secondary school principals in Ilembe District'. I agree to participate in this study. I am also fully aware that I have a right to withdraw from the study at any point if I wish to do so, without any negative or undesirable consequences. I am also aware that there are neither any foreseeable direct benefits nor direct risk associated with my participation in this study. I therefore understand the content of this letter fully, and **I** do GIVE **CONSENT/** ~~**DO NOT GIVE CONSENT**~~ for the interviews to be digitally recorded.

______________ 18/02/2020

Signature **Date**

ISIFUNDAZWE SAKWAZULU-NATAL
HIGH SCHOOL
School Stamp
2020 -02- 18
PO BOX 279 GINGINDLOVU 3800
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Appendix A – Declaration by The Participants

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SECTION FOR CONSENT OF PARTICIPATION

I ________________________ (Full names of the participant) hereby confirm that I understand the nature and the purpose of the study titled 'wresting the underperformance pressures: narratives of six secondary school principals in Ilembe District'. I agree to participate in this study. I am also fully aware that I have a right to withdraw from the study at any point if I wish to do so, without any negative or undesirable consequences. I am also aware that there are neither any foreseeable direct benefits nor direct risk associated with my participation in this study. I therefore understand the content of this letter fully, and I do GIVE **CONSENT/** ~~**DO NOT GIVE CONSENT**~~ for the interviews to be digitally recorded.

________________ 19/02/2020

Signature **Date**

KZN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
HIGH SCHOOL
2020-02-19
P.O. BOX 4027, SUNDUMBILI 4401
CELL No: 083 462 4726

School Stamp

Appendix A – Declaration by The Participants

I ______________________________ (Full names of the participant) hereby confirm that I understand the nature and the purpose of the study titled 'wresting the underperformance pressures: narratives of six secondary school principals in Ilembe District'. I agree to participate in this study. I am also fully aware that I have a right to withdraw from the study at any point if I wish to do so, without any negative or undesirable consequences. I am also aware that there are neither any foreseeable direct benefits nor direct risk associated with my participation in this study. I therefore understand the content of this letter fully, and I do GIVE **CONSENT**/ ~~**DO NOT GIVE CONSENT**~~ for the interviews to be digitally recorded.

______________________ 2020 - 02 - 24

Signature **Date**

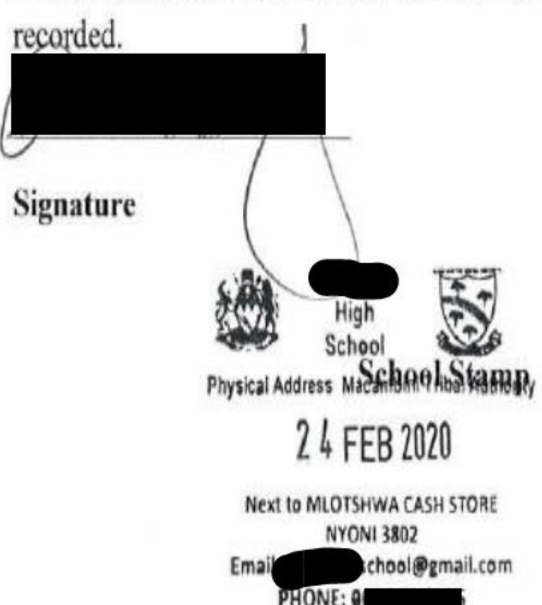
SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL
PRIVATE BAG X2103 NYONI 3802
24 FEB 2020
LOWER TUGELA CIRCUIT
ILEMBE DISTRICT

School Stamp

Appendix A – Declaration by The Participants

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SECTION FOR CONSENT OF PARTICIPATION

I ______________________ (Full names of the participant) hereby confirm that I understand the nature and the purpose of the study titled 'wresting the underperformance pressures: narratives of six secondary school principals in Ilembe District'. I agree to participate in this study. I am also fully aware that I have a right to withdraw from the study at any point if I wish to do so, without any negative or undesirable consequences. I am also aware that there are neither any foreseeable direct benefits nor direct risk associated with my participation in this study. I therefore understand the content of this letter fully, and I do GIVE **CONSENT/** ~~**DO NOT GIVE CONSENT** for~~ the interviews to be digitally recorded.



Signature

2020/02/24

Date

Appendix B - Letter to The Department of Education Requesting Permission to Conduct Research in KwaZulu - Natal Schools

P. O Box 945

Gingindlovu

3800

28 May 2020

Attention to: The Superintended General
Department of Education
Province of KwaZulu-Natal
Private Bag X9137
Pietermaritzburg
3201

Dear Sir

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Ishmael Chibelihle Simelane is my name, and I'm a PHD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Edgewood Campus in the School of Education. I must perform research in order to complete my degree. I sincerely ask your permission to conduct study in six secondary schools in the Ilembe District that are under your control. **Wrestling with Underperformance Pressures: Narratives of Six Secondary School Principals in Ilembe District is the title of my study.** This study aims to investigate how secondary school principals who are dealing with underperformance deal with the strain that comes with it. The secondary school principals will be the main subject of the study. Unstructured interviews and an artefact inquiry with the principal will be used in the study. At least three visits will be made to the participants to gather data. Each data generation session will be voice recorded. Each participant will be requested to give or not a consent to this. The participant will be given a platform to share their biagraphies on the first day in an unstructured interview that could run up to an hour, depending on how long the biography is. The participants will have two opportunities to share their experiences managing underperforming schools: first, on the second day, they will have a chance to do so in an

unstructured interview; second, they will have a chance to do so using objects called artefacts that will bring back memories. Pseudonyms rather than real names will be used in responses, which will be handled confidentially. In advance of the interviews, participants will be contacted, and they will have been specifically chosen to take part in the study. The study will always be voluntary, so participants are free to leave at any time and for any reason they want without facing any consequences.

If you have any inquiries or concerns, feel free to get in touch with me, my supervisors, or the UKZN Research Office:

Supervisor: Prof TT Bhengu

Tel. 031-2603534 (office)

E-mail: bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za.

UKZN Research Office

Mariette Snayman

HSSREC-Ethics

Tel: 0312608350

E-mail: snymanm@ukzn.ac.za

My contact number:

E-mail:

Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Thanking you in advance

Yours sincerely

IC Simelane

Appendix C – Letter Requesting Permission from Principals for Conducting Research in their Schools

P.O. Box 948

Gingindlovu

3800

11 June 2020

The Principal

Ilembe District

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

My name is Ishmael Chibelihle Simelane, a PhD student in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). As part of my degree fulfilment, I am required to conduct research. I therefore kindly seek permission to conduct this research at your school. **Wrestling with Underperformance Pressures: Narratives of Six Secondary School Principals in Ilembe District is the title of my study**. This study aims to investigate how secondary school principals who are dealing with underperformance deal with the strain that comes with it. The secondary school principals will be the main subject of the study. Unstructured interviews and an artefact inquiry with the principal will be used in the study. At least three visits will be made to the participants to gather data. Each data generation session will be voice recorded. The participants will be requested to give or not give a consent to this. The participant will be given a platform to share their biagraphies on the first day in an unstructured interview that could run up to an hour, depending on how long the biography is. The participants will have two opportunities to share their experiences managing underperforming schools: first, on the second day, they will have a chance to do so in an unstructured interview; second, they will have a chance to do so using objects called artefacts that will bring back memories. Pseudonyms rather than real names will be used in responses, which will be handled confidentially. In advance of the interviews, participants

will be contacted, and they will have been specifically chosen to take part in the study. The study will always be voluntary, so participants are free to leave at any time and for any reason they want without facing any consequences.

Please be advised that:

- No participant in this study will receive any financial gain as a result of their participation.
- No one will ever learn your identity, either during or after the reporting process.
- All comments, findings, and inspected documents will be handled in strict confidence.
- The names of the individuals and the school will be represented using pseudonyms.
- Participation will always be optional, so participants are free to leave the study whenever they want, for any reason, and without facing any consequences.
- Participants in this study were chosen on purpose, and they will be notified well in advance of the interview.
- In order to help me focus on the real interviews, the voice recordings of the interviews will be made.
- The interviews shall be voice-recorded to assist me in concentrating on the actual interviews.

If you have any questions or concerns, you can get in touch with me, my supervisors, or the Research Office.

You may contact my supervisors, the Research Office or me should you have any queries or questions: **Supervisors:**

Prof TT Bhengu
Tel. 031-2603534 (office) Tel. 031-2601870 (office)

E-mail: bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za.

Appendix C – Letter Requesting Permission from Principals for Conducting Research in their Schools

UKZN Research Office

HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

My contact numbers

E-mail: m

Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated

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Appendix D Letter Requesting the Principals to Participate in Research

Gingindlovu

3800

20 October 2019

The Principal

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH

I am Ishmael Chibelihle Simelane. I am conducting a research as a requirement at the University of KwaZulu-Natal towards a degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The title of the research is 'wrestling underperformance pressures: Narratives of six secondary schools in Ilembe District'. The objectives of the study are:

- To determine from principals' stories, the identities of the principals that experience underperformance pressures.
- To find out how the secondary school principals wrestle with underperformance pressures in iLembe district
- To find out from the stories of the principals their perceptions which they regard as solutions to outwrestle underperformance in Ilembe District.

This study will focus on six secondary schools that have wrestled with underperformance in Ilembe District. This letter intends to elucidate the purpose of this study and to request your participation in the study. Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your input will not be attributed to you in person, but will be reported only as a population member opinion.
- The interview may last for only about one and half hour and may be split into two sessions depending on your preference
- Any information given by you may not be used against you, and the generated data will be used for the purpose of this research only.
- The generated data will be secured in storage and will be destroyed after five years.
- You have a choice to participate, or not to participate, or stop to participate in the research. You will not be penalised for taking such a decision.
- Your involvement in this study will be purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you agree to be interviewed, kindly indicate if you are willing or you are not willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

Equipment	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

Appendix D Letter Requesting the Principals to Participate in Research

Photographic equipment		
Video equipment		

I can be contacted at:

My Supervisor is Professor T.T. Bhengu who is located at the school of Education in the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He can be contacted at:

Email: bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za

Phone: 031-2603461

I hope that this letter will find your favourable consideration, I also thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely

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Jshmael Simelane

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Appendix E - DATA GENERATION PLAN

DATA GENERATION PLAN

Data will be generated through three methods, namely: narrative interviews, collage inquiry, and artefact inquiry. On the first day, session one will be unstructured interview and second session will be a collage inquiry with each participant. On day two, the first session will be another unstructured interview and second session will be an artefact inquiry.

Day one

Session one: Life Story Interview (Unstructured) Participants will be expected to freely narrate stories of their early life childhood experiences leading up to their decisions to pursue roles in principalship. These may include:

- Descriptions of their experiences of growing up
- Childhood memories
- Experiences of attending school
- Experiences of attending colleges/universities

Session Two: Collage Inquiry

- Participants will be provided with material such as charts, magazines, newspapers, scissors and glue stick to complete these activities.
- Participants will be expected to tell their work experiences triggered by the pictures that they have put in the collage.

Day Two

Session Three: Life Story Interview (Unstructured): Participants will be requested to tell their stories of experience as principals of underperforming schools. This may include:

- What are the factors that contribute to the creation of pressures for principals of the underperforming schools in Ilembe District?
- What are the effects of underperformance pressures on principals' instructional leadership, health, social life, and on their wellbeing?
- What are the strategies that principals use in managing underperformance pressures?

Session Four: Artefacts Inquiry: Each participant will be asked to identify one object or artefact that triggers some memories of experiences in the principalship position. This may include:

Appendix E - DATA GENERATION PLAN

- The objects that bring into the mind the memories of experiences and the way in which they share the act of making sense about the underperformance of schools.
- What the artefacts could trigger in the participants' remembrance of feelings and thoughts which occurred when they were threatened due to underperformance of their schools.

Appendix F

FIELD REFLECTION

Date	Name of the participant	Purpose of the session	My reflection
13-06-2020	Paul Smith	For the purpose of creating biographical stories about the participant	Paul talked about his upbringing and how difficult the teachertraining programme was. He displayed great bravery by being candid and honest about his painful events.
19-06-2020	Paul Smith	To generate stories about leading an underperforming school	Paul received harsh criticism from the neighbourhood for the underwhelming performance of his 12th-grade learners. He works very hard to raise the school's performance.
20-06-2020	Jabu Zuma	To generate biographical stories of the participant	Jabu told about her happy memories of her early years, when her devoted father looked after her.
23-06-2020	Stambu Moroka	To generate a biographical story about the participant	Mr Moroka is a skilled storyteller who has vivid memories of his formative years. He emphasised the traumatic events he went through while trying to finish school with his look.
24-06-2020	Jane Govender	To generate biographical stories of the participant	Jane speaks carefully as she recounts her past experiences. She wants to see as much of it as possible. She recalls how her parents encouraged her to pursue a career as a teacher.

26-06-2020	Jabu Zuma	To generate narratives about how she leads and underperforming school	Miss Zuma speaks honestly about the sacrifices she made and the contributions she made to help her Grade 12 students do better. Her story demonstrates that she is a strong leader.
29-06-20	Stambu Moroka	To generate stories about how the participant led underperforming school	Mr Moroka conveys his difficult life as the principal of a failing school by his face. He was never successful. He stated that he was currently on an extended leave of absence in order to escape the community's outrage over the school's poor performance.
02-07-2020	Jane Govender	To generate stories about how the participant led her underperforming school	The story given by Jane Govender was meticulously told. She spoke about each encounter while it was happening and was quite steady throughout. Her account indicated that she wished to leave the group of failing schools.
03-07-2020	Jackson McDonalds	To generate biographical narrative of the participant	Jackson's account of his upbringing was fascinating. He emphasised and conveyed his feelings by varying his voice, facial expression, and usage of his hands.
05-07-2020	Dr Simangaliso Sikhakhane	To generate biographical stories of the participant	Dr Sikhakhane was quite composed as he discussed how his grandmother, who she described as having influenced him to become a music teacher, guided him as he grew up.

08-07-2020	Jackson McDonalds	To generate stories of the participant participant's experiences in leading underperforming school	The way Mr McDonalds described his leadership experiences was outstanding, and he went into great detail about how he felt about going through accountability sessions. Additionally, he described the steps he took to address underperformance at his institution.
11-07-2020	Dr Simangaliso Sikhakhane	To generate the participant's narrative about his experiences of leading the underperforming school	The participant spoke strongly about his leadership of the struggling school. He conveyed both the positive and negative events through his face expression.
13-07-2020	Paul Smith	Artefact inquiry	It became easy for Mr Smith to do this task. He chose a photo of his mother nursing him when he was a newborn. He explained how the image had an impact on and motivated him to solve the Grade 12 class's academic underachievement at his school.
15-07-2020	Jackson McDonalds	Object inquiry	To serve as artefacts, Mr McDonald brought a variety of items. I asked him to choose one. When I questioned him about why he chose it, he replied that it brought back memories of his time as his school's principal. He gave more information on how he handled pressure for underperformance at

			his school than he did in the unstructured interview.
17-07-2020	Jabu Zuma	Object inquiry	Miss Zuma brought a photo of her father and a picture of her late father's car, but she was unsure of the item she would use as her relic. I asked her to decide on the item she was going to utilise in the end. She chose her father's picture as the final choice. She used the image to explain how her father's background as a cab driver had helped her deal with pressure to achieve well at school.
18-07-2020	Samson Moroka	Artefact inquiry	Mr Moroka shared a photograph of the mealie-grinding stone his family used at their property. The stone served as a constant reminder that he had developed strength and fortitude in response to the difficulties caused by underperformance. He felt like a stone as a result. The stone served as a constant reminder to him that it could withstand tremendous pressure from numerous individuals who could grind various meals on it.
20-07-2020	Dr Simangaliso Sikhakhane	Object inquiry	The large tree behind Dr Sikhakhane's office served as an object. He claimed that the tree made him think of the anguish he went through when the lawmakers came to visit. They were made to

			answer for the poor performance of their school under that tree. The circuit manager then calls them there under that tree if he goes to see them. He has made it common practise to hold SMT and staff meetings. The tree brought to mind a variety of situations from his time as a leader at a failing school. He brought up several topics during the artefacts inquiry that he did not bring up during the initial unstructured questioning.
25=07-2020	Jane Govender	Object inquiry	Miss Govender's artefact was a radio. While working as an SRC member at the campus radio station, she connected her leadership techniques to what goes on in the radio industry. She claims that the radio motivated her to pursue a career in management, and as a result, she uses what she hears on the radio to develop and implement methods to address the underperformance of Grade 12 students at her school.

Appendix G – Permission to Conduct Research in The KZN DOE Schools

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma | Tel: 033 392 1063 | Ref.:2/4/8/4006

Mr Ishmael Chibelihle Simelane
P.O. Box 948
GINGINDLOVU
3800

Dear Mr Simelane

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"WRESTLING UNDERPERFORMANCE: NARRATIVES OF SIX SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN ILEMBE"**, 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 15 November 2019 to 10 January 2022.
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 below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

Dr. EV Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 15 November 2019

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
...Championing Quality Education - Creating and Securing a Brighter Futu

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Facebook: KZNDOE....Twitter: @DBE_KZN....Instagram: kzn_education....Youtube:kzndoe

Appendix H - Turnitin Certificate

Ishmael Chibelihle Simelane First Draft

ORIGINALITY REPORT

9%	8%	2%	%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	2%
2	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	1%