UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

From moving schools to sinking schools: Narratives of stakeholders of schools in decline

By

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Supervisor: Dr SB Blose

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DECLARATION

I, Ndumiso Quincy Khuzwayo declare that:

(i) The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated is my original work.

(ii) This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

(iii) This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.

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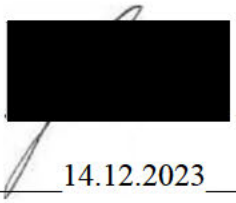
Signature: 

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ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
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27 October 2020

Mr Ndumiso Quincy Khuzwayo (209512741)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Khuzwayo,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00001758/2020
Project title: From moving schools to sinking schools: Narratives of stakeholders of schools in decline
Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 12 August 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** on the following condition:

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 27 October 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,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
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Finally, I acknowledge Yolanda Adams's song "In the midst of it all" for keeping me motivated:

I've come through many hard trials
Through temptations on every hand
Though Satan's tried to stop me
And to place my feet on sinking sand
Through the pain and all of my sorrows
Through the tears and all my fears
The Lord was there to keep me
For He's kept me in the midst of it all

Not because I've been so faithful
Not because I've always obeyed
No it's not because I trusted Him
To be with me all of the way
But it's because He loves me so dearly
He was there to answer my calls
He was there always to protect me
For He's kept me in the midst of it all

I've come through many hard trials
Through temptations on every hand
Though Satan's tried to stop me
And to place my feet on sinking sand

But Jesus loves me dearly
He was there to answer my calls
He was there always to protect me
For He’s kept me in the midst of it all
For He’s kept me in the midst of it all

No He’s never left me
And He’s never let me fall
Oh yes He will protect you For He’s kept me in the midst of it all
For He’s kept me in the midst of it all

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my mother, Thembisile Khuzwayo, for being a positive influence in my life. I love you mom.

ABSTRACT

There is a significant amount of research focusing on ways to improve schools; however, this research does not seem to make attempts to understand the causes of the decline in schools. This results in a scarcity of literature regarding the causes of school decline. Some of the reasons for this scarcity could be the sensitivity of this phenomenon, and unwillingness of declining schools to expose themselves to scrutiny. The study reported in this thesis attempted to hold a bull by its horn through engaging with stakeholders of these schools. The study employed social realism and general systems theories to understand the structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms influencing school decline, and also to explore how stakeholders could imagine schools in decline as moving schools. The theoretical framework of the study was therefore made up of these two theories (Archer's social realism theory and general systems theory). Methodologically, the study employed narrative inquiry. The study targeted five secondary schools in the Umlazi District of KwaZulu-Natal. Two stakeholders per school were purposively selected to participate in the study. Narrative interviews and artefact inquiry were used to generate field texts (data). Field text analysis occurred at two levels: narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. The study revealed multiple mechanisms (structural, cultural and agential) that influence decline in the sampled schools. These include, but are not limited to, stakeholder role confusion, toxic behaviours dominating the school culture, and the constrained agency of teachers and principals. The study concluded that schools in decline cannot turn themselves around or rescue themselves from decline but require external intervention that is multi-pronged to address different causes of decline. This intervention may come from stakeholders such as the SGB foundation, community stakeholders, well-performing schools, and subject advisors. The study then produced a model for intervention for schools in decline. This model sets out forms of external intervention that are desired by stakeholders in declining schools and is termed the internally desired external intervention model (IDEI).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS / ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CASS	Continuous assessment
CEO	Chief executive officer
DH	Departmental head
DBE	Department of Basic Education
EMS	Economic and Management Sciences
FET	Further education and training
HIV / AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HSSREC	Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
PAT	Practical assessment task
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate
PLC	Professional learning community
PPN	Post provisioning norm
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Union
SAPS	South African Police Services
SASA	South African Schools Act

SGB	School governing body
SMT	School management team
UCT	University of Cape Town
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

School decline is the steady downwards spiral that schools experience when a complex collection of forces interacts with negative and unresolved outcomes (Hawk, 2008). Taking this idea further, decline in schools and in other organisations might be described as a strange and interesting phenomenon in that, despite the lack of knowledge about it, few people seem to want to know about it; (Brooks, 2018; Carmeli & Sheaffer, 2009; Duke, 2008; Hochbein, 2011). Within the South African context, the literature tends to focus on dysfunctional schools and how they can enhance academic performance (Christie et al., 2007; Kamper, 2008; Prew, 2007) rather than the understanding of school decline. Therefore, this study intended to explore the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline. In this chapter, firstly, I commence by providing a background to the study and the research problem. Secondly, I provide a justification for conducting this study. Thirdly, I discuss the significance of the study and present the research puzzles that drove the study. Fourthly, I provide a clarification of key concepts that are used in the study. Finally, I present the study's chapter overview.

1.2 Background to the study

South Africa has a history in which apartheid education was used as a tool to divide society as it constructed certain types of identities among learners (Msila, 2007). Under apartheid education, schools were divided according to race, and education enhanced the divisions in society. These divisions exacerbated the inequalities of a divided society. Gumede (2012) explains that black people were subjected to the Bantu education system, which prevented them from attaining the skills necessary to perform work. However, this came to end when South Africa became a democratic society in 1994. The end to apartheid education was celebrated when schools in South Africa opened their doors to learners of all races. There was optimism that education quality would

be enhanced, since the markets were now going to exercise their power as decision-makers (Msila, 2005). There was also hope that, once apartheid was abolished, all schools would be able to meet international standards (Msila, 2005). In addition, South Africa's democratic dispensation in the 1990s made individuals aware of their right to choose among several options in society. Among these was the right of parents to choose schools with high standards rather than low-quality schools which are associated with a decline in academic performance (Msila, 2005). As a result, a growing percentage of black parents have been avoiding historically black schools by enrolling their children in historically white schools, which offer education of a high standard (Msila, 2005).

The historically black schools are in South African townships and rural areas, and the majority of learners that go to these schools do not receive education of high quality, due to the decline in the culture of teaching and learning (Thaba-Nkadimene, 2020). Along with this, the poor material provisioning of these schools, as well as poverty and disruption in black communities, have contributed to the low value placed on education (Christie, 1998). These contextual challenges have not gone away despite the replacement of the apartheid government with a new democratic government. For instance, the working conditions in some of the historical black schools are still deplorable, the culture of teaching and learning is toxic, teachers have an excessive workload, and the environmental factors are disheartening (Thaba-Nkadimene, 2020). Furthermore, some of these schools are faced with complexities such as overcrowding in classrooms, a lack of resources and facilities, learner indiscipline, crime, and vandalism, among other things (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; White et al., 2015). However, a few schools in townships and rural areas demonstrate high levels of resilience and performance equivalent to first-class schools in terms of learner pass rates (Chikoko et al., 2015; Maringe et al., 2015). These schools achieve this through servant leadership and asset-based approach to community development (Chikoko et al., 2015). Furthermore, leadership in these schools can be characterised as involving commitment to serve, leading by doing, trust in those with whom one works, self-belief, firmness against distraction, maximum utilisation of available resources, and accountability. However, my research focus is not based on these schools since they are not declining in academic performance. My research focuses on schools that have subsequently declined in academic performance and I want to know the factors that have led to this.

Since 1994, there have been numerous changes in the curriculum in the South African education system (Shava & Heystek, 2018). In a quest to break from the apartheid era education curriculum, South Africa introduced Curriculum 2005, which was based on Outcomes Based Education (OBE). The objective of Curriculum 2005 was to make education learner centred (Musitha & Mafukata, 2018). Also, learner-centeredness made sure that learners were not limited to examinations but instead applied what they had learned (Musitha & Mafukata 2018). Curriculum 2005 with OBE instead failed to transform the curriculum, due to inequalities that existed between schools, as only schools with adequate resources were capable of doing well in its implementation (Jansen, 1999). A study conducted by De Waal (2004) found that overcrowded classrooms hindered classroom engagement between teachers and learners. There was a need to transform it so that it could meet those aims and prepare children for social, economic, and cultural life (Musitha & Mafukata, 2018). It was amended and amendments resulted in the National Curriculum Statement 2002 (NCS).

Following the NCS curriculum, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) was introduced in 2014. It appears to have been implemented as a result of the failure of NCS when Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga, ordered its review in 2011 (Musitha & Mafukata, 2018). This was evident in the subsequent decline in the Grade 12 national results. The CAPS curriculum has also led to a decline in academic performance in the South African education system. For example, the national results of Grade 12 of the three-year examination implementation of CAPS reveal inconsistencies from 2014 to 2016 (Musitha & Mafukata, 2018). In 2014, the results were 75,8% of the implementation of CAPS. In 2015, the results dropped to 70,7%. This represents a 5,1% decline. In 2016, the third year of the implementation of CAPS shows an increase of 1,8%. The inconsistencies in percentage performance suggests that a constant decline could be attributed to a lack of detailed planning by stakeholders, such as educational officials and teachers (Musitha & Mafukata, 2018). This could also indicate a lack of monitoring and evaluation of school-based work.

Since there has been a decline in academic results due to curriculum issues, principals are expected to improve the low academic achievement as evidenced in the examination results. According to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2016), up to 60% of high schools are declining in academic performance, which means that they have a less than 70% pass rate in the school leaving

examination. Besides this, the National Systematic Tests that are administered by DBE highlights major concerns about the poor performance of learners across the board (Bansilal, 2017; Block, 2009; Fleisch, 2008; Kallaway, 2009; Van der Berg, 2015). It is precisely for this reason that there are concerns that schools in South Africa are declining due to principals who lack the requisite knowledge and skills to lead their schools effectively (Block, 2009; Heystek, 2016; Mestry, 2017).

It was the background factors discussed above that ignited my curiosity regarding the need to explore the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline.

1.3 Research problem

In South Africa, there is a group of schools that have been known for doing well in terms of learner academic performance, in which, however, over a period of time that performance has been gradually declining (Mthiyane et al., 2014). These schools become less popular and some of the learners leave to join other more reputable schools (Duke, 2008; Gorard et al., 2002; Hochbein & Duke, 2011; Hochbein, 2012). To understand schools in relation to their performance, Stoll and Fink (1996) offer a typology of school culture to indicate that a process is involved in school decline. This typology categorises schools on two continua; one of effectiveness to ineffectiveness, and the other of improving to declining. First, we have moving schools that are effective in teaching and learning. However, when these schools slightly decline in academic performance, they are perceived as **cruising** schools, where learners achieve regardless of teaching quality. Second, we have ineffective schools that were once effective and have subsequently declined over a long period of time. Stoll and Fink refer to these schools as **struggling** and **sinking** schools. There is a lack of scholarship on what causes these schools to decline, but in the organisational science literature, a lot has been written on models and theories, and numerous studies have been conducted in the business sector (Hochbein & Duke, 2011). Many factors contribute to the lack of scholarship on school decline: the first being that school stakeholders may feel defensive and not divulge information about their declining schools which in turn may limit the findings; secondly, identifying schools that are subsequently declining is a challenge; thirdly, school decline as a process needs to be studied over a period of time in order to know what constitutes it (Duke, 2008; Hochbein & Duke, 2011).

Given the above discussion, the lack of scholarship on school decline makes it a challenge for school stakeholders to identify the early signs of decline. This is affirmed by Hawk (2008) who asserts that schools that have not been able to notice the signs of decline have faced significant challenges in addressing the issue at hand. Given the above, the focus of this study is to understand the lived experiences of stakeholders (circuit managers, school principals, school governing body chairpersons, departmental heads, and teachers) of schools in decline. The purpose of my study is twofold. Firstly, it seeks to understand the structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms influencing school decline. Secondly, it seeks to explore stakeholders' re-imagination of schools in decline as **moving** schools.

1.4 Rationale and motivation for the study

Narrative inquiry studies are justified at three levels, namely, personal, practical and social (Clandinin, 2013). Firstly, the personal justification explains the narrative inquirer's importance in the study through his or her personal experiences. Secondly, the practical justification explains how the inquiry is going to change practice. Finally, the social justification explains the theoretical understandings that informs the study focus (Clandinin, 2013). Below I attend to these three levels to provide justification for this study.

1.4.1 Personal justification

Growing up, my mother taught me that education is the key to success. Consequently, I adopted a positive attitude towards education. In 1996, I started my primary school education, and I was fortunate to have attended a primary school that provided a good education. Among other things, my teachers helped me develop a passion for writing, and through this passion I was able to make good use of my writing skills to a great extent such as entering interschool writing competitions. To my dismay, I did not win these writing competitions. However, writing remained as one of my strengths. This strength enabled me to perform well in my subjects and I was consistently in the top ten in each grade. I was able to achieve this due to my teachers' hard work and dedication. My teachers always went the extra mile to ensure that they provided learners with quality education. For instance, they stayed after school to assist me and other learners to comprehend the concepts

that we found challenging in Mathematics. This fostered a positive culture of learning in my school because we were all eager to learn and the support was everlasting. Not only did these teachers develop us academically, but they also played an active role in various sports. My teachers coached different sporting codes and would accompany us to play with other schools on weekends. As a result, a close relationship between us (learners) and teachers was formed since we spent a lot of time together. It was indeed a bittersweet moment when I left the primary school in 2003.

In 2004, I started my secondary education. I consider myself privileged to have attended another school which I strongly believe was effective in providing quality education. The school received certificates of excellence from the DBE for consistently producing outstanding matric results. These certificates were on the walls of the school's reception area. Teachers were motivated to work since they were praised publicly by the principal and members of the School Management Team (SMT) for producing quality results in their respective subjects. As a result, teachers continuously worked meticulously since they were recognised for the academic difference they were making in the lives of learners. However, from 2006, the school encountered many hardships. The school declined drastically in its matric results. As a result, learners in lower Grades (8-10) left the school. These learners went to high performing schools that were in the same vicinity as this school. Due to financial constraints at home, my mother could not afford to send me to a high performing school. I had no choice but to adjust to the 'toxic' school environment I was exposed to. Nevertheless, I adopted a positive attitude towards teaching and learning. I sought assistance from my teachers regarding academic work because they still adopted a positive attitude for teaching and learning despite the school decline. I cast my gaze to these remarkable teachers for their resilience. In addition to this, these teachers encouraged other learners who did not leave the school to strive for the best in academics. Unfortunately, some of these learners did not take the advice into consideration. I did not blame them because the school, at the time, did not have a good reputation due to the declining learner intake. Irrespective, I worked to the best of my ability due to my mother's support. My mother's unwavering support enabled me to pass Grade 12 with a Bachelor pass in 2008. Regrettably, some of the learners that I did matric with failed. Unlike some of these learners that failed, I managed to obtain good results. This was driven by my commitment and passion – the two qualities that shaped me as a person. These qualities also influence my practices as a teacher at the school I teach. Considering the above, I would also like to know the leadership qualities of stakeholders involved in schools that are in decline.

1.4.2 Practical justification

In 2013, I was appointed as a teacher at one of the most effective schools in Umlazi district. Working at this school has been a pleasure, because it has consistently promoted a culture conducive to teaching and learning. Being exposed to this type of work environment has broadened my horizons as a teacher. For instance, my colleagues and I have attended various workshops that promoted critical thinking and we incorporate critical thinking in our lessons, consequently seeing results manifesting in learners' performance as they show the ability to think critically and analytically. My principal has done a magnificent job in leading the school in the right direction. She and the management team have put structures in place to promote quality teaching and learning. These structures include distributing teaching resources to all classes, appointing School Governing Body teachers to ensure that there is no overcrowding in classes, drawing up intervention programmes for designated subjects, and fostering school community partnerships. Through these structures, we have consistently achieved excellent matric results.

In 2015, I was privileged to be appointed by the DBE as a lead teacher to teach Grade 12 learners in a school that was declining in academic performance. I taught in this school on weekends and school holidays. I did not know that my first day at this school was going to bring unexpected surprises. For example, when I drove into this school, I observed that learner discipline was lacking. Learners were outside the school gates, and they were rowdy. To make matters worse, I did not see any member of staff trying to address the unruly behaviours of these learners. I turned a blind eye and parked my car at the staff parking. I got out of the car, and I was welcomed by the school principal. The school principal invited me into his office to discuss the formalities of the intervention programme and my duties as a lead teacher. In our conversation, he mentioned that I was going to encounter challenges with the class that I was going to teach because their teacher was on sick leave, and finding a suitable replacement was a challenge. At that moment I was agitated. I did not anticipate that I would have to teach all sections in the curriculum to enable learners to pass. Thoughts of quitting this intervention programme were on my mind; however, I knew that all these complexities were presenting me with a new experience and learning. Hence, I decided not to quit because my sole purpose was to make a significant difference in this declining school.

I formed a close relationship with teachers and the principal at this declining school. The nature of our relationship was based on trust, because they were able to confide in me about the politics of the school and what led to a decline in academic performance. On the one hand, in my conversations with teachers, it was revealed that the principal was not well received by some of the teachers and members of the school management team due to his external appointment as principal in 2014. These stakeholders did everything to make life impossible for the principal. On the other hand, the principal reported that when he assumed duty as manager at this school, he was locked out of the school gate by a few teachers and members of the SMT and was told to go back where he came from. The circuit manager intervened and calmed the situation down. Eventually the principal was accepted, but resistance was evident among these individuals as they were not honouring their teaching periods. They would merely go to school and spend time in the staffroom and not go to class. What was worse is that the principal was afraid to address the unprofessional behaviour of these individuals. Apart from this, it came to my attention that some teachers had a tendency of taking three months sick leave with the intention to frustrate the principal. The principal lamented that this impacted negatively on teaching and learning because it took time to find suitable replacements. Working at a high performing school that consistently produces excellent results made it difficult for me to understand a school that is in decline since I am not exposed to it on a daily basis. However, given my short-lived experience as a lead teacher in a declining school, I learnt that stakeholders shift the blame to other stakeholders; sadly, this impacts negatively on teaching and learning, leading to poor learner performance. Based on the above discussion, I would like to explore the lived experiences of different stakeholders involved in schools that are in decline.

1.4.3 Social justification

When it comes to research on school decline, there is a dearth of knowledge in this regard**.** The literature indicates that much more is known about school effectiveness and school improvement than school decline (Hochbein & Duke, 2008). Evidently, there is an abundance of scholarship on school effectiveness and school improvement (Al-Harthi & Al-Mahdy, 2017; Altricher & Kemethofer, 2015; Botha, 2016; Chapman & Muijs, 2014; Etxeberria et al., 2017; Gaertner et al., 2014; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Myende & Chikoko, 2014; Pretorius, 2013; Saminathen et al.,

2018; Obasanmi & Obasanmi, 2012; Schildkamp et al., 2016; Shava & Heystek, 2018; Silbert et al., 2015). Researchers like Christie et al. (2007), Duke (2008), Hochbein (2012), Mthiyane and Chiororo (2019), and Prew (2007) attest that scholarship with regard to school decline has been underrepresented in research.

The limited studies that have been done on school decline have focused on different perspectives of the phenomenon. Some of the researchers have focused on the difficulties of studying school decline (Duke, 2008; Hochbein, 2012). Other studies have focused on what causes decline in schools (Bayat et al., 2014; Hocbein, 2011; Mthiyane et al., 2014; Mthiyane & Chiororo, 2019; Pearson et. al, 2015). Factors and models associated with declining schools have also been studied (Hochbein, 2010; Hochbein & Duke, 2011). Scholars have explored the sociological perspectives on school decline (Allodi, 2013; Tomlinson, 1997). However, there has been silence in terms of school decline in relation to the lived experiences of school stakeholders (circuit managers, school governing body chairpersons, principals, departmental heads, and teachers). I have not come across yet a study that explores school decline through the lived experiences of stakeholders. Thus, this narrative inquiry aims to fill the gap in the body of knowledge by exploring lived experiences of stakeholders involved in schools that are in decline.

1.5 Significance of the study

It is critical that a study carves a niche in which it can clearly demonstrate its contribution to knowledge (Shabalala, 2022). This study provides deep insights on the experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline. Furthermore, it contributes to the existing body of knowledge about school decline and the turnaround process, since it is underrepresented in research. Duke and Hochbein (2008) suggest many factors that may be investigated to ascertain the reasons behind school decline, but they also note that many other factors that they do not mention could be a cause of school decline. The causes of school decline may have not previously been mentioned in the literature. By identifying the gaps in the literature on school decline, the goal of my study was to inform future researchers in their quest to understand why a school declines and how to prevent school failure (Robinson-Gatewood, 2020). Apart from this, researchers can build upon my findings to lay the groundwork for future investigations into the complex issues surrounding school

decline, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved. Also, it is critical for researchers to pay close attention to this study's phenomenon and articulate precisely how it manifests itself in various settings or contexts (Shabalala, 2022).

If South Africa is to gradually improve the quality of its education provisioning and mitigate the decline in some schools, policy makers and practitioners need to have a better understanding of what causes schools to decline in the first place (Mthiyane et al., 2014). These authors articulate that this has the potential to enable these stakeholders to better identify and offer insights into declining schools; to assist in understanding the critical process responsible for the phenomenon and to prevent schools from ever developing into chronologically low-performing schools rather than attempting to costly and unreliable turn around strategies. This study proposed an external intervention model that could rescue the declining schools and, in the process, enhance teaching and learning. Therefore, this study is significant for external stakeholders such as the DBE, circuit managers, subject advisors, well-performing schools, community stakeholders and the SGB foundations. These stakeholders will have insights on the approaches and strategies that they can employ in turning around the performance of declining schools in South African drawing from the external intervention model (Nzimande, 2019). The declining schools are characterised by challenges such as leadership incompetency, illiteracy of parent governors, learner drug use and dealing, and lack of resources, among others.

1.6 Research puzzles (critical questions)

In narrative inquiry, critical questions are referred to as research puzzles. Narrative inquirers make use of 'research puzzles' in order to understand the nature of human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The research puzzles driving this inquiry are presented below:

a) What are the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline?

b) What are the structural, cultural and agential mechanisms influencing school decline?

c) How do stakeholders re-imagine schools in decline as moving schools?

1.7 Clarification of key concepts

The following key concepts used in this study are clarified in this section: school decline, school effectiveness, school improvement, leadership, management, stories and lived experiences.

1.7.1 School decline

Scholars provide different meanings of school decline. Duke (2008) defines school decline as the inability of a school to maintain the effective academic performance of learners over a long period of time. In addition, this process represents the continuing failure of a school to respond adequately to challenges that threaten learner achievement. School decline is when a school deteriorates in learner enrolment and increases the proportion of socio-economic disadvantage in its intake (Gorard et al., 2002). School decline takes place in schools that were once high performing and began to deteriorate in academic performance (Mthiyane et al., 2014). In this study, school decline is the term used to refer to schools that were once high performing and have subsequently declined in academic performance over a period of time.

1.7.2 School effectiveness

School effectiveness, just like any other concept, can be defined in many ways. School effectiveness refers to the interaction between school leaders and teachers to improve teaching and learning (Ramberg et al., 2019). According to Saminathen et al. (2018), school effectiveness is an optimal learning environment that promotes learner outcomes. Botha (2016) defines school effectiveness as the ability of the school to achieve its objectives. In South Africa, the concept of school effectiveness is regularly associated with learner achievement in matriculation (Grade 12) results (Botha, 2010). The matric examination results are a measure of academic learning in schools (Botha, 2010). In this study, school effectiveness refers to schools that are able to achieve their objectives using various intervention strategies to achieve good matric results.

1.7.3 School improvement

Scholars define school improvement in similar ways. Hopkins and Reynolds (2001) defines school improvement as a distinct approach to educational change that aims to enhance learner outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change. School improvement describes conscious efforts to raise school achievements by modifying classroom practices and adapting management arrangements to improve teaching and learning (Heneveld & Craig, 1995). School improvement focuses on the actual steps that are taken to bring change in the organisation (Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014). In this study, school improvement refers to the steps proposed by school stakeholders to improve learner academic performance.

1.7.4 Leadership

According to Botha (2013), leadership involves motivating people, managing conflict and communicating with subordinates in an organisation. In their definition of leadership, Bush and Middlewood (2013) refer to it as developing and articulating a vision for an organization, through people, to achieve organisational outcomes. The articulation of the vision illustrates the desirable future, the intended purposes, and the direction taken by the organisation (Thurlow et al., 2003). Another definition views leadership as the work of mobilising and influencing others to articulate and achieve the school's shared intentions and goals (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). In this study, leadership is seen as a process in which school stakeholders can influence individuals or groups in a school to improve academic performance.

1.7.5 Management

Management is defined as using resources to achieve goals through planning, organising, controlling and leading (Northouse, 2013). Management, on the other hand, refers to the organisational process that entails strategic planning, goal setting, resource management, and allocating the human and material resources required to fulfil goals in the organisation (Hisson, 2020). According to Smith (1995), management in the education context is working with staff, learners and resources to accomplish the hierarchical objectives of a school. The task of management is to ultimately create favourable conditions in which teachers and learners improve

during teaching and learning (Bush, 2007). In this study, management refers to how school stakeholders can plan, organise, control, and lead to manage decline while, in the process, achieve educational outcomes and goals.

1.7.6 Stories

Stories are particularly suited as the linguistic form in which human experience as lived can be expressed (Ricouer, 1991). Stories are told by people about themselves and about others as part of their everyday conversations (Polkinghorne, 2007). Also, stories reflect the social context in which they are produced and evolve and the broader system of cultural meaning (Zilber et al., 2008). In this study, stories refer to narratives that are narrated by school stakeholders in their social contexts, which in the context of this study is their declining schools.

1.7.7 Lived experiences

Lived experiences encompass the perceptions, feelings, and context of a person's human experience (Swanson et al., 2018). Furthermore, researching lived experience can be a way of understanding identity, emotions, perceptions, and contexts to develop a more thoughtful understanding of human experience. Lived experiences can also be understood as a storied phenomenon that involves living, telling, retelling, and reliving (Clandinin, 2013). Based on these constructions, I explored the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline; these experiences were captured in the form of stories.

1.8 Outline of chapters

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. Below, I present a brief summary of what is included in each chapter.

Chapter One

This chapter has presented an overview and foundation for this study. In doing so, the chapter commenced with the background of the study and the problem statement to highlight the studied phenomenon 'the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline'. Furthermore, it presented the rationale of the study, research puzzles, significance of the study, and the clarification of key concepts. Thereafter, I conclude with the outline of chapters.

Chapter Two

This chapter presents the review of national and international literature on school decline, school effectiveness, and school improvement to develop a comprehensive understanding of the causes of school decline. I set out the recurring debates in the existing scholarship regarding the phenomenon under the study, school decline. Recurring debates in the scholarship include internal and external factors that have an impact on school decline. The factors that will be presented in the chapter will, among others, include leadership, teacher job dissatisfaction, learner indiscipline, socio-economic factors, curriculum, and educational policies.

Chapter Three

This chapter presents the theoretical underpinnings of the study. I have deployed social realism theory and general systems theory as a lens underpinning this study. As part of the discussion, I discuss the genesis of the theory. I then describe the theory in detail and how I used it in the study. Thereafter, I integrate the two theories into a framework that underpins this study.

Chapter Four

This chapter discusses explicitly the research approach and methodology adopted in carrying out this study. In doing so, the chapter commences by declaring the paradigmatic position for the study, the interpretivist paradigm. It then goes on to discuss narrative inquiry as the methodology adopted in the study. Thereafter, the chapter presents the research methods, which include

sampling, field text generation methods, and analysis of field texts. Finally, the chapter discusses issues of trustworthiness and issues of ethics in the study.

Chapter Five

This chapter presents the first level of analysis, which is referred to as narrative analysis. This type of analysis entails co-constructing the field texts, which were generated through two data sources (narrative interview and artefact inquiry). The co-constructed short stories of participants addressed the first research puzzle, which aimed to explore the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline. In addressing this research puzzle, the chapter presents the co-constructed short stories depicting the experiences for participating school stakeholders which consist of circuit managers, principals, school governing body chairpersons, departmental heads, and teachers.

Chapter Six

This chapter presents the second level of analysis, which is known as the analysis of narratives. This second level of analysis addresses the second research puzzle, which examines the structural, cultural and agential mechanisms influencing school decline. Hence, this chapter presents themes under three sections, namely, structure, culture and agency.

Chapter Seven

This chapter also presents the second level of analysis. This second level of analysis responds to the third research puzzle: *How do stakeholders re-imagine schools in decline as moving schools?* The chapter presents a detailed discussion on strategies that can be put into place to change a school in decline towards sustainable improvement and effectiveness.

Chapter Eight

This is a thesis chapter, which wraps up the study. I commence by reflecting on all chapters, focusing on essential learnings in each chapter. Following this, I present the conclusions of the

study. Thereafter, I draw conclusions on each research puzzle respectively. Finally, I outline the theoretical contribution made to the study, provide recommendations to stakeholders, and suggestions for future research.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the introduction and background to the study. Furthermore, it presented the statement of the problem, rationale and motivation for the study, significance of the study, research puzzles, and clarification of key concepts. The layout of all the chapters was also presented to show the development of the dissertation. The next chapter will present the review of national and international literature on this study's phenomenon, school decline.

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON TYPOLOGY OF SCHOOL CULTURES, SCHOOL DECLINE, SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I commenced by giving a detailed background of the study and outlined the problem statement and rationale for the study. Furthermore, I outlined the various aspects of the study, including the breakdown of chapters of the thesis. In this chapter, I provide a review of literature; I begin by discussing Stoll and Fink (1996) typology of school cultures to show a relationship between schools and their performance. Following this, I provide a review of national and international literature on school decline, school effectiveness and school improvement to help develop a thorough understanding of the causes of school decline (Robinson-Gatewood, 2020). I divided the chapter into four sections; the first section focuses on the typology of school cultures. The second section provides a discussion of the factors that influence school decline. The third section provides a discussion on school effectiveness, and highlights, in particular, the characteristics of school effectiveness. The fourth section of this chapter presents a discussion on school improvement. The focus is on looking at various ways through which the academic performance of schools can be improved.

2.2 TYPOLOGY OF SCHOOL CULTURES

The Stoll and Fink (1996) typology of school cultures is a model developed by Louis Stoll and Dean Fink to categorise and understand various types of cultures that exist within schools. The typology outlines five types of school cultures, namely: moving schools, cruising schools, strolling schools, struggling schools and sinking schools. Below I explain these types of school cultures.

Moving schools are not only effective in 'value added' terms and for a wide range of pupil learning outcomes, but the stakeholders who work in them are also actively working together to respond to their changing context and continue to develop (Stoll & Fink, 1996). These stakeholders know where they are going and they have the skills to get there (Louis & Miles, 1990). Others, in more deprived inner city or isolated rural areas are making tremendous strides in extremely challenging circumstances (Stoll & Fink, 1996).

Cruising schools are often viewed as effective by teachers, school community and outside inspectors because they appear to possess many qualities of an effective school (Stoll & Fink, 1996). In this type of school, learners achieve regardless of teaching quality. These schools are smugly marking time and not seeking to prepare their learners for the changing world into which they are going. Besides this, these schools possess underpinning norms of contentment, avoidance of commitment, goal diffusion, being reliable, perpetuating total top-down leadership, conformity, nostalgia, blame, congeniality and denial (Fink & Stoll, 1998). In such schools, if school improvement initiatives are to take hold, it will be essential to challenge and change these norms (Stoll & Fink, 1996).

Strolling schools are neither particularly effective nor ineffective (Stoll & Fink, 1996). Moving towards some kind of school improvement at an inadequate rate to cope with the pace of change, it therefore threatens to overrun the efforts of these types of schools (Fink & Stoll, 1998). These schools have ill-defined and sometimes conflicting aims which inhibit improvement efforts (Stoll & Fink, 1996). Furthermore, these schools may not be ranked at the top academically, however, they seem to be meandering into the future to the detriment of their learners.

Struggling schools are viewed by Stoll and Fink (1996) as ineffective and declining. These types of schools experience low morale and poor academic performance. As a result, these schools come up with intervention strategies to improve their academic performance and other related challenges (Stoll & Fink, 1996). Ultimately, these schools may succeed since they have the will despite lacking the skill (Stoll & Fink, 1996). These are the schools that outside consultants can have an impact on since the staff recognises that the school is ineffective and declining and that change is required (Stoll & Fink, 1996). Therefore, these schools could benefit from external support (Stoll, 2000).

Sinking schools are regarded as failing schools and they are in critical state of decline (Stoll & Fink, 1996). These schools consistently achieve low test scores, graduation rates and learner achievement (Duke, 2008). Additionally, they are not only ineffective: the staff, either out of apathy and ignorance, are not prepared or able to change (Fink & Stoll, 1998). Isolation, self-reliance and loss of faith are dominating norms and powerfully inhibit improvement (Stoll & Fink, 1996). These schools are often located in deprived contexts and staff tend to blame the community for the school's problems (Stoll, 2000). Given the above, one can conclude that these schools are characterised by negative attributes that significantly impede their ability to function effectively and support student learning. Hence, these schools need dramatic action and significant support to change (Stoll, 2000). This study demonstrates that the decline in the study schools (sinking schools) escalated and intensified over time. As a result, these schools subsequently declined in academic performance.

2.3 SCHOOL DECLINE

In this section, I present a discussion of the recurring debates that influence school decline. These debates centre on the following areas: teacher job dissatisfaction; ineffective leadership practices by school principals; the role of learner indiscipline in school academic performance; poor implementation of curriculum policy; teacher unions as an impediment to teaching and learning; the impact of socio-economic status on school decline and the language of teaching and learning. Below I present these debates.

2.3.1 Teacher job dissatisfaction

There is consensus among scholars that low remuneration for teachers is one of the many factors that affects their overall performance in schools (Afshar& Doosti, 2016; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Danish & Usman, 2010; Inan, 2014; Mthiyane & Chiororo, 2019; Mtyuda & Okeke, 2016; Muguongo et al., 2015; Nzimande, 2018; Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017; Zaheer et al., 2015) and as a result, they lack the motivation to teach (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). The teachers' dissatisfaction with their salaries leads to inability to meet their daily expenses, due to the rising cost of living (Mtyuda & Okeke, 2016). For this reason, some teachers supplement their income through

establishing informal businesses, which diverts them from teaching activities during instructional time and this affects their performance in delivering quality education in schools (Mtyuda & Okeke, 2016). In line with this discussion, the writings of Iwu et al. (2013) show that teachers' inability to deliver quality education causes schools to decline.

Some teachers in South Africa are resigning from schools to pay off their debts (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017). This is contributing to school decline in the Eastern Cape Province because some of these teachers are specialists in designated subjects and their exit from the education system causes a high failure in Grade 12 examinations (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017). The low remuneration for teachers is not a South African problem exclusively. Much reviewed literature on the subject from Zimbabwe (Mthiyane & Chiororo, 2019), Pakistan (Alwi et al., 2015), Iran (Ashfar & Doosti, 2016), India (Aftab & Khatoon, 2015) and Kenya (Muguongo et al., 2015), to mention a few countries, had equally reported the impact of the low remuneration on teachers' job performance. It appears that this problem is equally present in some of the developing countries across the world (Mtyuda & Okeke, 2016).

Imtiaz (2014) from the context of Pakistan, Marais (2016) from South Africa, Mustafa et al. (2014) from Egypt link teachers' inability to manage instructional time in overcrowded classrooms to teachers' job dissatisfaction in schools. Mustafa et al. (2014) assert that teachers who teach in overcrowded classrooms have less time to perform their core function because they spend more time doing administrative tasks. These administrative tasks include checking class attendance lists and recording discipline entries, and as a result, teachers are expected to work more hours outside the classroom, in order to assess class tests, assignments and examination papers (Marais, 2016; Mustafa et al., 2014). Overcrowding in schools is an overwhelming experience for teachers in the profession since they are not equipped to deal with complexities of overcrowded classrooms, particularly the management of instructional time (Opuku-Asare et al., 2014). Taking this into account, Cortes et al. (2012) highlight other challenges that contribute to teacher job dissatisfaction in an overcrowded classroom. Firstly, teachers are finding it difficult to manage the disruptive behaviour of learners and in the process, learning time is lost. Secondly, learners achieve low marks in their assessments due to lost teaching time. Thirdly, teachers are unable to give learners individual attention due to large numbers in the classroom. Given the challenges above, research done in South Africa (Meier & West, 2020), Zimbabwe (Ngwenya, 2021), Ghana (Osai et al.,

2021) and Nigeria (Kpe-Nobana & Orisa-Ubi, 2020), found that classrooms that are overcrowded are a major source of burn out and stress for teachers. These factors contribute to performance decline in schools.

Teacher burnout, a syndrome that results from stress, has serious implications for the quality of teaching and learning and also learner achievement in schools (De Stasio et. al, 2017; Jacobson, 2016). For example, teaching does not take place when there is increased teacher absenteeism in schools due to burnout, and this subsequently affects quality teaching and learner achievement (Zeichner & Liston, 2013). Again, quality teaching is compromised when substitute teachers fill in vacancies for subjects that they are not qualified to teach due to teachers taking leave as a result of teachers' burnout (Jacobson, 2016). Sadly, learners suffer because unqualified substitute teachers teach them. Hence, South African scholars (Bayat et al., 2014; Marais, 2016; Mtyuda & Okeke, 2016; Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017) posit that the effects of teacher burnout and stress results in school decline in some of our schools. These sentiments are also shared by Spanish scholars (Gomez-Dominguez et al., 2022) who attest that teacher burnout and stress causes schools to decline.

South African literature also attributes poor working conditions in schools to teacher job dissatisfaction (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017; White et. al, 2015). Some teachers are required to work in rural schools that have a severe water shortage, poor electricity supply and lack of proper sanitation (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Moreover, these schools have broken windows, ceilings, and roofs in classrooms, and facilities that are in a poor state of repair. Hence, teachers find it challenging to work in such unfavourable conditions (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017). Another challenge presented in the literature that results in teacher job dissatisfaction is the lack of physical facilities for designated subjects such as science and technology. For this reason, the quality of lessons for these subjects are hampered, leaving teachers feeling tense, bewildered, and dissatisfied (Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017). This phenomenon is also observable even in other contexts, such are high-income countries. For example, Brown (2022) from Canada, Sutcher et al. (2019) from the United States of America, Dannefjord et al. (2022) from Sweden found that lack of resources to support teaching and learning is one of the many factors that contribute to teacher job dissatisfaction.

Various studies done in South Africa unequivocally confirm the linkage of poor working conditions in schools to teacher job dissatisfaction (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; White et. al., 2015; Mtyuda & Okeke, 2016). A study done by White et al. (2015) in selected rural, township and urban schools in the KwaZulu-Natal Province found that female teachers work in unsafe conditions as they are subjected to sexual harassment by male learners. Additionally, other participating teachers in this study mention that they feel unsafe in their schools due to the violent behaviour of learners. Some teachers also cite the death of a deputy principal on school premises for challenging the school principal's decision in claiming a salary from the DBE for a non-existent teacher. The above-mentioned factors cause teacher job dissatisfaction in schools. On the other hand, White et al. (2015) also reveal teacher job satisfaction in some urban schools, particularly former Model C schools. The participating teachers from these schools reveal that they work in safe working conditions since safety and security is a priority in their schools. These findings are contrary to the views of teachers from rural and township schools. In line with these contrary views, Bayat et al. (2014) reminds us that this is the case because leaders and managers of some rural and township schools fail to implement departmental policies to ensure safety of teachers.

Work done by Mtyuda and Okeke (2016) and Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) in rural schools in the Eastern Cape Province reveal that teachers work in schools that do not have enough resources, ranging from textbooks to laboratories, to use in their teaching and learning, and this subsequently leads to learners' academic failure. Likewise, work done by Mthiyane and Chiororo (2019) in a Zimbabwean rural school reveals that a shortage of material resources causes a decline in learner academic performance. These findings are in line with Harley and Wedekind's (2002) contention that schools situated in rural areas have a shortage of resources, which is a threat to learner achievement.

2.3.2 Ineffective leadership practices by school principals

Leadership has a profound impact on the quality of teaching and learning in schools that are in decline (Bayat et al., 2014; Mthiyane et al., 2014; Mthiyane & Chiororo, 2019). In the South African context, Heystek (2016), Mestry (2017), Msila (2011) and Spaull (2013) identify the inappropriate skilling of principals as the reason for schools in decline. These authors explain that many of the serving principals lack basic leadership skills, as they are not offered any training

before and after their entry into principalship and this leads to schools declining in academic performance (Heystek, 2016; Mestry, 2017; Msila, 2011; Spaull, 2013). Similar sentiments are echoed by Bayat et al. (2014), who argue that the decline in academic performance results from the lack of instructional leadership or poor instructional leadership; these scholars assert that school principals who are not good instructional leaders are likely to struggle in ensuring that quality teaching and learning is taking place in schools they are leading.

Researchers such as Ahmed (2015), Hallinger (2003), Manaseh (2016) and Naidoo (2019) identify instructional leadership skills that school principals' lack that makes them ineffective leaders. These skills include the protection of teaching and learning time, curriculum delivery, supervision, and evaluation of instruction, facilitating professional development of teachers, providing feedback to teachers, promoting a positive working environment, and creating collegial relationships with teachers. Therefore, the absence of these skills contributes to school decline in Africa. For example, schools in Ghana, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia have gradually declined in academic performance because some of the school principals' instructional leadership skills are of poor quality and they are ineffective in promoting teaching and learning (Ahmed, 2015; Donkor & Asante, 2016: Mthiyane & Chiororo, 2019). Naidoo (2019) asserts that school principals' lack of understanding of their instructional roles could be a reason for this occurrence. Consequently, these ineffective instructional leaders are also likely to struggle in maintaining learner discipline, acting against teachers whose behaviours are unprofessional, and protecting teachers from abusive parents (Bayat et al., 2014).

According to Mahlangu (2018), Mthiyane et al. (2014), and Mthiyane and Chiororo (2019), one of the causes of school decline is the autocratic leadership style that is used by school principals in leading and managing schools. As a result, teachers feel excluded because they are not involved in decision-making – they are just told to do things without being consulted first. This causes a tension between school principals and teachers, as teachers are unlikely to fully accept decisions imposed on them (Mthiyane & Chiororo, 2019). These researchers describe this type of leadership as weak and ineffective. This weak and ineffective leadership brings the school 'to its knees', leading to learner and teacher late-coming or absenteeism, and eventually to institutional decline (Bayat et al., 2014; Mthiyane & Chiororo, 2019). Mahlangu (2018) expresses similar sentiments, and states that the poor leadership of principals causes dysfunctionality in schools. Given the

above, the blame is shifted to the non-existence of institutionalised programmes for principal preparation in South Africa (Heystek, 2016; Mestry, 2017; Msila, 2011; Spaull, 2013).

While there is no preparatory programme for school principals in South Africa, countries like the United States of America, England, Sweden, Australia and Canada have formal and institutionalised programmes to develop the leadership skills of school principals; these programmes are run through universities and colleges before and after appointment of principals (Bush, 2010; Bush, 2013; Ibrahim, 2011; Murakami et al., 2014; Naidoo, 2019; Webber et al., 2014). In Sweden, Seychelles and the state of Texas in the United States of America, school principals are professionally developed in Curriculum and Educational Leadership to lead schools successfully (Ibrahim, 2011). Apart from professional development programmes, school principals are also required to hold a Master's degree in Education before they are appointed (Ibrahim, 2011; Webber et al., 2014).

The above-mentioned prerequisite qualifications yield a number of benefits for school principals in leading schools once they have obtained them. Firstly, school principals are able to provide instructional support in their schools to ensure quality teaching and learning (Murakami et al., 2014). Secondly, these programmes equip school principals with skills to stimulate and influence teachers to reach curricular goals and all learners to academic achievement (Norberg, 2019). Thirdly, school principals demonstrate skills relating to educational law and management in performing their duties (Murakami et al., 2014). Finally, school principals foster democratic processes in a form of distributed leadership to enhance school improvement and effectiveness (Murakami & Tornsen, 2015).

However, the prerequisite qualifications may not be regarded as the only panacea to school decline, because there are schools that are still found to be in decline, despite the formal qualifications that school principals hold (Allodi, 2013; Pearson et al., 2015). In the United States of America, 14,3% of public schools were in decline in the year 2012 despite the formal qualifications that school principals had obtained (Hurlburt et al., 2012). More specifically, one of the schools in Sweden was closed due to the school principal's lack of skills in managing and leading an effective school (Allodi, 2013). Firstly, the school principal lacked the leadership ability to accommodate learners who were poor and who had learning difficulties. Secondly, the school principal battled to address disciplinary problems. Thirdly, the school principals failed to defend the reputation of the school.

Finally, the school principal lacked instructional leadership skills to improve the academic performance of the school (Allodi, 2013).

2.3.3 The role of learner indiscipline in school performance

Many researchers have argued that learner indiscipline is one of the major problems in schools (Allodi, 2013; Bayat et al., 2014; Beland & Kim, 2016; Jinot, 2018; Makhasane & Chikoko, 2016; Mthanti & Mncube, 2014; Ngwokabuenui, 2015; Njoroge & Nyabuto, 2014; Pearson et al., 2015; Segalo & Rambuda, 2018; Semali & Vumilia, 2016; Stanley, 2014; Wolhuter & van der Walt, 2020). These researchers argue that problems related to discipline such as violent behaviour, disrespect, commotions, strikes, neglecting assessment tasks, bunking lessons, and possession of weapons, are some of the factors, among others, that cause schools to decline. These discipline related problems are congruent with studies that have been conducted in the Netherlands and Zimbabwe (Claessens et al., 2017; Mthiyane & Chiororo, 2019), which found that learner misbehaviour, low work engagement and disruption of the learning process results in a decline in academic performance.

The findings from studies conducted by Claessens et al. (2017) and Mthiyane & Chiororo (2019) in the Netherlands and Zimbabwe resonate with that of Simelane (2015) in South Africa. Simelane (2015) found that learners' disruption of lessons caused a significant decline in academic performance. To cite a few examples; the study reveals that learners use cell phones during teaching and learning, leave the classroom while teachers are teaching, distract their fellow learners in class by making noises and funny sounds, verbally abuse teachers during teaching time and write their examinations while they are drunk. Given these findings, Simelane (2015) posits that these ill-disciplined learners perform poorly in tests, examinations, and some of them frequently absent themselves from school. Learners who are disciplined also perform poorly in tests and examinations due to distractions that are caused by their undisciplined schoolmates (Simelane, 2015). Bayat et al. (2014) claim that some teachers feel demotivated and do not want to go to classes and teach since they are subjected to working with learners who are ill-disciplined.

2.3.4 Poor implementation of curriculum policy

The reviewed literature acknowledges that curriculum implementation is fraught with many challenges within the South African education system (Molapo & Pillay, 2018). This has been observable in the failure of implementation from previous curriculum changes, namely, Curriculum 2005, RNCS and NCS (Jansen & Christie, 1999; Jansen, 2008; Lelliot et al., 2009; Oguoma et al., 2019; Rogan, 2007; Sayed & Kanjee, 2013). Even with the current curriculum-in-use, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), schools are still grappling with many challenges in implementation. These challenges range from the quality of training for teachers in the CAPS curriculum (Maharaj et al., 2016; Molapo & Pillay, 2018; Taole, 2015), to challenges relating to teacher resistance to curriculum implementation (Adebayo & Adebayo, 2017; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Govender, 2018; Nxumalo, 2016; Phasha et al., 2016) and challenges relating to scarcity of resources in curriculum implementation (du Plessis & Marais, 2015; Govender, 2018; Fullan, 2007; Mtyuda & Okeke, 2016; Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017). These challenges are elucidated below.

The training provided by the DBE to teachers on implementing CAPS has been questioned in terms of its quality and effectiveness (Du Plessis & Marais, 2015; Maharaj et al., 2016; Taole, 2015). There is a consensus among these scholars that the lack of knowledge of the CAPS curriculum by training facilitators is a cause for concern because some impart incorrect knowledge to teachers. Furthermore, some training facilitators are unable to answer questions that are posed by teachers during the training sessions. Consequently, teachers find it hard to implement the curriculum in their classrooms due to these ineffective training sessions. The ineffectiveness of the training sessions is not new; they have been confirmed in recent studies (Du Plessis & Marais, 2015; Gobingca et al., 2017; Molapo & Pillay, 2018: Tapala et al., 2021), which highlight its poor quality. Hence, scholars (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Gibson & Brooks, 2012; Gokmenoglu & Clark, 2015; Tapala et al., 2021) criticise the quality of these training sessions in terms of how they are conducted. A case study done by Govender (2018) in the KwaZulu-Natal province identified time as a contributing factor that compromises the quality of CAPS training sessions. Participating teachers in her study reveal that training sessions are too short and do not allow for follow-up engagements. Another case study done by Phasha et al. (2016) in the Limpopo Province arrived at the same conclusion; the study added that time allocated for CAPS training sessions is too short

for teachers to grasp everything. These findings resonate with studies that have been done in Turkey and Nigeria of the ineffective curriculum training sessions conducted by the Department of Education (Gokmenoglu et al., 2016: Opeyemmi et al., 2019).

While teachers have shown dissatisfaction with the training arranged by the DBE in South Africa, they find the training sessions provided by teacher unions effective in following up to ensure that teachers grasp the curriculum. For example, work done by Molapo and Pillay (2018) found that teachers prefer training provided by teacher unions because they find them effective. These training sessions unfortunately do not reach all teachers and may vary from union to union.

Another shortfall is teacher resistance with regards to the implementation of the curriculum in their classrooms (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Gobingca et al., 2017; Pitsoe, 2013). According to Pitsoe (2013), the preparation and formulation of lesson plans and being organised in a classroom form a large part of a teacher's work. Although many activities precede the design and implementation of lesson plans, it appears that some teachers do not follow the guidelines in the CAPS. Many teachers focus on planning and completing lessons in the simplest way, and this has a detrimental effect on the quality of teaching and learning (Pitsoe, 2013). In some schools, teachers use books that are not in line with the current curriculum when they formulate lesson plans. For example, research done by Gobingca et al. (2017) in South Africa found that teachers formulate their lessons from *Nated 550* textbooks from the old curriculum, instead of CAPS orientated books. Furthermore, the participating teachers in this study mentioned that CAPS orientated books are not user friendly for their learners. Consequently, this action militates against the effective implementation of the CAPS curriculum (Gobingca et al., 2017).

Teacher resistance to curriculum implementation is also closely aligned to lack of support from school stakeholders (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Govender, 2018; Maharaj et al., 2016; Phasha et al., 2016). Firstly, some departmental heads lack content knowledge and therefore cannot advise teachers on how to plan and improve their teaching in line with CAPS (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Adding to this view, Govender (2018) argues that departmental heads are unable to supervise teachers with the necessary content support to enact the curriculum reform effectively due to the heavy workload that they have. Secondly, school principals also do not render support to teachers with curriculum implementation, leaving teachers feeling tense and stressed (Phasha et al., 2016). This suggests that school principals have not been trained themselves on how to assist

teachers with the implementation of the CAPS curriculum (Du Plessis, 2013). Thirdly, subject advisors and district officials whose primary roles is to support teachers in implementing the curriculum do not visit schools in their districts to monitor the progress of teachers and to offer support in areas of weakness in the implementation of the CAPS curriculum (Govender, 2018).

Teacher resistance to curriculum implementation is also prevalent in different contexts. Firstly, Altinyelken (2013) from the Turkish context writes that some teachers resist implementing the curriculum in schools because it is reduced in content knowledge. As a result, this hinders efforts to improve teaching and learning. Secondly, Adebayo and Adebayo (2017) from the Nigerian context report that many teachers resist implementing the curriculum in their schools because they are professionally incompetent and lack the necessary skills. Thirdly, Nxumalo (2016) from the context of Swaziland found that teachers resist curriculum implementation because schools do not have the funds to send them to curriculum workshops. Consequently, teachers miss important issues relating to the curriculum in this regard.

Shortage of resources, namely human resources and material resources, is a critical problem influencing curriculum implementation (Govender, 2018; Maharaj et al., 2016: Tapala et al., 2021). This shortcoming can be attributed to the DBE failing to provide resources to schools (Govender, 2018). According to Govender (2018), there is a shortage of subject advisors and district officials to supervise and monitor schools in their circuits and districts; hence, curriculum implementation is not properly implemented in schools that do not have access to these stakeholders. Apart from this, the literature highlights that the shortage of teachers in schools is another challenge that hinders the successful implementation of the CAPS curriculum (Gobingca et al., 2017). The DBE has been criticised for failing to fill vacant posts timeously, particularly in Mathematics and Science subjects (Gobingca et al., 2017). Due to this unforeseen circumstance, teachers in schools are expected to teach overcrowded classes; hence, the delivery of the curriculum is compromised because learners do not receive individual attention (Maharaj et al., 2016). This is a cause for concern because the National Treasury allocates funds to all provinces to ensure that the required teacher-learner ratio applies in all schools in South Africa (DBE, 2005; DBE, 2011). There is a contradiction in this regard, since class sizes are predominantly higher than the prevailing teacher-learner ratio in schools (Mtyuda & Okeke, 2016).

Apart from the shortage of human resources, the shortage of material resources for curriculum implementation has been widely acknowledged in the literature (Du Plessis & Marais, 2015; Fullan, 2007; Govender, 2018; Maharaj et al., 2016; Mtyuda & Okeke, 2016; Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017; Okwaraji & Aguwa, 2015; Phasha et al., 2016; Sethusha, 2015; Zaheer et al., 2015). These writers concur that the shortage of material resources hinders the effectiveness of curriculum delivery in the classroom. Govender (2018) reports that due to the shortage of books in schools, learners must share them in a classroom and as a result, these learners lose concentration during teaching and learning time. In line with this discussion, Mkimbili et al. (2017) from Tanzania report that the shortage of textbooks particularly in mathematics and science subjects impacts negatively on curriculum implementation in schools since learners share textbooks. Maharaj et al. (2016) affirm that this is cause for concern in many South African classrooms as well. This is, however, questionable because education in South Africa receives the largest share of the national budget, yet in the Limpopo Province, there are schools that do not have libraries and laboratory equipment for the teaching of Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, Chemistry and Mathematics (Sethusha, 2015).

2.3.5 Teacher unions as an impediment to teaching and learning

The teaching profession in South Africa is highly unionised (Dube & Tsotetsi, 2020; Letseka et al., 2012; Msila, 2022; Schneider, 2022). The teacher unions have a political influence that favours their members (Cowen & Strunk, 2015). The largest teacher union in South Africa is the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), which is allied to South Africa's ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC). This association makes SADTU a powerful teacher union (Amoako, 2014; Letseka et al., 2012; Mafisa, 2017; Msila, 2014; Moloi, 2019; Tangwe et al., 2015; Zengele, 2013) in the country. SADTU sometimes protects its teachers (members) at the expense of teaching and learning. This is supported by Zengele (2013), who argues that teacher unions have brought about fear, chaos, and dysfunctionality in schools. The reason for this occurrence is that teacher unions protect incompetent teachers, hinder school improvement and engage in disruptive strikes (Glaser, 2016). This chaos subsequently impacts teaching and learning in schools, thus leading to a decline in learner academic performance.

Teachers sometimes use the teaching and learning time to attend union activities, and this compromises learner performance (Cekiso & Maqhubela, 2015; Gobingca et al., 2017; Msila, 2014; Naidoo, 2019; Nzimande, 2018). These studies reveal that school principals in black township schools are unhappy with SADTU because they hold meetings during the instructional time, leaving learners unattended in classrooms and this leaves school principals with the only choice of sending learners home (Cekiso & Maqhubela, 2015; Gobingca et al., 2017; Msila, 2014). Therefore, the contention is that teacher unions are more concerned with teachers' well-being, which has a tendency of alienating the educational needs of learners (Glaser, 2016; Mafisa, 2017; Zengele, 2013).

The disruption by unions seems not to affect former Model C schools. These are previously white schools that are in affluent suburbs and are largely funded and managed by a governing body of parents (Ogina, 2017). Hence, these schools divert from union activities during instructional time and focus on quality teaching and learning (Nzimande, 2018). For example, in a study on teacher unionism and school management in the Eastern Cape Province, Msila (2013) reports that school principals from former white schools (Ex Model C) speak highly of their teachers who do not attend union activities during instructional time. Msila further reports that these schools have a great reputation because of the excellent results that learners achieve. These findings resonate with my experiences as a departmental head in an ex-Model C school in which I work. This school is well-known in the community for being effective in academic performance and one of the reasons for achieving this is that my colleagues and I hardly attend union meetings during school hours. This is driven by our passion for education and not wanting to compromise teaching and learning (Msila, 2013).

It appears that strike actions by teacher unions and their members play a role in the decline of academic performance in schools across several contexts. First, in South Africa, SADTU and its members (teachers) engage in strikes when the appointment of candidate principals who are redeployed members are not endorsed and appointed by the educational stakeholders from the district (Zengele, 2013). These sentiments are confirmed by Letseka et al. (2012), who concur that this teacher union and its members disrupt schooling through protests if their demands are not met. Consequently, teaching and learning is compromised since learners are not adequately prepared for their matric examinations (Tangwe et al., 2015). Therefore, these scholars posit that the matric

pass rate of affected schools' decline. Second, a similar phenomenon is observable in Mexico, as Glaser (2016) confirms that powerful teacher unions and its members embark on strike action when its members are not promoted in their respective schools. Third, in Nigeria, the overall performance of schools has declined due to teacher strikes caused by lack of support from the government due to lack of pay (Fejoh, 2016).

Some teacher unions contribute to school effectiveness in other contexts. For instance, in the United States of America, teacher unions put the interest of learners above their own (Baron, 2018; Cowen & Strunk, 2015). Teacher unions ensure that there is proper teaching and learning in schools through small class sizes. This is done to ensure that teachers can give learners individual attention (Cowen & Strunk, 2015). This corroborates the assertion of Vachon and Ma (2015) that small classes enable teachers to monitor the academic progress of learners effectively. Apart from this, a study conducted by Rubenstein and McCarthy (2016) in the California State School district found that teacher unions worked collaboratively in innovative ways with school principals and teachers to improve learner achievement levels. The findings reveal that school principals, teachers and teacher unions meet weekly as collaborative leadership teams to discuss substantive issues to solve problems and to engage in decision-making, including the allocation of textbooks, school schedules, the hiring process for each school, curriculum and instructional practices, and professional development of school principals. Rubenstein and McCarthy (2016) suggest that teacher unions should also work in collaboration with school principals and teachers in all States in the country to maintain consistency.

2.3.6 The impact of socio-economic status on school decline

The socio-economic status of communities determines the level and quality of education for learners through income and geographical channels (Branson & Leibbrandt, 2013). In South Africa, this means that learners who come from poor neighbourhoods are likely to attend schools that are in decline or at risk for decline (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019). In line with this claim, Moses et al. (2017) report that declining schools are usually located in rural and predominantly black communities and learners have no choice but to attend these schools due to their impoverished households. Some of these learners do not have parents and are heads of households (Gomba, 2018; Magwa & Magwa, 2016; Mpofu & Chimhenga, 2016; Van der Mark, 2015). This is because

child headed households have become an integral part of South Africa's society due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has disrupted families, communities, and social structures (Le Roux-Kemp, 2015). Apart from child headed households, the socio-economic status of poor communities increases the likelihood of female learners falling pregnant (Duby et al., 2021; Maemeko et al., 2018; Nkosi & Pretorius, 2019), an increased rate of unsafe neighbourhoods (Bayat et al., 2014a) and lack of parental involvement (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Mtyuda & Okeke, 2016: Pant, 2020). The above-mentioned factors are elucidated below.

The literature highlights that child headed households are rapidly increasing because relatives of these children are unable to take care of them, leaving children to self-care (Ibebuike et al., 2014). For this reason, there is an increase in a number of children in child-headed households, living in poverty (Le Roux-Kemp, 2015; Newlin et al., 2016; Phillips, 2015). Such an increase has a huge impact on the education system since learners who are heads of their households face a number of obstacles in accessing quality education (Le Roux-Kemp, 2015), which undoubtedly affects the academic performance of a school. This phenomenon is observable across several contexts. Child-headed households are found in other African countries such as Swaziland, Zambia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe (Maushe & Mugumbate 2015; Mohlakwana, 2013; Motsa & Morojele, 2016) and pose similar educational implications as in South Africa.

Learners from child-headed households often stay away from school due to household responsibilities (Gomba, 2018; Gubwe et al., 2015; Magwa & Magwa, 2016; Mohlokwana, 2013; Mpofu & Chimhega, 2016). The death of parents from HIV/AIDS and other factors force young children to increase adult responsibility, which they are not ready for (Ibebuike et al., 2014). These responsibilities range from being an income provider, providing physical daily care for siblings, and providing emotional support for discipline within their homes (Gomba, 2018). In support of this view, a case study conducted by Newlin et al. (2016) in South Africa found that learners who have poor attendance in a school, decline in their academic performance and eventually leave school due to household responsibilities. These learners find it difficult to balance their academic work, household chores and taking care of their siblings. A case study done by Gubwe et al. (2015) from a Zimbabwean context arrived at a completely different conclusion. Their study reveals that learners have poor attendance rates because they secure employment to take care of their needs

and their siblings. For this reason, Newlin et al. (2016) argue that schools decline is due to the underperformance of learners who are heads of households.

In addition to house responsibilities, learners from child headed households face economic challenges which impact negatively on their education (Gomba, 2018; Ibebuike et al., 2014; Mkhatshwa, 2017; Newlin et al., 2016). Due to financial constraints, these learners are unable to buy learning materials required for teaching and learning purposes (Gubwe et al., 2015). Further to this, some of these learners do not have basic school materials to write their examinations (Newlin et al., 2016). In the analysis by Ibebuike et al. (2014) of learners' economic challenges in South African township schools, it was found that learners walk long distances to school because they do not have money for public transport; as result, these learners get to school late. Additionally, these learners have challenges paying school fees and principals of schools force them to drop out from school for non-payment of fees. Likewise, this practice is observable in other African countries. For example, in Zimbabwe, some principals of schools chase away learners who are heads of households for the non-payment of school fees (Mpofu & Chimhenga, 2016). This practice is an impediment to the academic pursuits of learners since they are deprived of an education (Newlin et al., 2016).

Several studies (Gomba, 2018; Mohlakwana, 2013; Motsa & Morojele, 2016; Phillips, 2015; Van der Mark, 2015; Ye & Fang, 2010) claim that learners who are heads of households suffer from psychological problems. These studies reveal that the reaction of the learners with psychological problems often results in emotional neglect, trauma, depression, and anxiety due to the limited access to education and adult supervision. Le Roux-Kamp (2015) attests to these findings in relation to the emotional trauma and anxiety learners go through due to parental loss. South African studies by Phillips (2015) and Van der Mark (2015) conclude that through all the psychological problems that learners go through, they do not receive any form of counselling, and this often results in long-term psychological problems. As a result, discipline problems manifest in schools. In support of this, a study conducted by Ye and Fang (2010) in China reveal that psychological problems experienced by learners who are heads of households influence them to exhibit behavioural problems. The study concludes that this type of behaviour impacts negatively on the school because it limits other learners' attention in schooling due to constant disruptions.

There is concurrence among scholars (Barmao-Kiptanui et al., 2015: Du Preez et al., 2019: Maemeko et al., 2018; Ramalepo et al., 2021) that teenage pregnancy presents a few challenges during teaching and learning time. First, some pregnant learners do not concentrate in class during teaching time (Mutshaeni et al., 2015). Second, these learners are ridiculed by their teachers and fellow learners during teaching time and this action minimises teaching time in the classroom (Barmao-Kiptanui et al., 2015: Ramalepo et al., 2021). Given the above challenges, researchers found that the academic performance of pregnant learners' declines, resulting in school decline (Maemeko et al., 2018; du Preez et al., 2019). Moreover, these challenges interfere with the academic performance of a school.

A mixed methods study (Bayat et al., 2014) conducted in declining township, rural and urban schools in the Western Cape Province analysed the impact of the socio-economic status on the safety of learners. Learners and school principals were sampled for this study. The study found that a high percentage of learners from township and urban schools feel unsafe in areas in which they live and in their schools. When learners were asked why the areas of their schools are not safe, they mention the high crime rate, which includes acts of violent crimes, theft, robbery, and occurrence of gangs. Some learners also referred to the lack of proper infrastructure in the townships, which includes streetlights that are not working and insecure housing structures. This makes learners feel unsafe and scared. According to one of the participating principals in the study by Bayat et al. (2014), learners are often mugged on their way to and from school. On the contrary, learners who go to declining rural schools indicate that they feel safe, as they are not exposed to crime (Bayat et al., 2014).

The low socio-economic level of parents affects their inability to provide financially in their children's learning (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Hair et al., 2015; Okwaraji & Aguwa, 2015; Onyancha et al., 2015; Pant, 2020; Sandeep & Prahallada, 2015; Tapala et al., 2021; Vrinda & Nisha, 2015;). This translates to learner school achievement (Al-Matalka, 2014). The writings of Onyancha et al. (2015) from the Kenyan context conclude that learner achievement suffers due to parents' inability to buy necessary resources required for teaching and learning. In the same vein, Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) from the South African context expound that learner achievement suffers, as parents do not have the money to buy books and stationery for their children.

Apart from parents' financial inability to provide in their children's learning, some of these parents do not play an active role in their children's learning since they are often working since they have to provide for their families (Ratcliff & Hunt, cited in Al-Matalka, 2014). Again, some of these parents work far away and return home on month-ends, while others come back once at the end of the year (Mtyuda & Okeke, 2016). This phenomenon is observable in South Africa, as research has shown that parents are unable to provide academic support for their children in senior grades, for example, assisting with homework and school projects (Bayat et al., 2014). Such findings are cited in the literature as one of the causes of school decline (Bayat et al., 2014).

There is, however, a diverging view as Certin and Teskin (2016), Elia (2015), Selvitopu and Kaya (2021) assert, that many parents of low socio-economic state contribute towards school effectiveness. Certin and Teskin (2016) from the Turkey context and Elia (2015) from the American context propound that these parents are actively involved in their children's education regardless of their socio-economic status. Research by Certin and Teskin (2016) reveal that parents foster school community partnerships with schools to be kept informed on strategies that they can utilise to improve the academic performance of their children.

2.3.7 Language of teaching and learning

The policy on language (DBE, 2010) advocates that teaching should be done in English, even though it is not a home language for majority of learners and teachers in South Africa (Sethusha, 2015). According to Makgato (2015), African teachers in South Africa are not proficient in English since they come from different linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, they lack the skills to support English learning in schools. Supporting these views are Alidou et al. (2006) and Krugel and Fourie (2014) who attest that teachers do not have the necessary skills to express themselves fluently in English during teaching and learning. As a result, teachers give little explanations on subject content when presented in English, thus impacting negatively on learners' understanding and performance (McCoy, 2017). Nevertheless, teachers make use of mother tongue instruction in their classrooms. Similarly, Orodho (2014) from the Kenyan Context, Namamba and Rao (2017) from the Tanzanian context, and Albury (2019) from the Malaysian context write that teachers use mother tongue instruction instead of English since they are not fluent in English. It is worth mentioning that the medium of instruction for teaching and learning utilised by these three

countries is English (Albury, 2019; Namamba & Rao, 2017; Orodho, 2014). Given the above, researchers concur that the use of mother tongue instruction by teachers teaching in schools where English is the language of teaching and learning causes schools to decline in academic performance (Bayat et. al, 2014).

Apart from teachers' lack of proficiency in English, the literature highlights that it is applicable to learners as well (Grosser & Nell, 2013; Madonsela, 2015; Makgato, 2015; Nomlomo & Vuzo, 2014). According to Grosser and Nell (2013), majority of learners in South Africa are second language speakers and third language speakers and this contributes significantly to the growing decline in academic performance. Hence, Fakeye (2014) justifies this by stating that language and achievement are directly linked to each other. Makgato (2015) discusses the limitations of linking language and achievement for learners who are English second language speakers. He explains that these learners are unable to attain good academic results since English prevents them from interacting in lessons due to the lack of fluency and proficiency. Furthermore, the lack of fluency and proficiency in English limits the conceptual understanding of these learners. Nonetheless, his research study found that, even though learners do not understand English, teachers continuously present lessons in this language. Owing to this, learners perform poorly in assignments, tests, presentations, and examinations (Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2019; Mudaly & Singh, 2018). This is in harmony with Bosman's (2000) contention that learners' poor proficiency in the English language makes them fail their assessments. Hence, some teachers have resorted to code switching to help these learners improve their academic performance (Makgato, 2015; Nomlomo, 2010).

The recurring debates on the use of code switching in schools and its effectiveness has been widely documented in the literature (Ankrah et al., 2022: Grobler, 2018; Jantjies & Joy, 2016; Madonsela, 2015; Makgato; 2015; Maluleke, 2019; Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2019; Nomlomo & Vuzo, 2014; Probyn, 2009; Sethusha, 2015). Code switching contributes to school effectiveness because it enhances learner understanding. For example, code switching is beneficial in the sense that it lies in the teachers' ability to explain a concept in the learner's home language. Consequently, it enables the learner to gain confidence and receive knowledge through a holistic explanation and understanding of concepts (Jantjies & Joy, 2016). Supporting these claims are scholars (Makgato, 2015; Maluleke, 2019; Nomlomo & Vuzo, 2014; Probyn, 2009) who found that learners from black schools can gain a comprehensive understanding of curriculum concepts taught and in turn

develop confidence to actively engage in lessons since they are not taught in their home language. These findings resonate with studies done in other African countries such as Tanzania (Namamba & Rao, 2017; Nomlomo & Vuzo, 2014: Patrick, 2020), Kenya (Ogechi, 2009; Orodho, 2014: Rono et al., 2021), Zambia (Mohammed et al., 2020; Nomlomo & Vuzo, 2014), Namibia (Kamati et al., 2022) and Ghana (Ankrah et al., 2022; Owu-Ewie & Eshun, 2015).

Code switching has been criticised for being effective in the classroom and ineffective in learner academic performance (Kimwage, 2019; Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2019; Mudaly & Singh, 2018). Mavuru and Ramnarain (2019) write that an examination is dissimilar from the teaching and learning process where the teacher could explain concepts in vernacular language. In their study, learners encountered problems in comprehending questions in English, as there was no room for constant teacher translation into learners' home language. This is a challenge for learners, as they cannot be assisted during examinations and this subsequently results in a decline in academic performance in schools (Fakeye, 2014; Grobler, 2018; Krugel & Fourie, 2014; Mavuru & Ramnarain, 2019; Mudaly & Singh, 2018; Then & Ting, 2011).

2.4 SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

This section presents debates on school effectiveness. It pays attention to the following areas: relationship between school principals and teachers as enablers of school effectiveness; synergies between teachers and learners as mechanisms to teaching and learning, and school community partnership as key to school success. Below I present these debates.

2.4.1 Relationship between school principals and teachers as enablers of school effectiveness

Communication is presented in the literature as one of the most important tools that fosters harmonious relationships between school principals and teachers (Aslanargun, 2015; Egboka & Alike, 2018; Ejeh & Okoro, 2016; Hughes et al., 2015; Nwosu, 2017; Segui & Tatiana, 2016). Nwosu (2017) characterises communication as a managerial tool that is frequently used by school principals to share information with teachers, to coordinate activities, to reduce unnecessary

burdens and rules and ultimately to improve school effectiveness. For example, school principals form a professional relationship with teachers by informing them of their curriculum duties and how to execute them. This is supported by Egboka and Alike (2018), who expound that school principals disseminate curriculum information to teachers as a way of rendering professional support. Consequently, teachers become effective in delivering the curriculum leading to school effectiveness (Duze, 2012). In the process, school principals solicit teachers' opinions when making curriculum decisions in various departments within a school.

Apart from this, Ejeh and Okoro (2016) contend that, through communication, school principals can establish a mutual understanding with teachers through exchange of ideas, information, experience and innovation for peaceful co-existence, conflict resolution, cumulative development, progress, and the well-being of the school as an organisation. Hence, a collaborative relationship between school principals and teachers is maintained. Through this type of relationship, teacher leadership initiatives are created in the school, which improves school effectiveness (Hughes et al., 2015). This is synonymous with Yesilibas and Akyol's (2019) assertion that school principals assign teacher leadership duties in accordance with the objectives of the school to improve school effectiveness. Yesilibas and Akyol's assertion corroborates my experiences in my school, because my school principal creates teacher leadership positions to empower teachers. She thoroughly communicates with these teachers on how teacher leadership should be executed. In the process, teachers are also allowed to exchange ideas and provide input in the execution of their duties.

School principals use different approaches to enhance positive working relationships with teachers (Botha 2016; Exteberria et al., 2017; Lekhetho, 2013). In relation to this, the work of Lekhetho (2013) in Lesotho found that school principals maintained a strict relationship with teachers. This was achieved through constant supervision of teachers' work and ensuring that they honour their teaching commitments (Lekhetho, 2013). Scholars claim that school principals use legitimate power to maintain a strict relationship with teachers with the intention of maintaining discipline (Urgulu & Demir, 2016; Yesilbas & Akyol, 2019). For example, a study conducted by Yesilbas and Akyol (2019) in Turkey reveal that school principals engage in conversations with teachers on a one-on-one basis to address unprofessional behaviour that they do not approve of. The unprofessional behaviour in this study includes teachers arriving to work late and failing to

complete tasks that are assigned to them (Yesilbas & Akyol, 2019). Therefore, the eradication of this behaviour improves school quality and effectiveness (Aslanargun, 2015).

Apart from strict relationships, other principals use caring and friendly relationships to successfully lead their schools. An example of this is seen in the study by Exteberria et al. (2017), in a Spanish context, who found that school principals maintain a caring relationship and they assist teachers with effective curriculum delivery. Similarly, Botha (2016), in a South African context found that school principals who establish good relationships with teachers are able to assist teachers with delivery of a sound curriculum. This is achieved through the caring relationship that exists between school principals and teachers in schools. Evidently, Lasilla et al. (2017) identify several benefits that a caring relationship between school principals and teachers provide. First, school principals provide emotional support to teachers by reducing their workload in terms of teaching. Second, school principals play an active parental role to novice teachers through classroom discipline and management. Third, a caring approach used by school principals enables them to protect teachers from abusive parents who are constantly criticising teachers. Fourth, school principals indirectly create conditions in which teachers can build effective emotional relationships among themselves. Finally, school principals create structures to clear challenges that teachers may face daily.

The literature has established that positive relationships between school principals and teachers are significant since they are based on trust (Kars & Inandi, 2018). These writers suggest that a trusting relationship between school principals and teachers promotes trust in the organisation, resulting in school effectiveness. The trust in the school principal increases, participation in job satisfaction, performance, school commitment, information sharing, willingness to go the extra mile for the benefit of the school, and productivity all increase, while conflict and intention to leave the teaching profession decrease (Aslanargun, 2015; Kars & Inandi, 2018). Additionally, the trusting relationship between these stakeholders enables them to learn new things from one another. For instance, they can communicate about implementation that is effective or ineffective, which means that they disclose their deficiencies and make themselves vulnerable.

2.4.2 Synergies between teachers and learners as a mechanism to enhance teaching and learning

Teachers play a significant role in contributing to school effectiveness. Their effectiveness has been measured by learner academic performance in examinations (Dogan & Adams, 2018). Saminathen et al. (2018) assert that learners perform better academically when they interact well with their teachers; this type of interaction then makes it possible for the school to achieve its educational outcomes. A school in South Africa can achieve its educational outcomes because teachers create a positive learning environment by promoting classroom engagement during teaching and learning to improve learner outcomes (Omodan & Tsotetsi, 2018). For example, in a ground-breaking investigation on classroom engagement between teachers and learners, Omodan and Tsotetsi (2018) reveal that this type of relationship enhances the academic performance of learners. Similarly, researchers from the Spanish and the United Kingdom context attest that classroom engagement between teachers and learners poses similar outcomes (Garcia-Moya et al., 2019). Therefore, the relationship between teachers and learners is paramount for the effectiveness of a school.

Scholars such as Gasser et al. (2018) and Velasquez et al. (2013) identify teacher caring as an important factor for increasing learner motivation and learning in effective schools. These scholars describe teacher caring as giving praise to learners who work hard and do well, rewarding excellent behaviour, willingness to listen and the ability to reduce stress (Velasquez et al., 2013). In addition, the involvement of learners and establishing a safe environment also seem to be important components in the creation of a caring environment for enhancing teaching and learning in schools (Hawk & Lyons, 2008). Hence, an emotional bond is developed between teachers and learners in a school due to the nature of a caring relationship (Omodan & Tsotetsi, 2018). This resonates with research that has been done in Switzerland, Germany, and South Africa (Cherrington, 2017; Gasser et al., 2017), as well as elsewhere.

There is a broad consensus in the literature that a motivational relationship between teachers and learners increases the well-being of learners, which is paramount for school effectiveness (Guvenc, 2015; Mahler et al., 2017; Maulana et al., 2013; Omodan & Tsotetsi, 2018). The motivational support provided by teachers has positive effects on the learners' motivational orientation (Guvenc, 2015). First, learners develop a positive work ethic and, in the process, become

productive in their academic work. Second, learners feel accepted and appreciated, and this subsequently increases their engagement in school activities (Guvenc, 2015). This is corroborated by Mahler et al. (2018), who concur that learners are enthusiastic about school activities due to the motivational support provided by their teachers.

The interaction between teachers and learners has a positive impact on learners' social behaviours and skills, resulting in strong interpersonal relationships between these individuals (Omodan & Tsotetsi, 2018). Accordingly, the development of positive interpersonal relationships between teachers and learners is key to building an effective school (Koen, 2018). Moreover, these relationships subsequently create an emotional bond between teachers and learners in a school to increase the level of school effectiveness (Omodan & Tsotetsi, 2018).

2.4.3 School community partnerships as key to school success

The relationship between schools and the community is of critical importance for school effectiveness (Al Ahbabi, 2019; Galvez et al., 2016; Mphale & Mhlauli, 2014; Obasanmi & Obasanmi, 2012). Hence, national and international studies provide evidence that schools that effectively foster community partnerships have increased learner performance (Castro et al., 2015; Chikoko et al., 2015; Muijs, 2015; Myende, 2015; Strier & Katz, 2016; Valli et al., 2014), increased learning opportunities for learners' outside of school (Silbert et al., 2015), increased learner attendance rates (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Sheldon & Jung, 2015), supported school reform efforts (McAllister, 2013), and brought about an increase in the number of learners performing on a grade level (Ibrahim, 2014) and an improvement in quality teaching and learning (Gross et al., 2015; Letloenyane & Jita, 2015).

Scholars identify parental involvement as one of the ways in which schools can collaborate with communities to achieve school effectiveness (Hartman et al., 2017; Mphale & Mhlauli, 2014; Silbert et al., 2015). Firstly, parental involvement gives parents a platform to participate in their children's learning (Mphale & Mhlauli, 2014) and effective learner management (Lumadi, 2019). In line with this assertion, Bhengu and Myende (2015) from South Africa assert that there needs to be thorough communication between parents and teachers for this to be attained. Hence, in their research study, they found that schools have parent information weeks that enables parents and

teachers to communicate about learners' academic progress in their subjects as well as how parents can assist learners at home with schoolwork. Additionally, parents have been actively engaged in improving learner indiscipline. These findings resonate with Certin and Teskin from Turkey (2016), who found that there is communication between parents and teachers about learner performance. Findings from the above studies cohere with the practices in my school that involve parents in their children's learning. Consequently, parental involvement influences quality teaching and learning in schools (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016).

Secondly, parental involvement gives parents the opportunity to participate in school initiatives and projects (Bhengu & Myende, 2015; Bhengu & Myende, 2016; Strier & Katz, 2015). For example, the writings of Strier and Katz (2015) advocate that school leaders invite parents to participate in school meetings and give input in the implementation of school policies. These writings concur with that of Bhengu and Myende (2015) who point out that parents in collaboration with school principals often develop school policies. Apart from this, a case study conducted by Bhengu and Myende (2016) in schools located in the deprived communities of Eshowe, Empangeni and Ndwedwe in KwaZulu-Natal reveals that parents work with school principals to establish vegetable gardens to curb poverty and hunger. These vegetable gardens are a source of food for learners in these deprived communities (Bhengu & Myende, 2016).

In addition to parents, schools also collaborate with social service agencies to access essential services for learners (Gross et al., 2015; Myende & Chikoko, 2014). These agencies include healthcare, childcare services, mental health support, developmental disability resources and juvenile detention agencies, and the main aim of these agencies is to support learners in their educational prospects (Gross et al., 2015). Valli et al. (2014) uphold the same sentiments in that the collaboration of social service agencies with schools yields benefits for learners since it improves their educational outcomes. Other cited benefits include keeping learners out of trouble, the reduced cost health services or free healthcare services for learners and access to disability centres for learners and their families (Gross et al., 2015). In my school, we make use of these services to take care of the emotional needs of learners. Since I work in a well-resourced school, we work with a group of counsellors and psychologists from the community to provide counselling services to learners who are going through traumatic experiences at home and at the school (Gross et al., 2015).

Apart from social service agencies, universities have collaborated with schools to foster professional development of teachers (Brijlall & Maharaj, 2014; Hartman et al., 2017; Maheady et al., 2016; Silbert et al., 2015). School university partnerships have been cited for enhancing professional development of teachers in subject content knowledge. As a result, the University of Cape Town (Silbert et al., 2015), University of KwaZulu-Natal (Brijlall & Maharaj, 2014; James et al., 2015), University of Witwatersrand and the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (Brijlall & Maharaj, 2014) have launched school initiative programmes to strengthen the pedagogical content of teachers from declining schools. In these programmes, teachers are equipped with skills to improve their teaching methodologies in their respective subjects. Consequently, some of these programmes have improved student-learning outcomes in declining schools. Similar to the South African context, learners from the United Kingdom and the United States of America have shown significant improvement in their academic performance due to the professional development that teachers receive from universities (Hartman et al., 2017).

2.4.4 The role of parent governors in achieving school effectiveness

In South Africa, some schools have effective governing bodies, particularly where there are parent governors who, because of the wide range of skills they possess, perform their role with ease (Heystek, 2003; Malatji, 2018; Maluleke et al., 2016). Given that parent governors are a majority in the school governing bodies, and that they work directly with school principals who are main managers, they could play a pivotal role in enhancing school effectiveness in schools (Mohapi & Netshitangani, 2018). As a departmental head in a former Model C school, I also have observed the dedication and hard work of parent governors in how they perform their roles to ensure that the school is functioning well. They are able to perform various governance roles in line with the South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996, namely, developing the mission statement, supporting the SMT and teachers in the performance of their functions, making recommendations for the appointment of staff, maintaining school property, drawing up budgets and a wide range of school policies, as well as raising funds for the school, among other roles in achieving school effectiveness.

The parent governors' role in school effectiveness is not new; it has been confirmed in recent studies conducted in South Africa (Nzimande, 2019; Ogina, 2017). Firstly, a study conducted by

Nzimande (2019) in township and rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal Province found that parent governors contribute to school effectiveness through the direct involvement in supporting learners' academic performance. Parent governors achieve this by paying teachers from school funds to teach during weekends and school holidays, so as to maintain consistent learner academic performance. Apart from this, the study also found that parent governors are significant contributors to school effectiveness through the facilitation programmes aimed at learner discipline. Secondly, a study conducted by Ogina (2017) in former Model C schools in the Eastern Cape Province found that parent governors contribute to school effectiveness by supporting school principals in curriculum implementation through the provision of teaching resources, including interactive whiteboards and data projectors. Christie (2010) reminds us that parent governors in former Model C schools also support the curriculum by appointing SGB teachers and providing a diverse curriculum for learners.

The above-mentioned findings from South African studies harmonise with findings from an American study by Ford and Irhke (2016). These scholars conducted a study in Wisconsin State that revealed that parent governors contributed to school effectiveness through strategic planning with school principals in enhancing curriculum implementation to improve learner academic performance. Furthermore, parent governors collaborate with local communities and education district officials in school improvement initiatives in Wisconsin State (Ford & Irhke, 2016).

2.5 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In this section, I present a review of literature on how declining schools can be turned around to achieve school improvement. The review of literature will centre on the following areas: Instructional leadership practices in enhancing school academic performance and professional learning communities. Below I present the discussion.

2.5.1 Instructional leadership practices in enhancing school academic performance

Instructional leadership is explained by Bush and Glover (2003) as leadership that focuses on teaching and learning and on the behaviour of teachers in working with learners. Hence, in order

for this type of leadership to be enhanced in schools, principals need to ensure that teachers are professionally developed with the curriculum in order to improve learner performance (Saolo et al., 2014). In line with this discussion, the findings of Bhengu and Mkhize' s (2014) work in South Africa show that school principals play an active role in the professional development of teachers. The study found that school principals invite subject advisors and educational specialists from the DBE to support teachers in subject content knowledge and encourage teachers to attend workshops to keep abreast with latest curriculum developments. Additionally, school principals share ideas and information with teachers on teaching and learning practices in the classroom (Bhengu & Mkhize, 2014). These findings harmonise with other studies (Bhengu & Gounder, 2014; Goddard et al., 2015; Mestry, 2017; Mkhize, 2017; Naidoo & Peterson, 2015), which found that school principals as instructional leaders play an active role in teacher development to improve learner outcomes. Given these findings, it is for this reason that Salo et al. (2014), writing from the context of Norway, Sweden and Finland, posit that the roles of the school principal and teachers in teacher development, as co-learners, improves learner outcomes. This is why teachers apply themselves to contribute positively and meaningfully to improve quality teaching and learning if they are developed (Bhengu & Mkhize, 2014).

In order for quality teaching and learning to occur, school principals as instructional leaders need to ensure that schools have the necessary teaching resources (Mestry, 2017). This resonates with Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership model, which identifies the provision of instructional resources as one of the dimensions of managing the curriculum and instruction. In South Africa, some schools rely heavily on government subsidies for teaching resources since they are in deprived contexts (Mkhize, 2017). Mkhize's (2017) study, for example, found that school principals from deprived rural schools relied on government funds to provide teaching resources such as books, stationery, and laboratories to improve the teaching and learning process. Consequently, the study found that there was an improvement in learner performance. Apart from schools relying on government funds for resources, Bhengu and Mkhize (2014) elucidate that school principals from rural schools also solicit sponsorships to attain specialised resources such as computer laboratories, data projectors and libraries to improve and enhance learning. In contrast, in former Model C schools, school principals with the support from the school governing body can access these resources without relying on sponsorships, because they are well positioned in terms of financial and material resources (Christie, 2010; Ogina, 2017).

As instructional leaders, school principals should monitor the academic performance of learners to identify areas that need improvement (Donkor & Asante, 2016; Hallinger, 2003; Mkhize, 2017; Naicker et al., 2014). Monitoring of learners' academic performance is done through the analysis of continuous assessment and examination results (Mestry, 2017; Naicker et al., 2014). Thereupon, school principals facilitate intervention programmes with input from teachers to improve the academic performance of learners. Research done by Naicker et al. (2014) in black township schools found that these intervention programmes take place during weekends and on school holidays and learners are expected to attend these programmes. Furthermore, the instructional time of these schools is extended to have sufficient time for afternoon classes. Consequently, these schools achieve remarkable results (Naicker et al., 2014). Mkhize's (2017) research from a rural context reveals similar findings in relation to schools' intervention programmes drawn up by school principals.

Empirical studies (Brandon et al., 2018; Donkor & Asante, 2016; Manaseh, 2016; Mestry, 2017; Naicker et al., 2014) have indicated that school principals play a significant role in evaluating and monitoring the work of teachers to improve learner performance. For example, Naicker et al. (2014) study found that school principals use a distributed leadership approach to monitor the work of teachers. This task is delegated to departmental heads who conduct class visits to ensure school functionality and performance in terms of teaching and learning in the classroom. However, a study conducted by Mestry (2017) found that it is school principals themselves who perform these class visits with the intention to improve learner performance. In the process, school principals can provide alternative solutions to problems that teachers encounter during teaching and learning. Supporting these findings are studies (Brandon et al., 2018; Manaseh, 2016) conducted in Canada and Tanzania, which found that classroom visits by school principals enable them to identify teachers' weaknesses and, in the process, provide solutions on identified weaknesses. Donkor and Asante's (2016) research from Ghana reveal that not only do school principals evaluate and monitor the work of teachers during class visits but they check if teachers' lesson plans are prepared and the recording of formal assessments.

2.5.2 Professional learning communities

A professional learning community is a model of school organisation designed to foster collaboration and continuous learning among teachers to harness school improvement through organisational and cultural change (Mullen & Schunk, 2010). There are different types of professional learning communities that foster school improvement, namely, learning communities within the school (Admiraal et al., 2019), learning communities outside the school (Sleegers et al., 2013; Zulu & Bertram, 2019) and learning communities for leadership practices (Mestry, 2017; Naidoo, 2019; Van der Voort & Wood, 2014). PLCs within the school involve teachers collaborating and learning how to improve pedagogical practices based on assessment and evaluation (Admiraal et al, 2019). Hence, Stoll and Kools (2017) conclude that schools therefore become learning organisations since they support learning through the provision of resources, promote teacher development, provide guidance and support to newly appointed teachers, and promote team learning among staff relating to teaching practice. In addition, school principals distribute leadership to their management teams and teachers within the organisation to help them develop to their full potential.

It has been argued that professional learning communities outside the school are important for teacher professional development, learner achievement and school improvement (Sleegers et al., 2013). Professional learning communities outside the school consist of subject clusters, workshops, seminars by the DBE, and communities of practice, among others (Zulu & Bertram, 2019). In line with professional learning communities outside the school, Zulu and Bertram (2019), in a South African context, studied 19 mathematics teachers of a professional learning community that attended workshop facilitated by a non-governmental organisation with support from DBE. The findings of the study indicate that the collaboration of these teachers enabled them to share ideas with one another on different types of teaching approaches to utilise in the teaching of mathematics using relevant teaching resources. Furthermore, this study suggests that teachers shared resources and examination papers with one another and engaged in team teaching to support each other to address areas of improvements in sections that they were battling to teach in the subject. These findings are congruent with Tshiningayamwe's (2016) contention that professional learning communities outside the school contribute significantly to school improvement since they equip teachers with pedagogical practices, assessment practices and access to learner support

materials. I argue that this school improvement practice is not exclusive to South Africa only; it is also practised in other countries such as Canada (Butler et al., 2015), Netherlands (Admiraal et al., 2019), United States of America (Olivier & Huffman, 2016), Malawi (Mwale et al., 2021), Australia (Tour, 2017) and Taiwan (Chen et al., 2016).

In addition to professional learning communities within and outside the school, there are also professional learning communities that cater for the professional development of school principals. This type of learning community consists of a group of school principals who meet on a regular basis to discuss pertinent issues in relation to their development as leaders (Rittenour, 2017). Furthermore, these leaders work in a collaborative setting with the purpose of improving learner outcomes (Du Four et al., 2010). Rittenour (2017), writing from an American perspective, argues that school principals working in a collaborative setting are able to improve learner outcomes in their schools since they share ideas on curriculum management, the creation of a positive school culture, professional teacher development, and leadership and management practices.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, a review of literature on school decline, school effectiveness and school improvement has been presented to develop an understanding of the causes of school decline. Several recurring debates emerged from the reviewed literature in relation to the study focus. The recurring debates emanated from different contexts; national and international. The reviewed literature on school decline showed the negative impact that it has on the academic performance of schools, and it posed similar implications across several contexts. The next chapter presents the theoretical framework that I used as a lens in this study to explore the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline.

CHAPTER THREE
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed literature on school decline, school effectiveness and school improvement as important constituents of the research focus. This chapter focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of the study, namely, social realism theory and general systems theory. In developing the chapter, firstly, I explain the theory choice deemed most suited for this study. Secondly, I discuss Archer's (1995) social realism theory, particularly the mechanisms of structure, culture and agency, which is a lens I adopted to understand schools that are in decline. Thirdly, I discuss general systems theory to understand the reimagined improvements of schools that are in decline. Finally, I bring together the two theories to form a theoretical framework that underpins the study; also, to show how they assisted me in understanding the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline.

3.2 Theory choice deemed most suited for this inquiry

Researchers in the educational field are often urged to ground their research in a theoretical framework (Cohen et al, 2018). A useful theory in the research fraternity is one that tells an illuminating story about some phenomenon, one that provides new insights and deepens your understanding of that phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013). Extending from this discussion, a theoretical framework provides a lens for analysing and making sense of field texts (data) (Creswell, 2014). It is for this reason that I had to select a suitable theoretical framework that would assist me as a narrative inquirer to analyse and make sense of field texts for this inquiry. At first, I considered selecting Kanter's (2004) organisational decline theory and a conceptual framework on Stoll and Fink (1996) typologies of school cultures. However, after I intensively engaged with literature on this theory and conceptual framework, I came to a realisation that they would not fit perfectly well for this inquiry. Drawing from this experience, I realised that finding a suitable framework for this

inquiry would not be an easy process. As a result, I critically analysed the research puzzles and the purpose of the study (Maxwell, 2004), and solicited advice from my supervisor in selecting the most suitable theories for this inquiry. As a result, I found that this inquiry needed two theories, namely, social realism theory and the general systems theory. These theories will provide a lens in understanding the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline. Social realism theory deals with the influence of structure, culture, and agency in a declining school. General systems theory will provide a lens in understanding how the systems in the declining schools can be improved.

3.3 Social realism theory

Social realism is founded upon by a critical realist philosophy (Westaway et al., 2019). Critical realism holds that reality exists independently of our knowledge of it, but that our knowledge of the world is fallible and thus always subject to scrutiny (Bhaskar, 2008). Social realism is founded on one of the critical realist concepts, depth ontology (Archer, 1995). Depth ontology is well suited to research that seeks to understand the fundamental conditions of a phenomenon. Bhaskar (2008) purports that reality is stratified in that it is divided into three domains. This theorist goes on to explain each domain; firstly, the empirical domain is made up of people's subjective perceptions and experiences of what happens in the world. Secondly, the actual domain is made up of the objective world of events that gives rise to people's perceptions and experiences. Thirdly, the domain of the real includes all experiences, events, and structures that exist in the world, regardless of whether they generate events or not.

According to the social realism theory, every society is comprised of two basic features: morphogenesis and morphostasis (Archer, 1995). Both these features serve a specific purpose and play a unique role in the formation of social reality. On the one hand, morphogenesis is a process in which some internal changes are made in the system that not only change the overall structure of the system but also change the system's final product (Banifatemeh et al., 2018). On the other hand, morphostasis refers to a situation in which no change occurs, that is, processes that tend to retain or preserve a system's given form, organisation, or state (Vorster, 2010). Morphogenesis and morphostasis occur at all times and in all places, and their influences include an array of

potential structural changes ranging from change in action to change in reaction and interaction, as well as possible structural complexities (Ryan, 2005). On this compound notion, Mutch (2002) postulates that morphogenesis consists of two parts, one of which is "morpho", by which Archer refers to the change in society, while the other part, i.e., "genetic", is used to highlight the role of agency in this change. According to Archer (1995), the part "morpho" means that society has no predetermined form. In this context, the part "genetic" suggests that there are some agents whose intentional and non-intentional actions shape the society and give it a certain form.

Social realist theory, according to Archer (1995), accepts that there exists a reality independent of people's representation of it but acknowledges that their knowledge of reality is subject to all kinds of historical and other influences. Archer accentuates that social realist theory comprises structure, culture, and agency, which are superimposed on each other, and they either constrain or enable the actions of the agent, a person who manipulates and influences a situation in the organisation. Archer (2003) notes that enablements facilitate courses of action while constraints frustrate the achievement of desired outcomes. In order to understand what occurs in any social context, it is necessary to understand how people (agents) respond to the constraints and enablements presented by the socio-cultural context (Archer, 1995).

Social realism accentuates the importance of emergent properties at the levels of both agency and structure but considers these as proper to the strata in question and therefore distinct from each other and irreducible to one other (Archer, 1995). An emergent property is elucidated by Dave (2010) as a property "not possessed by any of the parts individually and that would not be possessed by the full set of parts in the absence of a structuring set of relations between them". The key aspect for emergence is how a specific set of components are related and patterned with one another to form a higher-level agent that possesses properties not owned by its parts (Archer, 1995; Nakamura, 2019). Furthermore, the relations and interactions amongst the components will determine whether an agent has emergent properties and what type of properties it has.

Structure, culture, and agency act as mechanisms at the level of the real (that influence events and our experiences of events) to effect change and transformation or keep the status quo (Archer, 1995; Pillay, 2015). For example, in the schooling context, it is now possible to see the generative powers of the rules and policies of the school and legislation framing these as structures, together with attitudes, beliefs and values that constitute culture, which can present constraining

mechanisms to change and transformation (Archer, 1995; Pillay, 2015). Below I critically discuss structure, culture and agency as enablements or constraints in the declining schools.

3.3.1 Structure

Structure, according to Archer (1995), is understood to consist of roles and positional levels within an organisation. Structure also includes material conditions that motivate action (Archer, 1995). In terms of schools, structure refers to roles, systems, policies, committees and positional levels (Leithwood et al., 2008). Archer contends that society precedes the individual and that people do not create society, for it is already made and they are born into a pre-structured context. Structures are the results of human interaction, any of which may be unintended, unwanted, and unacknowledged (Archer, 1995). As such, they are activity dependent but irreducible to current practices.

Thus, Archer (1995) contends that each individual in society has a structure that pre-exists them. For example, a teaching position must exist before someone can be a teacher or a school has to exist before learners can enrol. Archer's contention is that a position has to exist before someone can fill it and this remains the case where individuals have been able to define such things as new roles for themselves.

According to Archer (2003), structures impinge on agents to condition their actions through constraints and enablements that either impede or facilitate courses of action. Therefore, it is only because people envisage a course of action that one can speak of constraint and enablement. Constraints are confronted as situations that frustrate the achievement of desired outcomes. It is for this reason that Archer points out that structural constraints may generate events that are unfavourable. In terms of schools, Shava and Heystek (2018) identify financial constraints (structural challenge) as one of the causes of schools declining in learner academic performance. To cite a few examples, principals from some declining schools do not have adequate funding to purchase school resources, improve school infrastructure and employ teachers to reduce classroom overcrowding. Apart from financial constraints as a structural challenge in a school, lack of support from the DBE poses a similar challenge in terms of providing adequate funding for schools to function effectively (Mpungose & Ngwenya, 2017). Nonetheless, school principals in South

Africa are held accountable for a school's academic performance irrespective of its structural challenges and socio-economic status (Heystek, 2015; Mpungose & Ngwenya, 2017; Potgieter & Zuma, 2019). This is also evident in other contexts such as Nigeria (Abdulrahman & Shamsudeen, 2017; Usman, 2016), the United States of America (Adejumo, 2017), Ghana (Donkor, 2015), Malawi (Kafumbu, 2020), among other others. Irrespective of structural constraints in a school, agents have the power to change them to foster school improvement (Archer, 1995; Pillay, 2015).

A qualitative study conducted by Shava and Heystek (2018) in the North-West Province in South Africa reveals that there are structural enablements to improve declining schools such as professional development committees that arrange for teachers to attend professional development workshops and the establishment of subject heads in assisting departmental heads in managing the curriculum and sharing of instructional leadership. These structures (committees) enable teachers in the school to be able to establish policies related to teaching and learning and assigning different roles and responsibilities to different teachers. Besides this study, a study conducted by Pillay (2015) in the KwaZulu-Natal Province in South Africa reveals that school principals establish structures that enable opportunities for teachers to play a role in school improvement. These structures include subject committee meetings (where curriculum related matters are discussed) and performance evaluation. In this study, we see that the participating school principals entered pre-existing contexts not of their making but in keeping with Archer's view on reality emerged from the causal relationships between 'mechanisms' at the level of the real (Archer, 1995; Pillay, 2015). These structures brought with them new properties and powers causally influenced by personal emergent properties of teachers (Archer, 1995; Pillay, 2015). This means that teachers can use their personal emergent properties to bring structural change in a school (Archer, 1995).

In this study, the roles and positions of school principals, departmental heads, SGB chairpersons, teachers and circuit managers represent structures. In addition, structures such as policies, systems and committees were also studied.

3.3.2 Culture

From a social realist perspective, Archer et al. (1998, p. 504) describe culture as "knowledge, beliefs, language, theories, conceptual schemes, significant systems, semiotic patterns and socio-

symbolics" prevalent in an organisation. In the education context, culture refers to a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, values, ceremonies, traditions, relationships that are embedded in the school (Barth, 2002; Day & Harris, 2003). Furthermore, it is a historical legacy of power that is exerted over people's thoughts and their actions.

Archer makes a distinction between the cultural system and socio-cultural interactions between people. The cultural system includes a range of beliefs and various forms of knowledge. These beliefs and epistemic elements may be logically consistent or inconsistent with each other. The socio-cultural interactions pertain to influences of people on one another at the level of interaction. At this level, there is a dialogue, group formations, organisation, articulation, and pursuit of various vested interests; however, these may be of little or to great effect, depending on the extent of power and exchange at this level, and the distribution of resources such as power, sanctions, expertise (Archer, 1995, cited in Mantashe & Nkonki, 2019).

Archer (1995) elucidates that the cultural system consists of constraints, and they introduce new problems through the relationship between the emergent entities. In addition, the cultural system consists of logical propositions which may be contradictory, resulting in cultural tension. In terms of schools, the toxic culture may constrain the academic performance of learners, and this may subsequently lead to school decline. For example, Malowski (2001) claims that when a pattern of behaviours, attitudes, expectations, ideas, beliefs, and values in a school is toxic, the culture may cause a decline in learner academic performance. Sharing similar views are Watson (2001) and Msila (2013), who confirm that a toxic school culture is hostile to learning and this subsequently leads to a decline in learner achievement. This toxic culture is perpetuated by low school attendance by teachers and learners and learner indiscipline. It becomes a challenge for school principals to change this type of culture due to teacher and learner resistance (Archer, 1995; Msila, 2013).

Given the above discussion, Mombourquette (2017) asserts that the toxic culture that prevails in the declining school is influenced by the absence of vision and mission. She further asserts that in some instances, the vision and mission of the declining school may be displayed on the school walls and handbooks, however, the school may not put structures in place to use the vision and mission as a driving force to mould and shape the academic progress to enhance learner achievement. As a result, there is tension between the school principal and stakeholders such as

teachers, support staff and parent governors, due to the school principals' inability to demonstrate how vision and mission can be executed on a daily practice to achieve learner achievement (Mombourquette, 2017). These factors serve as mechanisms at the level of the real to constrain the cultural system and the socio-cultural level as a whole (Archer, 1995; Pillay, 2015).

Cultural constraints in a school setting can emerge through a process of causality as cultural enablements (Archer, 1995; Pillay, 2015). Furthermore, through time and causal relationships between groups and individuals at the socio-cultural level, there is elaboration of the cultural system due to the socio-cultural level modifying current logical relations and introducing new ones. In a school, there could be stakeholders who may change the cultural belief system due to the material power that they possess, in order to improve the culture of teaching and learning in the school (Archer, 1995). In improving the culture of declining schools, Mombourquette (2017) suggests that the vision and mission of the school must be clearly articulated by the school principal to teachers, learners and communities. In her analysis of positive culture in American schools, Mombourquette (2017) found that school principals displayed the vision statement of the school on their office walls, in each classroom of the school and on all documents that go out to the community. The vision statement included words such as "believe, trust, honesty, respect and responsibility". The development of the vision statement was developed using a collaborative and collegial approach involving teachers and members of the parent community. This was fundamental in improving the educational goals of the school. Shava and Heystek (2018), writing in the South African context, also share similar sentiments in that school principals working in collaboration with teachers and parents to foster positive school culture are fundamental for the achievement of educational goals. This improvement strategy acts as a mechanism at the level of the real (Archer, 1995) to improve the academic performance of declining schools (Shava & Heystek, 2018).

In this study, culture refers to behaviours, beliefs, values, and relationships between stakeholders within the declining schools. It is worth noting that it is the culture and the structures that are in place that hasten the decline in these declining schools. In line with this statement, Archer articulates that agents in this environment activate both structure and culture since they have relative autonomy from one another.

3.3.3 Agency

Agency from a social realism perspective refers to the human ability to act, influence and manipulate a situation (Archer, 1995). Agents have various ways of foreseeing challenges and acting strategically to discover ways around constraints. For instance, Archer (2003) suggests that agents have to diagnose their situations, identify their interests and design projects that are suitable for attaining their needs. Agents are able to do this by how they talk to themselves and how they consider themselves in relation to social contexts and vice versa (Archer, 2007).

Archer (1995) explains that there are different types of agents in society, namely, corporate agents, primary agents, and social actors. Archer's differentiation between corporate and primary agents partially recognises that some individuals or groups are more powerful in orientating social change than others; for, after all, they are less constrained in the sense that they are freer than others regarding their personal choices when pursuing goals. Firstly, corporate agents are organised interest groups that undertake some form of action to achieve a goal (Archer, 1995). In addition, these agents have power proper to themselves, as they form an emergent stratum, as Archer points out. Their typical power is the property to articulate shared interests, organise for collective action, generate social movements and exercise corporate influence in decision-making. In doing so, corporate agents act together and interact with other agents, and they do so strategically, that is, in a manner which cannot be construed as the summation of individuals' self-interest (Archer, 1995). Strategic action implies that corporate agents are active rather than 'passive', that is they are social subjects with reasons for attempting to bring about certain outcomes, rather than objects to whom things happen (Archer, 2000). According to Naicker et al. (2016), corporate agents in the schooling context are those who work with others (school stakeholders) and, in doing so, are able to transform themselves and become corporate agents.

Secondly, Archer accentuates that primary agents do not have power and influence. Furthermore, these agents remain powerless because of their relationship dependency based upon their lack of resources. For this reason, these agents remain passive because they do not play a part in the strategic guidance of society, as they have literally lack a say in cultural or structural modelling (Archer, 2000).

Archer elucidates that there is social interaction between primary and corporate agents. For instance, there are primary agents who, in the pursuit of change, use their agency to become

corporate agents (Archer, 1995). In terms of schools, school stakeholders who consistently take on leadership roles for the improvement of the school, transform from primary to corporate agents (Naicker et al., 2016). As a result, these school stakeholders become social actors because they have power and resources (Archer, 2003). However, not everyone is a social actor; some agents may not have power and resources (Archer, 2003).

Archer describes an actor as an individual who has internalised the mission or purpose of the issue for which he or she is a corporate agent. As a result, this individual is able to work independently and act upon matters that are considered significant in relation to structural emergent properties or cultural emergent properties that he or she encounters (Archer, 1995). In this study, agency refers to school stakeholders' ability to act, influence and manipulate a situation in relation to their social contexts, such as their declining schools.

3.3.4 Dualism – separating structure, culture, and agency

In order to examine the interplay between structure, culture and agency, Archer (1995) and Bhaskar (2008) maintain that it is necessary to assign independence to each. Hence, analytical dualism suggest that people and structural mechanisms are ontologically distinct and have emergent properties and casual powers that are irreducible to each other, meaning that in principle they are analytically separable (Archer, 1995). This allows for a deep analysis of each without any conflation. Therefore, Archer suggests that a researcher must engage in analytical dualism by studying structure, culture and agency independently without conflating them, non- conflationary theorising. This applies to the interplay between structure and agency as well as to that between culture and agency.

In this study, structure, culture, and agency were studied independently as enablers or constraints. The structural domain focused on positions, roles, systems, committees, rules, and policies. The cultural domain focused on behaviours, beliefs, values, and relationships within the declining schools. The agential domain focused on the ability of the agent to bring about improvement in the declining schools. In this study, the interplay on the structural, cultural, and agential domain led to the emergence of events and experiences relating to school decline and improving these schools.

3.4 General systems theory

Systems theory is a concept that emerged from engineering, biology, and economics, which examines principles and laws that can be generalised across multiple systems (Alter, 2007: Dubrovsky, 2004; Yoon & Kuchinke, 2005). The basis of systems theory is that all parts of an organisation are dynamic network of interrelated elements, and changing one variable may have an impact on many others (Gillies, 1982; Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). A system is a collection of two or more elements in which the behaviour of each element influences the behaviour of the whole; the behaviour of the elements and their effects on the whole are interdependent; and while subgroups of the elements all influence the behaviour of the whole, none has an independent effect on it (Skyttner, 1996). In other words, a system is made up of subsystems whose interaction and dependency bring the broader system toward equilibrium in the entire system (Martinelli, 2001; Steele, 2003). According to Oyebade (2010), a subsystem is a system that exists within a larger system. It is a set of components interrelating for a purpose that relates to the purpose of the larger system. Subsystems within the school system include instructional and support service subsystems, which are all made up of people and things that are components of the school system (Oyebade, 2010). A suprasystem is a larger system of which a particular system is a part. In addition, it is a set of interrelating elements to fulfil a broad purpose that includes a purpose of a particular system (Oyebade, 2010). For instance, the school system (including its own subsystems) is a subsystem of the school system in the local government area, which in this wise is a suprasystem to the school subsystem (Oyebade, 2010). An important feature of a system is that any system tends to achieve a balance among many forces operating upon and within the system (Oyebade, 2010).

3.4.1 Types of systems

In terms of an organisation's relationship with its environment, systems theories are usually classified as either closed or open (Bush, 2003; Ursacescu & Cioc, 2016). Closed systems tend to minimise interactions with the environment and take little consideration of outside opinions in establishing the organisation's goals and operations (Bush, 2003). Bolman and Deal (1991) provide structural assumptions about the closed systems approach; these assumptions depict

organisations as relatively closed systems pursuing fairly explicit goals. Such conditions enable organisations to operate rationally, with high levels of confidence, predictability, and efficiency. Organisations highly dependent on the environment are continually vulnerable to external influence or interference. To reduce this this vulnerability, a range of structural mechanisms are developed to safeguard control activities from fluctuation and uncertainty (Bolman & Deal, 1999).

The key characteristic of an open system is that the system itself is able to exchange information, materials, or energy with the external environment (Shin et al., 2017). Hence, the organisation's connection with this type of environment is critical for its survival and success (Amagoh, 2008; Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). In the context of education, organisations such as school systems are now viewed as open systems, which must adapt to changing external conditions to be effective, and in the long term survive. Also, the opens systems theory in education illustrates the relationships between schools and external groups such as parents, communities, employers and education authorities (Bush, 2003). Therefore, this makes it possible for schools to interact with external groups and individuals in the neighbourhood in soliciting support for the objectives of the organisation (Bush, 2003). In this study, open systems refer to the reimagined relationship between declining schools and external stakeholders from the community to foster academic improvement.

3.4.2 Input-Process-Output-Feedback-Model

According to Kast and Rosenzweig (1972), the open system can be viewed as a transformation model. In a dynamic relationship with its environment, it receives various inputs, transforms these inputs in some way, and exports outputs (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). Using an Input-Process-Output-Feedback model adapted from Hanson (1977) and Owens (1981), Obilade (1989) examined education as a process involving the following five inputs: a) human resources such as learners, educators, administrators, catering workers, bus drivers, and others. b) material resources such as buildings, desks, books, equipment, pencils, and others. c) financial resources such as money. d) constraints such as requirements of the law and policy, expectation of parents, values and goals; and e) existing knowledge in the society. The throughput process involves mainly the teaching-learning process. The output or products of the educational system are learners in the form of educated people now better equipped to serve themselves and society. These learners have acquired more knowledge, intellectual and manual skills, and powers of reason and analysis. Also

affected are their values, attitudes and motivation, creativity, communication skills, cultural appreciation, sense of social responsibility and understanding of the world. Some of the outputs go back to the system as new inputs. The feedback process is evaluative because it provides the necessary information about the performance so that appropriate modifications can be affected on the objectives and other inputs. Feedback is the process by which self-regulating and self-directing systems adjust themselves. It entails drawing some of the systems output back into the system as information inputs, so that possible discrepancies between intended outputs and actual outputs could be compared. Feedback is positive when no discrepancy exists, but it is negative when there is. Negative feedback indicates that the system is deviating from a prescribed course and should readjust to a new steady state (Von Bertalanffy, 1968).

3.4.3 Interventions in a school system

Cummings and Worley (2005) view interventions as a series of sequential, planned actions or events designed to assist an organisation in increasing its effectiveness. Furthermore, interventions are also viewed as purposeful actions by agents to create change (Midgley, 2000). The changes that are created are made to system processes, structures, and goals (Lyons, 2016). Interventions are intended to assist parts and subsystems work together to successfully implement change (Lyons, 2016). They are transition events that are intended to challenge the status quo or maintain equilibrium. Interventions are essentially intended to challenge the existing quo to expedite development that leads to positive change (Lyons, 2016). In this study, interventions refer to reimagined improvement strategies recommended by stakeholders to enhance the academic performance in the declining schools.

3.4.4 Critique of systems theory

Even though the systems theory has its advantages, it is also subjected to criticism. According to Yoon and Kuchinke (2005), the systems theory fails to indicate how co-operation in the organisation should occur, nor does it indicate what should be done when the analysis reveals conflicts between the workplace environment, organisational structure and the organisational environment. These are issues that are related to uncertainty, which makes it challenging for the

organisation to determine solutions that are suitable. The systems concept assumes that the boundaries between the organisation and its environment are distinct (Fioretti & Visser, 2004). Given this, Castells (1996) cautions that it is challenging to differentiate boundaries and transformations when organisations have several nodes of interaction and lines of communication. Furthermore, in an environment of rapid change where tasks and group compositions become intertwined, open systems theory fails to provide immediate solutions to how organizations must tackle such complex situations (Clippinger, 1999).

In their analysis, Kast and Rosenzweig (1973) identified four shortcomings of systems theory. Firstly, among one of their criticisms is the notion of comparing organisations to organisms, as advocated by systems theory. These scholars posit that we should be wary about overly literalising the connection between living organisms and organisations. What this means is that organisations may be systems but not necessarily natural systems. Secondly, on the division between closed and open systems, Kast and Rosenzweig (1973) argue that there are challenges in applying this strict polarisation to social organisations. Many social organisations and their subsystems are either open or partially closed. Hence, open and closed are a matter of degree. Thirdly, Kast and Rosenzweig (1973) urge that when applying systems theory, one should be more particular in describing the specific system under the study by being more detailed about the system's boundaries and the level of analysis. Fourthly, systems theory overlooks the reality that social organisations are contrived systems. Since the general systems theory focuses mostly on natural organisms, it may overlook some important aspects which are vital for social organisations. Social organisations are created by humans and do not occur spontaneously in nature. This shows that they can be established for a variety of reasons and do not follow the life-cycle patterns of biological systems (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1973).

3.5 Assemblage of the theories

In the previous section, I discussed social realism theory by Archer (1995) and the general systems theory. In this section, I explain how I brought together the two theories to provide the framework for the study, which focuses on the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline. These stakeholders, namely, principals, departmental heads, teachers, SGB chairpersons and circuit

managers were able to relay stories of experience regarding how the decline in their schools manifested. The stakeholders' stories of experience were influenced by multiple mechanisms which influenced the decline in the sampled schools. To this end, social realism theory was employed. The study drew on social realism theory to explain how mechanisms, namely, structure, culture and agency influenced school decline. These mechanisms are confronted with constraints and does not enable stakeholders to facilitate their course of action in mitigating school decline.

Given that structure, culture and agency served as constraints in the declining schools, they interfered with the effectiveness of the school system. The interplay of these mechanisms (structure, culture and agency) has been dynamic and complex since the interplay has had a negative impact on the academic performance of the sampled schools. As a result, all systems at these schools were paralysed. These systems include but are not limited to departments, teaching and learning, administration and management (Obilade, 1989). The general systems theory postulates that changes in one part of the school system can affect the entire social system (Oyebade, 2010). If the change is negative in of the school systems, it causes problems in the entire social system in the school (Normore, 2003).

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed two theories, namely, social realism theory and the general systems theory. These theories formed the theoretical framework of this inquiry. Social realism theory informed my understanding of mechanisms, namely, structure, culture, and agency, which led the sampled schools to decline. General systems theory informed my understanding of stakeholders' re-imaginations, in terms of how systems can in a school can mitigate school decline. These theories were comprehensively discussed and thereafter integrated to formulate an overarching theoretical framework for this inquiry. In the next chapter, I present the research design and methodology employed in carrying out the study and justification thereof.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the two theories constituting this study's theoretical framework, namely, social realism theory and general systems theory. This chapter aims to present the methodological underpinnings of the study. In developing this chapter, firstly, I discuss the research positioning that is adopted in this study, the interpretivist paradigm with its ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological assumptions. Secondly, I discuss the qualitative research approach, which I adopted to capture the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline. Thirdly, I discuss the narrative inquiry methodology, as well as the field text generation methods employed in this study. A justification for the use of field text generation methods is discussed. Finally, I discuss issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

4.2 Research paradigm

Thomas (2010) views a research paradigm as a worldview or belief within which a study is located. The literature outlines several paradigms that are used by researchers in the research fraternity. This includes positivist, post-positivist, transformative/critical, pragmatic, post structuralist, and postmodern, among others. These paradigms each embody different ideas about reality (ontology), and how we gain and produce knowledge (epistemology) (Maxwell, 2013). Firstly, the positivist paradigm is based on the premise that true knowledge is grounded on sensory experience and can only be advanced through observation and experimentation (Cohen et al., 2018). It gives validity and objectivity to research since it is scientifically based. Secondly, the post-positivist paradigm evolved from the positivism paradigm. It is concerned with the subjectivity of reality and moves away from the purely objective stance adopted by the logical positivists (Ryan, 2006). Thirdly, the transformative/critical paradigm heavily emphasises research related to issues of social inequity and social justice (Mertens, 2009). The research includes a reform agenda that may change the lives of the participants, the organisations in which individuals work, and the researcher's life (Creswell, 2014). Fourthly, the pragmatic paradigm is applicable to mixed-methods research in

that researchers draw from qualitative and quantitative assumptions when they are conducting their research (Morgan, 2007). Hence, this paradigm opens the doors to multiple data generation methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions. Fifthly, the poststructuralist paradigm sees no essential link between the word and its meaning. As a result, meanings do not exist before events, experiences, or discourses; they exist when they are articulated in language (Weedon, 1997). Finally, the postmodern paradigm is based on the understanding that knowledge is constructed and culturally situated, and people's lives are ultimately incomprehensible. This leads to a view of multiple realities (Cohen et al., 2018).

I grew up in a multicultural society which enabled me to interact with people from different racial and cultural backgrounds. Through these interactions, I have been able to establish a close and personal relationship with these people and in the process, we have become genuine friends. For this reason, I have attended weddings, places of worship, traditional ceremonies, and parties that friends have invited me to. Attending these cultural events broadened my horizons in understanding peoples' cultures and in the process embracing diversity. Drawing from this experience, I realised that the experiences, understandings, and realities of people are not similar; instead, they view the world differently. As a result, I learnt to pay attention to individual characteristics whenever I interact with people. This understanding resonated with the interpretivist research positioning, which I decided to embrace in exploring the lived experiences of stakeholders in declining schools (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Briggs & Coleman, 2007; Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ormston et al., 2014).

The interpretivist paradigm describes and understand how people make sense of their worlds, and how they make meaning of their particular actions (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Moreover, this form of paradigm seeks to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen et al., 2007). In this study, I was interested on how school stakeholders construct meanings from and about their experiences (Creswell, 2013). In this way, I was exposed to an array of experiences and realities, since one of the ontological assumptions of the interpretivist paradigm suggests that there are multiple truths or social realties that exist (Cohen et al., 2011). These sentiments are corroborated by Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2013), who explicate that people may or may not experience reality in the same way. Hence, as an interpretivist researcher, I depicted multiple

realities of school stakeholders by writing their stories. Moreover, the goal of this research was to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the phenomenon being studied, school decline (Creswell, 2014).

Apart from ontology, qualitative researchers also approach their research from epistemological, methodological, and axiological assumptions (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Nzimande, 2018). Epistemology is based on the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed, and it is bound by the context in which it is found (Cohen et al., 2007). Epistemology is elucidated by Giacomini (2010, p. 131) as a theory of knowledge concerning beliefs about "how phenomena come to be known". In line with this view, interpretivist researchers believe that knowledge construction is personal and unique in this regard (Hussain et al., 2013). Owing to this, I established a close and personal relationship with my participants to elicit rich data from the stories that they shared with me. Consequently, knowledge was produced because I was fully engaging with my participants when they shared stories of experience (Hiller, 2016). From an interpretivist perspective, all knowledge is grounded in our particular experiences; it is subjective and bound to the natural contexts in which we enact our lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The methodological assumption of the interpretivist paradigm requires the phenomena to be understood through the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher (Cohen et al., 2007). Hence, the goal of interpretivist methodology is to understand participants' social phenomena in their context. Methodology refers to the methods used in an investigation that is well planned to find out something and gain knowledge about a research problem (Keeves, 1997). To achieve this, I used narrative inquiry as a methodology through narrative interview and artefact inquiry. These interpretive methods yielded insight and understandings of behaviours, explanation of actions from the participants' perspectives regarding the decline in their schools (Scotland, 2012).

Finally, axiology considers the philosophical approach to making decisions of value or the right decisions (Finnis, 1980). It involves defining, evaluating, and understanding concepts of right and wrong behaviour relating to the research. In addition, it considers what value we shall attribute to the different aspects of the research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In this study, I followed all ethical procedures to ensure that participants were not harmed. This is discussed under the ethics section.

4.3 Research approach

Having a rigorous research approach is crucial in the research process (Cohen et al., 2018). Labaree (2013) views a research approach as an overall strategy that is chosen by the researcher to integrate different components of the study in a coherent and logical way. A research approach is explained by Pandey and Pandey (2015) as framework for a study that is used as a guide in generating and analysing field texts. It is a blueprint that is followed in completing a study. Mc Millan and Schumacher (2006) explicate that a research approach is set up of the research, the participants and field text generation methods that are used.

Creswell (2014) advances three types of research approaches used in educational research, namely, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. He argues that a researcher does not only select a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approach to conduct research, but he or she needs to decide on a type of study within these three choices. As a researcher, I located this study within a broad category of qualitative research approach because it enabled me to capture the meanings that people give to the nature of their experiences (Cohen et al., 2007). Sharing similar sentiments are Merriam and Tisdell (2016), who attest that a qualitative research approach enables a researcher to understand how people interpret their experiences, and construct their worlds and the meaning they attribute to their experiences. I found the qualitative research approach harmonising with the interpretivist research positioning, which I decided to embrace in exploring the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline (Thomas, 2003; Willis, 2007).

4.4 Research methodology

This study adopted narrative inquiry as a methodology and there are three reasons that contributed to this decision. Firstly, I found that narrative inquiry allows participants to tell stories; as Clandinin (2013) posits, humans are storytelling organisms who individually and socially lead lives. Narrative researchers describe such lives, collect, and tell stories of them, and write stories of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). The stories in this study are very pertinent since they are the only means through which the lived experiences of participants could be captured and told (Clandinin, 2013). Secondly, I found that the topic, school decline, is a complicated phenomenon because researchers should seek to describe how the process unfolds over time (Brooks, 2018;

Duke, 2008; Hochbein, 2011). Thus, narratives enabled me to present this phenomenon holistically "with all its complexities and richness" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 2). Thirdly, narrative inquiry aims at capturing 'the whole story', whereas other methods tend to communicate understandings of studied subjects or phenomena at certain points (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 3).

The narrative inquiry methodology attends to three commonplaces to understand individuals' experiences (Clandinin, 2013). These commonplaces are temporality, sociality, and place. Firstly, the temporality commonplace points the inquirer to the past, present and future of people, places, things, and events under the study. In this study, the focus is on the lived experiences of stakeholders serving in a declining school and showing how the process of decline unfolds over time, in terms of the past, present and future. These experiences portrayed in a form of stories had a setting where the events took place and included people who were part of the event (Naseem, 2014). Secondly, the sociality commonplace refers to personal and social conditions of individuals under the study. The personal conditions refer to feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions of the inquirer and participants, while the social conditions refer to the environment, external conditions, forces, and people that form part of the individual's life. In relation to this study, when participants' told stories of their experiences, I observed the emotions, feelings, behaviours and thoughts that were triggered. Thirdly, the place commonplace refers to the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry takes place (Clandinin, 2013). The key to this commonplace is recognising that "all events take place some place" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 481). In this study, all interview sessions took place in either the participant's classroom, office, or home. These places were conducive for participants to live their stories free from scrutiny (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996).

Clandinin (2013) claims that narrative inquiry is developed through the relational process. This means that narrative inquirers recognise that the researcher and participants are in a relationship with each other and that both parties will learn and change in the encounter (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006, p. 10). Who the researcher and the researched are will inevitably emerge in the interactions as they both bring their own experiences, histories, and worldviews to the inquiry process (Mendieta, 2013). It is precisely for this reason that I formed a close and personal relationship with participants by interacting with them through telephone calls, video calls and on various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok, and Instagram. Apart from this, I have also

interacted with participants in various workshops that we have attended and through informal visits to their schools and homes. This type of relationship subsequently led in participants feeling free to share sensitive stories of their declining schools. Listening to these stories made me understand the lived experiences of participants and the trajectory of decline of their schools. This is in harmony with the sentiments of Clandinin et al. (2011) that it is through narrated stories that people are able to understand, make meaning of and relate experiences because stories are how people make sense of their existence.

Africans used oral storytelling as the primary means of preserving their history, customs, traditions and ceremonial practices before writing and reading were developed in the continent (Vambe, 2001). Chinyowa (2004) informs us that storytelling was done through singing, drumming, percussion instruments, clapping and dancing. Hence, the function of storytelling has been identified as mediating and transmitting knowledge and information across generations, conveying information to the larger generations about the culture, worldviews, morals and expectations, norms, and values (Chinyowa, 2004). Based on the above discussion, participants shared stories of their experiences from the South African context since storytelling forms part of our African society (Chilisa & Preece, 2005).

4.5 Selection of schools and participants

In this study, I used convenience sampling to select schools and purposive sampling to select participants. Etikan et al. (2016) view convenience sampling as a sampling technique used by qualitative researchers to select subjects that are easily accessible and convenient for these researchers. Since I work at Umlazi District, convenience sampling enabled me to select five secondary schools in this district that were once academically strong but have since declined. As a result of this type of sampling, I travelled short distances to meet participants at these declining schools. Etikan et al. (2016) contends that travelling short distances is convenient since study subjects are in close geographical proximity to the researcher. Convenience samples are frequently referred to as “accidental samples”, since items may be chosen in the sample simply because they are physically or administratively close to where the researcher is generating data (Given, 2008).

The use of purposive sampling enables the researcher to handpick information-rich cases to be included in the sample (Cohen et al., 2011). This suggests that as a researcher, I had to use my own judgement in deciding who will participate in the study. For this reason, I purposively selected participants from five declining secondary schools that are in the Umlazi District. The selected participants were comprised of school principals, departmental heads, teachers, SGB chairpersons, and circuit managers. Since there are many departmental heads and teachers in the school, I selected those who have been in a position for more than a period of five years, based on the basis that they have accumulated adequate experience (Blose, 2018). All selected participants were relevant for the study because they were the key stakeholders in providing adequate knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation, school decline. This is supported by Cohen et al. (2018), as they posit that purposive sampling is used in order to access people who have in-depth knowledge about particular issues by virtue of their professional role, expertise and experience. The study consisted of ten participants, namely, two school principals, two departmental heads, two teachers, two SGB chairpersons, and two circuit managers. One SMT member and one non-SMT member were selected from each of the five declining schools to gain insight and an in depth understanding of their experiences from different hierarchal levels within the school (Patton, 2015). Below I provide short narratives of the declining schools. These schools have been given false names in the form of pseudonyms, which is explained in section 4.10.3

4.5.1 Phakathwayo High School

Phakathwayo High School is one of the biggest high schools in the Umlazi District, with a student population of three thousand three hundred (3300). The school has a total of 130 employees, including the principal, two deputy principals, five departmental heads, and 19 grade heads. The school features a large administration block with eight offices for SMT members, a financial office, a photocopying room, and two teacher staffrooms. The school has forty-seven (47) classrooms, two computer labs, and one scientific laboratory. Apart from this, the school has two sports facilities: a soccer field and an indoor basketball arena. Phakathwayo High school is ranked as a quintile four school, which makes it a fee-paying school. The school is in a township, surrounded by both lovely homes and informal settlements. Some of the students are from informal

settlements and live in poverty. As a result, the school battles to get school fees from parents since they are unemployed.

4.5.2 Star High School

Star High School is a school that is in an Indian township in the Umlazi District. The school has an enrolment of one thousand and eighty (1080) learners, which are predominantly Indian. These learners come from different socio-economic backgrounds. The school has a staff component of thirty-six (36), which includes the principal, two deputy principals and five departmental heads. The staff members are predominantly Indian with a few teachers who are Black. The administration block at this school has four offices for SMT members, one office for the administration department and a photocopying room. The school has excellent academic facilities which includes twenty-five (25) classrooms, a library, a science laboratory, a computer room, a kitchen for Hospitality Studies and a laboratory for Metal and Civil Technology. In addition to academic facilities, the school has sporting facilities such as a swimming pool, soccer field, netball court, and a cricket field. Star High is ranked as a quintile four school, which makes it a fee-paying school. However, most parents do not pay fees due to contextual factors.

4.5.3 Khondlo High School

Khondlo High school is a no-fee school that is in a black township in the Umlazi District. The school has a learner enrolment of one thousand and twenty-four (1024). All these learners speak IsiZulu and most of them come from underprivileged households and they come to school hungry. Fortunately, there is a school feeding scheme that ensures that these learners are fed daily. The school has thirty-four (34) staff members which includes the principal, two deputy principals, and four departmental heads. The school has a small administration block that has offices for the principal, the two deputy principals and the administrative staff. The offices for the departmental heads and the science laboratory are situated next to the administration block. There are twenty-six (26) classrooms at this school, and they are in an appalling condition. All classrooms have damaged windows and doors, and some have been vandalised by learners. Besides this, the restrooms for learners are leaking, and there is graffiti on the walls.

4.5.4 Yeyeye High School

Yeyeye High School is an ex-Model C school (former private school) located in the suburbs of Durban. This is a fee-paying school. The school has an enrolment of seven hundred and two (702) learners. Learners from this school are predominantly black since learners from other racial groups (White, Coloured and Indian) left owing to the decline in academic performance. The school has a staff component of twenty-six (26) which consist of one principal, one deputy principal and three departmental heads. The administration staff is paid by the school governing body. The administration block at the school has a reception area, offices for SMT members (principal, deputy principal, and departmental heads), finance office, and a photocopying room. The school has twenty-five (25) classrooms. In addition to the classrooms, there is also a school hall, team teaching room, science laboratory and a library. In addition to these facilities, the school has sport facilities such as the rugby field, soccer field, swimming pool, and tennis courts. Part of the school building is out of bounds due to infrastructural problems. The school has written to the DBE requesting assistance in this matter. The Department of Education has failed to assist the school.

4.5.5 Mnguni High School

Mnguni High School is a no-fee school that is in one of the black townships in the Umlazi District. The school has a learner enrolment of eight hundred and three (803) learners. All these learners speak IsiZulu and the majority of them are from deprived households. The school has a staff component of thirty (30), which includes the principal, deputy principal, and four departmental heads. The administration block has a reception area, offices for SMT members (principal, deputy principal, and departmental heads) and the photocopying room. The school has twenty-four (24) classrooms, and they are not in a good condition. In some of the classes there is graffiti on the walls, broken doors, broken windows, and broken desks.

4.6 Methods of generating field texts (data)

There are multiple ways to generate field texts from studying the experiences of participants and inquirers in a narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Field texts can include transcripts

of conversations to interview transcripts, field notes, family stories, memory box artefacts, photographs and other texts that are composed by narrative inquirers and participants to represent aspects of lived experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this inquiry, the stories were generated through narrative interviews and artefact inquiry. These two field texts generation methods were used to capture the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline. These methods are explained below.

4.6.1 Narrative interviews

The narrative interview was chosen for this study because it assisted me as a narrative inquirer in understanding people's experiences and behaviours (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015). Jovchelovich and Bauer (2000) view a narrative interview as a field text generation method that allows a participant to tell a story about significant events in his or her life and social context. Posing a similar view are Muylaert et al. (2014), who articulate that narrative interviews are highly appropriate for reporting detailed stories and life experiences of individuals. In this study, I asked each participant to tell me stories of experiences of serving in a declining school. While participants were sharing stories of their experiences, I listened attentively to understand how they made meaning from these experiences. This is supported by Paulson (2011), who describes narrative researchers as encouraging the telling of stories through listening. She further states that this needs to be done with a minimum of interruption and the use of silences. It is precisely for this reason that I encouraged my participants to control the direction, content, and pace of the interview sessions that we had (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Some of the stories told by participants during the interview sessions were unclear; therefore, I used probing questions to acquire a clear understanding of these stories. The probing questions that I posed to participants during the interview sessions assisted me in getting clarity from their stories and this was achieved because they provided more details on events that I did not understand (Flick, 2000; Stuhlmiller, 2001).

Roulston (2010) explains that narrative interviews enable narrative inquirers to schedule multiple meetings to allow participants to reflect and recount their stories. In this inquiry, I scheduled three interview sessions with each participant. In the first interview session, I requested participants to

narrate stories of serving in a declining school. In the second interview, I requested participants to narrate stories of challenges they experience in their declining schools. In the third interview session, I requested participants to narrate stories on how the status quo can be turned around to achieve sustainable improvement and effectiveness. I conducted these interview sessions at a time and place that were conducive for participants to freely share their stories. The interviews took place in either the participant's classroom, office, or home.

4.6.2 Artefact inquiry

In addition to narrative interviews, I used artefact inquiry as a field text generation method. Pithouse-Morgan and Van Laren (2012) view artefacts as objects that have cultural and historical significance. Hence, Agnew (2005) elucidates that in narrative inquiry, artefacts evoke memories, and telling of stories of these memories is an active process by which meaning is made. Examples of artefacts often included in the fieldwork in narrative inquiry are artwork, photographs (both memory-provoking photographs and intentionally taken recent photographs), and memory box items such as documents, policies, plans and chronologies (Clandinin, 2013). The use of these artefacts reveals important depths of experience of participants' lived lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999).

In this study, I asked each participant to pick any artefact that triggers memories of challenges that they experience as stakeholders in their declining school. This process led participants to share experiences of these challenges. This subsequently promoted further discussion between myself and these participants, since I wanted to gain a deeper meaning and understanding from their experiences (McAdam, 2019; Singh, 2011). Supporting this view are Cohen et al. (2018), who attest that the use of artefacts as a field text generation method stimulates a discussion between the researcher and the participant, allowing the researcher to get a glimpse into the participant's lived experiences. The field texts that were generated through artefacts were used in the co-construction of re-storied narratives of participants.

4.7 Field text (data) analysis

In this study, field texts from all sources (narrative interviews and artefact inquiry) were analysed through two methods of analysis: narrative analysis, which is the first level of analysis, and analysis of narratives, which is the second level of analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995).

4.7.1 Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis in this inquiry was used as a first level of analysis. Narrative analysis relates to events and actions to another by configuring them as contributors to the advancement of a plot (Polkinghorne, 1995). The intention of this analysis process was to co-construct the stories of participants using the short story genre. According to Pratt (1981), a short story is an artistic construction and communication of a limited sequence of events, experiences, or situations according to a closed correlative order which creates its own perception as a totality. Short stories are often marked by epiphany, an illuminating moment in which something hidden or not understood becomes immediately clear (Ogbeide, 2013). Using short stories as a genre in this study was beneficial because it has been rarely explored in the field of educational research (Stravakou & Lozgka, 2018).

In this study, I used a storyboard (see *Figure 4.1 for Sbusiso's storyboard*) as a thinking tool to co-construct short stories of school stakeholders. A storyboard is a visual outline or skeleton made up of a series of drawings or sketches, where each sketch or drawing represents one camera shot (Mitchell et al., 2011). These researchers claim that the storyboard provides critical data that should be read as visual text in a research process. In this study, I constructed the storyboard for each participant by using visual images from the storyboarding app to depict each scene showing their experience of serving in a declining school (Blose, 2018; Naicker et al., 2020). These visual images were informed by the field texts (narrative interview and artefact inquiry) that I transcribed for each participant, and in the process, they enabled me to develop plots (Blose, 2018). In developing short stories of participants, I arranged each participant's story considering the time and place in which it occurred, since narrative analysis prescribes a chronological sequence in the presentation of stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). The short stories were shared with participants to check whether they wanted to add or remove information from their co-constructed short stories.

Figure 4.1 Sbusiso's storyboard

4.7.2 Analysis of narratives

Analysis of narratives was used as a second level of analysis in this inquiry. In this level of analysis, I further analysed the co-constructed short stories that I had written for each participant using paradigmatic processes. Most often this approach requires a database consisting of several stories rather than a single story (Polkinghorne, 1995). The paradigmatic analysis results in descriptions of themes that hold across the stories or in the taxonomies of types of stories, characters, or settings (Polkinghorne, 1995). During this process, this would mean that the narrative inquirer would have to look for common themes or concepts that emerge from the co-constructed stories (Clandinin, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1995). In relation to the above, I used concept mapping (*see Figure 4.2 for Star High School's concept map)* as a thinking tool to analyse the co-constructed stories in this level of analysis. Concept mapping can be used to conceptualise emerging ideas before they take form by giving a visual sense to messy thoughts held in the mind during the analytical process. In addition, they assist researchers to represent ideas visually that emerge from the field texts that are being analysed (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). To achieve this, I presented the ideas that emerged from the co-constructed stories in the form of schematic diagrams, which led to the identification of themes. (Rose, 2001; Vaikla- Poldma, 2003). The concept mapping process deepened the analysis in understanding the phenomenon that was studied, school decline (Vaikla-Poldma, 2003)

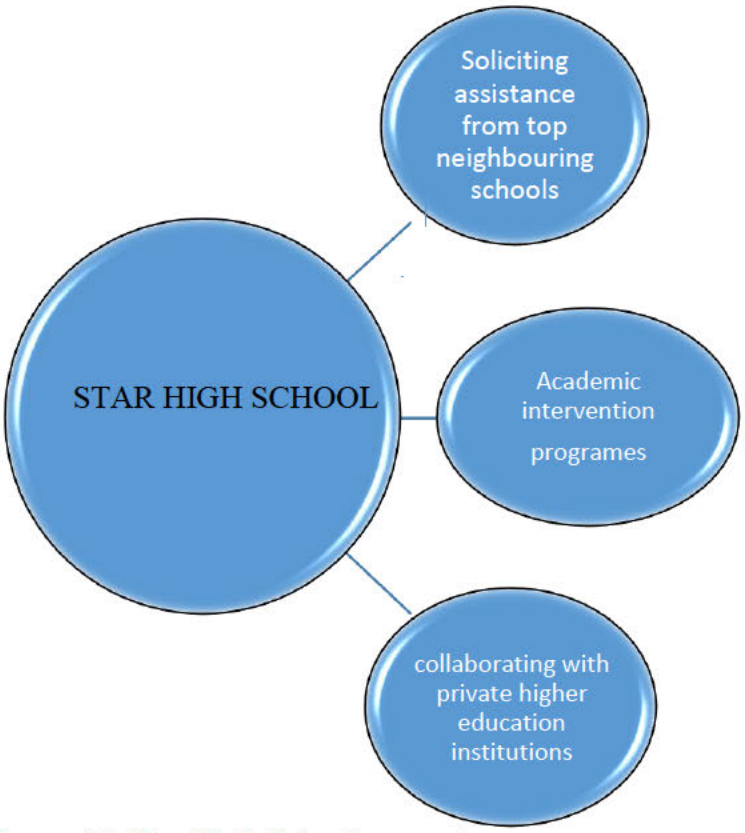


Figure 4.2 Star High School concept map

4.8 Analytical framework

An analytical framework is a set of codes organised into categories that have been developed by a researcher involved in analysis that can be used to manage and organise research texts (Gael et al., 2013). This framework creates a new structure for research texts (rather than the full original accounts given by participants) that is helpful for summarising/reducing the research texts in a way that can support answering the research puzzles (Gael et al., 2013).

The second research puzzle was "*What are the structural, cultural and agential mechanisms influencing school decline*"? This research puzzle was influenced by Archer's social realism theory which focuses on structure, culture, and agency in a society (school). I drew on this framework to understand the lived experiences of the stakeholders. According to Archer (1995), structure is understood to consist of positional levels and roles within an organisation. Apart from this, structure includes material conditions that motivate action. As I engaged with the analysis of stakeholders' short stories, I paid attention to roles and positional levels represented by principals,

circuit managers, SGB chairpersons, departmental heads, and teachers. Apart from this, I also paid attention to the systems and policies of the declining schools.

Culture from a social realist perspective refers to knowledge, beliefs, values, language, theories, conceptual schemes, significant systems, semiotic patterns, and socio-symbolics that prevail in an organisation (Archer, 1995; Archer, 2002). To further understand the lived experiences of stakeholders, I focused on the culture of their declining schools. As I engaged with the analysis of stakeholders' short stories, I paid attention to the behaviours, beliefs, values, norms, and traditions found within the declining schools.

Agency refers to people and their ability to act within and upon their own world in terms of their social roles and positions, depending on their ability to activate their personal emergent properties and powers (Archer, 1995). Archer is interested in what motivates agents to act in the way that they do, in terms of their structural and cultural contexts. As I engaged with the stakeholders' short stories, I focused on their abilities to act within their declining schools, in terms of their social roles and positions.

Structure, culture, and agency have their own emergent properties and powers; these mechanisms are intertwined and depend on one another, and they partly coincide (Archer, 1995; Nenweli, 2019). According to Archer (1995), emergent properties essentially refer to society's deep sub-structures which are relatively enduring, and which possess causal powers over social life. Archer suggests that a researcher must engage in analytical dualism by examining the situation distinctly in order to understand their interplay. This is done to avoid the fallacy of conflation; mixing the roles of the "people" (agency) and the "parts" (structure and culture), or focusing on one at the expense of the other which then gives a narrow explanation of the whole picture (Archer, 1995; Isike, 2018). As I engaged with the analysis of stakeholders' short stories, I separated structure (roles and positional levels represented by principals, circuit managers, SGB chairpersons, departmental heads and teachers as well as the systems, and policies of the declining schools), culture (behaviours, beliefs, values, norms, and traditions of the declining schools) and agency (stakeholders) and their ability to act within their world with regard to their social roles and positions to stimulate their emergent properties and powers.

In addition to the above theory, concept mapping as explained in 4.7.2 was used (see *Figure 4.3 for Mnguni High School's concept map*) as a thinking tool. In this study, I drew schematic diagrams

on a computer and mapped out the emergence of initial ideas and separated them into the domain of structure, culture, and agency for each declining school. This process allowed me to understand the restoried narratives of the declining schools and to identify themes as they emerged; accordingly, common, and unique themes are presented in chapter six.

In addressing the third research puzzle, *"How do stakeholders re-imagine schools in decline as moving schools?"*, I used concept mapping to identify common and unique themes from the stakeholders' stories and no analytical framework was used.

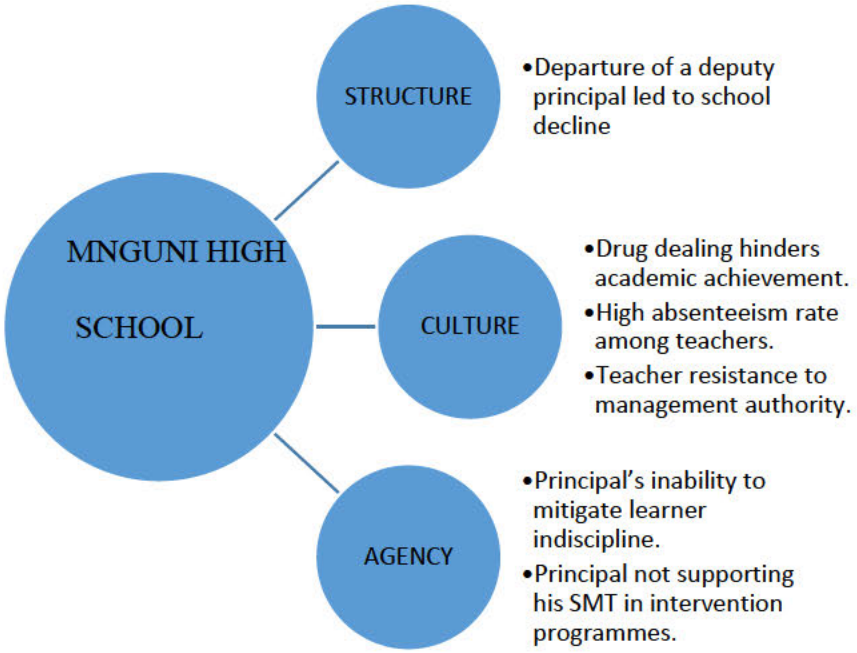


Figure 4.3 Mnguni High School concept map

4.9 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation and methods used to ensure the quality of the study (Polit & Beck, 2014). Authors such as Guba and Lincoln (1981) indicate that qualitative research must have truth-value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality to be considered worthwhile. They concluded that establishing rigour or trustworthiness for each method of research necessitates a distinct approach. Hence, Lincoln and Guba (1985) present

credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability as trustworthiness criteria to ensure the rigour of qualitative findings. However, Loh (2013) presents a diverging view on the trustworthiness criteria to ensure the rigour of qualitative findings in a narrative study even though it is qualitative in nature. He proposes verisimilitude and utility as trustworthiness criteria to ensure rigour (narrative truths) of qualitative findings in a narrative inquiry. In this study, I draw on Loh's (2013) constructs to ensure trustworthiness.

Verisimilitude

In the research literature, verisimilitude is elucidated as a criterion for a good literary study, in which the writing seems 'real' and 'alive', transporting the reader directly into the world of the study (Creswell, 2009, p. 250). Hence, Connelly and Clandinin (2000) view verisimilitude as an important criterion with which to judge the value of narrative inquiries and ensuring the believability of stories. To achieve this, I used the trustworthiness technique of member checking, particularly peer validation and audience validation (Loh, 2013). In peer validation, the narrative inquirer seeks validation from scholars who are working within a similar branch of research because they are knowledgeable about relevant research literature and research methods (Loh, 2013). In this study, I sent the interpretation of field texts in both narrative analysis and analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995) to my supervisor (peer) as a form of check, and in return, he provided his thoughts on what he agreed with and what he believed I needed to reanalyse (Loh, 2013).

In addition to peer validation, I also used audience validation to ensure believability of stories. This form of validation is from the "primary intended users and readers" of the study (Patton, 2002, p. 561), and in this study the intended users are stakeholders of schools in decline. For this reason, interview transcripts were given to participants to confirm if their stories were correctly captured during the interview sessions. In addition, I involved the participants at the first level of analysis (narrative analysis) in assisting me to co-construct stories of their declining schools. This assisted me in minimising researcher bias while I was interpreting the field texts (Loh, 2013).

Apart from peer and audience validation to ensure believability of stories, Loh (2013) suggests that, to have correct representation of participants' realities, multiple field text generation methods

must be used. To achieve this, I used two field text generation methods, namely, narrative interview and artefact inquiry (*see 4.6.1 and 4.6.2*) to increase the richness of field texts. This was used for the purpose of triangulation, which was essential for the corroboration of findings in this study (Loh, 2013). Triangulation overcomes the weakness of subjectivity and is regarded by many scholars as a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2007).

Utility

Utility refers to the usefulness of the study to the research community (Loh, 2013). This means that the study must have its use, its relevance, and its utility. Loh (2013) cites Eisner (1998), who provides three criteria to test a study's usefulness: its instrumental utility, namely, comprehension, anticipation, and guidance. In terms of comprehension, it assisted me in understanding a situation that was enigmatic or confusing. In terms of anticipation, I provided descriptions that go beyond the information given about the participants. Guidance assisted me in understanding what I was looking for in the study (Loh, 2013).

Apart from comprehension, anticipation, and guidance as trustworthiness criteria of utility, the trustworthiness technique of "thick description" can also contribute to establishing the criteria of utility (Loh, 2013). In this study, I gave a detailed account of field experiences in which I gave a thick description of the setting, context, people, situations, and events studied. In addition, the process of generating field texts and the analysis of field texts were also described (*refer to pages 72-73*). By describing the phenomenon and processes in detail, one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusion drawn can be generalised into other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, my intention was not to generalise findings to other contexts because narrative inquiry was used as a methodology, which was concerned with understanding participants' personal stories of their declining schools.

4.10 Ethical considerations

This section presents ethical considerations as follows: procedural ethics, ethics in the field and ethics in writing the research report.

4.10.1 Procedural ethics

Ethics are important in research since they determine the appropriate and acceptable conduct at all stages of the research process (Adler & Clark, 2008). As narrative inquirer, I followed procedural ethics in seeking approval from relevant ethics committee and gatekeepers to conduct research (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Firstly, I applied for ethical clearance to the Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) of the University of KwaZulu-Natal to conduct research. The Ethics Committee approved my application and I was granted permission to conduct research. Secondly, I applied to the KwaZulu-Natal DBE requesting permission to conduct research in schools that are in the Umlazi District and permission was granted *(see Appendix B, p. 215)*. Thirdly, I then requested and obtained permission from the school principals to conduct research in their schools *(see Appendices C1-C5, p. 215-220)*. Prior to obtaining permission from school principals, I set up an appointment with these stakeholders and I issued them letters, which had information about the nature and purpose of the study.

Apart from permission from gatekeepers, I sought informed consent *(see Appendix D, p. 221-222)* from participants to be part of this research study. According to Cohen et al. (2007), informed consent refers to the process whereby people decide whether or not to take part in a study after being provided with information that is likely to affect their choice. I visited the participants either at their schools, homes, or offices, and I requested their consent to be part of my research study. During our conversations, I explained the nature and purpose of the study to them. Thereafter, I issued letters to them containing information pertaining to the study and their rights as participants. These letters also had an informed consent section in which participants had to fill in their details and sign, giving consent to be part of the study.

4.10.2 Ethics in the field

The relational aspects of narrative inquiries encourage narrative inquirers to focus on specific ethical issues during the research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). That being the case, I established a close relationship with participants based on negotiation, respect, mutuality, and openness to multiple voices (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Murphy (2007) contend that the nature of this relationship is paramount in getting participants to share stories of their lived lives. When participants shared stories of their declining schools, I listened empathetically and, in the process, assured them that I would not judge them for sharing such stories. Furthermore, I suspended my own personal beliefs as I was attending to each participant's story (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007) since relational ethics considers a diversity of perspectives (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). As a result, no harm was inflicted on study participants in the research field because I respected their views (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007).

4.10.3 Ethics in writing the research report

In this study, I protected the privacy of participants by attending to ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity (Cohen et al., 2007: Leedy & Ormrod 2010). Clandinin and Murphy (2007), writing from a narrative inquiry perspective, express the view that issues of confidentiality and anonymity take on added importance as the complexity of lives are revealed in research texts. Firstly, I gave the participants the reassurance that the stories that they shared with me during the interview sessions would remain confidential. Secondly, I assured the participants that their identities and names of their schools would remain anonymous. As a result, the identities of participants and the names of their schools were given false names in the form of pseudonyms.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter presented the methodological journey that guided the process of the study. This study sought to explore the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline. This chapter commenced by discussing the interpretivist paradigm, which is the researcher positioning that was adopted in the study, followed by the research approach within which the study is located. This

study sought to explore the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline. Using narrative inquiry as a methodology provided a full description of these experiences and, in the process, I was able to make meaning from participants' lived lives. The chapter went on to discuss the methods of generating field texts and the justification thereof. The chapter concluded by discussing issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations. The next chapter presents the first level of analysis, narrative analysis. It presents the co-constructed stories of school stakeholders.

CHAPTER FIVE: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS
SHORT STORIES OF SCHOOL STAKEHOLDERS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the methodological underpinnings that guided the process of the study. The interpretivist paradigm, within which I positioned myself in this study, was discussed. The qualitative research approach, narrative inquiry methodology and methods were presented. In addition, the analysis of field texts, namely, narrative analysis and analysis of narratives were explained. This chapter presents the first level of analysis, narrative analysis. Through the co-constructed short stories, the chapter unpacks and answers the first research puzzle, *What are the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline?* Storyboarding was used as a thinking tool and it enabled me to develop plots to capture the lived experiences of school stakeholders. I present two short stories of stakeholders holding different positions in each of the five declining schools. In doing so, I commence with Rani Murkhajee and Harriet Khoza of Star High School, followed by Thabiso Phewa and Andile Dikana of Mnguni High School. Thereafter, I present the short stories of Khaya Mthethwa and Melusi Dlamini of Phakathwayo High School, followed by Sbusiso Dlomo and Fikani Qwabe of Khondlo High School. Finally, I present the short stories of Siyanda Hadebe and Mpiyakhe Zungu of Yeyeye High School.

5.2 RANI MURKHARJEE'S SHORT STORY: TEACHER

I am Rani Murkhajee, a teacher at Star High School. I have 25 years teaching experience and I teach Economic Management and Sciences (Grade 9) and Business Studies (Grade 10-12). I hold a Higher Diploma in Education from the University of Johannesburg. I have two leadership roles in this school, I am a site steward for a teacher union, and I audit the financial statements of the school.

5.2.1 Deterioration in the calibre of learners

From the year 2015, there has been a decline in the calibre of learners at Star High School. Prior to this, we had a high calibre of learners who were excelling in their subjects and achieving distinctions and as a result, this school was achieving excellent results for more than 15 years. These results continuously motivated my colleagues, including myself, to be effective at our work. Star High School was ranked as one of the top schools in Umlazi District, however, this has changed. The learners that we have at the moment have lost the enthusiasm to do well in their subjects because they have adopted a negative attitude to teaching and learning. Drawing from my experience, when I teach a new concept in Accounting I use a textbook since it has illustrated examples of concepts taught. Thereafter, I do the activity with the learners in class. The problems start when I give learners homework on the concepts that have been taught. These learners do not do their homework because they leave their textbooks at school. When I question them regarding the matter they come up with lousy excuses and say that their textbooks are too heavy for them to take home. As a teacher, I feel demotivated and frustrated because I end up doing the homework on the board to ensure that I am not behind with the syllabus. Unfortunately, this has become the norm for me. My colleagues also share similar experiences. Moreover, the poor work ethic of these learners contributes to the decline in this school.

The use of drugs by learners in this school has hindered our teaching and learning. There is a lot of drug dealing in this school, and it is done by learners. As much as we have security systems in place, they are ineffective as we are not allowed to search learners. We also call police officers to do raids, however, drug dealing still carries on. Drug dealing takes place in the morning, during break time and during teaching and learning times. This impacts negatively on teaching and learning. For example, when these learners are intoxicated with drugs, they fall asleep in class and are unable to concentrate. Apart from the dealing of drugs in this school, our learners are conducting other businesses on the plant. They sell chips and sweets to other learners during the change of periods and as a result, learners report late to classes since they need to buy these items before they are sold out. In consequence, teaching and learning time is affected due to the fact that I have to stop teaching and reprimand these learners for arriving late to my class. Many teachers in this school also lose teaching time due to reprimanding these learners for late coming. This is one of the factors that have impacted negatively on the academic results of the school.

Our learners are now engaging in gang fights. We have gangs of learners from our neighbouring schools who come here to fight after school with our learners when they have disagreements. Our learners retaliate and they fight back. It is for this reason that they have also formed their own gangs. The gang fights escalate, and we call the police to intervene. The next day, teaching time is lost as the SMT and teachers have to call the learners involved in gang fights to find the underlying reasons for the fights. It usually takes a day to get to the bottom of this. It is heart-breaking that learners who are not part of gang fights are affected since they are left alone in class by their teachers to attend to the matter regarding gang fights.

5.2.2 Learners from impoverished backgrounds

At Star High School, we have some learners that are living in "imijondolo" (informal settlements) and they live in poverty conditions. This has had a negative impact on teaching and learning. To cite a practical example, these learners come to school hungry; as result, they fall asleep in class and are unable to concentrate. Unfortunately, this is a quintile four school (a fee paying and well-resourced school, located in an affluent area) and the DBE does not provide a feeding scheme to cater for learners who come from poor homes. It is only learners from poor resourced schools that receive food from the DBE. For this reason, my colleagues and I have partnered with community-based churches, and they supply us with food to give to learners who are in need. Apart from this, local businesses in the area have also sponsored poor learners with school uniforms and textbooks.

We have some learners that do not have parents due to HIV/AIDS related deaths. In the South African context, HIV and AIDS is one of the many factors that give rise to child headed homes. As a result, some of our learners have to take care of their younger siblings. Usually, these learners have to take their siblings to school in the morning and then report to this school for instruction. When these learners get to school they are already tired and sometimes they arrive late. Furthermore, they do not have enough time to do their homework when they arrive home, since they have to take care of their siblings. As a result, their academic performance subsequently declines due to these extenuating circumstances. These are the challenges that we are experiencing at Star High School. Out of one thousand learners in this school, three hundred learners do not have both parents. These learners sometimes do not have money for public transport to get school. In some instances, they come to me and ask for transport money.

5.2.3 Limited learner support material

Figure 5.1 Rani's artefact- Textbooks

One of the challenges that I experience in serving this school is the limited learner support material. The school says that there are not enough funds in the budget to buy textbooks for all learners. I teach about 200 Grade nine learners in this school and the school could only afford to buy 35 textbooks. I am at my wits end because I do not know which criteria to use in distributing these textbooks to learners considering the fact that not all of them will receive them. At a Further Education and Training (Grade 10-12) level, there is also a shortage of textbooks in the subject that I am teaching, Accounting. In this subject, learners are expected to buy workbooks. However, some of them cannot afford to buy these workbooks. As a result, I use money from my own pocket to buy these books because I cannot let the socio-economic status of a learner deprive him or her of quality education. However, due to financial constraints, I cannot accommodate all learners who do not have workbooks.

5.2.4 Learner academic support programmes

At Star High School, we need to devise academic programmes to improve the academic performance of learners. To achieve this, we need to work in partnership with private higher

education institutions (Rosebank and Mancosa Colleges). I hear that these institutions run weekend classes and they provide academic support to learners who are struggling with challenging subjects such as Mathematics and Science. These weekend classes are free of charge and the school should arrange with parents to drop off their children at these colleges. Apart from the intervention programmes that will be provided by these colleges, at the school level, we also need to create intervention programmes to assist learners. We need to have matric (Grade 12) intervention programmes which will take place in the mornings, and in the afternoons during the weekday as well as on weekends. The SMT must draw up a timetable which includes a list of subjects where intervention will be provided. Following this, a timetable must be distributed to parents so that they can influence their children to attend the classes. The list of subjects in which intervention must be provided must include English Home Language, IsiZulu First Additional Language, Afrikaans Second Additional Language, Mathematics, Science, Business Studies and Accounting, since they are the underperforming subjects at this school.

5.2.5 Interacting with teachers from neighbouring schools has enhanced my skills as a teacher

Under each district, there are some cluster groups which consist of a group of teachers from neighbouring schools; in these groups, teachers share ideas relating to curriculum and instruction. These teachers usually share these ideas when they attend moderation meetings and orientation workshops that are facilitated by subject advisors. Working with teachers from my cluster group will enhance my skills on how to simplify certain concepts for my learners when I am teaching. Apart from this, teachers from the cluster group will share assessments via email or WhatsApp. These assessments are instrumental in helping learners that we teach.

5.3 HARRIET KHOZA'S SHORT STORY: DEPARTMENTAL HEAD

I am Harriet Khoza, a Commerce departmental head at Star High School. I have 25 years teaching experience and I teach Business Studies (Grade 10-12). I assumed my duty as a departmental head at this school in year 2008. I hold two degrees in education, namely, Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Education Honours in Educational Leadership and Management. Apart from my degrees in education, I also hold a Bachelor of Commerce Degree.

5.3.1 The retirement of our former principal took the school to a different direction

I have observed a few things at Star High School in terms of improving our results and the decline thereof. When I assumed my duties as a departmental head in year 2008, this school was achieving excellent results with a pass rate ranging from 90% to 100% in the Grade twelve final examinations. At that time, Mr. Sheokarah was the principal of this school. Mr. Sheokarah was an exceptional person with great leadership qualities. He was assertive, consistent with maintaining learner discipline, promoted an open-door policy for teachers in the school and involved them in decision-making. Following the retirement of Mr. Sheokarah, a new principal was appointed at this school and his leadership skills are weak. For example, teachers are not part of decision-making, their interests are disregarded and their concerns are often overlooked when it comes to matters concerning teaching and learning. Some teachers are scared of this principal because he humiliates them when they challenge his leadership practices. Subsequent to this, these teachers find it challenging to adjust to the principal's autocratic leadership approach.

Owing to the poor leadership practices of the principal, a number of high performing teachers have left. One of the teachers took a transfer and went to another school as she could not handle the toxic work environment created by the principal. Another teacher applied for a job at a private school and got the position. Three teachers took early retirement. This has been one of the greatest losses to the school, due to the fact that these teachers had an excellent track record in producing quality results in the Grade 12 final examinations. Unfortunately, the DBE did not replace these teachers since there was a decline in learner enrolment at this school. The decline in learner enrolment is due to the subsequent decline of academic performance.

5.3.2 Some of us do not know that denying the truth does not change facts

Some of the SMT members are in denial that we have a group of learners that have a poor work ethic and perform badly in assessments despite interventions. Therefore, the departmental heads and the principal force teachers to inflate marks so that learners have a good continuous assessment (CASS) mark. This practice backfires because the CASS mark is not a true reflection of the learners' performance. I have observed this when learners perform badly in their final examination and we see a huge discrepancy between their CASS mark and the final examination mark.

5.3.3 Contextual realities hamper our learner support programmes

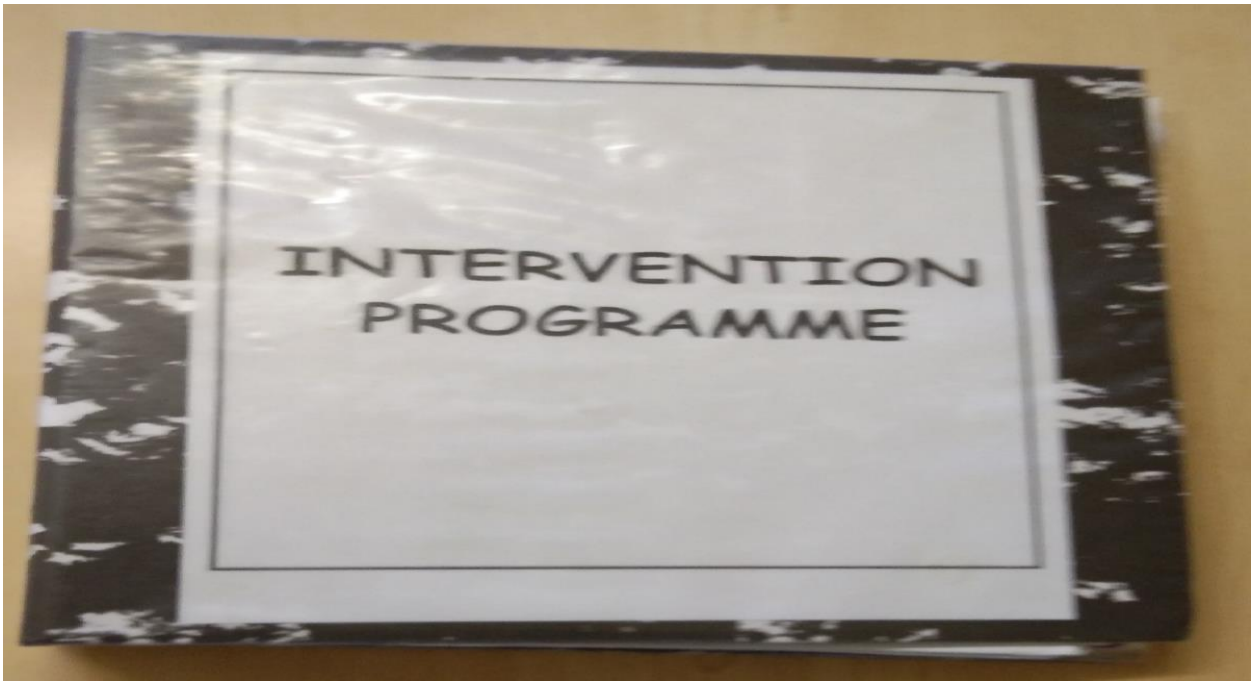


Figure 5.2 Harriet's artefact: Intervention programme file

This artefact (file) triggers so many memories of the challenges that I experience as a person in charge of the matric intervention programme (Grade 12) that we have at this school in the afternoons. The purpose of the matric intervention programme is to provide academic support to learners in underperforming subjects. Most of our learners stay far from the school and they travel by public transport. They usually do not attend the afternoon classes and the reason is that, in the afternoons, the taxi drivers charge them an adult fee whereas, if they finish at school at normal time, they are charged a learner fee. Another factor that contributes to poor attendance in the matric intervention programmes is that in the late afternoons criminals rob our learners on their way to the taxi rank and take their belongings. As a result, learners do not attend afternoon classes out of fear for their safety. My heart aches that our learners are unable to benefit from these intervention classes due to the factors that I have mentioned. These intervention classes have been unsuccessful in view of the fact that there is still a decline in the final Grade 12 examinations.

5.3.4 Reaching out to the community

It is of great importance for schools to work in partnership with the community. We must work with different stakeholders from the community to mitigate the challenges that affects academic performance at this declining school. Firstly, we need to work with the police since we have learners at this school who are selling drugs. The police can assist us with random drug searches through the dog unit. Secondly, we can approach social workers to assists us with learners who are going through personal problems and need psychological support. Thirdly, we can reach out to local businesses to assist us with financial resources because we want to build a library centre for that will specifically cater for Mathematics and Physical Science learners. The library centre must be used for the matric intervention programmes for these subjects. I think that English should also be one of the subjects to be added to the matric intervention programme because in order for a learner to grasp Mathematics and Science, they must have a good command of the English language. This form of intervention will improve Mathematics and Science results. Local businesses can also supply the school with funds to upgrade the computer classes since the school is experiencing financial constraints. Finally, we can work with parents to address learner indiscipline at this school. There have been incidents when learners arrive late to school, and I believe that if we invite parents for a meeting to discuss this type of behaviour, it will restore discipline in the school, hence, leading to an improvement in academic performance.

5.3.5 Soliciting assistance from external sources may be worthwhile

District leadership can play a pivotal role in enhancing teachers' skills in content knowledge. For instance, subject advisors can identify teachers in each cluster who have knowledge, experience and insight in a specific subject. Following this, these teachers would then be asked to network with teachers from declining schools in order to assist them in improving learner academic performance. At this school, we need to work with high performing teachers with the assistance of subject advisors. Also, we must invite these teachers to our school to teach a few lessons to prepare our learners for their examination. These teachers will also develop our skills in the setting of quality assessments such as tests, projects, and assignments.

5.4 THABISO PHEWA'S SHORT STORY: TEACHER

I am Thabiso Phewa, a teacher at Mnguni High School. I have five years teaching experience and I teach Physical Sciences and Technical Sciences in Grades ten to twelve. I hold a Bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). I assumed my duty as a teacher at this school in 2015. Ever since, I have produced great results in Physical Sciences despite the decline at this school.

5.4.1 The departure of a conscientious deputy principal

The deputy principal, Mr. Bhovungane retired in 2016**.** Mnguni High School was extremely blessed to have a deputy principal who went an extra mile to ensure that quality teaching and learning materialised. My colleagues and I always sang his praises because the school was functional due to his leadership. He was running a tight ship as the head of academics and, as a result, the school was achieving remarkable results for years. The school was well known in the community for producing such results. His departure led to the decline of academic performance in the school. The blame has been shifted to leadership and management practices of the current school principal and his departmental heads. Some members of staff have lamented that these leaders do not provide direction in terms of quality of teaching and learning and maintaining learner discipline. These weak practices were not enacted under Mr. Bhovungane's leadership, since he always provided a conducive environment for teaching and learning.

5.4.2 Cracks in the current leadership brush off

I would say that the principal at this school is an autocratic leader because he does not create a platform for teachers to have a say in decision making and to give input on how the school can be improved. For instance, from year 2016 to 2019, we have not had staff meetings where teachers are given a chance to express their views from the grass root level since they work closely with learners and are able to understand them. This would enable teachers to help the school grow and improve considerably. However, the current leadership practices of the principal do not create such platforms. For this reason, this has further perpetuated the decline in academic performance.

The principal at this school fails to hold teachers accountable for unprofessional conduct. There are teachers who are consistently absent from school and their conduct is not questioned. The principal allows these teachers to sign the time book despite not reporting to work. The

continuation of this practice enables teachers to do as they please because they know that there is a lack of accountability in the school. One of the contributing reasons for this occurrence is that the principal has sexual relationships with some of the teachers. This explains why they are not disciplined for their unprofessional conduct. Such actions have impacted negatively on teaching and learning.

In year 2019, the circuit manager made an observation about learner indiscipline during his visit to the school. Learners were loitering around the school during instructional time and the school principal would sit in his office and not address this behaviour. What made matters worse is that some of the teachers did not act to get learners into class since they were having their own conversations in the staffroom. The circuit manager was not pleased about this, and he expressed his disappointment in the principal's inability to restore a culture of discipline in the school. It is concerning that learners are not afraid of the principal; they just go into his office and demand for the school to close early. Instead of disciplining learners for making such demands, the principal gives a go ahead for the school to close. The SGB does not hold the principal accountable for closing the school early since they are in cahoots with him, by pocketing the funds of the school. Apart from this, there has been times when my colleagues and I have taken learners to the principal for bunking lessons and not doing their homework. To our dismay, the principal did not support us in disciplining these learners. As a result, learners do not take us seriously anymore because they know that the principal will take no action against them.

Owing to the autocratic and incompetent leadership of the school principal, some dedicated teachers have left the organisation to get away from this toxic work environment. Two teachers were appointed as departmental heads in other schools. One of the departmental heads was appointed as a principal in a primary school. There are also a number of educators who took an early retirement.

5.4.3 Drug dealing disrupts academic achievement

Figure 5.3 Thabiso's artefact: school bag

Drug dealing in this school has had a negative impact on the academic progress of learners. The artefact above reminds me of an incident that took place in February 2019, when a learner was caught with a bag full of drugs. When questioned, the learner revealed that he had been selling drugs to learners on behalf of drug merchants from the community. The police were called into the school to handle the matter as it was beyond teachers' control. After the police had left, matters got worse at the school. The learners who were supposedly customers of the drug dealer got violent and were throwing stones at teachers. That being the case, the school was closed for three days. I was disheartened because teaching and learning time was lost and there was nothing that I could do in this regard. Other teachers did not care about the lost teaching time; instead, they feared for their safety and did not want to go back to school.

After a period of three days, the school was opened. I had high hopes that things could change for the better. However, this was not the case. Drugs were still being sold at school and this hindered learners' academic progress because they would leave the classroom during lesson time to go and smoke drugs and in the process become intoxicated. As teachers, we do not address this type of behaviour because we do not want these learners to cause us harm like how they have done in the past. Our failure in addressing this behaviour has presented two enormous challenges for myself and my colleagues. Firstly, we find that learners struggle to concentrate in class and sometimes they fall asleep while we are teaching. Secondly, other learners become unruly, and this subsequently disrupts teaching and learning. The above-mentioned challenges occurred

throughout 2019 and the principal did not bother to address them. This is one of contributing factors that led this school to achieve at a 20% matric pass rate in 2019.

5.4.4 The caretaker principal came to our rescue

In 2020, the principal was removed from the school by the circuit manager in the year 2020 and was sent away for professional development for the entire year. While the principal was away, a caretaker principal, Mr. Sotobe, was brought in to manage and lead the school. Mr. Sotobe provided a healthy work environment that is conducive for teaching and learning. Firstly, he ensured that teachers went to class when they were supposed to. Secondly, he would walk around the school during teaching time to maintain discipline and order. Thirdly, he monitored the work of departmental heads by checking if they were executing their roles and responsibilities. Finally, he established a collaborative relationship with teachers to improve the academic results. For instance, this principal would call each individual teacher to solicit advice on how best their subjects can be improved and provide support in this regard. The nature of this relationship was somehow positive because the matric pass rate at the end of 2020 was 67%. This is a great achievement because the pass rate in the past has been quite disappointing to say the least.

5.4.5 Liaising with neighbouring schools

I personally believe that if a school is not performing well academically, it should liaise with top performing schools within the same neighbourhood. Working together with these schools would help in improving academic results. Teachers from these schools would share ideas with us on how best we can improve the academic performance in our respective subjects. Apart from this, they would also professionally develop us in subject content knowledge, and as a result, we would feel empowered. I personally think that inviting teachers from our neighbouring schools to teach a few lessons to our learners would be an excellent idea, considering the fact that they have an outstanding track record in producing quality results.

5.5 ANDILE DIKANA'S SHORT STORY: DEPARTMENTAL HEAD

I am Andile Dikana, a departmental head at Mnguni High School. I have eleven years teaching experience and I teach Accounting and Business Studies at Grades 10 to 12. I hold a Bachelor of Education Honours in Educational Leadership and Management. I am currently studying towards a Master of Education Degree. I assumed my duty as a departmental head at this school in year 2015.

5.5.1 A weak-minded head of institution

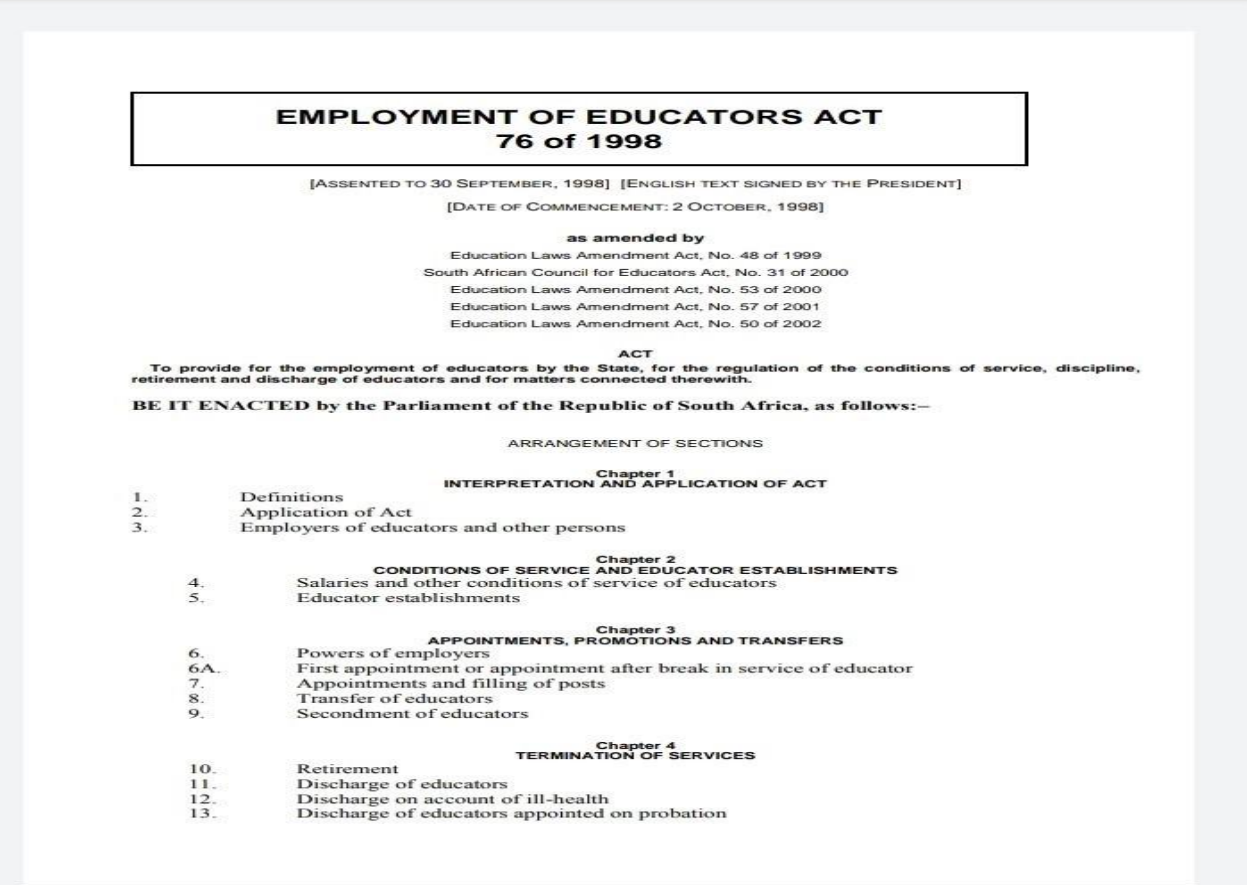
Mnguni High School had been producing good results until the year, 2017. In year 2017, a conscientious deputy principal, Mr. Bhovungane, retired from the teaching fraternity. Mr. Bhovungane was the pillar of this school since he was effective in executing his duties as the Head of academics. His departure from this school exposed the type of weak leader our principal is. Our principal, Mr. Ngunezi, does not lead by example. He comes to work at nine in the morning and as a result, a number of teachers have also adopted the culture of coming to school late. This has become a norm and the principal does not address this unprofessional conduct. It saddens me because failure in addressing such conduct compromises teaching and learning time.

From year 2019, Mnguni High School had many cases of learners using drugs. The principal turned a blind eye and pretended that the use of drugs does not exist at the school. Learners who were using drugs were not disciplined. Members from the community knew about this and used it to their advantage. For example, we had a guy at the school who pretended to be a learner, only for us to find out that he is a merchant (drug dealer) and selling drugs to learners. Apparently, one of the teachers at this school caught the merchant and gave him a few slaps and teachers called police officers to intervene because they knew that the principal would do nothing about it. There has also been an incident at this school where teachers were physically assaulted by learners who are intoxicated with drugs. At one stage the circuit manager closed the school for a week to calm the situation down. Unfortunately, some teachers did not want to go back to school since they feared for their safety and knowing fully well that the principal would not take action to protect them.

Owing to the weak leadership of the principal in addressing the factors mentioned above, some teachers who were consistently producing good results left the school. For instance, an Accounting teacher who was producing good results in the Grade 12 examinations every year left the school

due to the challenges under the principal's leadership. Apart from this teacher, a departmental head of Humanities who was achieving a 100% pass rate in the Grade 12 History final examinations left the school for the same reason as the Accounting teacher. I am also leaving this school because I have been promoted to be a principal in a primary school.

5.5.2 Teacher professional malpractice



EMPLOYMENT OF EDUCATORS ACT
76 of 1998

[ASSENTED TO 30 SEPTEMBER, 1998] [ENGLISH TEXT SIGNED BY THE PRESIDENT]
[DATE OF COMMENCEMENT: 2 OCTOBER, 1998]

as amended by
Education Laws Amendment Act, No. 48 of 1999
South African Council for Educators Act, No. 31 of 2000
Education Laws Amendment Act, No. 53 of 2000
Education Laws Amendment Act, No. 57 of 2001
Education Laws Amendment Act, No. 50 of 2002

ACT

To provide for the employment of educators by the State, for the regulation of the conditions of service, discipline, retirement and discharge of educators and for matters connected therewith.

BE IT ENACTED by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, as follows:–

ARRANGEMENT OF SECTIONS

Chapter 1
INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION OF ACT

1. Definitions
2. Application of Act
3. Employers of educators and other persons

Chapter 2
CONDITIONS OF SERVICE AND EDUCATOR ESTABLISHMENTS

4. Salaries and other conditions of service of educators
5. Educator establishments

Chapter 3
APPOINTMENTS, PROMOTIONS AND TRANSFERS

6. Powers of employers
6A. First appointment or appointment after break in service of educator
7. Appointments and filling of posts
8. Transfer of educators
9. Secondment of educators

Chapter 4
TERMINATION OF SERVICES

10. Retirement
11. Discharge of educators
12. Discharge on account of ill-health
13. Discharge of educators appointed on probation

Figure 5.4: Andile's artefact- Legislation document

This policy document, the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998, speaks about incapable educators, incapacity of educators, educators who do not carry their duties in a school. At this school, we have teachers who bring intoxicating substances to the school premises, deliberately stay away from school, refuse to go to class to teach and challenge management authority of departmental heads and the deputy principal. Based on the examples that I have cited, the Employment of Educators Act clearly states principals can charge teachers for insubordination. However, the principal at this school does not do this as it has been alleged that he has sexual

relations with some of the teachers who are not carrying out their duties. These teachers are protected, and they use this to their advantage to resist management authority of departmental heads and the deputy principal.

However, teachers who are under my department know that I address their unprofessional conduct. At one stage I addressed the unprofessional conduct of a teacher who would stay away from work deliberately and learners were deprived of teaching and learning. I issued a written warning to this teacher, and I threatened to call the subject advisor to make account for underperforming in the subject that she is teaching. Afterwards, I began to see a change in this teacher, and she was reporting to work daily and was improving on her teaching.

5.5.3 I am constrained as an agent of change

As a departmental head, I have worked with other members of the SMT to devise strategies to improve the school's academic results. However, we did not receive any support from the principal and the deputy principal as the head of Academics. There was a time when I drew up a study timetable for Grade 12 learners where they would attend afternoon classes so that their teachers could assist them. I stayed in the afternoons to monitor these classes. Unfortunately, that came to end when the principal stripped me of this duty because he believed that I had the little managerial experience to monitor the afternoon classes and change the school for the better. He decided that he and the deputy principal were going to monitor the afternoon classes. Following this, the afternoon classes were ineffective, and this was due to the lack of monitoring by the principal and deputy principal.

5.5.4 Our circuit manager as a catalyst for change in this school

In year 2020, the principal was removed from the school by the circuit manager due to the decline in academic performance. The principal was sent for development for a year to be trained by a principal of a high performing school on school leadership and management. The circuit manager then became a caretaker principal of the school while he was still looking for a person that was going to execute the principalship duties for the entire year. I would say that there was a major improvement in terms of discipline under the circuit manager's leadership. He ensured that there were discipline systems in place to address learner discipline. He would walk around the school to ensure that learners were in class during instructional time. Apart from this, the circuit manager

worked with grade heads to assist teachers who were experiencing learner indiscipline during teaching and learning time. This motivated teachers to work hard since they were supported in maintaining discipline in their classrooms.

As weeks went by, the circuit manager managed to find a caretaker principal for this school. He brought in a deputy principal from one of the top performing schools in the Umlazi District to lead and manage this school. Under his leadership, the school improved in its academic performance with a sixty five percent pass rate in the Grade 12 final examinations.

5.5.5 Seeking assistance from high performing schools

As a departmental head, I have sought assistance from high performing schools to improve the results in my department. Teachers from these schools have been instrumental in capacitating teachers in my department in pedagogical knowledge and methodology. Apart from this, I have invited these teachers to my school to teach learners in the afternoons during the weekdays and also on weekends. At times, our learners are invited by these teachers to be part of their schools' intervention programmes which takes place on weekends. I can say with confidence that networking with these teachers has been a blessing in disguise for this school. For this reason, I have influenced other departmental heads in my school to network with teachers from high performing schools.

5.6 KHAYA MTHETHWA'S SHORT STORY: PRINCIPAL

I am Khaya Mthethwa, a principal at Phakathwayo High School. Apart from being a principal at this school, I also teach Mathematics and Physical Sciences. I have 35 years of teaching experience. I hold a Secondary Teachers Diploma in Mathematics and Science Education, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Education Honours, Masters in Education, Masters in Business Administration and a Doctor of Philosophy.

5.6.1 The Department of Education does not come to our aid

Phakathwayo High School was recognised as one of the top schools in the Umlazi District for producing quality results in the Grade 12 final examinations. However, that came to end when the DBE forced me to increase the learner enrolment. We are one of the two Technical high schools

in Umlazi and many parents wanted to enrol their children to do technical subjects such as Electrical Technology, Civil Technology, Mechanical Technology and Automotive Technology. Hence, the DBE put pressure on me to increase the learner enrolment. This school currently has an enrolment of three thousand three hundred learners and an academic staff which consist of one hundred and thirty teachers. It is difficult to cater to the needs of these learners and teachers and the DBE does not provide any support in this regard. For instance, the DBE does not provide us with extra classrooms and as a result, we have learner overcrowding which hinders quality teaching and learning. As a principal of this school, on many occasions, I have invited the Staff development team from the DBE to professionally develop my teachers since my management team and I do not have the time to do so. We are overloaded with work, and we do not have the time to visit teachers in their classrooms when they are teaching. As a result, we are unable to guide and develop them in areas of weaknesses. To my dismay, my invitation to the Staff development team has been declined and I have been told by them that they do not have the time to come to my school considering that they have more than six thousand schools to attend to in the province. You end up waiting for over two years to get the support that you need.

In year 2020, we lost an Automotive Technology teacher to COVID 19. The DBE is failing to replace this teacher and their argument is that there is shortage of Automotive Technology teachers. Failure in finding this teacher has impacted negatively on our learners as they have not been prepared for the Practical Assessment Task (PAT). As a principal, I had to intervene and ask one of our teachers who teaches Mechanical Technology to assist these learners. This teacher encountered difficulties in assisting the learners due to timetable clashes. It was difficult to solve this problem because the timetable of this school is not done by one person. You have to send it to a specialist that has a specific computer program that designs the timetable for the whole school. These specialists are paid by the school governing body because the Norms and Standards funds (school funding) that we receive from the Department of education do not cater for such an expense.

Figure 5.4 Khaya's artefact: photo

When I look at this photo, I think of a harmonious relationship I had with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of one of best companies in South Africa. This company provided the school with funds, and we used these funds to take care of the needs of the school. However, this came to an end when the CEO was replaced. The newly appointed CEO at the time stopped funding the school because his vision was not aligned with our school. I felt disheartened and helpless because I knew that the DBE would not come to our rescue since we are a fee-paying school. Even though we are a fee-paying school, most parents do not pay fees due unemployment. The DBE does not consider the fact that effectiveness is informed by how you address the needs of each school context. We are still in dire need of teaching resources, and I have approached Toyota and Rotatrim Paper to assist in this regard.

5.6.2 Poverty deprives learners from achieving academic excellence

At this school, we have some learners who come from poor families and child headed households. From my experience as a principal of this school, I have observed that these learners fall in the trap of using and selling drugs. The academic performance of these learners has declined since they divert their attention from learning to using and selling drugs. It is quite disturbing because some of these learners are highly intellectual. As a principal, I have tried to intervene by involving parents in addressing the inappropriate behaviour by these learners. However, some parents are

not supportive in assisting me to correct such behaviour. Therefore, I argue that if the parent component does not exist in the life of the learner, there is very little you can expect to achieve from a child who is selling and using drugs.

Apart from drug use by learners and lack of parental support, learners from poor homes steal cars since they need money to support their families. These learners usually steal cars at night, and you find that the next day they come to school they are tired and as a result, they fall asleep during teaching and learning time.

5.6.3 Unionisation and politicisation of issues in my school

Working with members of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) has been one of the greatest challenges that I have experienced as a principal. SADTU is radical and it is sometimes difficult to work with members of this union. For example, they reject every proposal that I put forth to remedy the decline in the school. One of the proposals that I had put forth was intervention classes to provide academic support to learners. SADTU members (teachers) abused their power by influencing other teachers in this school not to participate in the intervention classes without being compensated. Due to financial constraints, the school does not have the funds to compensate teachers. For this reason, SADTU members have turned teachers into radicals who do not commit themselves to improving the academic performance of the school… However, there are some teachers that are supportive and they have intervention classes to support learners. I always make sure that I protect these teachers from SADTU members. In protecting these teachers, I stand up to SADTU members when they bully them. I never back down without a fight. If I was a weak leader, I would have resigned a long time ago due to fear of this teacher union, SADTU.

5.6.4 We need to be effective at planning and implementing learner support programmes

At this school, we have to be effective at planning and implementing learner support programmes in order to improve school performance. My management team which consists of the deputy principals and departmental heads would have to work tirelessly to achieve this. For instance, they should get together and plan study sessions to provide intervention to learners who are struggling academically. During the planning session, a study timetable for underperforming subjects such as English, IsiZulu, Geography, Mathematics and Physical Science should be drawn up. The study timetable must then be given to me to check if it has been properly structured. Following this, my

management team and I must humbly approach teachers to have study sessions to provide academic support to learners.

5.7 MELUSI DLAMINI'S SHORT STORY: SGB CHAIRPERSON

I am Melusi Dlamini, SGB chairperson of Phakathwayo High School. I have served in the SGB for over a period of six years at this school. I have a matric (Grade 12) certificate and I work as a private investigator for the Forensic Department; I deal with criminal and civil matters. Currently, I serve as a member of the National Association of SGB's, and I am instrumental in capacitating SGB members of other schools in school governance except for managing the finances of the school.

5.7.1 SGB's lack of know-how on their governance roles

In 2021, governing body elections took place in all South African public schools. The purpose of these elections was to elect members that are going to serve schools by executing their governance roles. Sadly, some members that are elected into the governing body are not educated and as a result, they do not know what their role in the school entails. As a chairperson of the SGB, I do not know how to manage the finances of the school since I have not received any form of training. Some SGB members have instructed me to check if the principal is stealing money from the school. This has caused conflict between these SGB members and the principal and has subsequently hindered the performance of this school. I solely believe that the nature of this conflict could be avoided if the DBE effectively trained SGB members about their roles in the school. Many schools have declined due to the ineffectiveness of the SGB training sessions conducted by the DBE.

5.7.2 Teacher unions use their positional power to destabilise the school

As an SGB Chairperson, I spend most of my time at this school and I have observed the abuse of power by teacher unions and the implications thereof. Union meetings take place on weekdays during instructional time. Teacher unions influence all the teachers at this school to attend these meetings. When this occurs, learners are left alone in classes with no teachers to teach them.

Owing to this, bullying takes place in some of the classes and some of the learners bunk classes. It is challenging for the SMT and myself to control these incidents since we have an enrolment of

three thousand learners. Furthermore, we are unable to investigate these incidents with the assistant from teachers as they are away on union meetings. Unfortunately, we cannot prevent teachers from attending union meetings since the Employment of Educators Act gives them the right to do so.

When we had SGB elections this year, 2021, SADTU, a powerful teacher union interfered with the process. They used their power and influence to ensure that their members were the only individuals that were elected into the teacher component of the SGB. Members from other teacher unions were side-lined and they were not elected into the SGB. Consequently, there has been a lot of conflict and fighting taking place between SADTU members and non-SADTU members. As an SGB chairperson, I feel powerless because I do not have the power and the authority to deal with teacher unions. Dealing with teacher unions does not form part of my governance roles.

5.7.3 Deficient parental practices are common at this school

Figure 5.5 Melusi's artefact: Policy document on community engagement framework

The chosen artefact above is the policy document on community engagement between the school and the parent. One of the challenges that we face at this school is that we do not receive support from parents to enhance learner performance. For instance, when we invite parents to meetings to discuss their children's academic progress they do not attend. To address this matter, the principal

and I contact these parents telephonically and we explain the importance of parental involvement in the life of a child with the hope that they will be supportive. To our dismay, they still do not attend parent meetings. Instead, they send other people on their behalf. When we experience learner indiscipline, we also do not get support from parents. As a result, we suspend the learner until we see his or her parent. If a learner comes back to school without the parent, we send him or her back home.

5.7.3 Empowering newly elected SGB members

Following the elections of SGBs in schools, elected candidates need to be empowered through training on their governance roles. The DBE should delegate school governing body foundations to adequately train newly elected SGB members (parent governors). School governing body foundations are bodies that promote sound governance in South African Public Schools. I am a member of a governing body foundation and I believe that this foundation can train SGB members on leadership and management, working with parents and the community, adopting the vision and mission of the school, and legislation on school governance among others.

5.8 SBUSISO DLOMO'S SHORT STORY: PRINCIPAL

I am Sbusiso Dlomo, a principal at Khondlo High School. I have worked in the teaching fraternity for more than 24years. Prior to being a principal at this school, I served as a deputy principal and my portfolio was curriculum management. In addition to managing the curriculum, I taught Mathematics at Grades ten to twelve (FET level). I hold a Bachelor of Education Honours in School Leadership and Management.

5.8.1 Abominable working conditions

Khondlo High School is located in a township and has the capacity to accommodate seven hundred learners. With an enrolment of seven hundred learners in this school, we were consistently producing quality results. However, this changed when the DBE forced us to take in more learners as there are only two high schools in this area. The DBE promised us that if we increase the learner enrolment, our school will be renovated since the infrastructure is in an appalling condition. Our current learner enrolment is 1 024. Having this learner enrolment has led to learner overcrowding

in classrooms. My teachers are subjected to teach about 70 to 87 learners in the classroom yet the policy by the DBE stipulates there should be 30 to 35 learners in a classroom. These working conditions, particularly overcrowded classes, have brought a number of challenges for teachers at this school. Firstly, in overcrowded classrooms, teachers are unable to give learners individual attention. Secondly, teachers are unable to discipline unruly learners in overcrowded classrooms. Thirdly, monitoring the work done by learners during lesson time is a challenge for teachers since there is not enough space in the classroom for them to walk around. These challenges that teachers experience in overcrowded classrooms have resulted in the decline of this school's academic performance.

Figure 5.6 Sbusiso's artefact: Classroom photo

The artefact that I have chosen above triggers memories of helplessness of being unable to renovate classes in order to improve to improve the working conditions conducive for teaching and learning. Most of the classes at this school have broken windows and some of them do not even open properly, and this creates a problem for teachers during summer. They are unable to be productive in class due to the heat and there are no fans to help remedy the situation. In winter, the broken windows are a constraint to teaching and learning because it gets cold in the classrooms and as a result, learners are unable to concentrate on academic work. Unfortunately, the school does not have sufficient funds to repair the broken windows. The funds that this school receives from the DBE are not enough repair the broken windows and for renovating classrooms. A large portion of the funds is used to pay the salaries of security guards and for purchasing of school resources.

5.8.2 Uncaring attitude of parents

Every term we invite parents for a meeting to give them feedback on the academic progress of their children. Only a few of these parents come. A large majority of parents do not come, and I am under the assumption that they do not care about their children's well-being and academic performance. At times they send other people on their behalf when we have parent teacher meetings. This has not been effective because we do not see any improvement in the learners' academic performance. These parents never cease to amaze me. On many occasions our learners do not come to school when they feel like not coming. When we contact parents to address this matter they do not offer us any support in getting the learners to come to school. Sometimes I drive to the learners' homes to force them to come to school since their parents do not care.

The socio- economic status of our parents could be the underlying factor why they do not play a pivotal role in their children's education. The parents that stay here "Elokshini" (Township) are university graduates, and they are struggling to find jobs. Therefore, they do not see the importance of education. Other parents are school dropouts and they do not see the value of a good education. These factors have led to the decline of parental care and support at this school.

5.8.3 Drug intoxication is prevalent among our learners

Khondlo High School is facing an enormous challenge of learners coming to school intoxicated with drugs. Some of our learners use drugs particularly "insangu" (Marijuana) before they come to school. When they enter the school premises, they are highly intoxicated. For this reason, these learners are unable to concentrate in class when teachers are teaching. At times they are difficult to work with considering that they do not cooperate with the school authority. It is difficult to combat the drug usage at this school since a large majority of our learners are using them. The police officers have also intervened, but they have been unsuccessful in combating the use of drugs by learners.

5.8.4 Our interventions as a stepping-stone to enhance learner academic performance

As a principal of this school, it is my duty to work with my SMT and teachers in putting structures in place to improve the academic performance of learners. This will entail assigning the deputy principal, the Head of Academics to draw up an intervention programme specifically aimed at providing academic support to our learners. In drawing up the intervention programme, the deputy

principal will have to solicit assistance from departmental heads and teachers from different departments to ensure that there is intervention from all departments in terms of subjects. Following this, an intervention timetable should be given to learners to attend intervention classes. We should have morning and afternoon intervention classes during the weekdays, weekend classes and holiday classes.

Some of our teachers are not doing justice in terms of teaching and learning during intervention classes. When I question them regarding this matter, they say that professional development workshops conducted by the DBE do not capacitate them enough with teaching skills. I am partly to blame as I have not done anything from a school level to enhance the teaching skills of these teachers. To address this, I should solicit assistance from well-performing schools to capacitate my teachers with knowledge and skills needed to improve learner performance.

5.9 FIKANI QWABE'S SHORT STORY: CIRCUIT MANAGER

I am Fikani Qwabe, a circuit manager of Umlazi District; Khondlo High School is one of the schools that I am serving. I have been in the teaching fraternity for thirty-three years. Prior to being appointed as a circuit manager, I have served as a departmental head, deputy principal and principal of a Primary School. I hold a Primary Teachers Diploma, Advanced Certificate in Education, Bachelor of Education Honours in Educational Law and Policy, and a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership and Management.

5.9.1 The exit of principals and teachers leaves cracks in the school

In my district, I have observed that schools perform well academically, but once the principal exits, things start to fall apart. The cracks in a school show that the principal who was consistent in leading and managing teaching and learning is no longer there. Owing to this, you find that the principal and other members of the SMT do not have any direction for taking the school to greater heights in terms of academic performance. For instance, they experience challenges with instructional leadership practices such as curriculum management, monitoring learner progress, and professionally developing teachers. This negatively affects teaching and learning and as a result, schools decline. I am not surprised by the decline because it is clear that instructional leadership practices such as curriculum management, monitoring learner progress, professional

development of teachers, among others, are not enacted. This is what I have observed during my visits to these schools. Drawing from this experience, I noticed that succession planning was not done at these schools. For this reason, I have stepped in as a circuit manager to train newly appointed school leaders on instructional leadership since I consider this type of leadership as the core of teaching and learning in a school.

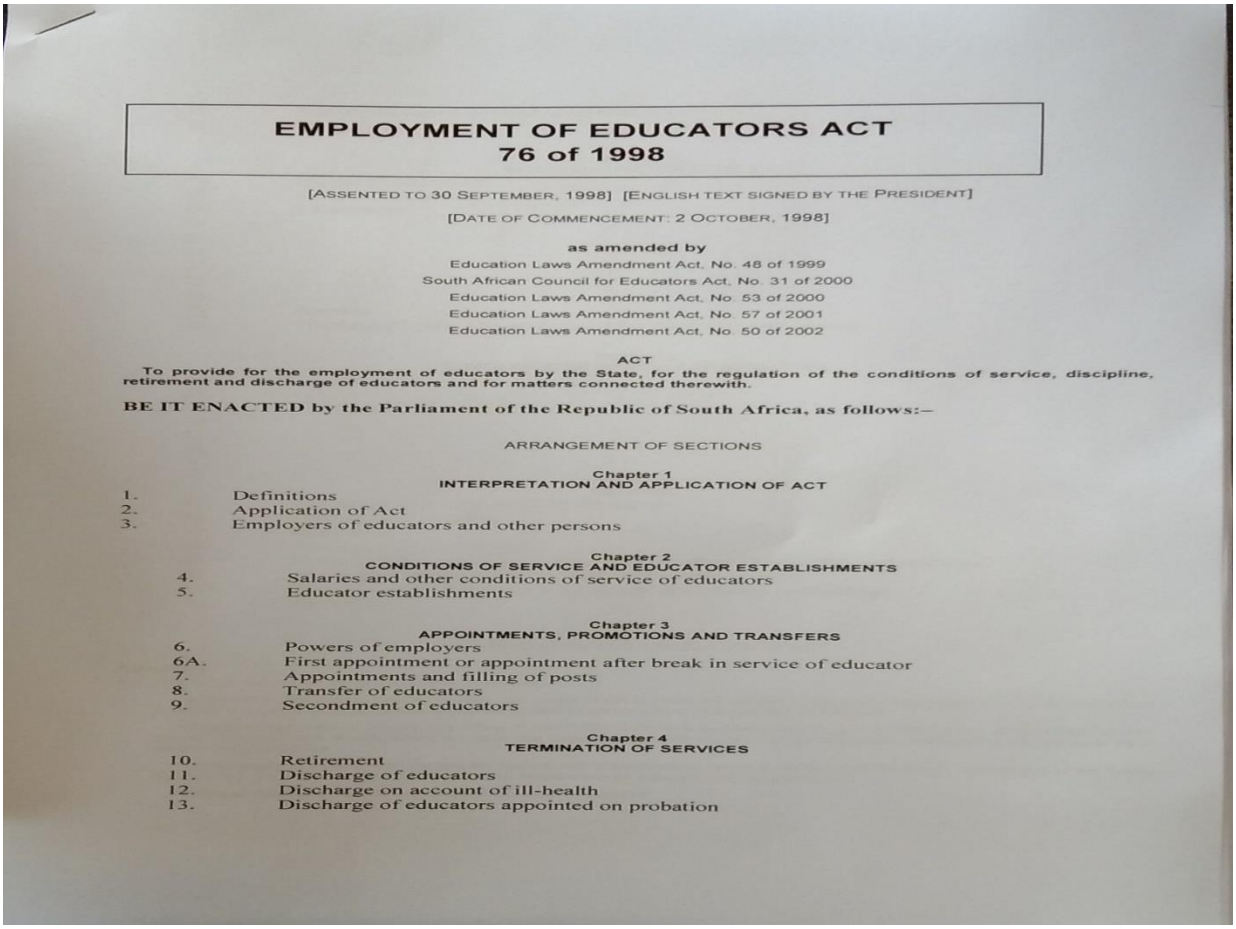
Apart from the exit of principals, I have observed that the exit of Grade 12 teachers who produce outstanding results may also cause a school to decline. These high performing teachers are replaced with novice teachers since there is a shortage of highly skilled teachers and this presents a number of complexities. Firstly, novice teachers do not have adequate knowledge and experience to maintain the status quo in terms of performance. Secondly, it takes time, induction and mentorship to equip a novice teacher with skills to produce quality results.

5.9.2 Deployment of incompetent candidates into leadership positions

The South African education system has been prone to deployment of leadership in schools. In this context, teacher unions influence the appointment of candidates to leadership positions. Teachers who have exceptional leadership skills are not given the opportunity to lead and manage schools on the grounds that they are not politically affiliated and not active in the teacher union. Conversely, teachers who are politically affiliated and hold leadership positions in teacher unions are the ones that are promoted to departmental heads, deputy principals and principals. Sadly, I cannot challenge the promotion of these candidates because they have been through the interview process and awarded high scores by the interview committees to get the leadership positions. Interviews are not recorded, and they are subjective in nature, therefore, it would be difficult to challenge the outcome and the appointments thereof if the interview policies were followed.

In most cases, teachers who are politically affiliated do not have the leadership skills to lead and manage the schools. I argue that not everyone is meant to be a leader and this manifests in the academic performance of the school. You find that candidates appointed to leadership positions in schools struggle to get into the shoes of their predecessors who had great leadership skills and took the school to greater heights. As a result, newly appointed leaders struggle to maintain the status quo in terms performance and subsequently, schools begin to sink.

5.9.3 Teachers fall short of expected behaviour



EMPLOYMENT OF EDUCATORS ACT
76 of 1998

[ASSENTED TO 30 SEPTEMBER, 1998] [ENGLISH TEXT SIGNED BY THE PRESIDENT]

[DATE OF COMMENCEMENT: 2 OCTOBER, 1998]

as amended by

Education Laws Amendment Act, No. 48 of 1999
South African Council for Educators Act, No. 31 of 2000
Education Laws Amendment Act, No. 53 of 2000
Education Laws Amendment Act, No. 57 of 2001
Education Laws Amendment Act, No. 50 of 2002

ACT

To provide for the employment of educators by the State, for the regulation of the conditions of service, discipline, retirement and discharge of educators and for matters connected therewith.

BE IT ENACTED by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, as follows:—

ARRANGEMENT OF SECTIONS

Chapter 1
INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION OF ACT

1. Definitions
2. Application of Act
3. Employers of educators and other persons

Chapter 2
CONDITIONS OF SERVICE AND EDUCATOR ESTABLISHMENTS

4. Salaries and other conditions of service of educators
5. Educator establishments

Chapter 3
APPOINTMENTS, PROMOTIONS AND TRANSFERS

6. Powers of employers
6A. First appointment or appointment after break in service of educator
7. Appointments and filling of posts
8. Transfer of educators
9. Secondment of educators

Chapter 4
TERMINATION OF SERVICES

10. Retirement
11. Discharge of educators
12. Discharge on account of ill-health
13. Discharge of educators appointed on probation

Figure 5.7 Fikani's artefact: Legislation document

As a circuit manager, I have observed that in my district, there is a lot of inappropriate behaviour among teachers in declining schools and this is not in line with the Employment Educators Act 76 of 1998. Firstly, you find that teachers fight for leadership positions. When this occurs, unity and collegiality come to an end at the school, and it becomes a warzone as everyone thinks they deserve to be in a leadership position. This is one of the reasons for school decline. Secondly, teachers report to work and do not honour their periods, and this subsequently affects teaching and learning time. Learners must attend weekend and holiday classes to catch up on the lost teaching time. Thirdly, there is a high absenteeism rate among teachers and there is no level of commitment from their side since they know that they are going to get paid regardless of their high absenteeism. Some principals do not take action against these teachers.

5.9.4 Implication of school decline on a school's standing

There are quite a number of consequences for declining schools. If the school declines, it is categorised as underperforming and once it declines on three consecutive years it is termed as chronologically underperforming. From a circuit and district level, we charge the underperforming principal for incapacity according to Section 58 B in terms of the South African Schools Act. This Act also enables us as the DBE to remove the underperforming principal from the school and send him or her to a high performing school for professional development. The purpose of this intervention is for the underperforming principal to be mentored by a high performing principal on school leadership and management and it should be our duty as circuit managers to oversee this process. While this is happening, we appoint a caretaker principal who should turn the declining school around. Apart from principal intervention, many parents withdraw their children from declining schools and send them to high performing schools. This then affects the Post Provisioning Norm (PPN) of the school and quality teachers lose their jobs at the school due to significant decline in learner enrolment.

5.9.5 My interventions as a circuit manager

As a circuit manager, it is my duty to work with principals from declining schools to mitigate performance decline. To do this, they will need to be advised to identify the subjects that do poorly. Once this has been done, appropriate intervention would have to be implemented. Possible intervention programmes could include having afternoon classes during weekdays, weekend classes and holiday classes. As a circuit manager, I will work with subject advisors in supporting principals in implementing intervention programmes. Subject advisors point the direction in terms of teaching and learning. Once you speak about teaching and learning, subject advisors are in the forefront, and they are there to provide support from a district level. For this reason, I will work with them in identifying teachers from high performing schools to be part of intervention programmes where they would provide academic support to learners from declining schools who are struggling academically. Apart from this, these teachers share their ideas, material resources, and assessments with teachers from declining schools.

5.10 SIYANDA HADEBE'S SHORT STORY: CIRCUIT MANAGER

I am Siyanda Hadebe, a circuit manager of Umlazi District, Yeyeye High School is one of the schools I serve. I have been in the teaching fraternity for thirty years. Prior to being appointed as a circuit manager, I have served as a departmental head in a High School and a principal at a Primary School. Apart from these leadership roles, I have served as a chairperson of a teacher union. I hold a Secondary Teachers Diploma in Languages, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Education Honours, Masters in Education and Doctor of Philosophy Degree.

5.10.1 Inadequate systems hinder school performance

There are quite a number of schools that were once high performing but are no longer as good as they were before and one of the factors that have led to such is poor systems within the schools. This includes curriculum management and learner discipline. You find that a principal does not put these systems in place to empower other SMT members to assist him or her in managing and leading the school. As a result, the school is only functional because the principal executes his duties well apart from being a good disciplinarian. When the principal leaves the school for whatever reason, it could be due to attrition, retirement or resignation, things take a different direction in the school. The new principal and the current management members struggle to keep the school functional since they are not well conversant with the systems in the school. For this reason, there is a subsequent decline in academic performance in the school. This has been the case for some of the declining schools that are under my circuit.

As a circuit manager, I do acknowledge that I have not played a role in ensuring that there is succession planning where members of the SMT are trained for the principalship position at a school level. From a circuit level, I now conduct training sessions to empower newly appointed principals on school leadership and management.

5.10.2 Appointing incapable candidates to ascend positions of power

As a circuit manager, one of my roles is serving as a human resource person for the shortlisting and interviewing of candidates for principal positions. Panels include a group of parents (parent component of a school governing body) who form part of the interview committee. Some of these parents are illiterate or less literate and the South African Schools Act affords them powers to select and recommend a candidate to be a principal of a school. Sometimes candidates use the

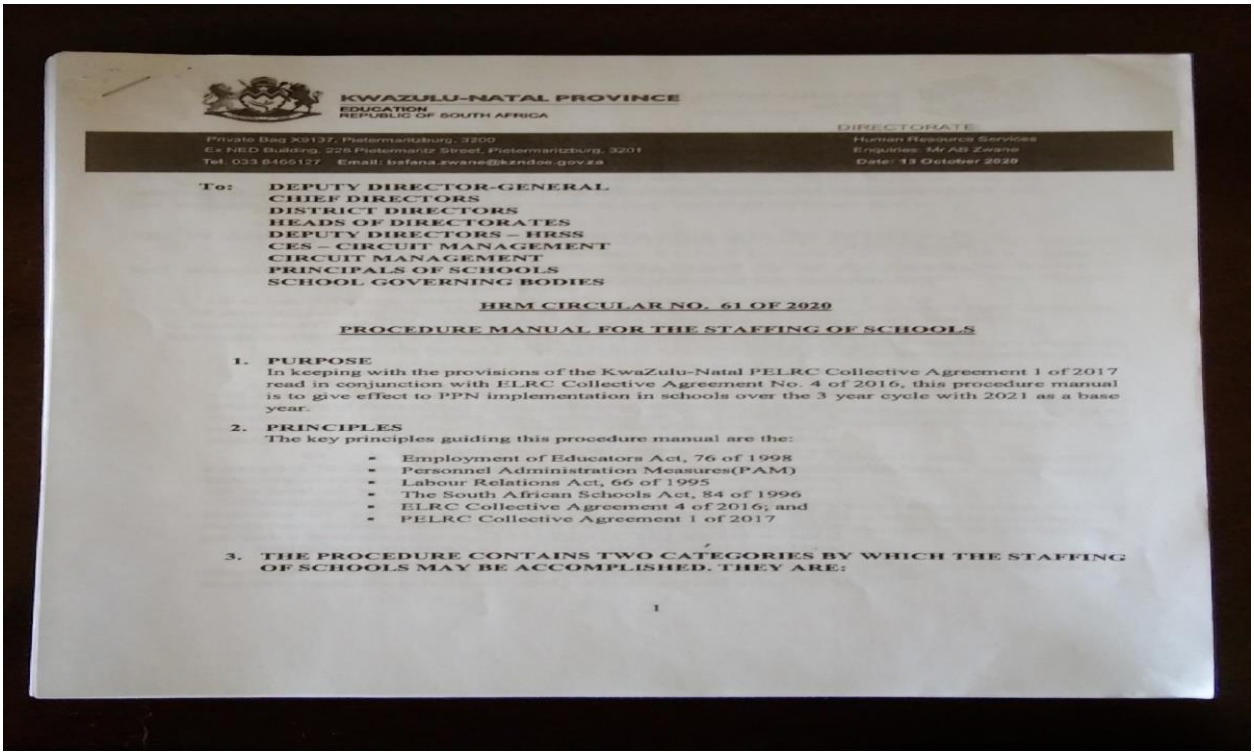
literacy status of the parent component of SGB to their advantage, which is done behind closed doors. For instance, they visit these parents, and they offer them bribes. Given that some of the parents are unemployed and have no source of income, they accept the bribes. They do not consider that teachers offering them bribes may not have the leadership and management skills for a principalship position. As a circuit manager, I do not intervene as bribing is done secretly and no evidence is presented. I can only take action if there is evidence beyond a reasonable doubt that parents have been bribed by candidates to ascend positions of power.

I have observed that candidates who get promoted through manipulating parents do not have an excellent track record of producing remarkable results. Their appointment normally lowers the morale in the school. For example, teachers lose the enthusiasm for teaching because it comes to their attention that the newly appointed principals did not get the position on merit. This causes a school to decline because teachers no longer perform as they used to in the past. Some even leave the school and seek greener pastures.

5.10.3 Greener pastures for teachers

Principals from high performing schools are strategic in the sense that they recruit dedicated teachers from declining schools into their schools. From my experience, it is usually principals from former Model C schools who recruit these teachers. They offer them leadership positions ranging from departmental heads and deputy principals since school governing bodies in these schools have the finances to pay people who will be occupying these positions. It is usually Mathematics and Science teachers who are offered these positions. Most of these teachers accept the job offers and they leave the declining schools. This leads to a decline in academic performance in Mathematics and Science. One should bear in mind that quality Mathematics and Science teachers are scarce in South Africa, and it would be a challenge for declining schools to find such teachers in order to improve their results.

5.10.4 Schools without dedicated teachers



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DIRECTORATE: Human Resource Services
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Date: 13 October 2020

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To: DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL
CHIEF DIRECTORS
DISTRICT DIRECTORS
HEADS OF DIRECTORATES
DEPUTY DIRECTORS – HRSS
CES – CIRCUIT MANAGEMENT
CIRCUIT MANAGEMENT
PRINCIPALS OF SCHOOLS
SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES

HRM CIRCULAR NO. 61 OF 2020

PROCEDURE MANUAL FOR THE STAFFING OF SCHOOLS

1. PURPOSE
In keeping with the provisions of the KwaZulu-Natal PELRC Collective Agreement 1 of 2017 read in conjunction with ELRC Collective Agreement No. 4 of 2016, this procedure manual is to give effect to PPN implementation in schools over the 3 year cycle with 2021 as a base year.

2. PRINCIPLES
The key principles guiding this procedure manual are the:

- Employment of Educators Act, 76 of 1998
- Personnel Administration Measures(PAM)
- Labour Relations Act, 66 of 1995
- The South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996
- ELRC Collective Agreement 4 of 2016; and
- PELRC Collective Agreement 1 of 2017

3. THE PROCEDURE CONTAINS TWO CATEGORIES BY WHICH THE STAFFING OF SCHOOLS MAY BE ACCOMPLISHED. THEY ARE:

1

Figure 5.8 Siyanda's artefact: Circular document

The Human Resource Management Circular no 61 of 2020 refers to the procedure manual for staffing of schools. The challenge that I have encountered as a circuit manager is that declining schools that are under my supervision are declining in learner enrolment. This being the case, these schools will now have to declare teachers in surplus, which means that they would have to be redeployed to other schools. Some of these teachers are dedicated and their exit from declining schools further perpetuates the decline because it means that learners will not have teachers to teach them. There are many declining schools that do not have teachers and learners are left unattended. These learners are expected to compete with learners that are taught by dedicated teachers in high performing schools.

5.10.5 Stepping in as a district to bail out declining schools

In order to turn around declining schools to achieve effectiveness, we as circuit managers should investigate whether the principal of the school is the cause of the decline. If this is the case, we must put measures in place to assist the principal. For example, as circuit managers, we should work in partnership with principals and equip them with instructional leadership skills which is

the main core for teaching and learning. Such insight will enable the principal to turn a declining school and achieve effectiveness and improvement. However, if this does not work, we will remove the principal from a declining school and send him or her to a high performing school to become a mentee of a particular principal. During the mentorship, the principal is going to be mentored and coached and we will supervise this process. In this way, the principal will attain the skills to improve the declining school.

5.10.6 Synergy among school stakeholders and community members

In order to improve declining schools, synergy between the DBE, the South African Police Services (SAPS), social workers, circuit managers, SMTs, and other members from the community is needed. There are places in the community where learners buy drugs from merchants (drug dealers), and they come to school intoxicated. It is imperative for schools to work with members of the community and the police services to address the matter at hand. As stakeholders, we should work in unity in addressing drug related issues in our schools. Hence, the partnership between school stakeholders and the police services will restore order and discipline in some of the declining schools.

5.11 MPIYAKHE ZUNGU'S SHORT STORY: SGB CHAIRPERSON

I am Mpiyakhe Zungu, SGB chairperson of Yeyeye High School. I have served in the SGB for over a period of four years at this school. I have a matric certificate and I work as a residential advisor at a boarding school. Prior to this, I owned several businesses, and they were closed down due to bad economic conditions.

5.11.1 I serve with members who are clueless about their roles as SGB members

I have served as a chairperson of the governing body at this school (Yeyeye High School) for a period of three years. I have observed that some of the members that I serve with in the governing body do not know what their role entails. They do not know what they are supposed to do when it comes to governing the school. These members think that they are responsible for the day to day running of the school and this is not their role as SGB members. The role of SGB members is actually in the boardroom where they should be developing school policies and supporting the

principal. However, this is not the case at this school because SGB members frustrate the principal since they do not play an active role in drawing up the code of conduct for learners, admission policy, finance policy and maintenance of school buildings. As a chairperson of the SGB, I am battling to execute these roles by myself without the support of other SGB members. Working with incompetent SGB members has been one of the reasons for this school's performance decline.

The DBE is to blame for the inability of our SGB members to execute their roles at this school. SGB training that is conducted by the DBE to capacitate SGB members is of poor quality. These have been some of the experiences that have been shared by our SGB members. Officials who conduct SGB training only do an induction course which usually takes two to three hours. The time spent on this induction course is too little for our SGB members to grasp the skills needed to execute their governance roles at this school. Due to the ineffectiveness of training provided by the DBE, I sought assistance from external sources. Last year, I approached the Governing Body foundation to train my fellow SGB members on governance roles.

5.11.2 The principal dominates us (SGB members) at this school

The principal at this school has taken away our powers as SGB members when it comes to the appointment and dismissal of staff. For instance, when an SGB teacher has to be employed, she does not involve us in the selection and interview process. At times, she appoints her friends and family members to teach at this school. There have also been times when she dismissed dedicated SGB teachers just because she does not have a good relationship with them. As SGB members, we were not consulted on the dismissal of these dedicated teachers. When we questioned her regarding this matter, she said that there was no need for her to consult us. From my knowledge, the SGB should have a say in the appointment and dismissal of SGB teachers. This principal abuses her power by virtue of her position and as a result, this school is subsequently declining in academic performance.

5.11.3 School's survival has deteriorated as more parents do not pay fees

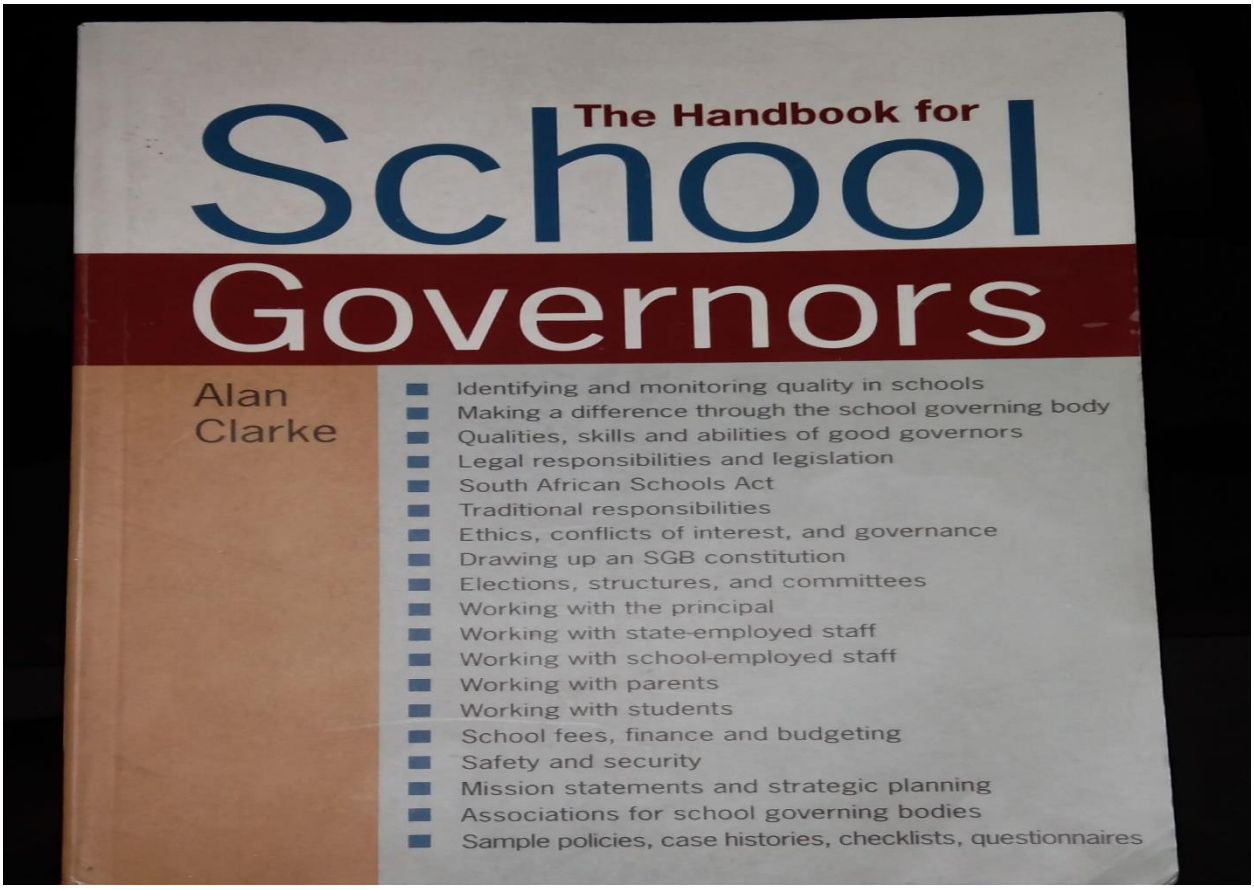


Figure 5.9 Mpiyahke's artefact: Handbook for school governors

The handbook on School Governors triggers memories of working with parents who do not want to pay school fees. Furthermore, these parents once formed a coalition and wanted the school governing body to reduce school fees. As it is, the school is struggling to stay afloat, and these parents come up with this ridiculous request. With the little fees that we receive at this school, I usually sit down and try to work out if the budget is viable for the survival of this learning institution. Sadly, we have had to retrench SGB teachers at this school as we do not have the funds to pay them. This is due to parents who do not pay school fees. As a result, there has been a huge decline in quality teaching and learning because there is learner overcrowding in all classes. Teachers are unable to give learners individual attention, and this has had a negative impact on this school's academic results. Some parents have removed their children from this school as a result of poor academic results. This has led to a decline in learner enrolment.

The inability of parents to pay school fees has not only affected the academic performance of the school. The school does not have enough funds to maintain its buildings and grounds, sporting equipment and replacing administration staff who have retired since the DBE does no longer do this. The DBE is unable to replace retired staff due to financial constraints.

5.11.4 Quality training for SGB members would be beneficial for all schools

The DBE and SGB foundations should provide quality training to people who have been elected to be SGB members (parent governors) in schools. There should be training sessions throughout the year and these sessions should focus on the core roles of SGB's so that SGB members can be able to successfully execute these roles in schools. My thoughts on these training sessions are that they would empower SGB members in schools, particularly at this school since some of our SGB members do not know what their roles entail. Once they accumulate the knowledge of what their roles entail, they would be able to make informed decisions that would be in the best interest of the school.

5.12 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the co-constructed short stories of stakeholders of schools in decline. The short stories respond to the first research puzzle: *What are the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline?* Attending to three common places of narrative inquiry, namely, temporality, sociality and place was critical during the process of co-constructing these short stories. To achieve this, I paid attention to the past, present and future of stakeholders as well as the emotions and feelings that they expressed. The next chapter presents a further analysis (analysis of narratives) of these co-constructed stories. This involves deconstructing the above stories with an aim to provide answers to the second research puzzle. Here, I attend to the stakeholders' lived experiences in terms of structural, cultural and agential mechanisms influencing school decline.

CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES STRUCTURAL, CULTURAL AND AGENTIAL MECHANISMS INFLUENCING SCHOOL DECLINE

6.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented the re-storied short stories of stakeholders who participated in the study. The re-storied short stories provide comprehensive answers to the first research puzzle: *What are the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline?*

In this chapter, I present the second level of analysis, the analysis of narratives. This chapter addresses the second research puzzle: *What are the structural, cultural and agential mechanisms influencing school decline?* This research puzzle was influenced by Archer's social realism theory; therefore, in responding to the research puzzle, I was guided by this theory as a lens through which I examined participants' stories. In developing this chapter, I present themes under three sections that depict the theory's domains: structure, culture and agency. In each section, I begin by presenting a table showing how themes were derived from the stories. Three themes reflecting the structural domain emerged from participants' stories: the challenges of transition following the departure of a principal, parent governors' lack of understanding of school governance roles and the teacher union's interference in instructional and teacher appointment processes. Two themes reflecting the cultural domain emerged: lack of accountability that promotes teacher misconduct and learners' exposure to drugs. Finally, two themes reflecting the agential domain emerged: teacher agency compromised by lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms and poor instructional leadership by school leaders.

6.2 Section 1: Structural mechanisms influencing school decline

This section presents three themes related to structural mechanisms influencing school decline. These themes pay attention to the following areas: the challenge of transition following the departure of a principal, parent governors' lack of understanding of school governance roles and

teacher union's interference in instructional and teacher appointment processes. I developed a concept map to identify structural mechanisms and the table below captures the outcome.

Table 6.1 Concept map of structural mechanisms

Mapping out of emerging ideas from the concept maps	**Stakeholder**	**Theme**
Leadership challenges following the exit of a principal	Fikani (circuit manager)	**1.** Challenges of transition following the departure of a principal
Curriculum and discipline challenges encountered following the departure of a principal.	Siyanda (circuit manager)	
Difficulty transitioning to the leadership approach of a new principal	Harriet (departmental head)	
Parent governors' lack of understanding in managing school finances	Melusi (SGB Chairperson)	**2.** Parent governors' lack of understanding of school governance roles
Parent governors' lack of understanding of governance policies	Mpiyakhe (SGB Chairperson)	
Union interference in academics	Khaya (principal) Melusi (SGB Chairperson)	**3.** Teacher union's interference in instructional and teacher appointment processes
Deployment in the appointment of leaders	Fikani (circuit manager)	
Union members offering bribes for the appointment of positions	Siyanda (circuit manager)	

6.2.1 Challenges of transition following the departure of a principal

There is a consensus among scholars that principals play a pivotal role in schools in terms of providing quality education (Bagi, 2015; Louis et al., 2010; Shava & Heystek, 2018). The research indicates that new principals across several contexts experience challenges that can be unsettling

and stressful as they transition into the role (Aggrey-Fynn, 2020; Earley et al., 2013; Garcia-Garduno et al., 2011). The stories of circuit managers who participated in the study suggest that principals and members of SMTs experience challenges when transitioning into their leadership roles following the departure of their predecessors. Fikani, a circuit manager, for instance, observes that newly appointed principals and other SMT members in his district struggle with instructional leadership in schools when an effective principal has exited the system. This impacts negatively on teaching and learning. He explains below:

> *In my district, I have observed that schools perform well academically, but once the principal exits, things start to fall apart. The cracks in a school show that the principal who was consistent in leading and managing teaching and learning is no longer there. Owing to this, you find that the principal and other members of the SMT do not have any direction for taking the school to greater heights in terms of academic performance. For instance, they experience challenges with instructional leadership practices such as curriculum management, monitoring learner progress, and professionally developing teachers. This negatively affects teaching and learning and as a result, schools decline (see Chapter 5, p.108).*

Siyanda, who is also a circuit manager, shares a similar sentiment with Fikani; he believes that instructional leadership is often a challenge for new principals and their management teams during the transitional period following the departure of principals in schools. Siyanda adds learner discipline as another challenge for school leaders during the transitional period; he refers to both these challenges as systemic. He explicates below:

> *There are quite a number of schools that were once high performing but are no longer as good as they were before and one of the factors that have led to such is poor systems within the schools. This includes curriculum management and learner discipline. You find that a principal does not put these systems in place to empower other SMT members to assist him or her in managing and leading the school…When the principal leaves the school for whatever reason, it could be due to attrition, retirement or resignation, things take a different direction in the school. The new principal and the current management members struggle to keep the school functional since they are not well conversant with*

the systems in the school. For this reason, there is a subsequent decline in academic performance in the school (see Chapter 5, p.112).

While stories of circuit managers show agreement in terms of transitional challenges, Harriet, a departmental head at Star High School seems to have a different perspective regarding the sources of these challenges. She mentions that teachers in her school experienced difficulties transitioning from the leadership approach of the former principal to that of the new principal. She explains below:

This school was achieving excellent results with a pass rate ranging from 90% to 100% in the Grade twelve final examinations. At that time, Mr. Sheokarah [pseudonym] was the principal of this school. Mr. Sheokarah was an exceptional person with great leadership qualities. He was assertive, consistent with maintaining learner discipline, promoted an open-door policy for teachers in the school and involved them in decision-making. Following the retirement of Mr. Sheokarah, a new principal was appointed at this school and his leadership skills are weak. For example, teachers are not part of decision-making, their interests are disregarded and their concerns are often overlooked when it comes to matters concerning teaching and learning. Some teachers are scared of this principal because he humiliates them when they challenge his leadership practices. Subsequent to this, these teachers find it challenging to adjust to the principal's autocratic leadership approach (see Chapter 5, p.89).

The above excerpts highlight leadership competency as a key challenge for newly appointed principals in schools that are in decline. Lee (2015) identifies management and leadership abilities as challenges that newly appointed principals experience as they navigate their new leadership role. Hong et al. (2020) reveal that newly appointed principals are inclined to a top-down approach with teachers as they transition into their leadership role, and this reflects Harriet's observation. The extracts from Fikani, Siyanda and Harriet's stories suggest leadership incompetence in newly appointed principals in declining schools. Archer (1995) identifies roles and positional levels in an organisation as constituents of structure. Therefore, the leadership incompetence of newly appointed principals that participants cited shows a structural contribution to school decline. In this study, the newly appointed principals, among other things, struggled to manage curriculum

and to ensure order in schools. This suggests that principals could not perform their role, hence, the decline in schools.

6.2.2 Parent governors' lack of understanding of school governance roles

Another structural challenge that is prevalent in the declining schools is parent governors' lack of understanding of school governance roles. According to Ogina (2017), the literacy status and socio-economic status of parent members in governing bodies play a significant role in their ability to carry out their expected functions. Schools that are usually located in deprived contexts often have parent governors who are illiterate; they lack the required expertise, skills, and experience of governing as well as time and resources to travel to meetings (Christie, 2010; Khuzwayo; 2019; Phori, 2016; Xaba; 2011). Another complexity that parent governors experience in the execution of their roles is the lack of skills in terms of what is expected from them to improve the quality of education of learners. Subsequent to this, parent governors find it challenging to execute their role in schools that they are governing (Davids, 2020). From the stories narrated by SGB chairpersons, it appears that parent governors do not understand school governance roles. For instance, Melusi, the SGB chairperson at Phakathwayo High School, indicated that he does not know how to manage the finances of the school since he has not received any training. He laments:

> *Sadly, some members that are elected into the governing body are not educated and as a result, they do not know what their role in the school entails. As a chairperson of the SGB, I do not know how to manage the finances of the school since I have not received any form of training. Some SGB members have instructed me to check if the principal is stealing money from the school. This has caused conflict between these SGB members and the principal and has subsequently hindered the performance of this school. I solely believe that the nature of this conflict could be avoided if the DBE effectively trained SGB members about their roles in the school. Many schools have declined due to the ineffectiveness of the SGB training sessions conducted by the DBE (see Chapter 5, p.103).*

Adding to the above view is Mpiyakhe, the SGB chairperson at Yeyeye High School, who explains that parent governors do not know how to draw up a code of conduct for learners as well as devising

the school's admission and finance policies due to inadequate training provided to school governors. He expatiates:

> *I have observed that some of the members that I serve with in the governing body do not know what their role entails… The role of SGB members is actually in the boardroom where they should be developing school policies and supporting the principal. However, this is not the case at this school because SGB members frustrate the principal since they do not play an active role in drawing up the code of conduct for learners, admission policy, finance policy and maintenance of school buildings. As a chairperson of the SGB, I am battling to execute these roles by myself without the support of other SGB members. Working with incompetent SGB members has been one of the reasons for this school's performance decline…The DBE is to blame for the inability of our SGB members to execute their roles at this school. SGB training that is conducted by the DBE to capacitate SGB members is of poor quality. These have been some of the experiences that have been shared by our SGB members. Officials who conduct SGB training only do an induction course which usually takes two to three hours (see Chapter 5, p. 115-116).*

Mpiyakhe believes that the principal has abused her power in school governance matters owing to parent governors' illiteracy. For instance, Mpiyakhe and other parent governors are not consulted in the appointment and dismissal of staff at the school. He explains:

> *The principal at this school has taken away our powers as SGB members when it comes to the appointment and dismissal of staff. For instance, when an SGB teacher has to be employed, she does not involve us in the selection and interview process. At times, she appoints her friends and family members to teach at this school. There have also been times when she dismissed dedicated SGB teachers just because she does not have a good relationship with them. As SGB members, we were not consulted on the dismissal of these dedicated teachers. When we questioned her regarding this matter, she said that there was no need for her to consult us. From my knowledge, the SGB should have a say in the appointment and dismissal of SGB teachers. This principal abuses her power by virtue of her position and as a result, this school is subsequently declining in academic performance (see Chapter 5, p.116).*

The above extracts show that parent governors in declining schools are illiterate or less literate which impacted on their role performance. The parent governors who participated in the study also complained about the quality of training they receive in preparation for their role. The school governing body is part of the school structure (Mestry, 2018; Xaba, 2011). According to Archer (2003), structures can either impede or facilitate courses of action; in this study, poor training sessions and literacy levels impeded the parent governors' course of action in declining schools.

6.2.3 Teacher union's interference in instructional and teacher appointment processes

A teacher union's interference in instructional and teacher appointment processes also emerged as a structural challenge in the declining schools. McCollow (2017) views teacher unions as organisations that safeguard and advance the interests of teachers. Also, teacher unions are legally recognised as organised labour in the field of education with specific responsibilities, including securing better working conditions for teachers and engaging them in innovative teaching methods to enhance educational quality (Mafisa, 2017). However, the literature has also shown how the involvement of teacher unions in schools may hinder school improvement (Wills, 2017; Wills, 2020). From some of the participants, it emerged that teacher union interference in instructional processes is a common practice in one of the declining schools. For instance, at Phakathwayo High School, SADTU members influence teachers to refrain from participating in academic programmes to support learners. Khaya, who is a principal at this school, had the following to say:

> *Working with members of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) has been one of the greatest challenges that I have experienced as a principal. SADTU is radical and it is sometimes difficult to work with members of this union. For example, they reject every proposal that I put forth to remedy the decline in the school. One of the proposals that I had put forth was intervention classes to provide academic support to learners. SADTU members (teachers) abused their power by influencing other teachers in this school not to participate in the intervention classes without being compensated. Due to financial constraints, the school does not have the funds to compensate teachers. For this reason, SADTU members have turned teachers into radicals who do not commit themselves to improving the academic performance of the school… However, there are some teachers that are supportive and they have intervention classes to support learners.*

I always make sure that I protect these teachers from SADTU members. In protecting these teachers, I stand up to SADTU members when they bully them. I never back down without a fight (see Chapter 5, p.102).

Again, Melusi (SGB chairperson) expressed further discontent about a teacher union's interference at this school. He mentioned that teacher unions influence teachers to attend union activities during instructional time. Melusi declared the following:

As an SGB Chairperson, I spend most of my time at this school and I have observed the abuse of power by teacher unions and the implications thereof. Union meetings take place on weekdays during instructional time. Teacher unions influence all the teachers at this school to attend these meetings. When this occurs, learners are left alone in classes with no teachers to teach them… Unfortunately, we cannot prevent teachers from attending union meetings since the Employment of Educators Act gives them the right to do so (see Chapter 5, p. 103-104).

Apart from compromising the teaching and learning time, the teacher union also interferes in the teacher appointment processes. Fikani, who is one of the participating circuit managers in the study, mentions that teachers who are politically active and hold positions of leadership in teacher unions are promoted to positions of leadership in the school. He claims that the union only manipulate the interviewing committee, but correct interview protocols are followed, which makes it difficult to challenge the appointment of these leaders. Fikani delineates:

The South African education system has been prone to the deployment of leaders in schools. In this context, teacher unions influence the appointment of candidates to leadership positions… teachers who are politically affiliated and hold leadership positions in teacher unions are the ones that are promoted to departmental heads, deputy principals and principals… As a result, newly appointed leaders struggle to maintain the status quo in terms of performance and subsequently, schools begin to sink… Sadly I cannot challenge the promotion of these candidates because they go through the interview process and are awarded high scores by the interview committees to get the leadership positions. Interviews are not recorded, and they are subjective in nature, therefore, it would be difficult to challenge the outcome and the appointments thereof if the interview policies were followed (see Chapter 5, p.109).

In line with Fikani's view, Siyanda, who is also a circuit manager, implies that candidates who are union-affiliated offer bribes to parent governors who are less illiterate and economically disadvantaged to ascend leadership positions. He expounds:

> *Some of these parents are illiterate or less literate and the South African Schools Act affords them powers to select and recommend a candidate to be a principal of a school. Sometimes candidates use the literacy status of the parent component of SGB to their advantage, which is done behind closed doors. For instance, they visit these parents, and they offer them bribes. Given that some of the parents are unemployed and have no source of income, they accept the bribes. They do not consider that teachers offering them bribes may not have the leadership and management skills for a principalship position… I have observed that candidates who get promoted through manipulating parents do not have an excellent track record of producing remarkable results. Their appointment normally lowers the morale in the school (see Chapter 5, p. 112-113).*

While every stakeholder has a role to play in schools, the findings of this study shows that teacher unions overstep their mark by interfering with other stakeholders' roles to achieve their personal agenda. For instance, they interfere with teaching and learning, which leads to poor performance; also, they influence the appointment processes which leads to the incompetent appointment of leaders (Dube & Tsotetsi, 2020; Khumalo, 2021; Mahlangu, 2019; Naidoo, 2019; Nzimande, 2018; Schneider, 2022). Drawing from the Archer's social realism theory, teacher unions emerged as a structural constraint in harnessing school improvement in the researched declining schools. Constraints are seen as situations that obstruct the achievement of desired outcomes (Archer, 1995). Archer (1995) emphasises that structural constraints may result in unfavourable events. It is possible to conclude that teacher unions, as a structure, were a primary cause of school decline.

6.3 Section 2: Cultural mechanisms influencing school decline

In this section, I present two themes related to cultural mechanisms influencing school decline. These themes are lack of accountability that promotes teacher misconduct and learners' exposure to drugs. I developed a concept map to identify cultural mechanisms and the table below captures the outcome.

Table 6.2 Concept map of cultural mechanisms

Mapping out of emerging ideas from the concept maps	**Stakeholder**	**Theme**
Unauthorised teacher absenteeism Bring intoxicating substances to school	Thabiso (teacher) Andile (departmental head)	4. Lack of accountability that promotes teacher misconduct
Negligence of duties.	Fikani (circuit manager)	
Falsifying of marks	Harriet (departmental head)	
Excessive drug use	Sbusiso (principal)	5. Learners' exposure to drugs
Drug dealing	Thabiso (teacher)	
Uncontrollable drug dealing	Rani (teacher)	
Drug use and dealing in school premises	Khaya (principal)	

6.3.1 Lack of accountability that promotes teacher misconduct

Mothata (2000) views teacher misconduct as any behaviour on the part of the teacher that deviates from an approved or expected pattern. He adds that teacher's actions that do not conform to the codes of the profession's ethics constitute misconduct (Mothata, 2000). Teacher misconduct is a global concern and is one of many challenges facing school leadership in declining schools (Ayechew Ayenalem et al., 2023; Fussy, 2018; Makoelle & du Plessis, 2019; Nkambule, 2023). Literature increasingly indicates that teachers across several contexts are implicated in misconducts such as absenteeism, misuse of school funds, inappropriate sexual conduct and alcoholism, among other things (Fussy, 2018; Mabagala, 2016; Mfaume & Bilinga, 2017). According to Betweli (2020) and Fussy (2018), teacher misconduct impacts negatively on learner attendance and academic performance. Teacher misconduct appears to be a common practice at Mnguni and Star High School. The stories of Thabiso (a teacher) and Andile (a departmental head) at Mnguni High School suggest that the principal does not hold teachers accountable for misconduct since he has sexual relationships with some of them. Thabiso, for instance, indicates that teachers who are consistently absent from work are not questioned by the principal. He explicates:

The principal at this school fails to hold teachers accountable for unprofessional conduct. There are teachers who are consistently absent from school and their conduct is not questioned. The principal allows these teachers to sign the time book despite not reporting to work. The continuation of this practice enables teachers to do as they please because they know that there is a lack of accountability in the school. One of the contributing reasons for this occurrence is that the principal has sexual relationships with some of the teachers. This explains why they are not disciplined for their unprofessional conduct. Such actions have impacted negatively on teaching and learning (see Chapter 5, p. 92-93).

Again, Andile indicates that the principal protects teachers who are bringing intoxicating substances to school, refusing to teach and challenging the management authority of the school. He elucidates:

At this school, we have teachers who bring intoxicating substances to the school premises, deliberately stay away from school, refuse to go to class to teach and challenge the management authority of departmental heads and the deputy principal. Based on the examples that I have cited, the Employment of Educators Act clearly states principals can charge teachers for insubordination. However, the principal at this school does not do this as it has been alleged that he has sexual relations with some of the teachers who are not carrying out their duties. These teachers are protected, and they use the principal's wrongdoing to their advantage to resist the management authority of departmental heads and the deputy principal (see Chapter 5, p. 97-98).

Similarly, the circuit manager, Fikani, identified similar sources of teacher misconduct in schools under his district. As a result, teaching and learning time is affected. He expatiates:

As a circuit manager, I have observed that, in my district, there is a lot of inappropriate behaviour among teachers in declining schools and this is not in line with the Employment Educators Act 76 of 1998… teachers report to work and do not honour their periods, and this subsequently affects teaching and learning time. Learners must attend weekend and holiday classes to catch up on the lost teaching time… there is a high absenteeism rate among teachers and there is no level of commitment from their side

> *since they know that they are going to get paid regardless of their high absenteeism. Some principals do not take action against these teachers (see Chapter 5, p. 110).*

While Thabiso, Andile and Fikani share similar experiences in relation to teacher misconduct in schools, Harriet, a departmental head at Star High School had a different approach to misconduct in her school. She states that SMT members force teachers to falsify continuous assessment marks to boost the performance of learners. However, learners still perform poorly in the final examination. She states:

> *Some of the SMT members are in denial that we have a group of learners that have a poor work ethic and perform badly in assessments despite interventions. Therefore, the departmental heads and the principal force teachers to inflate marks so that learners would have a good continuous assessment (CASS) mark. This practice backfires because the CASS mark is not a true reflection of the learners' performance. I have observed this when learners perform badly in their final examination, and we see a huge discrepancy between their CASS mark and the final examination mark (see Chapter 5, p.89).*

The preceding excerpts show that principals fail to hold teachers accountable for misconduct and this has become a norm in the declining schools as teachers are able to do whatever that they want without any consequence. According to Archer (1995), culture is a result of the institution's norms and traditions and the findings in this study suggests that principals have normalised teacher misconduct and their unwillingness to addressing it has resulted in a toxic culture, which is reflected in these declining schools. Ayechew Ayenalem et al. (2023) found that lack of proper accountability measures in schools is a cause for teacher misconduct. Furthermore, principals do not implement professional codes of ethics, nor do they enforce such professional codes of ethics when teachers are guilty of misconduct. What is concerning in the extracts of Thabiso, Andile, Fikani, and Harriet is the number of misconducts committed by teachers, which include absenteeism, bringing intoxicating substances to school, defying management authority, and falsifying marks, among other things (De Villiers, 2022; Munje, 2019).

6.3.2 Learners' exposure to drugs

Another cultural constraint that participating school stakeholders experience in declining schools is learners' exposure to drugs. South Africa has a high percentage of drug abuse among learners in schools (Hochfeld et al., 2022; Kutwayo et al., 2022; Mokwena & Setshego, 2021; Nzama & Ajani, 2021; Sedibe & Hendricks, 2021). The reason for this occurrence is that learners are easily exposed to drugs since they can access them at home, school, and township communities (Le Roux & Mokele, 2011; Maserumule et al., 2019; Ramorola & Joyce, 2014). Although intervention measures have been enacted in schools to mitigate many social ills, drugs still find their way into some of the township schools, either through learners or communities (Makgoke & Mofokeng, 2020). Within the South African context, townships are residential areas that are predominantly occupied by black people and are associated with poverty, crime, and violence (Motseke, 2013). Learners' exposure to drugs is an observable phenomenon in the researched schools which are located in townships. For instance, Sbusiso, the principal at Khondlo High points out that some of his learners are using drugs (marijuana) excessively and as a result, they are unable to concentrate in class. This is still a norm at this school despite police intervention. He reports:

> *Khondlo High School is facing an enormous challenge of learners coming to school intoxicated with drugs. Some of our learners use drugs particularly "insangu" (marijuana) before they come to school. When they enter the school premises, they are highly intoxicated. For this reason, these learners are unable to concentrate in class when teachers are teaching. At times they are difficult to work with considering that they do not cooperate with the school authority. It is difficult to combat the drug usage at this school since a large majority of our learners are using them. The police officers have also intervened, but they have been unsuccessful in combating the use of drugs by learners (see Chapter 5, p. 107).*

Thabiso, a teacher at Mnguni High School, shared a similar perspective on learner drug use and added that they also engage in drug dealing. Thabiso cites an incident of a learner who was caught selling drugs on behalf of members of the community. This made matters worse when the police were called to intervene. Thabiso had the following to say:

> *Drug dealing in this school has had a negative impact on the academic progress of learners... [this] reminds me of an incident that took place in February 2019 when a*

learner was caught with a bag full of drugs. When questioned, the learner revealed that he had been selling drugs to learners on behalf of drug merchants from the community. The police were called into the school to handle the matter as it was beyond the teachers' control. After the police had left, matters got worse at the school. The learners who were supposedly customers of the drug dealer got violent and were throwing stones at teachers. That being the case, the school was closed for three days. I was disheartened because teaching and learning time was lost and there was nothing that I could do in this regard… Drugs were still being sold at school and this hindered learners' academic progress because they would leave the classroom during lesson time to go and smoke drugs and in the process become intoxicated (see Chapter 5, p. 94).

In the same vein, Rani, a Star High School teacher, reported that drug dealing continues despite police intervention. This has impacted negatively on teaching and learning. Rani adds her thoughts below:

The use of drugs by learners in this school has hindered our teaching and learning. There is a lot of drug dealing in this school, and it is done by learners. As much as we have security systems in place, they are ineffective as we are not allowed to search learners. We also call police officers to do raids, however, drug dealing still carries on. Drug dealing takes place in the morning, during break time and during teaching and learning times. This negatively impacts on teaching and learning (see Chapter 5, p. 85).

Khaya, the school principal at Phakathwayo High, also bemoans the fact that learners who sell drugs are declining in academic performance. Khaya has involved their parents to address this behaviour, however, he has received little support from them. He elucidates:

I have observed that these learners fall in the trap of using and selling drugs. The academic performance of these learners has declined since they divert their attention from learning to using and selling drugs. It is quite disturbing because some of these learners are highly intellectual. As a principal, I have tried to intervene by involving parents in addressing the inappropriate behaviour by these learners. However, some parents are not supportive in assisting me to correct such behaviour. Therefore, I argue that if the parent component does not exist in the life of the learner, there is very little

you can expect to achieve from a child who is selling and using drugs (see Chapter 5, p. 101-102).

From the above excerpts, we learn that drug usage and drug dealing are challenges facing the declining schools. As a result, a negative culture has developed and became part of these schools' cultural system (Archer, 1995). Drawing from Archer's social realism theory, the cultural system presents constraints in organisations and the findings in this study show that despite measures to reduce drug use and dealing, it continues, hence, constraining school performance. This is in line with the work of Nzama and Ajani (2021), which found that, despite several interventions that have been undertaken to fight the scourge of drug use among learners, there has been a significant increase in drug abuse in township schools. This has resulted in a decline in school performance (Hunter, 2021; Matagi et al., 2022; Sedibe & Hendricks, 2021; Walton et al., 2016).

6.4 Section 3: Agential mechanisms influencing school decline

In this section, I present two themes related to agential mechanisms influencing school decline. These themes pay attention to the following areas: teacher agency compromised by lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms and poor instructional leadership by school leaders. I developed a concept map to identify agential mechanisms and the table below captures the outcome.

Table 6.3 Concept map of agential mechanisms

Mapping out of emerging ideas from the concept maps	**Stakeholder**	**Theme**
Lack of resources compromise teacher agency	Rani (teacher)	6. Teacher agency compromised by lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms.
Overcrowded classrooms compromise teacher agency	Sbusiso (principal)	
Principal's lack of support in intervention programmes.	Andile (departmental head)	7. Poor instructional leadership by school leaders.
Loss in instructional time	Thabiso (teacher)	

Inability to enhance teachers' skills.	Sbusiso (principal)	

6.4.1 Teacher agency compromised by lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms

Teacher agency refers to the capacity for a teacher, in consultation with learners and colleagues, to act wilfully and intentionally to achieve predetermined educational purposes and goals (Spink, 2021). This form of agency pays particular attention to the day-to-day work in classrooms and schools, considering teachers' personal beliefs, values, attributes as well as the local and national characteristics of the school settings, in the sense that teachers shape and are shaped by their working conditions (Biesta et al., 2017; Priestley et al., 2015). In some instances, teachers work in unfavourable working conditions and as a result, their agency is compromised (Imants & Van der Wal, 2020; Ramrathan & Mzimela, 2016). In the current study, teacher agency seems to be compromised by a lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms in the declining schools. For instance, Rani, a teacher, at Star High School claims that she is compromised by a lack of teaching resources in her school due to lack of funds. She laments:

> *One of the challenges that I experience in serving this school is the limited learner support material. The school says that there are not enough funds in the budget to buy textbooks for all learners. I teach about 200 Grade nine learners in this school and the school could only afford to buy thirty-five textbooks. I am at my wits end because I do not know which criteria to use in distributing these textbooks to learners considering the fact that not all of them will receive them… At a Further Education and Training (Grade 10-12) level, there is also a shortage of textbooks in the subject that I am teaching, Accounting. In this subject, learners are expected to buy workbooks. However, some of them cannot afford to buy these workbooks. As a result, I use money from my own pocket to buy these books because I cannot let the socio-economic status of a learner deprive him or her of quality education. However, due to financial constraints, I cannot accommodate all learners who do not have workbooks (see Chapter 5, p. 87).*

While Rani is constrained by the lack of teaching resources in her school, Sbusiso, a principal at Khondlo High School indicates that the agency of teachers in his school is compromised by overcrowded classrooms. He expounds:

> *These working conditions, particularly overcrowded classes, have brought many challenges for teachers at this school. Firstly, in overcrowded classrooms, teachers are unable to give learners individual attention. Secondly, teachers are unable to discipline unruly learners in overcrowded classrooms. Thirdly, monitoring the work done by learners during lesson time is a challenge for teachers since there is not enough space in the classroom for them to walk around. These challenges that teachers experience in overcrowded classrooms have resulted in the decline of this school's academic performance (see Chapter 5, p. 106).*

From the above extracts, teachers are foregrounded as primary agents because they are compromised by the lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms in their schools (Archer, 1995). Archer (1995) defines primary agents as persons who lack agency in society due to their disempowered position. In this study, teachers are disempowered in terms of their position in the declining schools because they are unable to assist all learners who do not have teaching and learning resources. Also, they are unable to control classroom discipline and monitor learners' academic progress due to overcrowding, hence, the decline in schools (West & Meier, 2020). Considering that these schools are located in a township, the literature reveals that the scarcity of resources and overcrowded classrooms are prevalent in township schools due to the inequalities that originated in the apartheid era and which are often complicated by poor home environments (DBE, 2014; Thaba-Nkadimene, 2020).

6.4.2 Poor instructional leadership by school leaders

The decline in learner achievement has been attributed to poor quality teaching and this is due to poor instructional leadership in schools (Seobi & Wood, 2016). These authors indicate that there is poor instructional leadership in schools because school leaders struggle to interpret the prescription of what they should do in executing their roles as instructional leaders. Poor instructional leadership by school leaders appears to be a recurring problem at Mnguni High School and Khondlo High School. Andile, the departmental head at Mnguni High School indicates that his principal and deputy principal did not support him with the academic intervention programme that he devised with his colleagues to enhance the school's academic results. Andile articulates:

> *As a departmental head, I have worked with other members of the SMT to devise strategies to improve the school's academic results. However, we did not receive any support from the principal and the deputy principal as the head of Academics. There was a time when I drew up a study timetable for Grade 12 learners where they would attend afternoon classes so that their teachers could assist them. I stayed in the afternoons to monitor these classes. Unfortunately, that came to end when the principal stripped me of this duty because he believed that I had the little managerial experience to monitor the afternoon classes and change the school for the better. He decided that he and the deputy principal were going to monitor the afternoon classes. Following this, the afternoon classes were ineffective, and this was due to the lack of monitoring by the principal and deputy principal (see Chapter 5, p. 98).*

Again, Thabiso, a teacher at Mnguni High School communicated his discontent about the principal's poor instructional leadership. Firstly, the principal closes the school early when instructed by learners. Secondly, he does not take action against learners who loiter around school premises during instructional time. Thabiso laments:

> *It is concerning that learners are not afraid of the principal, they just go into his office and demand for the school to close early. Instead of disciplining learners for making such demands, the principal gives a go ahead for the school to close. The SGB does not hold the principal accountable for closing the school early since they are in cahoots in pocketing the funds of the school… Learners were loitering around the school during instructional time and the school principal would sit in his office and not address this behaviour (see Chapter 5, p. 93).*

Similarly, the principal at Khondlo High School also exhibits poor instructional leadership. He has not enhanced the teaching skills of his teachers after finding that the DBE has not adequately prepared them. Sbusiso, the principal of this school, adds his thoughts below:

> *Some of our teachers are not doing justice in terms of teaching and learning during intervention classes. When I question them regarding this matter, they say that professional development workshops conducted by the DBE do not capacitate them enough with teaching skills. I am partly to blame as I have not done anything from a school level to enhance the teaching skills of these teachers (see Chapter 5, p. 108).*

The preceding excerpts reveal that school leaders lack competency in instructional leadership, which is the main core of teaching and learning. Drawing from Archer's social realism theory, the lack of competency in instructional leadership by school leaders constrained their ability to act or exercise their agency to enhance teaching and learning. This is shown in the study when there is non-monitoring of instruction, abuse of instructional time and absence of teacher professional development. This is a cause for concern since it is the role of school leaders to improve teaching and learning in schools, yet there is a lack of agency from them (Osborne-Lampkin et al., 2015; Plaatjies, 2019).

6.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to answer the research puzzle: *What are the structural, cultural and agential mechanisms influencing school decline?* The chapter demonstrated that these mechanisms (structural, cultural and agential) are the main contributors to school decline in the researched schools. Throughout the chapter, I realised that these mechanisms are confronted with challenges and constraints, hence, they are a reason behind school decline. In the next chapter, I address the third research puzzle: *How do stakeholders re-imagine schools in decline as moving schools?* Thus, the chapter explores the initiatives that can be put into place by stakeholders to change a school in decline towards its sustainable improvement and effectiveness.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES RE-IMAGINING SCHOOLS IN DECLINE AS MOVING SCHOOLS

7.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented the second level of analysis, the analysis of narratives. The aim of the chapter was to answer the second research puzzle, "*What are the structural, cultural and agential mechanisms influencing school decline?"* Hence, these mechanisms were discussed as contributors to school decline. This chapter addresses the third research puzzle, "*How do stakeholders re-imagine schools in decline as moving schools?*" To respond to this research puzzle, a detailed discussion on strategies that can be put into place to change a school in decline towards sustainable improvement and effectiveness is presented. The concept mapping was used to map out emerging ideas from the participants' stories and this process resulted in the identification of themes. This is captured in the table below.

Table 7.1 Concept map on school effectiveness and improvement strategies

Mapping out of emerging ideas from the concept maps	Stakeholder	Theme
Adequate school governance training by SGB Foundations	Melusi (SGB chairperson)	1. Enhancement of SGB capacity
Quality SGB training sessions by the DOE and SGB Foundations	Mpiyakhe (SGB chairperson)	
Working with the police, social workers, local businesses and parents.	Harriet (departmental head)	2. School community partnership
Collaborating with private higher education institutions	Rani (teacher)	

Synergy between school stakeholders and the community	Siyanda (circuit manager)	
Soliciting assistance from top neighbouring schools	Rani (teacher) Harriet (departmental head)	3. Seeking assistance from well-performing schools
Seeking pedagogical assistance from top performing schools	Thabiso (teacher) Andile (departmental head)	
Academic intervention programmes	Rani (teacher)	4. Introduction of learner support programmes to improve performance
Academic intervention programmes in Maths, Science and English	Harriet (departmental head)	
Interventions for underperforming subjects	Fikani (circuit manager) Khaya (principal) Sbusiso (principal)	
Circuit management role in principalship professional development	Fikani (circuit manager)	5. Close supervision of principals by circuit managers
Circuit management role in improving principals' instructional leadership skills	Siyanda (circuit manager)	

7.2 Enhancement of SGB capacity

In South Africa, school governance is the single most important factor in an education system that seems to experience apparently insurmountable challenges regarding capacity building (Xaba, 2011). In this study, the findings revealed that SGB members in the studied schools were not adequately capacitated in the execution of their governance role. This was cited as one of the

contributors to school decline and the participants agreed that the enhancement of training sessions could turn the situation around. Melusi, the SGB chairperson of Phakathwayo High School, suggests that the DBE should delegate SGB foundations to adequately train newly elected parent governors on governance roles. The SGB foundations are service organisations that empower SGB members to enhance their capacity to function effectively as a body and as individuals within their school environment (Woolman & Fleisch, 2008). Melusi believes that SGB foundations can enhance the role capacity of SGB members. He explains:

> *Following the elections of SGBs in schools, elected candidates need to be empowered through training on their governance roles. The DBE should delegate school governing body foundations to adequately train newly elected SGB members (parent governors). School governing body foundations are bodies that promote sound governance in South African Public Schools. I am a member of a governing body foundation and I believe that this foundation can train SGB members on leadership and management, working with parents and the community, adopting the vision and mission of the school, and legislation on school governance among others (see Chapter 5, p.105).*

Mpiyakhe, the SGB Chairperson at Yeyeye High School, adds that the DBE and SGB foundations should provide quality training sessions on school governance throughout the year to ensure that parent governors are successfully capacitated on their roles. He expounds:

> *The DBE and SGB foundations should provide quality training to people who have been elected to be SGB members (parent governors) in schools. There should be training sessions throughout the year and these sessions should focus on the core roles of SGB's so that SGB members can be able to successfully execute these roles in schools. My thoughts on these training sessions are that they would empower SGB members in schools, particularly at this school since some of our SGB members do not know what their roles entail. Once they accumulate the knowledge of what their roles entail, they would be able to make informed decisions that would be in the best interest of the school (see Chapter 5, p. 118).*

From the above excerpts, we learn that the enhancement of training sessions by SGB foundations and the DBE could improve the capacity of SGB members. The parent governors who participated in this study believe that the enhancement of training has the potential to turn around declining

schools because it will equip SGB members with knowledge and skills to effectively execute their roles. Given the above, research conducted by South African scholars (Luphoko, 2019; Maluleke, 2016) reveal that quality SGB training sessions enhance the role performance of parent governors, and this could subsequently lead to an improvement in schools. Parent governors form part of the school structure (Luphoko, 2019). According to Archer (2003), structural enablement can facilitate the course of action: in this study, training sessions could facilitate the course of action of parent governors in declining schools.

7.3 School community partnerships

School community partnerships are collaborative relationships and activities involving members of staff in the school, parents, and community organisations and members (Myende, 2019). The purpose of a collaborative relationship between the school and the community is to improve quality education and learner development (Berg, 2012). In the context of this study, some participants suggest that schools should work with a wide range of community stakeholders to improve the performance decline. Harriet, a departmental head at Star High School, proposes that working community stakeholders such as police, social workers, local businesses, and parents could mitigate the challenges that affect school performance. She adds her thoughts below:

> *It is of great importance for schools to work in partnership with the community. We must work with different stakeholders from the community to mitigate the challenges that affects academic performance at this declining school. Firstly, we need to work with the police since we have learners at this school who are selling drugs. The police can assist us with random drug searches through the dog unit. Secondly, we can approach social workers to assists us with learners who are going through personal problems and need psychological support. Thirdly, we can reach out to local businesses to assist us with financial resources because we want to build a library centre that will specifically cater for Mathematics and Physical Science learners. The library centre must be used for the matric intervention programmes for these subjects… Local businesses can also supply the school with funds to upgrade the computer classes since the school is experiencing financial constraints. Finally, we can work with parents to address learner indiscipline*

at this school. There have been incidents when learners arrive late to school, and I believe that if we invite parents for a meeting to discuss this type of behaviour, it will restore discipline in the school, hence, an improvement in academic performance (see Chapter 5, p. 91).

Rani, who teaches in the same school with Harriet, adds that they should collaborate with private higher education institutions to improve the academic performance of learners. She comments below:

At Star High School, we need to devise academic programmes to improve the academic performance of learners. To achieve this, we need to work in partnership with private higher education institutions (Rosebank and Mancosa Colleges). I hear that these institutions run weekend classes and they provide academic support to learners who are struggling with challenging subjects such as Mathematics and Science. These weekend classes are free of charge and the school should arrange with parents to drop off their children at these colleges (see Chapter 5, p. 87-88).

Siyanda, who is one of the participating circuit managers in this study, believes that synergy between school stakeholders and the community is required to mitigate drug use and dealing in schools. He believes that such a collaboration will improve declining schools. Siyanda elucidates:

In order to improve declining schools, synergy between the DBE, the South African Police Services (SAPS), social workers, circuit managers, SMTs, and other members from the community is needed. There are places in the community where learners buy drugs from merchants (drug dealers), and they come to school intoxicated. It is imperative for schools to work with members of the community and the police services to address the matter at hand. As stakeholders, we should work in unity in addressing drug related issues in our schools. Hence, the partnership between school stakeholders and the police services will restore order and discipline in some of the declining schools (see Chapter 5, p. 115).

From the preceding extracts, it appears that collaboration between schools and community stakeholders could contribute to turning around declining schools. This type of collaboration will address two key challenges in declining schools. Firstly, it will address the decline in learner

academic performance through parental involvement and higher education institutions. Secondly, it will address socio economic challenges such as lack of financial resources, drug abuse and learner indiscipline through the assistance of local businesses, police services, and social workers, among others. Research has demonstrated that such partnerships have been found to enhance student learning and strengthen schools affected by socio-economic challenges (Valli et al., 2018). Drawing from the systems theory, schools can achieve this because they are viewed as open systems (Bush, 2003). Most schools are regarded as open systems due to the interactions that they have with external groups, which in the context of this study are community stakeholders.

7.4 Seeking assistance from well-performing schools

It is known that less performing schools sometimes seek assistance from well-performing schools to improve their own performance (Hill et al., 2012). In such cases, skilled leaders in high-performing schools share their skills, knowledge, and systems to help struggling schools improve (Hill et al., 2012). The participating stakeholders believe that seeking assistance from teachers in well-performing schools could enhance teachers' skills and learner performance in declining schools. For instance, Rani, a teacher at Star High School, believes that soliciting assistance from teachers in the district's cluster groups will enhance her teaching skills relating to curriculum and instruction. Rani expounds:

> *Under each district, there are some cluster groups which consist of a group of teachers from neighbouring schools; in these groups, teachers share ideas relating to curriculum and instruction. These teachers usually share these ideas when they attend moderation meetings and orientation workshops that are facilitated by subject advisors. Working with teachers from my cluster group will enhance my skills on how to simplify certain concepts for my learners when I am teaching. Apart from this, teachers from the cluster group will share assessments via email or WhatsApp. These assessments are instrumental in helping learners that we teach (see Chapter 5, p. 88).*

Echoing similar sentiments is Harriet, a departmental head at Star High School, and she adds that subject advisors will play a role in achieving this. Harriet believes that teachers from well-

performing schools will prepare learners for examinations and develop teachers' skills in the setting of assessments at this school. She expatiates:

> *District leadership can play a pivotal role in enhancing teachers' skills in content knowledge. For instance, subject advisors can identify teachers in each cluster who have knowledge, experience, and insight in a specific subject. Following this, these teachers would then be asked to network with teachers from declining schools in order to assist them in improving learner academic performance. At this school, we need to work with high performing teachers with the assistance of subject advisors. Also, we must invite these teachers to our school to teach a few lessons to prepare our learners for their examination. These teachers will also develop our skills in the setting of quality assessments such as tests, projects, and assignments (see Chapter 5, p. 91).*

In accordance with the above view, Andile, the departmental head at Mnguni High School, stated the following:

> *As a departmental head, I have sought assistance from high performing schools to improve the results in my department. Teachers from these schools have been instrumental in capacitating teachers in my department in pedagogical knowledge and methodology. Apart from this, I have invited these teachers to my school to teach learners in the afternoons during the weekdays and also on weekends. At times, our learners are invited by these teachers to be part of their schools' intervention programmes which takes place on weekends. I can say with confidence that networking with these teachers has been a blessing in disguise for this school. For this reason, I have influenced other departmental heads in my school to network with teachers from high performing schools (see Chapter 5, p. 99).*

Thabiso, a teacher at Mnguni High School, shared the same view. He propounds:

> *I personally believe that if a school is not performing well academically, it should liaise with top performing schools within the same neighbourhood. Working together with these schools would help in improving academic results. Teachers from these schools would share ideas with us on how best we can improve the academic performance in our respective subjects. Apart from this, they would also professionally develop us in subject*

content knowledge, and as a result, we would feel empowered. I personally think that inviting teachers from our neighbouring schools to teach a few lessons to our learners would be an excellent idea considering the fact that they have an outstanding track record in producing quality results (see Chapter 5, p. 95).

The views expressed by participants suggest that teachers from declining schools require assistance in their subjects. The above extracts show that teachers believe in external support; they cite well-performing schools and subject advisors. While some of these teachers already work with other external teachers, they still believe that they can do better. Andile further regards external teachers as instrumental in knowledge sharing and capacitating teachers on subject content knowledge. The literature indicates that, when soliciting assistance from external sources such as well-performing schools, one discovers the possible advantages of adopting or altering their successful approaches (Harris & Jones, 2017). This finding harmonises with the systems theory in that it recognises that changes made in one element of a system could have an impact on the entire system (Wang, 2004). In line with this, the extracts of Rani, Harriet, Andile and Thabiso demonstrate that the expertise and knowledge they receive from well-performing schools will enable them to improve their systems and achieve higher levels of performance.

7.5 Introduction of learner support programmes to improve performance

Bond (2009) views learner support programmes as intervention programmes that attempt to give learners the opportunity to develop the academic and social skills necessary to ensure a positive school experience, hence, improved performance. Learner support programmes comprise additional lessons, peer tutoring, collaborative teaching and learning, and the outsourcing of teachers who are subject specialists, among other things (Muthala et al., 2022). Participants in this study suggest that schools must create learner support programmes as part of their response to the decline in academic performance. In order to address the decline in her school, Rani, a teacher at Star High School, proposes that matric (Grade 12) intervention programmes be created to help learners who are performing poorly in certain subjects. These intervention programmes should take place during the week and on weekends. Rani propounds:

> *At the school level, we also need to create intervention programmes to assist learners. We need to have matric (Grade 12) intervention programmes which will take place in the mornings, and in the afternoons during the weekday as well as on weekends. The school management team must draw up a timetable which includes a list of subjects where intervention will be provided. Following this, a timetable must be distributed to parents so that they can influence their children to attend the classes. The list of subjects in which intervention must be provided must include English Home Language, IsiZulu First Additional Language, Afrikaans Second Additional Language, Mathematics, Science, Business Studies, and Accounting, since they are the underperforming subjects at this school (see Chapter 5, p. 88).*

Harriet, a departmental head at this school, adds that English should be incorporated in the intervention programmes to help learners understand Mathematics and Science. She explains:

> *I think that English should also be one of the subjects to be added to the matric intervention programme because in order for a learner to grasp Mathematics and Science, they must have a good command of the English language. This form of intervention will improve Mathematics and Science results (see Chapter 5, p. 91).*

Khaya, the principal of Phakathwayo High School, also proposes academic interventions for underperforming subjects in his school. He explains that this can be achieved through the collaboration of his management team, who will be planning and implementing study sessions for underperforming subjects. Khaya provides his comments below:

> *At this school, we have to be effective at planning and implementing learner support programmes in order to improve school performance. My management team which consists of the deputy principals and departmental heads would have to work tirelessly to achieve this. For instance, they should get together and plan study sessions to provide intervention to learners who are struggling academically. During the planning session, a study timetable for underperforming subjects such as English, IsiZulu, Geography, Mathematics and Physical Science should be drawn up. The study timetable must then be given to me to check if it has been properly structured. Following this, my management team and I must humbly approach teachers to have study sessions to provide academic support to learners (see Chapter 5, p. 102-103).*

Sbusiso, the principal at Khondlo High School, shares similar sentiments. He propounds:

> *As a principal of this school, it is my duty to work with my SMT and teachers in putting structures in place to improve the academic performance of learners. This will entail assigning the deputy principal, the Head of Academics to draw up an intervention programme specifically aimed at providing academic support to our learners. In drawing up the intervention programme, the deputy principal will have to solicit assistance from departmental heads and teachers from different departments to ensure that there is intervention from all departments in terms of subjects. Following this, an intervention timetable should be given to learners to attend intervention classes. We should have morning and afternoon intervention classes during the weekdays, weekend classes and holiday classes (see Chapter 5, p. 107-108).*

While school-level participants proposed that intervention programmes be developed to address the decline in underperforming subjects, circuit managers at a district level stated that they would support schools with these interventions to mitigate performance decline. Fikani, who is one of the participating circuit managers in this study, mentions that he will advise principals on intervention programmes for underperforming subjects. Also, he will assist them by soliciting assistance from subject advisors to identify expert teachers from top performing schools to provide intervention to learners who are struggling academically. Fikani declares the following:

> *As a circuit manager, it is my duty to work with principals from declining schools to mitigate performance decline. To do this, they will need to be advised to identify the subjects that do poorly. Once this has been done, appropriate intervention would have to be implemented. Possible intervention programmes could include having afternoon classes during weekdays, weekend classes and holiday classes. As a circuit manager, I will work with subject advisors in supporting principals in implementing intervention programmes. Subject advisors point the direction in terms of teaching and learning. Once you speak about teaching and learning, subject advisors are in the forefront, and they are there to provide support from a district level. For this reason, I will work with them in identifying teachers from high performing schools to be part of intervention programmes where they would provide academic support to learners from declining schools who are struggling academically. Apart from this, these teachers share their*

ideas, material resources, and assessments with teachers from declining schools (see Chapter 5, p. 111).

According to the above quotations, learner support programmes are needed in order to foster academic improvement in declining schools. The participating stakeholders cite matric intervention programmes, extra classes and subject advisory expertise as a form of support that will enhance learner performance in these schools. This finding resonates with the work of Nzimande (2019), which found that underperforming schools that implemented extra lessons and academic support programmes for struggling learners improved in academic performance. According to Nzimande (2019), the learner performance improvement was achieved through the collaboration of SMT members who contributed to the planning and implementation of these programmes. The extracts of Rani, Khaya, and Sbusiso in this study demonstrate the significance of SMT engagement in the planning of learner support programmes to enhance learner performance. The systems theory approach emphasises the necessity of considering the interrelationships and interactions between various components while planning interventions or addressing difficulties in educational systems, hence, an improvement in learning outcomes (Castillo, 2014).

7.6 Close supervision of principals by circuit managers

Circuit managers are district representatives at the circuit level who support and supervise principals in their daily leadership and administrative work (Mafuwane & Pitsoe, 2014). They have an increased responsibility over principals and serve as their direct supervisors (DBE, 2013). The findings in this study revealed that leadership competency was a key challenge for principals in schools that are in decline. In responding to this, the participating circuit managers in this study recommended that they should closely supervise principals to improve their leadership skills. Siyanda, who is one of the circuit managers, suggested that circuit managers should equip principals with instructional leadership skills. Besides this, Siyanda also recommends removing a principal from a declining school to be mentored at a high performing school and supervising this process. He elaborates:

> *In order to turn around declining schools to achieve effectiveness, we as circuit managers should investigate whether the principal of the school is the cause of the decline. If this is the case, we must put measures in place to assist the principal. For example, as circuit managers, we should work in partnership with principals and equip them with instructional leadership skills which is the main core for teaching and learning. Such insight will enable the principal to turn a declining school and achieve effectiveness and improvement. However, if this does not work, we will remove the principal from a declining school and send him or her to a high performing school to become a mentee of a particular principal. During the mentorship, the principal is going to be mentored and coached and we will supervise this process. In this way, the principal will attain the skills to improve the declining school (see Chapter 5, p. 114-115).*

Similarly, Fikani, the circuit manager, believes that circuit managers should supervise principals' professional development while they are mentored at high-performing schools. He goes on to say that this process is mandated by the South African Schools Act. Fikani elucidates:

> *From a circuit and district level, we charge the underperforming principal for incapacity according to Section 58 B in terms of the South African Schools Act. This Act also enables us as the DBE to remove the underperforming principal from the school and send him or her to a high performing school for professional development. The purpose of this intervention is for the underperforming principal to be mentored by a high performing principal on school leadership and management and it should be our duty as circuit managers to oversee this process (see Chapter 5, p. 111).*

According to the preceding excerpts, one of the strategies for turning declining schools around is to develop the capacity of school personnel. The participating circuit managers believe that capacity building of principals in leadership and management is essential to achieve their goal of improving these schools, which in the context of this study entails sending them to high-performing schools for mentorship and supervising this process. Following this, the principals will then use the acquired skills and turn around the performance of their schools (Mthembu, 2018; Myende et al., 2020; Nzimande, 2019). Drawing from Archer's social realism theory, these principals will transform from primary agents to corporate agents and exercise their agency in these schools. Archer (1995) views corporate agents as organised interest groups that act to attain

a goal. While capacity building of principals is important and could contribute to improving declining school, it is concerning that the participating circuit managers only theorise about this instead of getting their hands dirty.

7.7 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to answer the research puzzle: *How do stakeholders re-imagine schools in decline as moving schools?* The chapter revealed strategies such as enhancement of SGB capacity, school community partnership, seeking assistance from well-performing schools, introduction of learner support programmes to improve performance and close supervision of principal, all as possible means to turning around declining schools in achieving sustainable improvement and effectiveness. The chapter shows that participating stakeholders could overcome the challenges that they encounter in declining schools. In the next chapter, I put all the findings together to draw conclusions and present the contributions of the study. I also present the study's recommendations and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER EIGHT
CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

8.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented the second level of analysis, the analysis of narratives. The aim of the chapter was to answer the third research puzzle, *"How do stakeholders re-imagine schools in decline as moving schools?"* To respond to this research puzzle, strategies that can be put into place to change schools in decline and set them towards sustainable improvement and effectiveness were explored.

The purpose of this chapter is to tie up the study and present the conclusions and contributions of the study. In developing this chapter, firstly, I reflect on all chapters, focusing on what I thought to be essential learnings in each chapter. Secondly, I present the conclusions of the study around each research puzzle respectively. Thirdly, I present the theoretical contribution of the study, the internally desired external intervention model. Finally, I discuss the recommendations to stakeholders' and suggestions for future research.

8.2 Reflecting on all chapters

In **Chapter one**, I outlined my interest in the phenomenon of school decline, which stemmed from my personal and professional experiences (refer to Chapter 1, pp. 5-9) with declining schools in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. This piqued my interest to seek stories of stakeholders of schools in decline in order to understand their lived experiences. The first research puzzle that this study sought to answer was: *What are the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline?* To dissect the main puzzle, two sub-puzzles were crafted: *What are the structural, cultural and agential mechanisms influencing school decline?* And *how do stakeholders re-imagine schools in decline as moving schools?*

In **Chapter two**, I provided a review of national and international literature on school decline, school effectiveness and school improvement to help develop a thorough understanding of the

causes of school decline (Robinson-Gatewood, 2020). In reviewing the literature, I learned that both internal and external factors have an impact on school decline. These factors include leadership, teacher job dissatisfaction, learner indiscipline, socio-economic factors, curriculum, and educational policies. All these factors present challenges and constraints to schools in decline, and they are similar across several contexts, as presented in national and international studies that were reviewed.

In **Chapter three**, I presented the theoretical underpinnings of the study. These theories are social realism theory and general systems theory. These theories provided a framework to unpack the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline. Social realism theory was used to understand stakeholders' experiences in terms of structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms influencing school decline. General systems theory was used to understand how schools as open systems reimagine working with various stakeholders to improve the decline in academic performance. The assemblage of these theories provided a framing of the study that informed my engagement with stakeholders of schools in decline.

In **Chapter four**, I presented the research approach and methodology employed in this study. The chapter commenced by discussing the researcher positioning adopted in the study, the interpretive paradigm with its ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological assumptions. I then moved on to discuss the narrative inquiry methodology to establish a comprehensive understanding of school stakeholders' experiences through their stories. Using narrative inquiry was a complex process because I did not have structured questions to generate field texts from participants; instead, I asked them to recount stories of their lived experiences. This approach taught me, among other things, to establish relationships based on care and trust in order to elicit stories from participants through an object-based (artefact inquiry) field text generation method.

In **Chapter five**, I presented the first level of analysis, which is known as narrative analysis. This chapter responded to the first research puzzle: *What are the lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline?* The chapter presented short stories of stakeholders of schools in decline. Given

that narrative inquiry methodology aims to engage with people's lived experiences over time (Clandinin, 2013), a small sample is normally used. In this study, I wanted to hear the voices of different stakeholders, and the sample was slightly bigger. Instead of extensive accounts of stories, I used the short story genre in presenting the experiences of stakeholders. This genre is unusual in narrative inquiry. The short stories were able to shed light and provide insight into the experiences of many stakeholders serving in declining schools and they embraced the three common places, namely, temporality, sociality, and place.

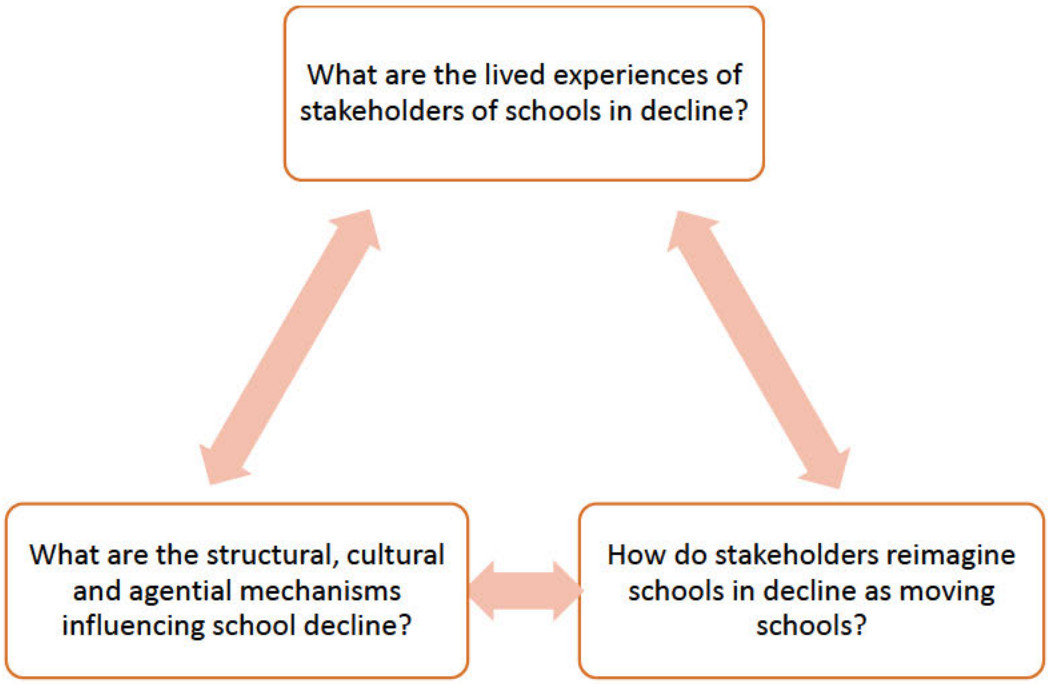
In **Chapter six**, I presented the second level of analysis, which is known as the analysis of narratives. This chapter responded to the second research puzzle: *What are the lived experiences of stakeholders in terms of structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms influencing school decline?* Archer's social realism theory influenced this research puzzle; therefore, in responding to the sub-puzzle, I used this theory as a lens through which I examined participants' stories. In this way, I presented the themes under three theory domains: structure, culture, and agency. The findings revealed that structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms are confronted with challenges and constraints and are the reason for school decline.

In **Chapter seven**, I presented the continuation of the second level of analysis. This chapter addressed the third research puzzle: *How do stakeholders re-imagine schools in decline as moving schools?* The chapter paid particular attention to strategies that can be put into place to change schools in decline to schools with sustainable improvement and effectiveness. The findings showed that stakeholders' re-imagination could overcome the challenges encountered in the declining schools. This can be achieved through external interventions such as the SGB foundation, community stakeholders, subject advisors, and well-performing schools.

8.3 Conclusions of the study

Below, I draw conclusions from the findings; to this end, I begin by reminding readers of the research puzzles and then draw conclusions around each research puzzle.

Figure 8.1 Illustration of the three research puzzles



Lived experiences of stakeholders of schools in decline

This study found that stakeholders encountered a wide range of experiences in the declining schools. Firstly, the departure of effective principals and deputy principals in the sampled schools led to a decline in academic performance because the current leaders (who were new to their roles) were not well conversant with the systems within the organisation and did not know some aspects of their roles. This was evident in their inability to manage the curriculum, monitor learner progress and professionally develop teachers. Some of these leaders adopted an autocratic approach when dealing with members of staff and this has resulted in high staff turnover. Secondly, the stakeholders in the sampled schools expressed that there has been a deterioration in the calibre of learners. For example, the learners adopted a poor work ethic and as a result, declined in academic performance. Thirdly, the socio-economic status of learners, schools and surrounding communities

presented challenges to teachers and other stakeholders in mitigating school decline. These challenges among others include a lack of parental support, child-headed homes, learner drug use and dealing, poverty and a lack of resources. Finally, it appeared that teacher unions played an active role in preventing schools from improving. This is evident in their actions when they influence teachers to attend union meetings during instructional time and not to participate in intervention programmes without compensation. Given these challenges, it appeared that the participating stakeholders in this study seem to have shared similar experiences in their declining schools. These challenges equally contributed to the decline in these schools.

8.3.1 Structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms influencing school decline

In this study's conceptualisation, I adopted a general assumption that multiple factors contribute to school decline. Archer's framework of social realism helped me understand the multiple mechanisms contributing to school decline; through this framework, I managed to understand the mechanisms influencing school decline through three domains, namely, structural, cultural, and agential. Below I show the study's contribution to knowledge around these three domains.

8.3.1.1 Structural mechanisms influencing school decline

From the social realism perspective, structure comprises roles, positions, policies and systems (Archer, 1995). The findings of this study revealed three structural mechanisms that influence school decline in the sampled schools. Firstly, newly appointed principals battled with management and leadership abilities; they struggled with curriculum management and instilling discipline, among other things. Secondly, parent governors struggled to execute governance roles due to low literacy status and poor training sessions. Thirdly, teacher unions were found to overstep the mark by interfering with instructional processes and teacher appointment processes; this led to the appointment of incompetent leaders and a decline in academic performance. When I looked at the above structural mechanisms closely, I observed that they reflect ambiguity in the roles of different stakeholders of schools in decline. According to Harrold and Wayland (2002) and Jalagat (2017), role ambiguity occurs when an employee is in a stage of confusion on how to perform their role or when an employee is assigned a role without clear direction, resulting in role confusion.

The literature highlights that, when this occurs, employees usually put in less effort and exhibit fewer behaviours that go beyond what is required by their job description (Caillier, 2016). In this study, stakeholders such as novice principals, parent governors, and teacher union representatives appeared to be confused about their roles; they appeared not to know what they were doing in schools.

The role confusion detected from the stakeholders' lived experiences in this study seems to have contributed to school decline in the sampled schools. I conclude that all structural mechanisms identified in this study (principals, parent governors and teacher unions) reflect role ambiguity or confusion and regard the role ambiguity or confusion as tantamount to structural disarray, hence the observed decline in schools. The opposite is true, role clarity is significant for the effective functioning of a school or an institution; therefore, a school or an institution with stakeholders who are not clear about their roles and responsibilities is on the verge of decline. Normore (2003) rightly claims that role ambiguity is one of the several structural conditions that cause problems in social systems.

8.3.1.2 Cultural mechanisms influencing school decline

According to Archer (1998), culture refers to knowledge, beliefs, language, theories, and significant systems in an organisation. The findings of this study revealed three cultural mechanisms that influence school decline in the sampled schools. Firstly, teachers engaged in misconduct such as staying away from school, bringing intoxicating substances to school, and challenging the school's authority, among other things. Secondly, principals failed to hold teachers accountable for misconduct. Thirdly, learners engaged in drug use and dealing, which subsequently led to a decline in academic performance. The cultural mechanisms mentioned above reflect stakeholders' toxic behaviours which are dominating the culture of the sample schools. Toxic behaviours are defined as behavioural patterns that impede organisational productivity and work-life effectiveness (Kusy & Holloway, 2009). These behaviours lead to a toxic workplace environment, which is embedded in the culture of the organisation (Cheung & Yip, 2015). In the context of this study, stakeholders such as teachers, principals, and learners displayed toxic behaviours that dominated the school culture. I conclude that the prevalent toxic behaviours in these declining schools constitute a toxic culture that is counterproductive to the schools' core

business. The culture of a school or any organisation is vital for its success (Özgenel, 2020); but if it is toxic, the organisation's effectiveness and performance suffer, hence school decline (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015).

8.3.1.3 Agential mechanisms influencing school decline

Agency refers to the human ability to act, influence and manipulate a situation (Archer, 1995). The findings of this study revealed three agential mechanisms that influence school decline in the sampled schools. Firstly, teachers are compromised by a lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms and are unable to teach effectively. Secondly, the principal of one of the declining schools struggled to monitor intervention programmes aimed at improving academic performance and he failed to address the behaviour of learners that disrupted instructional time. Thirdly, principals did not provide professional development opportunities for teachers to improve their teaching skills.

When I closely examined the above agential mechanisms, I learnt that agency is constrained in the sampled schools; the stakeholders who are agents appeared not to act as expected to enhance teaching and learning. Constrained agency occurs when individuals or entities have the ability to make decisions and take actions, but these decisions and actions are limited or constrained by a variety of factors, such as rules, policies, personal capabilities and contextual factors, among other things (Robinson, 2012). In the context of this study, personal capabilities and contextual factors played a role in constraining the agency of principals and teachers. Given that the sampled schools are in townships that are associated with poverty, teachers were constrained by a lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms. Apart from this, role confusion as explained in section 8.4.1.1 also constrained the agency of stakeholders in the sampled schools. For example, school principals seemed to be confused about their instructional leadership roles, and they did not act to improve teaching and learning in their schools. This role confusion results from a lack of information and missing clarity in a specific job position (Schmidt, 2014). People (principals, SMT members, teachers, SGB members and non-teaching staff) play important roles in schools as agents. The findings of this study show that these agents are constrained in declining schools, and I conclude that the constrained agency of stakeholders may lead to school paralysis.

8.3.2 Stakeholders' re-imaginations of schools in decline as moving schools

The findings of this study revealed a number of strategies that can be put into place to turn around schools in decline and to achieve sustainable improvement and effectiveness. Firstly, SGB chairpersons suggested that the DBE collaborate with SGB foundations to enhance SBG capacity. Secondly, some participants mentioned that they should work with community stakeholders to mitigate challenges affecting school performance. Thirdly, participants recommended that they should establish collegial relationships with teachers from well-performing schools to improve their teaching practices. Fourthly, the participants suggested that teachers and SMTs should solicit assistance from subject advisors in devising learner support programmes. Finally, circuit managers pointed out that underperforming principals should be capacitated by principals from well-performing schools in leadership and management.

Upon examining the above strategies proposed by stakeholders, it became clear that schools in decline are not in a position of rescuing themselves from their predicament but require external intervention. Judging from their suggestion the desired assistance is immediately outside the school; this includes interventions by SGB foundations, community stakeholders, well-performing schools, and subject advisors.

8.4 Theoretical contributions of the study: Internally desired external intervention model

Structure, culture, and agency are critical components of a school's operation and performance. These domains impact on numerous aspects of a school, including the running of the school, teaching and learning, and staff members' interaction (Lockton et al., 2020). This assertion is validated by Shava and Heystek (2018), who identify structure, culture and agency as critical domains in developing a successful school. These scholars go on to explain the criticalness of each domain; firstly, the structure enables the management systems and processes in the school to operate effectively. Secondly, culture shapes the role of key stakeholders in the school to provide a positive teaching and learning environment. Thirdly, agency in a school creates a supportive work environment that fosters collaboration among members of staff, parents and learners by developing and supporting a comprehensive approach to willingness. While the above notions are

ideal, the findings of this study showed the defectiveness of structure, culture, and agency in schools in decline.

The structure, culture, and agency in schools in decline appeared to be stripped of their vigour by numerous factors, including role ambiguity, toxic behaviours, and constrained agency. As a result, these domains became less powerful in these schools. According to Archer (1995), structure, culture and agency operate in tandem with each other. To keep a school stable, the three domains must work together; however, in this study, all of the domains were equally paralysed and could not supplement one another. Figure 8.2 below illustrates the paralysis of domains, using the skewed bars. The paralysis of the key domains in schools in decline was also acknowledged by the stakeholders who took an inside-looking-out stance in reimaging their schools' turnaround. Oyebade (2010) views schools as living systems that have to interact with their communities and other institutions. This speaks to the above-mentioned stance of stakeholders who are looking outside for assistance.

To theorise the turn-around approach for schools in decline, I came up with the internally desired external intervention (IDEI) model (*see Figure 8.2*). This model foregrounds the importance of internal stakeholders' realisation that help is needed in schools in decline. The desired help can be in the form of external sources such as the SGB foundation, community stakeholders, well-performing schools, and subject advisors (*see the second illustration on Figure 8.2*). Given that this study involved different stakeholders, the IDEI model may be adopted by any stakeholder in a school that demonstrates the symptoms of decline in any of the school's domains (structure, culture, and agency). Also, circuit managers as supervisors to principals could adopt this model to facilitate the turn-around interventions in schools in decline.

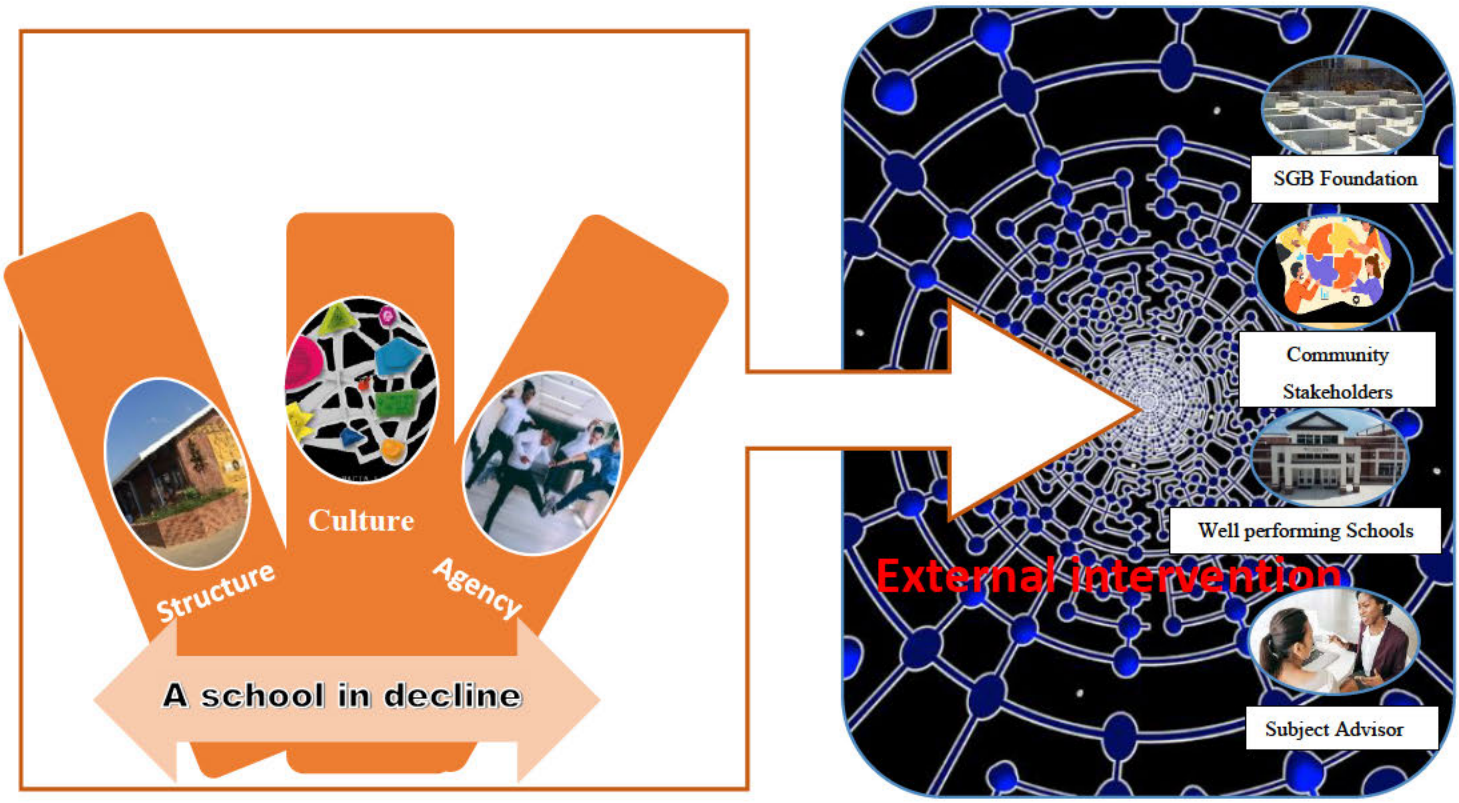


Figure 8.2 Internally desired external intervention model

8.5 My reflections on the study's contribution

In this study, I engaged with stakeholders to gain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences of serving in a declining school. The decline in learner academic performance emerged as a major concern for all the stakeholders, with a variety of factors contributing to it. The findings of this study show that structure, culture and agency in these declining schools were equally paralysed by various factors, including role ambiguity, toxic behaviours and constrained agency. From the close examination of findings, I developed the IDEI model which advocates a collaborative intervention to turn around declining schools. In this model, we learn that multiple stakeholders could come together and work towards rescuing a declining school. I find this model

interesting because it shows that learner performance is not a preserve for internal stakeholders, but external stakeholders as well. Hence, stakeholders such as SGB foundations, community stakeholders, well-performing schools, subject advisors and circuit managers could play a pivotal role in turning declining schools around.

In turning declining schools around, firstly, SGB foundations should work closely with the DBE to ensure that SGB members are well capacitated with their governance roles. This will ensure that schools have functional SGB members. Secondly, community stakeholders could assist declining schools in mitigating socio-economic challenges such as drug use and dealing, child headed homes, learner indiscipline, shortage of teaching and learning resources, and crime, among others. Thirdly, well-performing schools could reach out to declining schools and offer support in subject expertise and leadership development for SMTs. Finally, subject advisors should offer support to declining schools by providing subject expertise to teachers who are underperforming in their subjects.

Given that the IDEI model facilitates turn around interventions for declining schools, research on other turn around models for declining schools show that systemic approaches to educational reform produce positive changes in the school operational processes, which in turn, result in significant increases in school effectiveness (Feldhoff et al., 2022; Al Mekhlafi & Osman, 2019; Osman & Al Mekhlafi, 2018). It also show the importance of the effect of effective leadership, which inevitably leads to enhancing the school environment and results in raising learner achievement (Osman & Al Mekhlafi, 2018).

8.6 Recommendations to stakeholders

In this section, I present recommendations to principals, circuit managers and the DBE. These recommendations may be instrumental in mitigating school decline.

8.6.1 Recommendations to principals of schools

The findings of this study reveal that principals and teachers encounter challenges with learners who divert their attention from teaching and learning to using and selling drugs. As a result, these

learners become disruptive during instructional time and this has had a negative impact on their academic performance. In responding to this challenge, I recommend that principals put measures in place, such as working with the police officers in mitigating the selling of drugs. Also, SGBs could play a role by ensuring policies that prohibit the use and possession of drugs on school premises are in place and implemented. Such policies must also give direction in terms of supporting learners who are battling with drug addiction.

8.6.2 Recommendations to circuit managers

This study revealed signs of incompetence in newly appointed principals leading declining schools. These principals struggled with curriculum management, monitoring of learner progress and learner discipline, among other things. Also, this study found that principals do not hold teachers accountable for misconduct. Considering these challenges in these schools, I suggest that circuit managers provide preparatory programmes to train newly appointed principals on how to lead and manage schools and deal with teacher misconduct. It is possible that circuit managers, as supervisors to principals, do train them; if so, I recommend that such training be intensified and prolonged. In addition, I suggest that circuit managers assign experienced mentors, particularly principals from well-performing schools, to work closely with newly appointed principals. These mentors can supervise, share leadership practices, and offer support.

8.6.3 Recommendations to the DBE

It also appeared in this study that a lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms compromise teacher agency in declining schools. In addressing these challenges, I suggest that the DBE should supply sufficient resources to schools in decline. The resources may serve as a springboard to stimulate teacher agency in declining schools. The study also found that parent governors struggle to perform their roles due to literacy status and inadequate training. To address this complexity, I suggest that the DBE works in partnership with school governance experts and provides preparatory programmes to train parent governors on their governance roles. These preparatory programmes will facilitate the course of action of parent governors.

8.7 Looking back at the journey I have traversed in this research project

Every long journey arguably deserves a map, and this includes doctoral learning journeys (Elliot, 2022). Doctoral studies, despite being embedded in a "high-performance academic culture", are frequently characterised by unstructured journeys with multiple possible routes capable of branching out in different directions (Angervall, 2016). My PhD journey has been filled with struggles, successes, high expectations and I believe that this has contributed to my growth as a researcher. Here I reflect on these experiences.

When I began with my PhD journey in 2019, I was excited about the path that I was taking. Little did I know that the path that I took was going to be filled with struggles and challenges. For instance, the deterioration of my mother's health diverted my attention away from my research project because I had to take care of her, since my sister resides in Gauteng Province. At times I would take my mother to the hospital for medical check-ups, because she suffers from severe high blood pressure and a heart condition. I suffered in silence as I did not want people to know about what I was going through. There were times when I wanted to give up on the research project but my mother encouraged me to soldier on even though she was not well. Her exacts words were to me were "*Ungalilahli ithemba ndodana*" (Do not lose hope, my son). These words were a source of motivation for me. Over a period of time, there was an improvement in my mother's health and as a result, I was able to focus on my research project. Just when things were finally falling into place, I lost three close family members. However, with the emotional support of my two close friends, Dr Nompumelelo Meyiwa and Mr Thami Sibisi, I was able to gather enough strength to continue with my research project.

In year 2020, South Africa was on lockdown, like many other countries, due to the COVID 19 pandemic and as result, all non-essential businesses, schools, and public universities were closed, and academics were constrained to work from their homes (Walters et al., 2022). As a PhD student, I was not able to gain access to the university (UKZN). The university offers a special facility, the Research Commons, for PhD students so that they can be able to engage in their research projects free from distractions. This facility is also a support structure for PhD students in the sense that they would engage in discussions about their research projects and foster relations as critical friends. During the pandemic, I was not able to engage with critical friends about my research project. I found this challenging and demoralising because I was constrained in my house and as

result, I had to rely on technology to communicate with critical friends. This was not easy to adjust to as it was not as comfortable and fulfilling as meeting in person. Considering this, I had no choice but to adjust.

After the lockdown, I went to the field to generate data (field texts) for my research project. I adopted narrative inquiry as a research methodology to understand the lived experiences of participants since Connelly and Clandinin (1990; 2006) posit that this methodology is inspired by a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. In this research project, I generated field texts through narrative interviews and artefact inquiry. These field text generation methods allowed me to capture the experiences of participants of serving in a declining school, and as a result, I generated a huge amount of field texts, and the interview transcripts came to a total of three hundred pages. I was pulled in different directions because I did not know how I was going to re-story the narratives of participants considering the large volume of field texts that I had generated. While I was still baffled by the process of re-storying participants' narratives (narrative analysis), I reviewed literature on thinking tools that could help me with the process of analysis. Also, I sought advice from my supportive supervisor regarding this, and he suggested that storyboarding (*see Chapter four, p. 75*) would be an ideal thinking tool to use in the analysis process. This process allowed me to write a short story for each participant.

Given the challenges that I encountered in my PhD journey, I would like to acknowledge Dr SB Blose for his role as an amazing, supportive, caring, kind, motivating and supportive supervisor. It has been foregrounded in the literature that adequate supervisory support is related to PhD students' positive well-being (Devine & Hunter, 2017; Hamid et al., 2021; Spacey et al., 2021). My supervisor was a brother and a mentor to me, and I appreciated his positive work ethic. I consider him as one of my role models because he is such a humble person and he respects people in all facets of life. He had an open-door policy and I could always approach him if I needed clarity on feedback he provided in my draft chapters I had sent to him. Also, during our supervision meetings, he provided a platform for me to think analytically and critically. As a result, I have developed as an emerging academic researcher.

8.8 Suggestions for future research

In this study, I used ten participants (principals, circuit managers, SGB chairpersons, post- level one educators, and departmental heads) from five secondary township schools in the Umlazi District in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) in South Africa. Researchers can conduct other studies in other education districts in KZN or other provinces. A large sample of participants and schools located in different contexts (rural and urban areas) can also be used to gain more insight and understanding of the phenomenon, of school decline.

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APPENDIX A: FIELD TEXT GENERATION PLAN

FIELD TEXT GENERATION PLAN

Narrative interview and artefact inquiry will be used to generate data. The data generation process will be done over a period of three days per participant. On the first two days, each participant will be met for the narrative interview and the focus will be on their experiences of their declining schools. The third day will be used for objects and discussions.

Narrative interview (Day one and two)

Participants will be asked to narrate their experiences of their declining schools. In addition, they will also be asked what strategies can be put into place to change a school in decline towards sustainable improvement and effectiveness.

Artefact inquiry (Day three)

Participants will be requested to select an object that triggers important memories about the main challenge that they experience as stakeholders in their declining schools. Each participant will be given the platform to discuss the significance of the chosen object.

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION FROM DBE

KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 3921062 / 033-3921051
Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za
Buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Phindile Duma/Buyi Ntuli **Ref.**:2/4/8/7035

Mr Ndumiso Quincy Khuzwayo
18 Ross Street
7 Ropley Court
AMANZIMTOTI
4126

Dear Mr Khuzwayo

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"FROM MOVING TO SINKING SCHOOLS: NARRATIVES OF STAKEHOLDERS OF SCHOOLS IN DECLINE;** 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 19th October 2020 to 10TH March 2023.
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/Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

[redacted]

Dr. EV Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 19th October 2020

APPENDIX C1: PERMISSION FROM GATEKEEPER (PRINCIPAL)

[redacted]

Dear Mr Khuzwayo

Kindly be informed that your application to do research at PhD level at the above institution is granted.

I am looking forward to meeting you as you engage in your study.

Thank you

Yours faithfully

[redacted]

[redacted] (Principal)

[redacted]

APPENDIX C2: PERMISSION FROM GATEKEEPER (PRINCIPAL)

[redacted]

Dear Ndumiso Quincy Khuzwayo

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT [redacted] HIGH SCHOOL

I have read the letter whereby you requested permission to conduct research at this school. Please be informed that you are granted permission to conduct research at [redacted] High School.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Signature

APPENDIX C3: PERMISSION FROM GATEKEEPER (PRINCIPAL)

[redacted]

Dear Ndumiso Khuzwayo

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT [redacted] HIGH SCHOOL

Your letter titled "Request to conduct research at the school" has reference. Please be informed that you are granted permission to conduct your research at [redacted] High School.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Name of Principal

[redacted]

Signature

APPENDIX C4: PERMISSION FROM GATEKEEPER (PRINCIPAL)

Dear Ndumiso Khuzwayo

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT [redacted] SECONDARY SCHOOL

Your letter titled "Request to conduct research at the school" has reference. Please be informed that you are granted a permission to conduct your research at the above mentioned school.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Name of Principal

[redacted]

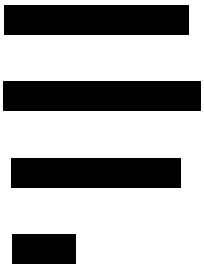
APPENDIX C5: PERMISSION FROM GATEKEEPER (PRINCIPAL)

Dear Ndumiso Khuzwayo

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT [redacted] SECONDARY SCHOOL

Your letter titled "Request to conduct research at the school" has reference. Please be informed that you are granted a permission to conduct your research at the above mentioned school.

APPENDIX D: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION LETTER



Dear Sir/ Madam

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH

I am Ndumiso Khuzwayo, and I am conducting research as a requirement at the University of KwaZulu-Natal towards a Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy. The title of the research is "From moving schools to sinking schools: Narratives of stakeholders of schools in decline". The objectives of the study are:

- To explore the lived experiences of stakeholders in terms of structural, cultural and agential mechanisms influencing school decline.
- To ascertain how stakeholders re-imagine schools in decline as moving schools.

The study will focus on the experiences of stakeholders of their declining schools. This letter intends to elucidate the purpose of the study and to request your participation in the study

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- The interview may last for about 1 hour and may be split into three parts depending on your preference.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.

- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be interviewed remotely, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

I can be contacted at:

Email: ndumiso.quincy1@gmail.com

[redacted]

My supervisor is Dr. SB Blose who is located at the School of Education, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He can be contacted at:

Email: Bloses@ukzn.ac.za

Phone: 031 260 1870

The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) office can be contacted at

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Phone: 031 260 4557

I hope this letter will find your positive consideration, thanking you in advance.

Yours Sincerely

_____

MR NQ KHUZWAYO

– –

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SECTION FOR CONSENT OF PARTICIPATION:

– –

I **______________________________________** (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the nature and purpose of the study entitled: "From moving schools to sinking schools: Narratives of stakeholders of schools in decline" I agree to participate in the study. I am also fully aware that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point should I wish to do so, without any negative or undesirable consequence. I am also aware that there are neither any foreseeable direct benefits nor direct risks associated with my participation in this study. I therefore understand the contents of this letter fully and I do **GIVE CONSENT / DO NOT GIVE CONSENT** for the interviews to be digitally recorded

__________________________ ____________________

Signature Date

APPENDIX E: TURNITIN CERTIFICATE

Mr N Khuzwayo

ORIGINALITY REPORT

15%	6%	5%	9%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal Student Paper	8%
2	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	1%
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5	www.scribd.com Internet Source	<1%
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APPENDIX F: EDITOR'S LETTER

Crispin Hemson
15 Morris Place
Glenwood
Durban
South Africa 4001

hemsonc@gmail.com
[redacted]

This is to confirm that I have undertaken language editing of a doctoral thesis by Ndumiso Quincy Khuzwayo entitled **From moving schools to sinking schools: Narratives of stakeholders of schools in decline.**

.

[redacted]

12th December 2023