



**INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE MIDST OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:
A CASE STUDY OF DEPARTMENTAL HEADS IN RURAL SECONDARY
SCHOOLS**

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**A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Education in the discipline of Educational Leadership Management and Policy**

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December, 2021

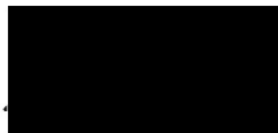
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DECLARATION

I, Sokesimbone Ngcobo declare that:

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Sign: _____

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SUPERVISOR'S AUTHORISATION

This dissertation is submitted with my approval.



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Supervisor: Dr BNCK Mkhize

Date: 28/03/2022

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my late parents, Nobuhle Ngcobo and Sakhile Mzizi for watching over me and giving me encouragements and strength from above during my study journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to:

- God, the Almighty, who protected, guided and provided me with a lifetime opportunity, spiritual strength, wisdom, courage and inspiration to complete this study. God gave me the power to triumph all challenges I faced throughout this research journey.
- My supervisor, Dr BNCK Mkhize, many thanks for your patience, sacrifices, professional support and motivation you have instilled in me to complete this work. Thank you for nurturing my academic growth.
- All participants, Departmental Heads, who agreed to partake in my study and for sharing their experience with me which assisted in the completion of this study.
- My friends for their encouragement and support.
- My life partner, MaKhumalo, for your encouragement, support, endless love and reminding me to complete what I have started. Thank you for the sacrifices you have made for me. I love you.
- My dearest family, my siblings (Nomvelo and Simphiwe), for their never-ending support.
- Most importantly, my parents, my Mother MaNgcobo and uBaba uMzizi, I know you have been with me throughout this journey, I felt the strength you bestowed unto me whenever I felt like giving up. Heaven is blessed to have you with. This one is for you.

Thank you.

ABSTRACT

This research aimed at exploring the DHs' instructional leadership experiences in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic in the Gert Sibande District in the Mpumalanga Province. The study focused on the DHs' experiences in rural secondary schools during COVID-19 pandemic. This study explored the different experiences of five DHs from three rural schools. The objectives of this study are; To explore the Departmental Heads instructional leadership experiences in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic; to explore how Departmental Heads have modified their instructional leadership practices in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic; to explore skills and knowledge required by Departmental Heads to improve their instructional leadership when leading during an unprecedented time. This is a qualitative study located within the interpretive paradigm. The participants were purposively selected. The study used semi-structured interviews as a method of generating data. Due to COVID-19 regulations, interviews were conducted telephonically to observe social distancing. The study employed thematic data analysis to analyse the generated data from the participants.

The findings in this study revealed that the participating DHs have a clear understanding of their role as DHs. They however endured varying experiences of their roles due to COVID-19 pandemic and the different contexts they work in. Some were still able to enact some of their instructional leadership experiences without any hindrances, while other participants experienced major COVID-19 related disturbances when enacting their instructional practices. The strategies used by these DHs to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic included the following; drawing on teacher collaboration, drawing on parental and SGB support and drawing on support from district officials. The study recommended the following; DHs should attend workshops to equip themselves with technological skills and the latest technological teaching and learning models such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom Meetings; DHs induced collaboration among their educators in order to ensure there was no interruption in the teaching and learning in their schools; drew on parental and SGB support and lastly drew on support from district officials.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------|------------------------------------|
| DH(s) | Departmental Head(s) |
| APT | Annual Teaching Plan |
| MBWA | Managing by walking around |
| FET | Further Education and Training |
| UKZN | University of KwaZulu-Natal |
| Mpu DoE | Mpumalanga Department of Education |

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a global health crisis. Undeniably, it has had a tremendous impact on schools, students and teachers alike (Almanthari, Maulina & Bruce, 2020). The pandemic required drastic measures to be pursued as means of curbing the spread of the virus. One of the measures pursued by governments around the world was the implementation of temporary closure of schools and introduction of social distancing (Mahaye, 2020; Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020). South Africa was no exception, the government implemented a national lockdown leading to closure of all schools, including universities resulting to a complete halt of formal learning process (Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020). This pandemic resulted in the loss of valuable teaching and learning time. Teaching and learning time was lost because schools had to adhere to strict government restrictions such as social distancing measures to curb the rapid spread of this virus (Almanthari et al., 2020). Well-resourced private and public schools shifted their teaching and learning to technology-based models to ensure they minimise curriculum disruption (Lieberman, Levin & Luna-Bazaldua, 2020). In addition to online learning, which is an untested terrain in South Africa, the use of television and radio for educational purposes began to occupy the corridors of the education sector immediately after the reality of lockdown in South Africa (Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020).

The shift described in the above paragraph is prone to generating daunting challenges emerging from rural communities (schools) in which teachers are both unwilling and incapable of utilising technological devices in their teaching and learning (Chisago, Marongwe, Mtsi & Matyedi, 2020). On the other hand, learners in rural areas are confronted with adjusting to a new mode of life and learning, the latter being characterised by the predominant use of online learning (Dube, 2020). The less fortunate schools had to wait nearly four months to have a taste of what is left of normalcy – contact teaching and learning time. It was not without its own challenges as the lack of resources in rural schools such as physical space to practice social distancing and human resource meant additional challenges for schools to accommodate their learners at once. During the period of school closures, many school children in rural areas received no education. On a school to school basis, school leaders decided to platoon and rotate learners to ensure the safe and controlled resumption of teaching and learning while at the same

time ensuring compliance with the safety protocols such as social distancing. Against this background of the abrupt and unprecedented changes that have erupted as a result of COVID-19 virus in the educational sector, this study aims to explore the instructional leadership experiences of Departmental Heads (DHs) in rural secondary schools.

This is the first chapter of the study and it serves as an orientation to understanding the research problem. The chapter begins by providing a background to the problem, followed by a formal statement of the problem. Thereafter, the study objectives follow. This is followed by the research questions and the rationale and motivation for the study. Other usual elements of the first chapter such as the significance of the study, the demarcation and limitations of the study follows. Towards the end of the chapter, an outline of the whole study and chapter summary concludes the chapter.

1.2 Background to the problem

According to the Employment of Educators Act, No.76 of 1998 on the Terms and Conditions of Employment of Educators, as well as Section 4 of the Personnel Measures (PAM) Document, contained in the Education Law and Policy Handbook (1999), and also in the Policy Handbook for Educators (2003), the implementation and management of curriculum are core duties of the Departmental Heads (DHs) in the schools (Republic of South Africa, 1998; Republic of South Africa, 1999). The DHs are at the frontline of instructional leadership as they are the middle managers tasked with the responsibility of enhancing quality in teaching and learning and curriculum management (Grootenboer, 2018; Leithwood, 2016). It is their understanding of leadership and management aspects that sets the instructional culture of the school, the teaching environment, and the level of professionalism and morale of teachers (Tapala et al., 2017). It is therefore, the expectation that even in the crisis brought by COVID-19 pandemic, the DHs would be at the forefront to restore normality in teaching and learning, take affirmative measures to set instructional culture of the schools, follow COVID-19 regulations and protocols to create conducive environment for teaching and learning, and boost the morale of teachers and learners knowing that schools are deemed as hotspots for the widespread of infectious diseases, which was the main reason for the closure of schools worldwide (Abdulmir & Hafidh, 2020).

1.3 The research problem

In South Africa, the scope of the job description of the DHs is guided by the Employment of Educators Act, No. 78 of 1998 (Republic of South Africa, 1998). As promulgated in this Act, the roles and duties of the DHs depend on the needs of the school, which may include but not limited to administration; teaching; supervision and coordinating extra-curricular activities. As leaders of a specific phase, grade or subject, DHs should ensure development of teaching methods of the subject and implement school-based policies that reflect the vision of the school (Jaca, 2013). As teachers who have been promoted to a leadership role, they should supervise teachers and equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to produce quality results. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa in early March 2020, the duties of DHs have been further complicated by the precise and demanding regulations and protocols promulgated to curb the spread of this virus (Abdulmir & Hafidh, 2020). As a result of the surge of this virus, DHs are confronted with the conundrum of adapting their known and expected instructional leadership practices to lead in these unprecedented changes with the aim of achieving quality teaching in their departments.

There is currently limited research of COVID-19 in relation to the educational sphere (Sintema, 2020). The limited research of COVID-19 in relation to educational sphere focuses on the effects of this virus in education such as the transition to online learning, platooning and attendance rotation to observe social distancing. There seems to be limited research on how these accelerated COVID-19 related changes in rural secondary schools have impacted on instructional leadership practices to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is maintained in schools. Such research is mainly conducted in urban and township settings, rural contexts are often snubbed. Little is known about how DHs in rural secondary schools, for example, take affirmative measures to set instructional culture of the schools, follow COVID-19 regulations and protocols to create conducive environment for teaching and learning and boost the morale of teachers. This pandemic has highlighted the need for school stakeholders to collaboratively work closely together for the betterment of the learners. This is particularly difficult in rural schools as Myende and Nhlumayo (2020) suggest that getting all school stakeholders involved in the learners' academic affairs is almost mission impossible. This study sought to explore instructional leadership experiences of the DHs in rural secondary schools while leading in the midst of this vastly challenging period of COVID-19 virus. It is worth to document and learn from DHs' experiences of how they confronted the conundrum of adapting

their known and expected instructional leadership practices to lead in these unprecedented changes for present and future reference.

1.4 Study objectives

The aim of this study were to explore the instructional leadership experiences of Departmental Heads in rural secondary schools during COVID-19 pandemic and seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- To explore Departmental Heads' instructional leadership experiences during COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.
- To explore challenges DHs encounter in executing/enacting their instructional leadership role during COVID-19 pandemic.
- To explore appropriate strategies DHs in rural secondary schools exert/employ to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their instructional leadership role.

1.5 Research questions

- What are the Departmental Heads' experiences of their role as instructional leaders in rural secondary schools during COVID-19 pandemic?
- What challenges do DHs encounter in executing/enacting their instructional leadership role during COVID-19 pandemic?
- What appropriate strategies do DHs in rural secondary schools exert/employ to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their instructional leadership role?

1.6 Rationale and motivation for the study

The rationale for undertaking this study has binary dimensions that influenced it; personal and academic. After completing my undergraduate degree, I had the opportunity to enrol for an Honours degree specialising in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy. My Independent Research project focused on the leadership roles of Departmental Heads in enhancing quality in teaching and learning. In my discussions with the respective DHs during individual interviews I had with them, I got the opportunity to explore the complexities associated with their duties as DHs. The literature I engaged demonstrated a mismatch in the

DHs' understandings of their instructional leadership roles owing to complex nature of secondary schools and various contexts. One can imagine that the complexity and uncertainty brought by COVID-19 pandemic does not make it particularly easy for the Departmental Heads to perform their duties to the best of their abilities to ensure effective teaching and learning still takes place in schools. That is where my mind was ignited to explore the instructional leadership experiences of DHs during COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study sought to explore how DHs experienced their instructional leadership practices during this unprecedented time. Instructional leadership has been researched extensively, but there is limited research on instructional leadership experiences in the midst of a health crisis in rural school.

1.7 Significance of the study

The intended outcome of this research is to explore how DHs in rural secondary schools experienced instructional leadership in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is crucial that we document and learn from their experiences. These lessons could be useful to all DHs working in similar rural contexts where they are expected to effectively lead during a time of crisis. Through this practice, current and aspiring leaders can target their efforts on aspects of the job that are likely to be most effective and efficient in improving their leadership experiences. Also, the findings generated from this study could act as a blueprint of understanding the instructional leadership practices that might contribute to improvements in the instructional leadership culture of the school during an unprecedented time. Departmental officials at circuit and district levels responsible for policy formulation may benefit from this study since it can assist them in designing relevant policies and mechanisms for DHs to improve their leadership skills when confronted by uncertainty.

1.8 Demarcation of the study

According to Horberg (1999), demarcating the problem of the study refers to identifying the boundaries of the problem area within which the research progresses. Demarcating the problem helps the researcher to make the study manageable. In the context of this study the research focused on exploring the instructional leadership experiences of DHs as they are leading during the unprecedented time of COVID-19. The population of this study was limited to five participants, thus limiting this study as they do not represent the total proportion of the whole

population of rural secondary school departmental heads. These five participants were interviewed which is consistent with the requirements of qualitative research. More importantly, the selected participants were situated in the Chief Albert Municipality. Therefore, the empirical outcomes of this study are likely to be limited to within the perimeters of the research sites.

1.9 Study limitations

According to Hofstee (2006), any study, regardless of research design and methodology is highly likely to have study limitations. As a researcher it is my responsibility to state these limitations as to how they may affect the credibility of the findings of this study. The sample of this study was drawn from three South African rural secondary schools in the Mpumalanga province. It is therefore, not possible to generalise the findings of this study to all South African schools. Consequently, further studies need to be conducted in other provinces with schools in similar contexts to corroborate or challenge the findings of this study. However, regardless of the location of the research sites, there are participants who are reluctant to divulge information with strangers (Babbie, 2020). Some participants who do not have experience of participating in an empirical study may portray me as someone who is there to police their activities. Therefore, it is highly likely that the information they provide may not be a true reflection of their true instructional leadership experiences during COVID-19 pandemic. To counter this challenge will be difficult because I will not have the opportunity to observe the participants outside of our scheduled interviews to witness for myself what was happening in their schools.

1.10 Clarification of key concepts

To ensure a constant view of terminology in this study, I provide the clarification of key terms which are Departmental Heads, instructional leadership, departmental heads as instructional leaders, leadership and management lastly, rural secondary schools.

Departmental Heads

Departmental head (DH) is a revised concept referring to school-based educators employed in terms of the Employment of Educators Act (Republic of South Africa, 1998), who occupy junior management posts which are commonly dubbed post-level two with curriculum

management as their responsibility in addition to their teaching duties. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) declare that in other countries like England, DHs are also called middle managers and curriculum coordinators. In the South African context, DHs are the members of the School Management Team (SMT) and they are the first line of the SMT. They are responsible for monitoring and supervising curriculum delivery.

Instructional leadership

The main focus of instructional leadership is on leadership of teaching and learning. Seobi and Wood (2016, p. 2) define instructional leadership as “an approach to direct teaching and learning aspects of school leadership”. The common understanding of instructional leadership among educationists focuses on the following characteristics; leadership influencing the quality of education in schools, enhancing learner achievement, managing resources to effectively improve teaching and learning, pedagogic and curriculum management (Mestry & Pillay, 2013; Naicker, Chikoko & Mthiyane, 2013).

Departmental Heads as instructional leaders

While the principals carry the overall responsibility of setting school improvement plans, the DHs are responsible for securing high quality teaching and learning in their subjects/phases (Sindhvad, 2009). Osterman (2004) argues that DHs should play a central role in ensuring the academic improvement of their learners by creating a climate which is fertile for them to reach their full potential. According to Earley and Weindling (2004, p. 112), as instructional leaders, DHs are the “driving force behind the organisation and the key to improving the quality of teaching and learning”. A similar view is held by Du Four (2002) who paints DHs as kingpins of change who are up-to-date with knowledge transform and energise teaching and learning.

Leadership

Leadership is defined as a process whereby an individual of authority does not use means of coercion but rather adopts an approach of influencing and encouraging others to go beyond expectations (Seema, 2016). Leadership is about directing people somewhere or to something. Bush and Glover (2003) contend that leadership is about persuading followers towards attaining a desired goal.

Management

Management is closely associated with “efficiency, planning, paperwork, procedures, regulations, control and consistency” (van Deventer, 2016, p.141). These scholars further state that for management processes to be effective, there must be strong leadership and communication. Management activities include, among other things, supervising, directing, running, command and guidance.

Rural secondary schools

According to the Department of Basic Education’s Rural Education Policy (Republic of South Africa, 2017, p.6), rural areas are “farms and traditional areas characterised by low population density, low levels of economic activities and low levels of infrastructure.” The policy further defines secondary school as “a school that offers all or a selection of grades from Grade 8 to Grade 12.” Rural secondary schools are located in farms and places under traditional tribal authority distant from urban and peri-urban areas. These places are “characterised by low economic activities, transport, access to technological developments and are geographically isolated, among others” (Republic of South Africa, 2017, p.6). The schools have Grades 8 to 12 teaching and learning programmes. Rural schools have high needs of resources including teachers (low teacher retention) and infrastructure (Du Plessis, 2014).

1.11 The overall structure of the study

This study is made up of five chapters and in this section, I sign-post the route I have taken in compiling this study report.

Chapter One: This chapter provided the introduction and background to this study. The study purpose, which was to interrogate leadership practices of DHs and transform their misconception into more informed consciousness, was highlighted. A background to the study is provided, expressing the key areas the study aims to address. The rationale and motivation for the study is given; statement of the problem, and purpose of the study are further discussed in this chapter. The significance of the study and clarification of key concepts were discussed. The chapter concludes by providing a structure for the thesis and closes with the summary of the chapter.

Chapter Two: This chapter reviews literature on instructional leadership, rurality and educational leadership in crisis. In addition, this chapter also offers a critical review of local and international literature on the research phenomenon.

Chapter Three: The chapter presents a detailed account of the research design, methods and procedures that were followed in carrying out the study. It also outlines research instruments that were used to generate data for this study.

Chapter Four: This chapter presents and discusses data that was generated through semi-structured interviews with the participants and document analysis. This chapter focuses on the analysis and interpretation of data generated to make meaning.

Chapter Five: This chapter contains the summary of the whole study, while discussing findings that emerge from the previous chapter and lastly it provide recommendations for future research.

1.12 Chapter summary

This chapter provided an orientation of the study, namely the leadership practices of DHs. It provided a meticulous discussion on the background and rationale for the study. More importantly, the aims and objectives of the study were clearly explained. Furthermore, the significance of this study and clarification of underlying key concepts were discussed. The chapter concludes by providing a structural snippet of the study. The next chapter reviews related literature on instructional leadership, rurality and educational leadership in crisis

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I provided a detailed contextual background of the study. I further outlined the significance of the study and provided its rationale. This chapter presents the reviewed body of literature of both international and local research based on the instructional leadership of Departmental Heads in times of crisis. The main focus of this chapter is on the analysis of related literature to gain an insightful perception of instructional leadership practices of Departmental Heads in rural secondary schools during times of crisis. It also provides clarity on key concepts related to the research topic. By providing an analysis of the current body of literature on the said aspects, a clear picture emerged regarding instructional leadership practices of Departmental Heads in ensuring there is teaching and learning despite challenges brought by COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this chapter aims to give a multifaceted experiences of DHs when leading in the midst of a pandemic in order to ensure teaching and learning in their schools regardless of rural context they are rooted in.

2.2 Leadership

In Chapter One, I gave a brief clarification about various scholars conceptualise leadership. In this chapter, I give a more detailed discussion about what leadership is all about. Leadership is defined as a process whereby an individual of authority does not use means of coercion but rather adopts an approach of influencing and encouraging others to go beyond what the norms (Seema, 2016). Although other scholars define leadership as not necessarily located to any formal position in an organisation, in the context of this study which focuses on Departmental Heads, the position is embedded in the definition. The research fraternity seems to share similar views about the lack of a clear distinction between leadership and management. While correlation between the two terms is recognised, literature seems to lean toward the indication that these terms are commonly used interchangeably as a result of the lack of distinction they possess. According to Bush (2010), educational leadership attracts significant interest from researchers because of its correlation with school performance and student outcomes. Grant (2010) views leadership and management as entities of authority while on the other hand

Northouse (2004) defines leadership as a process in which an individual exerts his/her influence on a collection of other individuals with the idea of achieving a common goal. Nel, Werner, Haasbroek, Poisat, Sono and Schultz (2008, p. 356) echo Grant's sentiments that leadership is a process, with an individual who influences and encourages others to work towards the achievement of a common goal, previously set by the group. They further note that people who claim to be leaders must be able to utilise change and improvement in their organisations through motivation.

In light of the definitions found in the literature, leadership is defined as a process whereby an individual of authority does not use means of coercion but rather adopts an approach of influencing and encouraging others to go beyond the norms (Seema, 2016). People in leadership positions are finding difficulty in maintaining an appropriate balance between leading and managing. Cuban (1988) provides a clear distinction between the two concepts of leadership and management. Cuban's definition of a leader is closely linked to Northouse's definition that a leader must be able to influence others' actions with the view of achieving favourable ends. Management is therefore defined as the act of effectively maintaining current organisational arrangements with efficiency (Dimmock, 1999). Dimmock also highlights the overlapping of these concepts by noting that managers often display leadership skills. Day, Harris and Hadfield (2001) suggest that management is linked to a rigid system while leadership is perceived to be characterised by flexibility.

2.3 Management

Management is closely associated with "efficiency, planning, paperwork, procedures, regulations, control and consistency" (van Deventer & Kruger, 2003, p.141). These scholars further state that for management processes to be effective there must be strong leadership and communication. Kydd, Anderson and Newton (2003) accords that management is incumbent to realising the vision of the organisation to ensure efficient functionality. These views are echoed by Sapre (2002) who defines management as a collection of activities directed towards efficient utilisation of organisational resources to maximise output. The fundamental aim of educational management is to facilitate effective education (Loock, 2003). Similarly, Squelch (2000) holds similar sentiments that are performed by the school management team, which is inclusive of the DHs because of the power bequeathed in their position. Because of the power bequeathed in their positions, they have a responsibility to their positions to create an

environment that is favourable of high-quality teaching and learning (Bush, 2003). As heads of departments, the DHs automatically form part of the decision-making structures in the school setting. According to Bush (2003), the distribution of power in schools assert DHs in a position of being labelled as teacher leaders. As already established, leadership is a process of exerting influence over others with the purpose of achieving set goals and ensuring there is broad success in the implementation of the school's vision and mission. It is evident from literature that for DHs to perform their duties to the satisfaction of their constituents, it is vital that they are knowledgeable in the aspects of management and leadership. It is for that reason that I articulate management as the need to achieve organisational goals through maintaining efficiency in planning, controlling, organising and problem-solving.

2.4 Transformational leadership

This leadership theory is only discussed for the purpose of understanding the DHs' experiences of leading teaching and learning during the reformation of their instructional leadership experiences in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mora and Tidor (2012) argues that transformational leadership is best suited when the organisation is undergoing reformation. This is because the leaders serve as an initiator for restructuring, integrated with the organisations' creativity, innovation, flexibility, and responsiveness. At the same time, the status quo in terms of performance level should not fall below standard. During the COVID-19 pandemic, DHs had to ensure that performance levels in their departments or schools did not drop while transforming to the COVID-19 brought challenges. The transformational leadership theory sparks change (Bass, 2008). In this study, DHs are transformational leaders.

2.5 Roles and responsibilities of the Departmental Heads

The following discussion is channelled by what the literature provides to be the DHs' roles in enhancing instructional leadership in their schools. Usually, the sole aim of instructional leadership is that of achieving quality teaching and learning. As one contingent of the school management team, departmental heads are tasked with the specific task of ensuring that teaching and learning takes place in schools since they are closer to the teachers and teaching and learning process. In spite of their lack of formal preparation, DHs are still expected to produce quality results in their respective departments. For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on the following leadership roles; instructional supervision, curriculum management,

creating a conducive working environment, administration, appraisal and support. Middle managers, as DHs are sometimes labelled in the school hierarchy, play a crucial role in improving the standards in education in secondary schools; they act as Phase or Subject Heads and coordinators. Heaton (2016) argues that senior management must work in close proximity with the DHs to ensure school improvement since the middle managers control and coordinate directions to the teachers they lead in their respective departments.

Instructional supervision

Instructional supervision plays a crucial intervention in secondary schools for all the subjects taught. It is a useful tool to monitor the developmental needs of both the learners and the teachers. Sullivan and Glanz (2013) hold the view that in order for the supervision to achieve its desired goal, both the supervisors and the teachers should be equally invested and have equal trust in the supervision process. Tshabalala (2013) holds comparable sentiments that effective supervision is realised when the supervisor and the teachers in his or her department enjoy a good collaborative working relationship.

Departmental heads are responsible for supervising and monitoring the standard of work done by teachers in their departments. There is a study by Zepeda and Kruskamp (2007) that revealed that most departmental heads opt to utilise appraisal as another form of performing the task of monitoring and observation due to their lack of official preparedness and training they receive from the department. They further affirmed that in order for the DHs to have control and certainty of what happens in the classroom during allocated instructional time, they should look to initiate a culture of systematic planned and unplanned classroom observation. Lastly, they assert that supervision should be in line with the developmental needs of the teacher under supervision. Scholars in the field of educational leadership and management (Smith, Mestry & Bambie 2013; Naicker et al., 2013) concur that instructional supervision assists teachers to improve their performance in class and DHs are liable for what happens in their classrooms. There is a further argument by Bush (2010) that managing instructional time begins with an assessment of what is practiced in the classroom, and this can be achieved through monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of teaching plans. The DHs should put in place procedures and routines to create an environment where everyone utilises appropriate methods for lesson delivery. It is the core duty of the DHs to supervise teaching and learning. When DHs do their supervision of instructional time through class visits, it is well within their rights as stipulated in the departmental policies. Teachers need to be monitored to ensure smooth

completion of the syllabus. However, monitoring and classroom observation is not without its challenges; there has been an outcry from teacher leaders to oust class visits. They cite invasion of privacy as well as a lack of trust between school leaders and the teachers at grassroots level (Bennett, 2003). Other challenges confronting DHs when executing their roles include adjusting to the constant curriculum changes and conditions of services (Sullivan & Glanz, 2013). These challenges have an effect on staff morale which can then affect quality of lesson delivery.

Instructional supervision in South African schools

Prior to the dawn of democracy in the Republic of South Africa, instructional supervision focused mainly on control and power with little emphasis on the improvement of the quality of education (Tapala, et al, 2020). There were inspectors positioned in the districts who would do school visits to monitor, evaluate and check on the teachers' work, but they were not competent enough to adequately perform these duties as they did not possess specialist and expert knowledge of the subjects they supervised. Tyagi (2010) affirms that inspection used a top down approach. This exercise was not effective and lacked organisation and professionalism. After the dawn of democracy in the country, numerous policies were formulated in an attempt to cast aside the preceding practices and embrace the newly found freedom. On top of the agenda of the newly formulated policies was the formulation of an Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) initiative by the then Department of Education to supplement the frail performances of teachers in the education system. The IQMS was implemented in 2003. The fundamental intentions of IQMS were to determine educator competence; to consider the strengths and areas of development; to provide support chances for growth; to promote accountability and to monitor school overall performance (DoE, 2005).

The IQMS concept consists of three programmes, namely; Developmental Appraisal (DA) for the identification of areas of weakness and strength for individuals; Performance Measurement (PM) for pay progression on individuals and Whole School Evaluation (WSE) to evaluate the effectiveness of the whole school (Resolution 8 of 2003). IQMS is an ongoing process which takes place within the academic period and it allows educators to supervise their personal growth and needs for professional development. Department of Education (2005) mentions that it is the DHs that have an obligatory duty to lead the Developmental Support Groups (DSG) in the appraisal activity for implementation of appropriate professional development programmes. Inclusive in their roles, the DHs must also work in close coordination with the

teachers to assist them to develop their Personal Growth Plans (PGPs) which aim to highlight areas of excellence and areas which raise concerns. IQMS also plays a role in the identification of areas of weakness in curriculum implementation. Although this study is not concerned with IQMS, I deemed it important to highlight the role of the DHs in assuring quality of teaching and learning in the South African sphere. This is because IQMS is one of the most important policies that direct the duties of the DHs to identify and implement appropriate development programmes for teachers once their work has been monitored.

Professional development

Supervision cannot be separated from teacher development, which is viewed as another important cog in the strides of improving the quality of teaching. The process has the capacity to assist teachers to improve their skills if it coordinated properly since teachers are expected to modify what they know by learn, un-learn and re-learn (Bak, 2010.). Professional development helps to guard against the professional fossilization groove (Smith, 2003). The danger of ‘fossil fossilization’ is professional stagnation, teachers stagnate and become too comfortable in their teaching routine (Hallinger & Liu, 2016). Attempting to utilise modern updated pedagogical methods becomes a foreign concept, thus compromising the quality of the academic performance of learners in the school with unenthusiastic teaching and learning. Therefore, the Departmental Heads play a significant role in organising and supporting their teachers’ professional development (Hallinger & Liu, 2016). There are various definitions of professional development that the literature provides. Older literature like that of Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) and Parker (1990) define the phenomenon of professional development as those processes that improve the job-related knowledge, skills or attitudes of teachers so as to enable them to design instructional programmes to improve student learning. Such definitions reiterate the ideology that schools act as sites of professional learning focusing on the empowerment of individuals and teams (Osmond-Johnson et al., 2019).

The quality of teaching and learning leans heavily on the quality of teachers at the disposal of the school (Fullan, 1992). If there is no teacher training, there is a risk of a mismatch between the intended curriculum and the curriculum practiced in the classroom (Bishop, 1985). Departmental Heads can ensure continuous staff development through in-service training. Seminars, workshops and short courses are typical training that teachers receive through the duration of their professional service. In-service training is advantageous in a manner that it familiarises teachers with the latest innovations in the subject area, updates their curriculum

understanding as well as the latest and most effective methods of teaching and evaluation in the subjects.

Schools acting as professional learning sites allow for the manifestation of mandated in-service training of teachers against the backdrop of new introductions such as new policies. In an eventful country like South Africa, in-service training has been necessitated frequently with the regular changes that have been in place in the education sphere such as the migration from outcome-based education to content based (Lessing & De Witts, 2007). Members of the school management team are responsible for overseeing in-service training of teachers renounced at national or provincial level. Departmental Heads are tasked with ensuring that teachers attend workshops to update their knowledge and skills to enable them to cope with the changes in policy to positively contribute to quality teaching and learning (Mpisane, 2015). Such professional development does not come without its own challenges as some teachers feel there is no sufficient time to attend development activities (Lessing & De Witts, 2007). They cite loss of delicate instructional time. In most instances, professional development activities are conducted after working hours or during weekends, these alternatives are often rejected by teachers who highlight personal commitments outside their professional life. The onus is therefore, on the Departmental Heads together with the rest of the school management team members to provide means and mechanisms to cater for lost instructional time to professional development training activities in and outside the working site. The school management team is tasked with liaising with affected stakeholders on rescheduling school time to make up for lost instructional time. The monitoring systems are in place to advice the DHs in the event of the following scenarios; something unexpected has happened to interrupt the plans or the situation requires formulation of a new plan as a result of interruptions. It is worth mentioning at this point that this study is not seeking to gain a better understanding of professional development *per se*; however, I saw it important that teachers and members of the SMT are aware of opportunities for developing themselves with the view of enhancing quality teaching and learning.

Teacher collaboration

The educational sector is confronted with an increasing pressure towards collaboration. Vangrieken, Dochy, Raes and Kyndt (2015) hold the opinion that teachers need to display good collaboration skills in order to proficiently executive their duties in the classrooms and beyond.

The majority of schools in South African are characterised by toxic working environments with prevailing conflicts amongst the school management team and the teachers on the ground (Mpisane, 2015). To create conducive working environments in their departments and beyond, the DHs must attempt to form collaborations among teachers in their departments so that teachers work together, build and sustain relationships with colleagues, promoting improvement in instructional capacity providing feedback, fostering reflection on teaching skills and developing new teaching techniques (He & Ho, 2017). Mpisane (2015) notes that school leaders, specifically the Departmental Heads should have systems in place to create a harmonious working environment to provide teachers with opportunities to discuss with their colleagues the various professional challenges they encounter with the aim of improving and developing teaching practices. Tonna and Shanks (2017) cite the need to implement a process through which teachers are made aware of how they can contribute to the growth of each other's professionalism through the sharing of their experiences working collectively. Collaboration and collegiality of informal activities including the exchange of ideas or stories between the principal and teachers and between teaches themselves should be highly encouraged.

Kuper and Kapelle (2012) define the art of collaboration as a process in which a group of individuals work together to produce a greater output of results compared to what they would have been able to produce while working in their individual capacities. They further note that having a jointly devised common goal is central to the success of the collaboration. Kelchtermans (2006) offers his definition of collaboration as task-related cooperative and interactive actions with colleagues. These interactions ultimately lead to both the intended and unintended learning opportunities for the teachers. Such interactions are in line with what is presented in the literature that teacher collaborations have high probability to succeed in schools with trusting, caring and open relationships among staff members (Harris & Jones, 2019; Hallinger & Truong, 2014). Collaboration is highlighted as one of the primary methods of improving teacher professionalism in schools (Reh, 2008). Schools that adopts a high collaborative culture amongst their teachers have the potential to produce quality teaching and learning in a conducive environment.

Creating a conducive working environment

Liu and Hallinger (2018) define the instructional leadership model as critical to the principal's ability to encourage school success and effectiveness. The purpose of referring to the model is

to explain what instructional leadership entails and how it relates to leadership for learning. The model strives to reveal the positive impact instructional leadership has made over the years. The notion of school climate refers to how individuals or stakeholders feel about the culture of the school (McEwan, 2003). Creating an environment that is hospitable to quality teaching and learning entails ensuring that the climate at the school is characterised by safety; it allows opportunities for staff to take positive risks, professional, supportive, conducive to teaching and learning to achieve the desired academic results, characterised by trust and stakeholder involvement in school activities (Wallace Foundation, 2013). To promote conducive teaching and learning environment the school management team must play a central role in boosting stakeholder morale and participation for them to feel worthy and capable of making positive contributions to the teaching and learning process.

Creating positive organisational culture

Organisational culture refers to the organisation's member's uniform understandings of both the internal and external operations of the organisation in response to shared perceptions and representation (Haworth, 2005). There are a number of links that have been noted and established between the organisation's culture and its performance. To explain and understand organisational culture better, the following section offers a brief definition of culture.

Defining culture

According to Scheider and Northcraft (2011), culture is a concept that is underpinned by complexity, multidimensional construct that can be studied on several levels such as international, national, regional, business and organisational. This suggests that organisational values, norms, beliefs and principles are taught to existing and newly appointed members of staff in order to guide and influence their employees' attitude and work behaviour. In the same vein, Schmidt (2002) maintains that organisational culture is the standards, rules and conduct that have undeniable influence on the corporate identity, as well as its work environment. Tharp's (2005) views on culture is much more specific in that he views culture as the compass guiding the organisation's direction while simultaneously acting as the glue that holds the organisation together. Schmidt (2002) identifies sets of cultural traits, and these are innovation, creativity, the value of team work, taking accountability for performance and reward

philosophy, the degree of customer commitment, the decision-making process, power relationships and management style.

There are strong external calls from stakeholders for improved learner achievement in schools, and increasingly, principals, along with the school management team have to bear the pressures that accompany these demands while ensuring these demands are realised. Instructional leadership concept is being advocated as one of the approaches that school leaders may consider in order to promote a culture of teaching and learning within their schools (Mkhize, 2012). According to the Policy Handbook for Educators (2003) as well as Section 4 of the Personnel Measures (PAM) document, curriculum implementation and management are core duties of the middle management in schools; the Departmental Heads while the principal provides and facilitates direction. It is thus, the full responsibility of the DHs to ensure that there are mechanisms in place to maintain desired quality teaching and learning as set out in the vision and mission of the school.

Administration

Administration is a key element of ensuring organisational departments operate effectively. It is a linear, yet flexible system of arranging and coordinating resources such as human, material and financial resources with the primary intention of achieving stipulated goals (Amadi, 2008). When applied in the school context, administration refers to the DHs tasks of organising and coordinating available resources for the purpose of meeting customer expectations. It also involves the analysis of results, which are used by the DHs to monitor the level of teacher performance. All DHs, irrespective of their phase, they specialise in, are expected to implement the following administrative duties, some which may be non-teaching duties like collecting fees for staff or learners, ensuring staff welfare, assuming authority on behalf of the principal if the school has no incumbent in the deputy principal position or as directed by policy, do not qualify for one. There is a professional expectation that the above-mentioned duties are to be done by all DHs (PAM, 1999).

According to Poopedi (2011), as heads of departments, the DHs should check lesson plans, teachers' files, work schedules and moderated scripts as part of their administration task. However, administration has presented plenty of challenges for the DHs, such as too much paperwork and minimal time available to execute this task. It is important to note that the DHs'

primary duties are to teach their own subject they are responsible for. Smith, Mestry and Bambie (2013) echo this view that the DHs' workload is too much for them while they receive minimal support in the execution of their extra duties. These extra duties include, conducting departmental meetings, drawing yearly budgets for the department and allocating human resources accordingly to ensure effective teaching and learning while they have no formal training for the job, thus, limiting their ability to work at full capacity (Bak, 2010). As part of their additional responsibilities, DHs organise and manage available resources responsibly to ensure efficient operations of the organisation.

Resource mobilisation and management

The institutional leadership should work tirelessly to ensure their institution has adequate resources for effective engagement. Zhimin et al. (2013) make a critical point that an institution that fails to raise adequate resources cannot fulfil its mission to the best of its ability. Therefore, the responsibility of resource availability rests on the institution's leadership. In schools, the SMTs are responsible for the availability of educational resources. Education resources, as defined by Usman (2016), refer to all human and non-human materials available in an academic environment to facilitate school administration and simplify the teaching and learning engagements in the school. This is in accordance with Akinsola and Ogunkola's (2013) assertion that resources are equated to a sum of everything utilised for the facilitation of specific engagements in any setting. Khosa (2012) echoes these sentiments by suggesting that resources can be human and non-human entities that fosters quality teaching. Education resources includes the teachers in the school, parents in the community, chalk and display boards, school buildings such as classrooms, the community at large and other key materials associated with direct teaching and learning like pencils, pens, exercise books which the learners are expected to have at their disposal at all times to facilitate learning.

Education resources are critical to the development of a conducive teaching-learning environment. The availability of these resources has the ability to potentially give more valuable and powerful direction to the teacher than any personal efforts without the materials (Usman, 2016). From the school administration perspective, the effectiveness and efficient utilisation of education resources is parallel to the organisation, coordination and controlling systems put in place by the school management team. This perspective is in agreement with Blunt's (1990) opinion that the mere availability of these critical resources does not guarantee quality school performance on the teaching and learning front, but their adequate management

and effective dispensation does. However, Blunt (1990) also notes that no matter how effective the school administration may be in terms of the distribution of resources, without proper and efficient management of the available resources, the organisation is likely to fail in its attempt to achieve its common derived goals. In South African schools, the availability of adequate resources is a major concern for the school management teams at all levels. Smith, Mestry and Bombie, (2013) argue that the workload is too much for the SMTs, especially DHs, citing the lack of availability of adequate teachers in schools as well as physical resources such as conducive classroom for conducive academic engagements. The lack of the plethora of resources results in the lack of self-motivation since there is minimal support in performing their duty to the best of their abilities. It is therefore, the duty of the Departmental Head to effectively mobilise resources for his or her teacher to achieve quality teaching practices. Shekai and Nikooparvar (2012) define mobilisation as the process of marshalling or harnessing things, human and non-human into circulation motion, making them readily available for action and securing attainment of additional resources for an organisation are tantamount to mobilising for a particular course.

2.6 Rural secondary schools

According to the Department of Basic Education's Rural Education Policy (Republic of South Africa, 2017, p.6), rural areas are "farms and traditional areas characterised by low population density, low levels of economic activities and low levels of infrastructure." The policy further defines secondary school as "a school that offers all or a selection of grades from Grade 8 to Grade 12." Rural secondary schools are located in farms and places under traditional tribal authority distant from urban and peri-urban areas. These places are "characterised by low economic activities, transport, access to technological developments and are geographically isolated, among others" (Republic of South Africa, 2017, p. 6). The schools have Grades 8 to 12 teaching and learning programmes. Rural schools have high needs of resources including teachers (low teacher retention) and infrastructure (Du Plessis, 2014).

2.7 Leading in the midst of a crisis

A crisis is an urgent situation that requires immediate and decisive action by an organisation and, in particular, by the leaders of the organisation. Coombs (2007, pp. 2-3), for example,

defines a crisis as; ‘the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organisation’s performance and generate negative outcomes’. Alternatively, Pearson and Clair (2008, p. 60) define a crisis as; ‘a low probability, high impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made quickly’. In the context of a school, a crisis can be regarded as any urgent situation that requires the school leader to take fast and decisive action. The contents of the definitions above fits those that have brought about by COVID-19 pandemic in schools since it was unexpected as it is not a recurring occurrence (Smith & Riley, 2012). Each crisis provides its own challenges and opportunities; hence, they require flexibility by the school leaders.

COVID-19 pandemic has presented its own unique challenges, school leaders are caught in the unfavourable position of being the pinch point in the system. They are reliant on guidance about COVID-19 responses, processes, procedures, and protocols from above. These can change, almost overnight, depending on how the virus develops. Simultaneously, school leaders are dealing with fluid and changing staffing situations meaning they are having to do much more with less. The social distancing of staff and students means extra work and extra pressure on those staff who can return to work. Every expectation either from above or below asks more of school leaders professionally and personally. Netolicky (2020) notes that ‘in a time of crisis, leaders must act swiftly and with foresight but also with careful consideration of options, consequences and side effects of actions taken’. That is why governments and schools around the globe are ensuring that teaching and learning continues during the height of the pandemic, in ways appropriate to their contexts. Hence, this study sought to explore the instructional leadership experiences of DHs in rural contexts as their contexts are predominantly deprived of adequate learning resources.

2.8 Challenges facing Departmental Heads

There are many challenges that face Departmental Heads and I have highlighted some of them in the previous sections. For purposes of this discussion, I focus on only two of them and these are underutilisation by school principals and a lack of resources. These two are discussed below.

Underutilisation by school principals

It is reported in the literature that there are schools with DHs who feel that they are being underutilised and misused by their principals (Lee, Seashore Louis, & Anderson, (2012). These DHs feel that their roles are being reduced to endorse principals' decisions or desires without contributing to the decision-making processes. Although that may be true, some DHs prefer to be given directives by the principals, to ensure they manage and successfully complete their tasks. Some principals have resorted to only assigning them minimal work or being delegated less challenging work to avoid failure. In some cases, the DHs lack knowledge, experience and understanding of their roles, and this makes the principal to be hesitant in giving them work, fearing that they will not do it properly, thus, resulting in failing to or not reaching deadlines (Leithwood, 2016). These challenges make me wonder how then the DHs understand their instructional leadership roles to ensure quality teaching and learning. It is for this reason that I have decided to undertake this study to explore the DHs understandings of their instructional leadership under these challenges and ambiguities clouding their professional roles.

There is minimal to no professional support for DHs offered by the principals as Mestry (2017) argues in his study that principals may not be able to assist DHs due of the little leadership and management preparedness they received prior to assuming their roles. The support from the school management may assist the DHs to be more productive in their duties. Sometimes, DHs are expected to perform miracles in their leadership without the necessary support from the principal (Maddock & Maroun, 2018). Where such support from the principal is not forthcoming, DHs become reluctant to act decisively; hence, limiting their effectiveness. To mitigate this barrier, the SMT must create a culture of supporting and working together to achieve the vision of the school. This has led to Mestry (2017) calling for the Department of Basic Education to make leadership and management programmes compulsory for school leaders.

Lack of resources

Some Departmental Heads view and complain about the lack of resources as one of the barriers to enacting their instructional practices efficiently (Bantwini, 2010). Resources like textbooks, classroom space, laboratory equipment, audio-visual equipment, internet, computers and data

for research purposes (Simpson et al., 2016). DHs lament the lack of these various resources as a major factor that leads to them performing poorly (Seobi & Wood, 2016). Tapala (2019) concedes that if DHs are provided with all the resources they need to enact their instructional practices, their chances of succeeding in their roles is increased. The lack of available educators is a major challenge for DHs as they have to manage and manoeuvre the shortfalls. Educators are one of the main resources of instructional leadership, the DHs must effectively manage their workloads to ensure their effectiveness (Tapala, 2019). Failure to effectively manage and organise their human resource personnel can lead to DHs being unable to stamp their instructional leadership practices in their departments.

2.9 Theoretical framework

According to Imenda (2014), a framework is used in research as a guide that helps researchers to direct their quest to generate data and to determine how the findings speak to the framework. In a nutshell, a framework acts as a guideline for the researcher in giving meaning and understanding to every stage and related aspects of the study. To get an understanding of the instructional leadership experiences of DHs leading in rural secondary schools in the midst of a pandemic, I adopted Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership model and Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky's (2009) Adaptive leadership theory as the theoretical framework.

2.8.1 Instructional leadership theory

This study features two theoretical frameworks. In this first section I will commence by discussing the instructional leadership theory and thereafter, I will focus my discussion on the adaptive leadership theory.

Various variants of the instructional leadership model have been proposed by various scholars (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985a; Leithwood, Begley & Cousins, 1990; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Van de Grift, 1989, 1990; Villanova et al., 1981). For the purpose of this study, I will adopt the model proposed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985a) since it is directly related to my research title and is the one that is frequented by empirical researchers (Hallinger & Heck, 1996a). Instructional leadership is a concept that is still evolving in both its meaning and models (Hallinger, 2005). Leithwood (1999) notes that

instructional leadership assumes that school leaders channel their focus and attention to the behaviour of teachers as they occupy activities that directly affect students' growth. This position seems to be consistent with the narrow purview of analysis held by Sheppard (1996). Leithwood (1999) conceptualises instructional leadership as the principal's actions that have a direct impact on teaching and learning such as class supervision. However, a broader conceptualisations of instructional leadership describes this model as all the management activities directly linked to teaching and learning as well as other functions that account for learner achievement in schools (Rowan et al., 1982; Hallinger, 2003; 2008; Murphy, 1990).

In the early 1980s, Hallinger and Murphy (1985) created a framework of instructional leadership with three dimensions and ten job descriptors as illustrated in Figure 2.1 below. This variant of the instructional leadership model brings to the fore a thoroughly comprehensive perspective on the concept of instructional leadership, which is, leading teaching and learning in schools.



Figure 2.1: Hallinger and Murphy's instructional leadership model of 1985.

The Instructional Leadership Model of Hallinger and Murphy (1985) has three dimensional functions composed of defining the school's mission, managing the instructional programme and promoting a positive school learning climate (Hallinger, 2003; 2005; 2010 Hallinger & Murphy, 1987). These dimensional functions are further expanded into ten instructional leadership behaviours and practices, which are framing clear school goals, communicating clear school goals, supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating curriculum, monitoring

student development, protecting instructional period, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, promoting professional development, providing incentives for learning (Hallinger, 2009).

The first dimension in Hallinger and Murphy's model of defining the school goal includes the key job descriptors of framing school goals and communicating school goals. Instructional leaders work in collaboration with teaching staff and parents to locate school-based areas of improvement to frame relevant and attainable school goals (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The function of communicating school goals refers to the manner in which instructional leaders communicate the importance of school goals to the teaching staff, learners and their parents. School leaders can achieve this through the use of various communication models such as handbooks, staff meetings, school assemblies, conversations with staff or students, bulletin boards, and teacher and parent meetings.

The second dimension in the Hallinger and Murphy (1985) model refers to managing the instructional programme. This is the core function of the leadership practices of instructional leaders. Managing the instructional programme of the school is a function that is directly linked to the coordination of the curriculum, supervision and evaluation of instruction, and monitoring learners' progress (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). This function requires instructional leaders to play an active role in stimulating, supervising and monitoring teaching and learning in the school (Hallinger, 2005). Maintaining a highly visible presence in the school, providing consistent praise and feedback to the teaching staff about their classroom performance and/or behaviours and facilitating the maintenance of allocated instructional time are facets of the job descriptors for instructional leaders (Alig-Mielcarek & Miskel, 2005). These functions described by Alig-Mielcarek and Miske (2005) present clearly the behaviours and practices involved in managing teaching and learning. As instructional leaders, school leaders possess adequate knowledge on curriculum matters, and are inclined to share that knowledge by motivating teachers towards shared school goal (Alig-Mielcarek & Miskel, 2005). Additionally, instructional leaders are directly involved in the instructional programme of the school and can account for teachers and learner performance due to their high visibility in school. Furthermore, the task of coordinating the curriculum is directed towards creating a platform for teacher collaboration in order to align curriculum delivery with the school's shared goals (Lyon, 2010). By creating a platform for teacher collaboration, instructional leaders help to stimulate a positive learning climate for learners in their schools.

The third function identified by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) in their model is the development and promotion of a positive school learning climate. Instructional leaders work in a way that maintains a positive school learning climate at all times by encouraging teacher collaboration, protecting the allocated instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, developing high expectations and standards and providing incentives for learning. The intentions and characteristics of this dimension are broad. This is because it incorporates the activities that are imperative for the promotion and maintenance of a positive academic culture of continuous improvement. The mentioned behaviours and instructional leadership practices reaffirm the notion that effective schools thrive on an academic environment that is fertile for quality teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2005).

Despite the criticism levelled against the instructional leadership model, empirical evidence from findings on studies researching effective schools indicate that instructional leadership plays a central role in effective schools (Hallinger, 2005). Further criticism of this model stems from its insistence of focusing on teaching and learning, thus, neglecting other functions of school management (Goddard, 2003; Goddard, Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Hallinger, 2003; Prytula et al., 2013). Probing into the highlighted instructional leadership behaviours, practices and functions, stimulates further queries regarding how the context schools are located in inform the instructional leaders' behaviours, practices and functions. Therefore, the following section will discuss the Adaptive leadership theory.

2.9.2 Adaptive Leadership Theory

This study is also underpinned by the Adaptive Leadership Theory which I used as my second theoretical framework. I chose to use the Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) model which describes the evolution of leadership theories such as situational, transformational, contingency and complexity theories. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) define adaptive leadership as “the practice of mobilising people to tackle tough challenges through debates and creative thinking, identifying opportunities to thrive.” Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) believe in modifying existing systems to thriving and excelling under new environments.

In unprecedented times such as the uncertainty brought by COVID-19 pandemic, Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) believe such times call for a different leadership model. They see the need for a different leadership model to be employed because of the different factors that affects different institutions. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009, p. 64) see the need to practice “adaptive leadership” which brings closure to the past and allows moving forward through using the “turbulence of the present”. In the late 2000s, Karp and Helgo (2009) identified “managing people amid chaos, uncertainty and complexity has become the main challenge for organisations of every kind, owing to the nature of today’s economy” (p. 81). Even as early as the mid-90s, Sarros and Woodman (1993) asserted that exerting successful leadership is difficult in a time clouded by chaos.

According to Heifetz, Kania and Kramer (2004), Adaptive leaders understand leadership to be a group process where colleagues work collaboratively to solve problems. This process involves members of the group focusing on specific challenges at hand and alter the problem solving methods previously utilised. This is done by tapping into the knowledge of those who know the culture of the organisation, their knowledge and experiences of the organisation are used to formulate solutions to solve problems with the aim of achieving change. This change is achieved by setting in motion constructive debates and creative thinking. According to Heifetz et al. (2004), Adaptive leadership encourages colleagues to collaborate to develop solutions by debating and using creative thinking to contextualise solutions. Since the adaptive leadership model advocates for collaboration to generate solutions, the model also acts as a tool of ensuring commitment from members as they are all actively involved in generating the desired solutions.

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) identified two types of challenges that leaders are confronted with. They identified these challenges as technical and adaptive challenges. Technical challenges are very complex in nature, even though they may seem to be easily defined and have known solutions. With technical challenges, Heifetz and Linsky (2002) identified that anyone with adequate organisational knowledge can resolve them as they have ready-made solutions. However, adaptive problems are not easy to define as the expertise, knowledge, experience and skills previously used to solve problems are no longer applicable (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). This is because these challenges are systemic and do not have ready-made solutions and hence, they require creativity and learning. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) further assert that adaptive challenges require experimentations, innovations and changes from several areas

in the organisation. To thrive and excel in the organisation, people need to readjust their thinking patterns to learn new ways, attitudes and values (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009).

| Kind of challenge | Problem definition | Solution | Locus of work |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Technical | Clear | Clear | Authority |
| Technical and Adaptive | Clear | Requires learning | Authority and stakeholders |
| Adaptive | Requires learning | Requires learning | stakeholders |

Table 1: Distinguishing technical challenges and adaptive challenges (adapted from Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009).

The above table, extracted from Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) distinguishes between technical problems and adaptive challenges. The table indicates that challenges are not necessarily packaged as either ‘technical’ or ‘adaptive’. The majority of challenges incorporates elements of both technical and adaptive characteristics which requires creativity and collaboration. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) identify three unique characteristics of adaptive challenges. First, they indicate that adaptive challenges have non-linear inputs and outputs. As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, schools situated in rural contexts are engulfed by challenges that are unique in nature when compared to schools situated in other contexts. The impact of these challenges has been further exacerbated by the surge of the Covid-19 pandemic which is unpredictable and frequently changes. This has made it difficult for DHs in schools to formulate rigid plans of dealing with the effects of this pandemic on teaching and learning. For the DHs to be able to formulate solutions to this pandemic, they would need to interact with the contextual variable and hence, outputs would not be predictable.

Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) are of the view that leaders who seek solutions during a period of adaptation should not engage challenges with comprehensive plans detailing big leap forward. As a result of the changing nature of the adaptive challenges, they require complex and flexible systems that can easily generate unpredictable responses. When responding to adaptive challenges, it should be expected for some formulated solutions to fail while others may work and provide leaders with new information.

Secondly, Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) further posit that dealing with adaptive challenges should not be limited to formal authority only. Adaptive challenges requires that

leaders collaborate with other stakeholders formulate solutions for the challenges at hand. The challenge with working collaboratively with other stakeholders, as alluded by Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009), is that these stakeholders may not necessarily share the same end goal. Whilst this collaboration may result in finding solutions for to the problem, it can also not be ignored that different people have different views about things should be done. People have different beliefs, values, skill and knowledge that leaders have to understand. Making progress requires leaders to influence other people to change their priorities, beliefs, habits and loyalties. In the case of my study, the DHs as instructional leaders have to mobilise discovery, shed certain embedded ways of doing things, tolerate losses and generating new capacity.to change (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). It is indicated in Ronfeldt et al. (2013) study that whilst some staff members were willing to go an extra mile to improve the performance levels of their learner's, not all staff members participated. The indication in aforementioned study is that even when benefits are evident they may still be viewed differently by different people.

Adaptive challenges are also characterised by the fact that solutions that may have been a success before may be outdated in adaptive challenges (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). Consistent adaptation and modification of tactics and strategies is key for adaptive leaders to succeed. The adaptation and modification of tactics and strategies is important because a solution that may have been a success previously may not work this time around. This is factored by the nature of the problem, the people involved and the timing of the challenge occurred.

According to Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009), Adaptive leadership is an iterative process involving three key activities: (1) observing events and patterns around you; (2) interpreting what you are observing; and (3) designing interventions based on the observations and interpretations to address the adaptive challenge you have identified. Each of these activities builds on the ones that come before it and the process overall is iterative, you repeatedly refine your observations, interpretations, and interventions. Figure 2 presented as part of the discussion below illustrates this adaptive leadership process. Each activity of the process is also briefly discussed below.

Observing events and patterns

Essentially, an adaptive leader observes events and patterns as they unfold, taking in this information as raw as it is without formulating judgements or making assumptions about the

meanings of this information. The observed information needs to be fascicled when the situation has been thoroughly observed and emerging patterns highlighted. Adaptive leadership acknowledges that the same event can be observed differently by different people depending on their own personal experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, it is encouraged that Adaptive leaders should make the observation process as objectively as they can. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) note that observing objectively can be a daunting activity especially while the adaptive leader is in the middle of the action in an organisation. They recommend that leaders should try to take themselves momentarily out of the action and simply observe the situations.

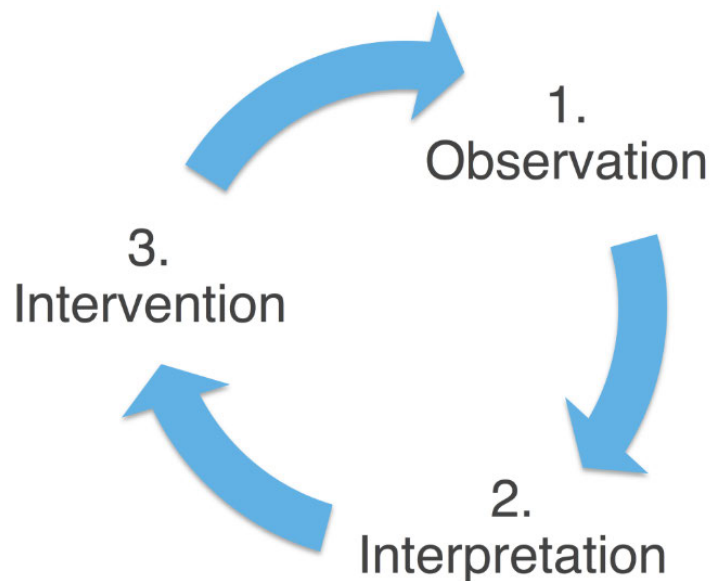


Figure 2: Adaptive leadership process adapted from Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009)
Interpreting observations

When an event has been observed, the following activity in Adaptive leadership involves interpreting what has been observed. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) note that the activity of interpreting observations is the most challenging. This activity makes sense of what you are getting from your observations, keeping in mind that different interpretations may be formed by other people even though they also observed the same event. The initial step of this activity is to formulate provisional interpreting by developing multiple-hypotheses about what you have observed. At the same time the Adaptive leader must keep in mind that the developed hypotheses are not a reality; they are just hypotheses. The idea of developing multiple hypotheses is to make interpretations as accurate as possible by engaging your own interpretations with the group's preferred interpretations. A leader identifies issues that engage

the most attention and counteract avoidance mechanisms such as denial, scapegoating, pretending the problem is technical or attacking individuals rather than issues. It is noted that it may not be possible for an individual to form and evaluate all the possible interpretations that could be made from a single set of observations. The idea is to get leaders to view the same set of data from multiple perspectives from different people. Reflection and continuous learning of new ways to interpret what goes on around the institution and new ways to carry out work is entrenched.

Designing interventions

Lastly, after observations and interpretations of the event have been made, interventions strategies can now be designed in response to the adaptive challenge (Heifetz et al., 2009). The leader should consider the resources available and the context. When designing the intervention strategy, an adaptive leader should influence people to take responsibility for the problem, but at a rate they can handle. The leader creates a conducive working environment for solving the adaptive challenge by ensuring distress levels are kept low and challenge people to rethink the issues at stake.

The distinctive feature of leading adaptive change is that the leader of the organisation must form a connection with the values, beliefs, and anxieties of all involved in the organisation (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) It involves drawing upon all the available resources, skills and wisdom. Furthermore, leadership is necessary when logic is not the answer. Adaptive leadership involves giving new direction to who have not been convinced by logic and facts (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). This requires a leader to adapt, to use his mental models, to capture the context and make sense of it, to influence others towards well thought activities and process that seek to enhance achievement of organisational goals.

2.10 Chapter summary

This chapter presented a discussion of the review of literature. The chapter intended to provide an understanding of the work done by other scholars in the research study phenomenon.. The reviewed literature portrays national and international perspectives in instructional leadership, rural schools and leading in the midst of a crisis. Instructional leadership theory and the

adaptive leadership theory were presented as theoretical frameworks underpinning this study. The following chapter will present research design and methodology that informed the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the Departmental Heads' instructional leadership experiences in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. The previous chapter reviewed findings from research conducted in local, continental as well as international literature on instructional and adaptive leadership in the midst of a crisis. The discussed literature focused mainly on the practices of Departmental Heads. The main intention of this chapter was to provide a discussion on the research design and methodology that underpinned this study. It will provide an overview of the research methodology and the design choices I have made. To begin, I discuss the interpretive research paradigm and qualitative methodological approach adopted. Next, I discuss the case study research design. I also outline the methods of data generation and highlight why these data generation methods were suitable for this study. This chapter also describes the purposive sampling procedure, explains how the data was analysed, describes the ethical considerations and highlights how the study was strengthened regarding trustworthiness.

3.2 Research paradigm

Ling and Ling (2020) define research paradigm as a philosophical way of thinking. In the contextual domain of empirical research, many researchers describe a paradigm as the researcher's philosophical lens of viewing the world and scrutinising the research phenomenon under study (Maree, 2009). There are a variety of paradigms that researchers may decide to adopt as their lens of viewing the world. These paradigms can be encapsulated into three main taxonomies: positivist, interpretive and critical paradigms.

This study is rooted in the interpretive paradigm. Thanh and Thanh (2015) define this paradigm as a method that seeks to understand why people behave and interact in the manner they do. The interpretive paradigm's nature is to understand how participants construct meanings in their daily events. Thanh and Thanh (2015) further emphasise that in this paradigm no single reality exists as social and personal contexts allow for the creation of multiple realities. With

this in mind, Guba and Lincoln (1994) affirm that the truth is not merely discovered by the researcher, but it is constructed through the interactions between the researcher and the participants. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) also noted a characteristic of this paradigm that it seeks to understand the meanings rather than the cause and effect. To achieve this, researchers must make attempts to understand the participants from within (Thomas, 2015). In the context of this study, the aim was to explore how DHs experienced instructional leadership during COVID-19 pandemic in rural secondary schools. Interpretive paradigm acknowledges that there are multiple truths that exists. Schools had different people, times and resources involved when dealing with the pandemic. As an interpretivist, I believe that diverse truths would emerge from the participants.

By adopting the interpretive paradigm, I wanted to allow the participants to share their full experiences of the phenomenon that is under study. This view is supported by Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey (2011 p.15) who say that the “reality is social constructed as people’s experiences occur within social, cultural, historical or personal contexts.” In this study, the DHs discussed their experiences of leading teaching and learning during COVID-19 pandemic in rural contexts. The paradigm is relevant for understanding how the characteristics of rural settings impacted on DHs’ abilities to enact their instructional leadership practices in secondary schools.

3.3 Research approach

Creswell and Poth (2016) define research approach as a set of directions and instructions that researchers need to be adhered to when addressing a research problem. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) posit that the purpose of the research approach is to identify a suitable and justifiable plan of action that can be used to produce empirical evidence that is in line with the research questions. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) further note that a research approach should follow an organised sequence to not only address the research question but to also enhance the validity of the study. For the success of this study it was very crucial that I adopted the most suitable approach before conducting my study. The two most prevalent approaches to research are quantitative and qualitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Creswell (2014) distinguishes between the two approaches arguing that quantitative is characterised by the use of mathematics and numerical interpretation of data while on the other hand, a qualitative approach to research tends to shy away from the use of numeracy. The emphasis of qualitative

approach is placed on gathering data from natural settings and data are in the form of words, not numbers (Creswell, 2013). In qualitative research participants are encouraged to share their experiences. Qualitative research is an approach underpinned by investigating and exploring participants' understandings of a certain problem or situation (Creswell, 2014).

Van Gog and Peas (2013, p. 39) defines a qualitative approach to research as one that produces findings “real –world settings, wherein the phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally”. Creswell (2014) takes it a step further by describing qualitative studies as research where the researcher is heavily involved in the interpretation of data and analyses of cases in their social and cultural context. Lichtman (2016) further concurs with the views of Creswell (2014) that although qualitative research focuses on a smaller amount of data than with a quantitative method, the researcher is able to make significant conclusions and recommendations. It is argued by Creswell (2013) that this type of research approach is a type of empirical research that places in substantiality on the manner in which participants respond and react during the face to face interactions with the researcher. Data is therefore transcribed *verbatim* to a written form.

Based on the scholarly definitions given in the above paragraph, I considered the use of qualitative approach as it is most appropriate and suitable when the aim is to seek a greater understanding of the topic in question. I aimed at uncovering depth rather than quantity in understanding the instructional leadership experiences of DHs during the heights of COVID-19 pandemic in rural secondary school. I heavily leaned on guided conversations with DHs who have first-hand experience to the research phenomenon. The study aimed at gaining an understanding beyond what is on the surface by probing further into the policies and practices that guided the work of the DHs in the midst of this torrid time. Therefore, for this reason a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it allowed me to analyse verbal and textual responses.

3.4 Research design

This study adopted a case study as its research design. This choice is influenced by a number of factors. Firstly, I have first-hand experience with this design as I used it in my B.Ed. Honours degree research and had relative success with it. Secondly, this study adopts design to formulate relations between the participants and the researcher appealed to me as this has the potential to

achieve an in depth understanding of the research phenomenon. A case study is thus a research design that is better suited for the achievement of the above. I chose it to explore the DHs' instructional leadership experiences in rural secondary schools during COVID-19 pandemic.

A case study design is described as a rigorous exploration approach that allows researchers to search and discover a researched phenomenon of the study (Flick, 2018), meaning a certain level of due diligence must be upheld. Flick (2018) further supports the use of a case study as it brings simplicity to the exploration of the research phenomenon. This view is in line with the aims of this study as it aims at gaining an insight on the exploration of the instructional leadership experiences of DHs who are leading in the disadvantaged rural settings during this unprecedented time of COVID-19. These interactions help to probe deeply and to analyse vehemently the multi-truths constituted in the phenomena (Cohen et al., 2011). In studies that seek the 'what is it like', case studies are appropriate as they allow the researcher to be up close and take advantage of the relations case studies allow to gain thick descriptions. Case study allowed me as a researcher to be exposed to the real context of the research phenomenon and behaviours of DHs and situation that were being researched. A case study provided insightful learning about DHs' instructional leadership practices in rural secondary school.

3.5 Research sampling

Research sampling is defined by Christiansen and Bertram (2014) as making decisions about which individuals will act as participants, settings, events or behaviours to focus the study on. Taherdoost (2016) regards sampling as a process utilised to study a small portion of the populations' response to an intervention, which can be transferable to a larger population with similar traits. Creswell (2013) concurs that in order to produce empirical evidence about a large population, it is preferable to look at a small portion of it. Maree (2012) also concurs that sampling must be performed with a specific purpose in mind, to maintain manageability of the research. Since it is almost impossible to use the whole population as participants in the study due to factors such as time, expense and accessibility, a manageable sub-group is selected to act as a representation of the whole population. Robinson (2014) correlates this statement as he adds that, sampling is a process of selecting a much slimmer and manageable number of participants to participate in the research.

Educational research is flooded with a variety of sampling techniques which are often classified into two common groupings, probability and non-probability sampling. Probability samples

include random stratified sampling, cluster sampling, stage sampling, and multi-phase sampling, whereas non-probability samples include convenience sampling, quota sampling, and purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 2011). For the purpose of maximising data capture, this study used a combination of purposive and convenience sampling which both can be categorised under the non-probability group. The choice of the use of these sampling techniques satisfied the needs of this study as the specific targeted group of DHs assumed to have thick data were purposively sampled.

3.5.1 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling technique was adopted as a participant recruitment strategy. Robinson (2014) states that purposive sampling method is most effective when the aim is to acquire rich and thick data by selecting information-rich participants. Two DHs from each of the three rural secondary schools were purposively selected. I decided to pin this study on rural schools because instructional leadership in the midst of a crisis is a terrain that is under researched in rural contexts. Selecting these participants was also to avoid having a wider pool of participants which could possibly have compromised the validity and accuracy of the findings of the study. This view is supported by Maree (2012) who mentions the importance of qualitative researchers being able to understand the setting being studied. Therefore, it is wise for qualitative researchers to purposefully select small samples that are data thick. The sampled participants are in junior leadership positions in their schools; therefore, their experiences of instructional leadership has a direct impact on the instructional culture of the school, this makes them trusted for being data rich participants for the purpose of this study. In bigger schools which have more than two DHs, I selected DHs who formed part of the School COVID-19 committee.

3.5.2 Convenience sampling

Convenience sampling is defined by Maree (2012) as a situation where the researcher's choice of participants is influenced by easy accessibility that is convenient for the researcher. Christiansen, Bertram and Land (2010) corroborate Maree's (2011) description that convenience sampling is choosing a sample which will make it easier for the researcher to access at any will. This study also adopted convenience sampling because I chose teachers from schools that are within a five-kilometre radius from where I stay. This study lacked any

form of funding; therefore, to travel long distances to the research sites would inconvenience the researcher in terms of expenses involved. Hence, it was important that the schools I selected were not too far from where I reside so that travel expenses were kept at an absolute minimum. The good relations I have with the schools also made it easier for myself to access my participants whenever I was available.

3.6 Data generation methods

Bulmer (2000) states that in empirical research, data generation is the most critical phase. According to Creswell (2013), data generation methods can also be defined as strategies used to generate data for empirical research. Case studies are understood to produce thick data that may be used to provide a holistic analysis of the phenomenon under study. Bulmer (2000) further aligns with the above statement and further posits that issues of trustworthiness as well as the validity of the study are further reiterated by the use of multiple data generation methods. Two methods were used in this study as means of generating data. These methods included semi-structured interviews and documents review. These are discussed below.

3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are the most leading method of generating data in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2011). The role of interviews in qualitative research is to allow the participants the opportunity to perceive the world through their perception. Cohen et al. (2011, p. 349) define interviews as “an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, which sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production”. Seidman (2013) states that participants are interviewed because the researcher is interested in their stories. Seidman (2013) further shared his views on interviews as a two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks the participants questions to generate data and to learn about ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviours of the participant while participants answer back.

I had to choose from a variety of types of interviews that are on offer for researchers in qualitative studies, and these are unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. I chose semi-structured, to be conducted virtually via Zoom Meeting to keep in line with the government and University protocols of social distancing to curb the spread of COVID-19. Semi-structured interviews are defined by McMillan and Schumacher (2010) as open response questions that help the researcher to obtain the participants’ meanings and

understandings of the occurrence of events. In semi-structured interviews the researcher has the opportunity to probe further and ask for clarification if the need arises (Maree, 2011). This study sought to explore instructional leadership experiences of DHs who are leading in rural secondary schools in the midst of COVID-19 crisis. Semi-structured interviews are therefore, best placed to achieve this objective as Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2010) claim that the interview constitutes learning process for both the researcher and the participant. This is because such a conversation brings especially the experiences of the interviewee and in the meantime, the interviewer use this opportunity to further probe and seek clarity on some matters. Because of the pandemic that has interrupted normality, the interviews were done through the use of remote platforms such as Zoom Meeting. Data for connectivity purposes was bought for the participants and those who were not familiar with such remote platforms were given a mini workshop so they can be familiar with the tools. All interviews commenced with nature and purpose of the whole process being communicated to the participants.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to come up with resolutions or supply additional information on their perception of events, but the central focus was fundamentally on their personal views of how they experienced instructional leadership during COVID-19 pandemic. The semi-structured interview requires that a researcher is attentive to the responses of the participants so that the researcher can identify new emerging lines of inquiry that are directly related to the phenomenon being explored and probe them. As data generation method, semi-structured interviews have had limitations and drawbacks levelled against them. It has been pointed out that they are expensive in terms of time, and financially. Nagle and Williams (2013) contend that conducting interviews can be too expensive and can exceed available resources as the research has to travel to from the research site. These types of interviews are also open to misinterpretation and biasness from the interviewer; they may at times cause inconvenience to the participants (Cohen et al., 2011). Semi-structured Zoom interviews were time consuming, ranging from setting them up to conducting them; it was difficult to get time that was favourable to the participants' schedule. Some participants were equally articulate and proved to be not as forthcoming and insightful (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014), resulting in gaps in generated data, thus causing an imbalance. Furthermore, the flexibility of the verbal conversation resulted in a less systematic data that required intense organisation and analysis for comparability of responses. The conversations often exceeded anticipated timeframe thus, resulting in voluminous, textured data generated; it took longer time to sort and analyse data. Researcher biasness is not the only limitation levelled against semi-structured interviews, there

is also the possibility of participant biasness as they can both conceal or over-elaborate information for reasons of fear or trying to impress myself.

de Vos (2011) holds the notion that interviews have a strong point in that they are a valuable way of sourcing high volumes of data in a short span and are an especially productive way of obtaining depth in data. The richness of data that interviews provide is unmatched as evident from Gilham's (2000, p. 10) assertion that "the positive feature of interviews is the richness and vividness of the data it turns up which enables one to see and understand what is reflected rather than more abstractly in other kinds of data such as statistical summaries". However, interviews also have limitations. To minimise biases, I have already discussed above, I remained partial and did not lean towards any sides. I took the data that was supplied by participants at face value, probing questions were constantly asked for eliciting additional details on practices. For every question I asked, whether it was one of the main research questions or probing questions, the participants had enough time to respond without being interrupted or influenced. I used a digital audio-recorder and the record option on the Zoom Meeting to record the *verbatim* form of the conversations with the aim of later transferring them to written form. Since it forms part of the ethical considerations, the purpose and the significance of the use of the audio-recorder was delicately discussed with the participants. Audio Recorder helps to maintain authenticity of the interviews.

3.7 Data Analysis

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) describe data analysis in a qualitative study as a process whereby the researcher organises, accounts for and explains the data. Yin (2014) holds a similar view by describing data analysis as a process of classifying and tabularising data. Rallis and Rossman (2012) view data analysis as a difficult process because of the central role the researcher must play in making meaning of the piles of data gathered during the interview phase. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) seem to agree that qualitative data analysis is a difficult process by their assertion that it requires a great amount of methodological knowledge and intellectual competence. For analysis purposes, generated data was transcribed *verbatim* to written form. Data transcriptions provided accurate account (Cohan, Manion & Morison, 2011; Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2008) states that data analysis in qualitative studies requires delicate understanding of how to make meaning of the text and images so that the researcher can have

deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This study analysed the data using De Vos's (2010) model which suggests that analysing data involves three phases; namely, sorting, structuring and sense making of the generated information. Data generated was examined through the lenses of thematic content analysis, hence, themes started to appear from the patterns, discrepancies and disjuncture in data generated from participants.

My data sources for this analysis included semi-structured interviews and documents reviews. The whole process of converting "raw" data to presentable final patterns of meaning was a critical phase of this research which was also a strenuous process. Creswell (2014) and De Vos (2010) outlines a four-step approach that can be followed to analyse qualitative data. Whilst I did not follow them in a linear manner, from the bottom to the top, it guided the process of making meaning of the research data. In order to analyse the data from interviews, the actual words recorded must be transcribed *verbatim*. According to Henning et al. (2004), audio-recording and transcribing are paramount as it allows the researcher to organise and prepare data analysis. In this study, I transcribed the interviews myself with the aim of familiarising myself with the data and making meaning of it. The online interviews with the participants were recorded for this specific reason. This process proved to be time consuming as the interviews consisted high volumes of data that had to be traced, tracked and categorised. Once this process was completed, I started reading the transcriptions repeatedly so that I could make corrections against the recorded visuals. Thereafter, the process of coding the data commenced. The second step included using ideas from the participants' responses to create a general picture that is influenced by the literature that has been reviewed. For this step to be successful, it was imperative that I kept on revisiting the data I have transcribed. Thirdly, as I have had a general idea of the data I had in my possession, after intensive analysis I began to generate codes. The process of coding is defined by Creswell (2014) as organising the data by grouping chunks containing similar information. I proceeded to generate segments by identifying paragraphs and sentences that spoke to one another.

The final step involved creating themes based on the segments I had developed in the previous step. This process was continuously interrupted as new themes kept on emerging. Data gathered from document analysis was infused to the themes that had emerged to ensure the process of triangulation acknowledged as it enhances the trustworthiness of the study. The following section discusses measures that were taken to ensure trustworthiness of the study.

3.8 Issues of trustworthiness

Research must have the ability to produce findings, conclusions and recommendations that are both realistic and credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unlike other forms of research, qualitative studies have developed their own techniques of ensuring that the findings and conclusions that are made can be regarded as trustworthy. This study adopted Lincoln and Guba's framework of ensuring the findings are truthful. Their framework is underpinned by four criteria which are discussed further below, they include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

3.8.1 Credibility

It is of utmost importance that the researcher ensures credibility of the study. To ensure data credibility, I adopted multiple data generation methods. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), establishing trustworthiness is one of the most important factors in ensuring credibility. The most common way of ensuring credibility is to ensure that each participant gave consent before participating in the study; thus, all participation was voluntary with no coercion of any kind. Ultimately, this means the research findings can be trusted because none of the participants were interviewed under duress, their participation was voluntarily without any act of compulsion. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further explain that credibility for the research findings to be considered as credible, they must display a clear reflection that the presented data is drawn from the participants and is a true reflection of a participant's views. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also argue that it is important for the researcher to create a mutual understanding between himself and the research participants. This technique aimed at promoting the credibility of the study. I encouraged participants to contribute ideas and talk without fear of losing credibility. During our interviews I also used probing questions to elicit more data.

The participants were encouraged to answer the questions in any of the official languages, while they were also encouraged to be as truthful as they can without concealing any major information. Furthermore, credibility was enhanced by member-checking where transcripts together with field notes, data analysis and findings were sent back to the participants for double checking. Bitsch (2005) asserts that member-checking allows the participants to check that what is displayed in the transcripts is a true reflection of what they said. They make

corrections on what they deem to be inaccurate. This process was done before the research reports were compiled.

3.8.2 Transferability

In qualitative research studies there are a variety of ways to enhance the transferability of the findings. Transferability denotes to the level to which the research findings can be applied and prove useful in similar contexts and settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure a high level of transferability of this study to contexts with similar settings, as a researcher I made a thick description of the process that underpinned the process of data generation, in that way, readers can make comparisons with what situation that emerge in their contexts. This study ensured transferability by giving precise details of information regarding the number of research sites and where they were based; the number of participants involved; the methods of data generation utilised and the number and the period of data generation sessions. This was done in order to ensure that the study had a clear footprint so any researcher who wants to replicate the study can be able to do so.

3.8.3 Dependability

Cohen et al. (2011) asserts that dependability refers to how consistent the research findings are. Bitsch (2005, p. 86) states that dependability refers to “the stability of findings over time”. In an attempt to address dependability, the processes within the study should be reported in detail. In that way, findings from semi-structured interviews could be checked against those generated from the review of documents. Lietz, Langer and Furman (2006) hold the view that selection of research instruments becomes instrumental in assisting the researcher to maintain a thick line of impartiality and unbiasedness that could have a negative impact on the accuracy of the findings.

3.8.4 Confirmability

In qualitative research, the process of confirmability concerns itself with whether the findings accurately reflect the experiences and ideas of the participants and it assures that the position of a researcher does not influence the findings (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) view confirmability as a technique that is used to ensure that presented findings are not based on the researcher’s biases and personal preferences. Through the use of confirmability, it is imperative

for the researchers to suspend their assumptions and views, therefore, I had to ensure that my own assumptions and interpretations were set aside and had to verify all data generated from the participants. All participants were given the same set of questions. A voice recorder was used to serve as proof that the data generated was indeed provided by the participants. Participants were sent transcripts of our interviews so they can clarify and rectify misunderstandings in instances where such may have occurred.

3.9 Ethical considerations

According to Denscombe (2014, p. 175), “ethics concerns the system of moral principles by which individuals can judge their actions as right or wrong, good or bad.” In other words, it is of paramount importance in the academic sphere that research is always conducted within strict ethical standards. Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006) affirm that this section of research assists in researchers to avoid research pitfalls and misuse; ethics also compel accountability of the researchers; who need to be guided by and to respect ethics. Therefore, the University of KwaZulu-Natal always tries to ensure that all researchers within its institution align themselves within these ethical standards. Hence, as a UKZN student myself, before the commencement of this study, I had to apply for ethical clearance from the Ethics Office and thereafter, permission was requested from the Mpumalanga Department of Education.

Informed consent was one of the ethical issues that I considered in this study. Participants must also give their consent to participate in the study and be assured of anonymity through the use of *pseudonyms*. I fully explained to them the design of this study and what was expected in terms of interviews, observations and how this data would be analysed. They were assured that their identities and that of their institutions would be concealed through the use of *pseudonyms*. In response to such a requirement, all participants agreed to participate in this study after they were satisfied with how this research would be conducted (Denzin, 2000). There was also the principle of nonmaleficence to consider. Cohen et al., (2011) considers this principle as a measure of ensuring the safety of participants during their participation in the study.

3.10 Limitations of the study

Hesse-Bieber and Leavy (2011) advises that any study, regardless of research design and methodology is highly likely to have limitations. As a researcher, it is my responsibility to state

these limitations as to how they may affect the credibility of the findings of this study. The sample of this study was drawn from three South African rural schools in the Mpuluzi Circuit in Mpumalanga province, it is therefore not possible to generalise the findings of this study to all South African schools. Consequently, further studies need to be conducted in other provinces with schools in similar situations to corroborate or challenge the findings of this study. However, regardless of the location of the research sites there are participants who are reluctant to divulge information with strangers. There were some participants who were willing to share the information with me, while some were too sceptical. This also contributed to the delay in conducting interviews. Barker (2006) advises that at one point of the research a researcher is likely to come across with participants who develop subjective meanings for people of their experienced realities.

3.11 Chapter summary

I started this chapter by discussing my preferred paradigm and its suitability. I further discussed the research design and methodology with various components of procedures used to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the researched topic while ensuring the research questions were answered. All the research processes were discussed such as sampling methods, methods of generating data, how it was analysed and how ethical considerations and limitations were handled. The next chapter is a discussion on data presentation.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research design and methodology that was employed in this study. This chapter presents and provides a discussion of the data that was generated in the field through semi-structured interviews conducted with six Departmental Heads in three research sites. During the interviews, participants were allowed to talk freely, responding to interview questions that guided the discussion. Probes were made to seek clarity on some of the issues and to redirect conversation to the focus of the study. Voluminous data was produced which was analysed using the content analysis. The chapter presents the data and discussions in the form of themes and sub-themes that emerged from this analysis of data in order to address the three critical research questions articulated in the first chapter, namely:

- What are the Departmental Heads' experiences of their role as instructional leaders in rural secondary schools during COVID-19 pandemic?
- What challenges (if any) do the Departmental Heads encounter in executing/enacting their instructional leadership role during COVID-19 pandemic?
- What appropriate strategies do the Departmental Heads in rural secondary schools exert/employ to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their instructional leadership role?

In presenting the data, *verbatim* quotes are used to ensure that the 'voices' of the participants remain pristine in the study. *Pseudonyms* of both the research participants and their schools are used in the discussion to protect their identities.

4.2 Profiles of the participants

I conducted semi-structured interview with six participants to generate data in this study. These participants are from three different secondary schools in a rural context. In order to protect their identity, *pseudonyms* were given to participants and also their schools. Table 4.1 below shows fictitious names of the participants and those of their schools. The nature of their roles as Departmental Heads is different. Three Departmental Heads lead in a specific department, for example, Commerce or Science while two participants, Miss Bophela and Mr Rama lead

phases in their school. They all have experience working as Departmental Heads ranging from four to eight years. This is also indicated in Table 4.1 below.

| Participant | Name of school | Years in the current position | Age |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Miss Bophela | Marikana Secondary School | 6 | 45-50 |
| 2. Mr Rama | Marikana Secondary School | 8 | 40-45 |
| 3. Mr Zeze | Forest Secondary School | 12 | 50-55 |
| 4. Mr Donald | Forest Secondary School | 6 (<20 in SMT positions) | 55-60 |
| 5. Mr Good | Comprehensive Secondary School | 4 | 30-35 |

4.2.1 Miss Bophela (Marikana Secondary School)

The first participant is Miss Bophela who is a teacher and a FET Phase Departmental Head at Marikana Secondary School. Her age ranges between 45-50 years. She teaches Economics in Grades 10 to Grade 12, as well as Business Studies in Grade 10. She studied at the Tshwane College of Education in Pretoria and obtained an honour's degree at the University of South Africa (Unisa). She has a Leadership and Management Master's degree which she obtained from the University of Johannesburg. Miss Bophela's teaching career started at Siyabonga Secondary School where she worked a period of less than three years. She has now been in service for nineteen years where five of those have been as a Departmental Head. Her school is a public school located in the Gert Sibande district on one of the farms in the Lothair area. It is in a very rural area which lacks public transport and other basic amenities. The area falls under private ownership which makes it challenging for the government to rebuild the school which was originally a prison during the apartheid years.

4.2.2 Mr Rama (Marikana Secondary School)

The second participant is Mr Rama who is a Departmental Head at Marikana Secondary School. He is between the ages of 40-45. He teaches History in the FET phase and Social Sciences in the Senior phase. His highest qualification is a teaching diploma. He hails from the Limpopo province where he grew up and has spent all his life. He has a deep understanding of

rural schools and rurality as a whole. He has taught in numerous provinces before but his experience as a Departmental Head is only limited to his current school. Similar to Miss Bophela, his school, Marikana Secondary School is public school which is in a deep rural area which falls under traditional leadership.

4.2.3 Mr Donald (Forest Secondary School)

The third participant is Mr. Donald who is a Departmental Head at Forest Secondary School. He teaches English in Grade 10 and 12. He is very experienced as he boasts a teaching career spanning over thirty years. He has held various management positions in various schools over these years. He has been a principal, deputy principal and a DH at various schools. Currently he is a Departmental Head at Forest Secondary School. He has been in his current position of DH for more than six years. He is a DH of Languages in his school and teaches English in grade ten and twelve at his school.

4.2.4 Mr Zeze (Forest Secondary School)

The fourth participant is Mr. Zeze who is a Humanities DHs in his school. His age ranges between the ages of 50-55. He has more than two decades worth of experience in his school. He is very dedicated to his job and says he gets along with all his educators. He views himself as a 'father figure'. He currently teaches Geography and History, which are subjects with a very high enrolment. He has a Diploma in Education as his highest qualifications.

4.2.5 Mr Good (Comprehensive Secondary School)

Mr. Good is the youngest of the participating Departmental Heads as his age ranges from 30-35. Of all the participating Departmental Heads, he is the least experienced. He has been in his current position for only four years. He teaches Mathematics and Physical Sciences in his school. He is also a cluster leader of mathematics in his cluster. He has an Honour's degree as his highest qualification. One of his biggest ambitions are to hold the principalship position one day. At his school, he is the most technologically savvy of all his colleagues. His school is situated in a rural area which also has similar disadvantages to the schools discussed above.

Age: Practicing teaching and leading education need a certain degree of maturity to comprehend various tasks that are undertaken in an educational field (Nhlumayo, 2020).

Therefore, because of age and having spent some years doing tertiary studies, it is assumed that participants have a certain level of maturity and appropriate exposure to our educational system.

Gender: The different perspectives of both males and females may be significant, but participants involved in the study are all males with only a single female. That captures male dominance in leading their departments/phases in secondary schools and help get their perception as Departmental Heads.

Work experience: The number of years working in an education field and particularly in their current positions in rural secondary schools provide a better understanding of their experiences before and in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic (Nhlumayo, 2020). Their years of experience could mean that this study has the possibility of generating seasoned data from these participants as they have experience of leading both in normal times and during this period of the Covid-19 pandemic that is characterised by confusion and uncertainty.

4.3 Data presentation and discussion

This section presents and discusses data under the following themes that emerged: (1) Departmental Heads' understandings of rural school, (2) Departmental Heads' experiences of their instructional leadership roles in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic; (3) Instructional leadership challenges faced by DHs in the midst of COVID-19; (4) Strategies employed by DHs in rural secondary schools to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their instructional leadership role and learning and knowledge and skills and (5) knowledge required by DHs when leading in the midst of a crisis.

4.3.1 The Departmental Heads' understandings of rural schools

In pursuit of the objectives of the study, the interview process began by asking the DHs about their understanding of rural schools. This question assisted me to find out how the DHs described and explained the contextual realities of their schools and how these could impact on their role as instructional leaders. Participants alluded to varied contextual intricacies in their conceptualisation of rural schools. The common thread to these varied contextual intricacies was the geographic distance and seclusion from town. Some participants conceptualised rural

schools as being schools that are centred in communities characterised by low economic activities resulting in low employment figures. While this was the case, some participants seemed to lean more towards the lack of textbooks and school infrastructures such as classroom space and technological advancement as what constituted rural schools for them. Miss Bophela had this to say when asked what she understood to be rural schools:

Rural schools are located in a place that is secluded from town. We are far from everything, far from shops, far from libraries, far from the police station and clinics. We are far from everything. We only have makeshift houses around us where the parents are not even working.

Mr. Rama who is the DH at Marikana Secondary School shared similar views to those shared by Miss Bophela that rural areas are places far from the urban setting. He shared the following sentiments:

In rural schools, we are far from the town, and we are found in homesteads where the majority of parents are not employed, hence, that is why I said there is a lack of job opportunities.

Mr. Good, DH at Comprehensive Secondary shared similar sentiments that rural schools are secluded from urban areas with better job opportunities for parents and municipal services. He had the following to say:

Rural schools are in settlements that are not well developed with limited opportunities to find work. Most of the time these areas also lack basic municipal services such as libraries, clinics, stable water and electricity supply.

Mr. Donald, DH at Forest Secondary School focused on the lack of textbooks and school infrastructure when conceptualising rural schools. He said:

I can distinguish rural schools from township and urban schools by the lack of infrastructure in rural schools. By infrastructure, I mean resources such as textbooks and furniture. In my school we do not have enough prescribed textbooks. Even the ones we are using ... we have been using them for over 6 years, they are worn and torn, and parents cannot afford to replenish these textbooks because they are unemployed. Technology-wise there is a digital gap in these schools compared to the former Model C schools. You find that a learner from a rural school completes school without having even touched a computer, they only get to operate a computer at tertiary

While giving his conceptualisation of rural schools, Mr. Zeze highlighted that although his school is secluded from town, challenges that normally marred rural schools do not seem to have impacted his school. He said that his school does not have a challenge of school infrastructure. They have enough classroom space and a reliable internet connectivity. This is what he said:

In our school we were lucky because we have got enough classroom space. We only divided our normal classes to the required number of 25-30 learners per class. We have stable supply of water and electricity. Our internet connectivity is reliable and stable.

It is noted in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two that South African communities located in rural contexts still have to grapple with a number of challenges (du Plessis, 2017; Moletsane, 2012). du Plessis (2017) conceptualise rural schools as schools that are located on farms and being distant from urban and peri-urban areas. du Plessis (2017) further notes, as highlighted by the participants, the low economic activities as one of the characteristics that mar rural schools. Hence, some schools located in rural contexts are inclined to progressively perform under par (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). This is because rural school lack the necessary resources such as textbooks and school infrastructure (du Plessis, 2017). While the lack of infrastructure, such as classroom space is normally married with rural schools, some rural schools now seem to be well developed in that regard as noted by Mr. Zeze who shared that in his school they do not experience shortage of classroom space.

In the classic case of a glass half full – half empty scenario, the participants seem to view the nature of the schools they worked in as a case of glass half empty instead of the former. In the societies, it is a common practice for people to channel their attention on what is broken and its effects (Renkly, 2018). This model tends to make people work in a manner that focuses on their deficiencies rather than their assets. This model does not work particularly well for schools as the focus needs to be assets rather than deficiencies (Renkly, 2018). The participants seem to hold a similar ideology that rurality and rural schools are hopeless in terms of adjusting to the rapid changes that have been necessitated, for example, by COVID-19 pandemic. They view their schools and the communities they work in as a problem that limits their instructional leadership capabilities. In turn, this makes it particularly challenging for DHs to be creative in order to overcome their challenges as they already hold the notion that their schools and communities are not fertile for change. This is evident in their utterances where the common

denominator is “we lack textbooks” and “we are far or secluded from everything”. This leaves a lot of questions as to how these DHs are navigating through this pandemic.

It is emerging from the discussion above that while rural schools may be secluded from town, each rural school context may have its own strains of uniqueness, setting it apart from the next rural school. There are rural contexts actualities that are similar to those that play out in urban locales, as Mr Lukhele is highlighting about his school. Evidence from the participants suggests that their schools have prevalent internal and external factors affecting (positively or adversely) the life of their schools (Ncokwana, 2020). This does not suggest that such factors are homogenous, and neither is the intensity of their impact the same.

4.3.2 Departmental Heads’ experiences of their roles as instructional leaders during COVID-19 pandemic

During my interviews with the participants, I asked them about their instructional leadership experiences in the midst of a pandemic. This question assisted me in exploring how DHs as instructional leaders have experienced their roles during this pandemic. The data generated from the participants revealed a number of common and diverging experiences of their instructional leadership experiences in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. The sub-themes to be discussed under this theme are; experiences of supervising and managing teaching and learning; experiences of organising professional development; monitoring learners’ progress; creating conducive working space; managing by wandering around and conducting class visits in the midst of a pandemic.

4.3.2.1 Experiences of supervising and managing teaching and learning

The participants shared a common thread that one of their roles as instructional leaders is to supervise and evaluate teaching and learning. They shared that they supervised and managed teaching and learning by ensuring there is teaching and learning in their schools regardless of the pandemic. This was done by ensuring educators were in class during their allocated teaching time teaching the learners as expected by the policy. They noted the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic, but this did not hinder their practices. Mr. Donald from Forest Secondary School had the following quote to utter:

As we know, the main role of a DH is to ensure learners are being taught. So as a DH I have to ensure the enforcement of the policy by ensuring educators are in class teaching learners. It was challenging during this period of the pandemic, but there is no two ways about it, I still had to see to it that educators are in class during their periods. That is what I think is the main purpose of a DH, supervising the delivery of the curriculum in the school. That is what I would consider as being the most important, seeing that learners are taught, their class works are being marked, and teachers are teaching and attending to their classes.

Similarly, Mr. Rama shared that he followed the policies to the letter. He supervised teaching and learning by tracking the curriculum coverage. When asked a question about how he supervised managed teaching and learning, he responded by saying the following:

A DH has to track and manage the process of teaching and learning. Because we had the challenges of COVID-19, I had to reintroduce period registers in class to track what has been taught. .

Sentiments of similar nature were also shared by Miss Bophela of Marikana Secondary School. She had the following to say:

I am responsible for the curriculum. The curriculum is what constitutes a DH. If the curriculum is not managed then that means I am not doing what I am supposed to be doing. To answer your question directly, I supervised the teaching and learning by requesting learners' exercise books and checking these against the educator's ATP.

Mr. Zeze shared that since his main role as a DH is to supervise teaching and learning in his school; he did not compromise on this role. He said he achieved this by supervising educators' lesson preparations before they attend their classes. This is what he said:

As a DH, I have to see to it that the teacher does prepare his/her lessons before going to class. Every week on Fridays or Mondays, educators submit their lesson plans and I signed them before they went to class. COVID-19 or no COVID-19, this had to be done.

Mr. Good from Comprehensive Secondary School averred completely diverging views. He shared that he viewed COVID-19 pandemic as a challenge to his instructional leadership role as a DH. He said the following:

According to my understanding, the core duty of a DH is to ensure supervision of teaching and learning in the school and ensure that educators attend to their classes having prepared in advance. To supervise and manage the delivery of the curriculum was difficult as we had a lot to do and some educators had additional subjects to teach. So to track them for supervision was difficult.

It is emerging from the participants that they supervised and managed teaching and learning by supervising the educator's lesson plans, tracking and managing the curriculum via the learners' exercise books. While some DHs did not compromise in their instructional leadership practice of supervising and managing teaching and learning, some participants had a different as they emphasised the challenges that hindered them. Scholars who have researched extensively about instructional leadership such as Mestry and Pillay, (2013); Naicker, Chikoko and Mthiyane (2013) are also of the view that instructional leadership should focus on characteristics such as leadership that influences the quality of teaching and learning in schools by effectively managing the teaching and learning process. This will assist educators to fully realise the full potential of their learners as argued by Peter, Gitonga and Kubai (2021). In this study, Departmental Heads appeared to be ensuring the process of teaching and learning was not compromised during this pandemic by supervising and monitoring the quality of the lesson plans before they were to be delivered in class. Their experiences are in line with Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership model which dictates that instructional leaders develop clear and precise plans to minimise disruptions. The DHs in this study developed clear and uniform plans to supervise, manage and track teaching and learning in their respective schools to ensure COVID-19 pandemic disruptions did not have a negative impact on teaching and learning.

4.3.2.2 Experiences of organising professional development

Data elicited from the participants shows that DHs had to contend with organising and doing professional development workshops for educators under their leadership amid COVID-19 regulations and changes. Mr. Zeze and Mr. Good explained that they had to conduct professional development workshops themselves for educators who were "forced" to teach subjects they were not necessarily familiar with due to staggered re-opening of schools. Mr. Zeze explained that he had to be polite, creative and motivational to capacitate these out-of-field educators who were not even willing to teach these subjects. Mr. Zeze said:

You know, as an instructional leader, I have a role to develop or capacitate educators in the department I am leading. This was a tough task to do for the out-of-field educators who had to teach subjects they were not familiar with due to the staggered approach to the re-opening of schools. This was not an easy thing to do because most of these teachers were not even willing to teach these subjects. I had to be polite and creative, and motivational.

Similarly, Mr. Good also shared that he organised professional development workshops. He conducted these workshops himself for the educators under his leadership. These were his utterances:

... A DH is also expected to organise professional development workshops. As a responsible DH I organised and conducted workshops myself, especially those that are curriculum-related as necessitated by COVID-19, I had to capacitate these educators. At first it was very difficult but I was very patient and used a lot of persuasion to ensure I get through to these educators.

Miss Bophela shared a similar experience that as a DH she was expected to provide professional development to her educators. She explained that COVID-19 pandemic made it a challenge for everyone. She had to go out of her way to source information so that she could impart this information to her educators. The aim was to assist the educators develop their pedagogical skills with this information. This is what she ventilated:

As an instructional leader I am there to assist the educators, if there is any problem that educators may have in terms of teaching and learning due to COVID-19 regulations. I am there to help them, more especially on the developmental side. It was not easy but I tried to avail myself and ensured that I gather enough information, resources and materials so that I can impart this knowledge to my educators.

Mr. Donald averred that he conducted class visits to assist educators to improve their teaching. COVID-19 pandemic did not affect him in this regard. This is what he articulated:

In order to professionally develop educators, as a DH, I ensured they had all the required resources to attend to professional development workshops at cluster level. I had to fight very hard to get the support of the SGB to assist with data connectivity since COVID-19 has demanded workshops be held virtually.

From the above discussions it emerged that the Departmental Heads in this study held varied views on how to professionally develop their educators. While the forgoing notion is that workshops are held at cluster level, two DHs in this study shared that they organised and conducted workshops themselves to capacitate educators who have been assigned to new subjects they have not taught before. It should be noted that Departmental Heads are dealing with fluid and changing staffing situations meaning they had to do much more with less. The social distancing of educators and learners meant extra work and extra pressure on educators. Netolicky (2020) notes that ‘in a time of crisis and uncertainty, leaders must act swiftly and with foresight but also with careful consideration of options, consequences and side effects of actions taken’. To counter the challenge of the burden placed on educators by the regulations necessitated by this pandemic, DHs in this study moved swiftly to capacitate educators to ease pressure on the more pressured educators.

Drawing from the literature that explores professional development, Bredeson (2018) finds that DHs are in a unique position to offer support and development to educators as they are curriculum managers. The DHs offered support to the educators to promote learning and development to become more effective in their teaching practices (Steyn & van Niekerk, 2015). In this study, two DHs used learner performance levels as a stimulus for organising professional development to assist the educators in their departments to improve their teaching practices to become more effective in their teaching. COVID-19 pandemic had impacted on the implementation of the curriculum; this has elevated the need for professional development workshops as educators needed to enable themselves with skills and competencies to deal with the impact. This experience can also be understood by using the Hallinger and Murphy (1985) instructional leadership model of 1985. According to this model, professional development should be proactive rather than reactive. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) further posits that schools can also have mechanisms that can be set to insource professional development. This is in line with what was shared by the participants that organised and conducted professional developments themselves without seeking external assistance.

4.3.2.3 Experiences of monitoring learners’ progress

The Departmental Heads in this study understood that monitoring learners’ progress was one of their core duties as instructional leaders. They shared similar experiences that they monitored the progress of learners through the learners’ subject exercise books. This gave them

an indication of how much content has been taught and how much support was needed by both the learners and the educators in the limited available time as learners have to platoon and rotate in terms of school attendance. When responding to a question about how he monitored learners' progress, this is what Mr. Zeze had to say:

I request at least three subject exercise books directly from the learners and check against the ATP if the teacher is in par, especially now during COVID-19 as we have limited time. The number of class works given gives an indication of how much content has been taught.

Miss Bophela emphasised that a DH monitors learners' progress. She mentioned that she did this through assessing learners' exercise books as well. This is what she had to say:

One of the main role of a DH is to monitor learner progress. To monitor their progress I used their exercise books. Learners' exercise books will indicate how much support is required.

On the same issue, Mr. Rama added that he contrasted the ATP with the learners' exercise books to monitor how much content has been covered in a particular subject. He had the following to say:

Every week educators are expected to submit their lesson plans together with exercise books so that I can check how far they have covered the ATP. This was difficult as you know that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced learners to attend lesser days so how the ATP was covered was affected somehow, but I still had to do it.

Mr. Good had a similar experience to the one shared above by Mr. Rama. He too used the learners' exercise books to monitor the amount of teaching and learning that has transpired in the subject. He responded in the following manner:

One of the few things I am still able to do is assessing learners' exercise books. I randomly request learners from each subject to give me their class work books. The aim is to check how much teaching and learning has taken place because everything taught should be indicated in the class work book. If less content is covered, then necessary steps can be taken to assist in the subject.

Mr. Donald added that COVID-19 has not changed anything in terms of monitoring learners' exercise books. He still had time to monitor learners' exercise books as the number of learners was still the same. He had the following views to share:

It is the same before COVID-19 and during COVID-19, in terms of book monitoring. I only sample those exercise books that I want. The number of learners is still the same, COVID-19 has not affected us much in that regard.

The above extracts show the DHs mainly used learners' exercise books to monitor their progress in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. It appears that the DHs were still able to monitor the progress of learners through their subject exercise books to monitor what has been and not been taught, thus evaluating the level of support needed by learners (Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019). Mr. Rama indicated that every week he expected educators to submit learners' exercise books so he can monitor by comparing and contrasting against the ATP to check what has been taught. A similar notion is held by Yaziz and Noordin (2018) who concluded in their study that learners' progress should be monitored as it has positive bearings as it determines the type of intervention needed. The participants' understanding of monitoring learner progress can be viewed with the Hallinger and Murphy (1985) instructional leadership model. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) assert that an effective instructional leader uses different tools to achieve the school's goals through continuous supervision of learner's progress. The DHs did this by continuously checking learner's exercise books. This ensured the subject educators and DHs knew of the learners' learning progress and type of intervention required.

4.3.2.4 Creating a conducive working space

The data generated from the participants revealed that they understood that part of their instructional leadership roles is to create a conducive working space for educators under their leadership. The participants shared that they achieved this by ensuring that educators were motivated to work in the midst of a pandemic. They indicated that they invited people from external institutions to motivate staff and learners to ease their anxiety and also ensure that they perform at full capacity. At his school, Mr. Zeze shared that the SMT assisted with motivational talks during their briefings and meetings. The rationale was to limit anxiety and maximise educators' potential while working in the midst of a pandemic. Mr. Zeze who invited people to come and motivate educators had the following to say:

To maintain a positive working space was very difficult because during this time of COVID-19; everyone was afraid of this disease as we didn't know who was infected and who was not. This emotionally and psychologically affected the educators. What I did together with the SMT as a whole we regularly motivated educators in our staff

briefings and meetings just to ease their anxiety. We also have one on one motivational talks with educators which are between the educator and the DH.

Similar sentiments were also shared by Mr. Donald who also shared that motivating educators during this period of COVID-19 was key for maintaining their potential at full capacity. When asked how a conducive working space was maintained at his school, he said the following:

That one is difficult because during this time of COVID-19 even educators treat everyone as if that person is infected with the disease. Emotionally, the educators were just as afraid as the learners. And so to keep morale high at such an institution becomes hard, although as the SMT we encourage them regularly and invite people to come and talk to them.

During our interview with Mr. Rama, it was evident from our discussion that he also adopted a similar strategy to the one adopted by Mr. Donald to maintain high staff morale. He also invited people from outside the school to visit the school and motivate teachers and learners alike. He elucidates:

I requested intervention from the Social Development Department, the social workers that they come to the school for motivation. The invite was for the motivation of both the staff and the learners as well. We wanted to make sure of their psychological well-being.

Additionally, Mr. Rama also shared that at his school he ensured that educators' anxiety and fear were put at ease by creating additional staffrooms for educators to enforce social distancing. On how he achieved this, this is what he said:

Our understanding is that this COVID-19 is here to stay, which is why the capacity of educators per staff room has been reduced. We have created more spaces for educators using the old store rooms. We did this to ease their nerves and anxiety as they now interacted with a limited number of educators each day.

Mr. Good said that he maintained staff morale at his school by inviting people to talk to the educators. He uttered the following utterances:

Leading in this midst of this pandemic is very difficult. There is a lot that one needed to consider. For the first time in this profession I had to think of the mental health of my educators. To achieve this, I had to ensure the working space was fertile. Once or twice

per month I would ask people from the churches to avail themselves for motivating educators at school. These motivation sessions really assisted us a lot.

Miss Good understood the psychological effect that COVID-19 had on educators. She highlighted the strain that social distancing had on them in rural schools. This is what she said:

Psychologically COVID-19 affected all of us, and we had to social distance. This affected us a lot in rural schools. Our classes are small and we had to distance. So a teacher you were only concerned with safety and the protocol of COVID-19. That is where I came in as DH, I constantly engaged with my educators to take their minds off things.

The data revealed that DHs understood the psychological challenges that educators were facing during this period of COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure that these fears and psychological challenges did not negatively affect instructional time, DHs ensured that they created working environments that were suitable for maximising learners' and educators' capacity. For instance, Mr. Donald and Mr. Rama shared that in their schools they invited people to come and motivate both the educators and learners.

Creating a working space that is conducive to quality teaching and learning entails ensuring that the climate at the school is characterised by safety; it allows opportunities for staff to take positive risks, professional, supportive, conducive to teaching and learning to achieve the desired academic results, characterised by trust and stakeholder involvement in school activities (Batt, 2014). To promote conducive teaching and learning environment the school management team must play a central role in boosting stakeholder morale and participation for them to feel worthy and capable of making positive contributions to the teaching and learning process. This experience can also be understood through the lens of the Hallinger and Murphy (1985) instructional leadership model. According to this model, instructional leaders should create an environment that is psychologically and physically appealing to the staff. The participating DHs were successful in this regard as they planned and organised for external people to motivate and encourage the staff. This ensured the school environment was work friendly.

4.3.2.5 Managing by Wandering Around

The data from participants reflected that the participating DHs managed by wandering around the school premises. Four Departmental Heads shared similar sentiments on the importance of managing by wandering around. The importance of this is further exacerbated by the demands placed on them by COVID-19 pandemic. These four DHs shared that they used some of their non-teaching time to walk around the school the premises for varying reasons. Some stated that they wandered around the school to maintain discipline in classes that could not be timetabled an educator for that period while others wandered to observe and enforce adherence to COVID-19 regulations even though it was not part of their job descriptions. On how she now had to take time off her lunch break to wander around the school to be seen and observe adherence to COVID-19 regulations, Miss Bophela said the following:

To ensure learners adhered to COVID-19 regulations, I had to take time from my lunch break to observe if learners are wearing masks and social distancing. If they were not social distancing, I then had to enforce it. Now that 30 minutes of my lunch time is gone because I have gone an extra mile doing something which is not even part of my job description.

Mr. Zeze also averred similar sentiments to those averred by Miss Bophela. He too also monitored learners when they were outside during lunch break to monitor their social distancing. He admitted to this being a major challenge.

It was a major challenge to monitor these learners since there is no allocated time to perform this task. It was impossible to maintain social distancing of these learners when they are outside during the lunch break. There is no way. You cannot monitor them with a knobkerrie. I tried but it was a major challenge. A lot of my non-teaching and lunch time was utilised for this.

Mr. Donald's sentiments were slightly different from those shared by the above participants. He wandered around to maintain discipline in classrooms that may be unattended due to additional classes. While he wandered around the school to monitor discipline in classes that were left unattended, he also wandered around to monitor adherence to COVID-19 regulations during lunch break. This is what he said:

Due to the increased number of classes, limited personnel and issues of timetabling some classes were left unattended. So as a DH, I had to move around, at the same time

I had to be in class... During the lunch break, one has to move around to check if learners are adhering to COVID-19 protocols by wearing masks. Check social distancing. It would have been better if I had not teaching and administrative time to use to wander around.

Mr. Rama has also experienced similar challenges when it comes to monitoring social distancing in school and the wearing of masks. He shared that learners at his school only wore masks and social distanced in the presence of educators in class. He ventilates:

Learners only wear their masks when they are in the classrooms. Once the educator leaves the classroom, they take off their masks, they even go in groups without masks. They know that they have to sanitize regularly but they do not do that, instead, they play with the sanitizer, so to monitor that situation is very difficult, it requires a lot of time, which I don't have unfortunately. Sometimes when it was possible I would use my non-teaching time to wander around monitoring adherence in classes. But it was difficult I must say.

Findings from the interviews seem to suggest that the participating Departmental Heads used Managing by Wandering around (MBWA) to both enhance and enforce COVID-19 regulations. To perform this task, the Departmental Heads required free [non-teaching] periods that they could use to enforce strict adherence to COVID-19 regulations. Hence, Mr. Donald emphasised the need to wander around the school to observe compliance with COVID-19 regulations. This is due to the additional classes that schools had to have to observe social distancing. Some classes were left unattended thus requiring the DH to walk around to observe these classes.

Managing by walking around can be described as an effective management technique that can be used to enhance the teaching and learning process (Grissom, Loeb & Master, 2013). If enacted effectively, MBWA can have a positive impact on the organisation as problems are identified and resolved as soon as possible (Serrat, 2017). For DHs working in the midst of a pandemic, it is crucial that they identify and resolve problems as soon as they emerge in order to channel their attention to other priorities that are demanding their time. When MBWA is viewed from the perspective of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership model, it can be described as 'maintaining high visibility'. During this period of COVID-19 pandemic, having the DHs highly visible and wandering around helps to maintain order and discipline,

thus protecting the instructional time which is one of the other key dynamics of the instructional leadership model.

4.3.2.6 Conducting class visits in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic

When the participants were probed to share their instructional leadership experiences, the data elicited revealed that some participants were still able to conduct class visits. They, however seem to have had varying experiences. While the other DHs shared that they were still able to conduct their class visits, Mr. Zeze and Mr. Good shared that they were only able to conduct them partially due to the increased workload they have had to carry. This is what Mr. Zeze had to say on what affected him to only conduct his class visits partially during COVID-19 pandemic:

Conducting class visits proved to be very challenging. I was able to only do them partially. This is because as a DH, I jumped from 9 classes to 20 classes per week which is something I am not familiar with. As educators had to take additional classes, I also had to take additional classes as there were subjects which did not have suitably qualified educators to teach them.

Similar sentiments were averred by Mr. Good who said that he also found it difficult to conduct class visits as expected. He noted the challenge of time management and other various duties that competed for his time and attention as the reason behind his inability to conduct class visits as expected. This is what he averred:

It was very difficult to do class visits. I can say I failed in that department until recently. I had a challenge with time management as I only had limited time to partially visit educators. The problem was that my teaching load increased drastically while on the other hand there were tons of other duties that demanded my time.

Mr. Donald said he was able to conduct class visitations but did not find them to be as effective as before due to the increased number of classes educators have had to teach. This, according to Mr. Donald, made educators vulnerable to fatigue as they have had to teach consecutive classes up to the 8th period without a free period in between. The true nature and quality of the educators are thus compromised as the educator would be tired by then, hence why Mr. Donald said they were not as effective as before. This is what he narrated:

If I visit at period number 8 then I don't see the correct nature of the teacher because by then the teacher would be fatigued having worked throughout the day without a free period in between. So if I visit during that period, the output will no longer be the same as it would have been during the morning. So, in all honesty I found the class visits to be ineffective during this period of COVID-19.

During our interview with Miss Bophela, she shared that conducting class visits was one of her core duties as a DH. She said that sitting in class visits two meters away was not reason enough to not conduct her class visits. This is what she said:

COVID-19 never changed anything. The day-to-day running of the school was the same except for masks and social distancing. So, I cannot be unable to do my class visits when I would be sitting 2 meters away. The class visit will show whether that subject needs development.

The above extracts reveal that the participants were aware of their instructional leadership role with regard to class visitations. The participants revealed how they conducted class visits in the midst of a pandemic. Mr. Good and Mr. Zeze indicated that conducting class visits during this period of COVID-19 was difficult. They struggled due to the increased duty load they now had to carry. On one side, Mr. Donald indicated that conducting class visits was still possible as he still had the number of educators to visit since no additional educators were employed to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Mendel (2012) agrees with the practices of Mr. Ncube and Mr. Rama by saying that instructional leaders should spend time in classrooms evaluating instructional practices, considering the strengths and weaknesses of teachers. Mendel (2012) also supports Miss Bophela's view that classroom visits assist with determining improvement and developmental session in the subject. According to the Hallinger and Murphy (1985), instructional leadership model, effective DHs should effectively observe classroom lessons through the process of class visits. While some DHs attempted to visit educators for class visits, COVID-19 pandemic impacted negatively on their plans.

4.4 Instructional leadership challenges faced by Departmental Heads in the midst of COVID-19

The data generated from the participants pointed to a number of challenges of which some were common and some were diverse. Under this theme, I will therefore discuss five sub-themes

that emerged from this theme, namely; competing priorities during COVID-19, internet connectivity as a barrier, insufficient support from school leadership and dependency on scholar transport.

4.4.1 Competing priorities during COVID-19

All participants had a common view on the impact of additional priorities that competed with their instructional leadership practices. These additional priorities demanded the DHs' time and attention. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, schools had to set their own control tests as per their teaching and learning pace. This created additional duties for the DHs who were expected to pre-moderate these papers which would otherwise have been moderated at cluster level as asserted by Miss Bophela. This pandemic has also limited parents' attendance at school as school visitations have been discouraged as part of COVID-19 health protocols. This then made it difficult for the DHs to invite parents at once for parental meetings on learner performance-related issues, thus calling parents on an individual basis. This consumed a lot of time which could have been utilised for other management duties as narrated by Mr. Rama. Additionally, the DHs in this study signalled that their leadership practices were negatively impacted by the need of having to ensure effective enforcement of COVID-19 regulations in the school premises during instructional time. All these are duties that now demanded their time and attention. On the issue of priorities that now competed with her instructional practices, Miss Bophela shared the following experiences:

Before COVID-19 pandemic, learners were writing common tests from the Clusters. Now it has changed because we could not finish the syllabus as expected, we could not follow the ATP as we are supposed to, so each and every school had to set its own paper. And if the school sets its paper, the moderation became extra. I'm talking about pre-moderation because when we used to write common papers, there were already pre-moderated so that moderation is now my duty. It's worse here because I am the phase DH I have to moderate each and every paper, Paper 1 and Paper 2 of all these subjects. If you are not careful you are likely to make mistakes.

The above sentiments by Miss Bophela competed with some of her other instructional leadership practices as she spent a considerable amount of time pre-moderating end-of-the-term tests and examinations which is a duty that originally did not fall under her jurisdiction. Pre-moderation is a traditional duty of the subject advisors and the cluster leaders at the cluster

and district levels. Some of the duties that demanded her time were ensuring COVID-19 adherence in the school. When asked to narrate how this unfolded she narrated it in this manner:

COVID-19 brought a lot of anxiety to educators. We were all concerned about our safety. Remember that when COVID-19 first started last year, we had to monitor at the gate to ensure learners adhered to the safety regulations, this took a lot of time away from us.

An experience that is similar to Miss Bophela's was shared by Mr. Zeze of Forest Secondary. On the issue of having to monitor adherence of COVID-19 regulations in the schoolyard during teaching and learning time, this is what he said:

We were able to ensure good hygiene. However, it was impossible to maintain social distancing at all times with these learners. There is no way, we got tired. You cannot monitor them with a knobkerrie. In the classroom it is possible to monitor, but the minute they are outside it becomes a challenge. We end up not enforcing it. Even during lunch you cannot say a learner must eat in isolation, they are used to that. They want to chat and share everything.

On the other hand, Mr. Donald recalled how the additional classes created challenges for him. He recalled having to wander around the school to maintain order as other classes were left unattended due to the nature of the new 'COVID-19 demanded' timetable. While he had to maintain order in the school, it is important to remember that he also had classes of his own that he had to teach. The following was his recollection:

The other duty that demanded my time was teaching, because as a DH, I am a full-time teacher. So, if we have additional classes that means some of these classes will not be occupied as we had limited personnel. So, as the DH, I had to move around and maintain order in classes that are not attended to. So, you find out what we are talking about, the A1, A2, A3, A4. If the educator is in A1, it means A2,3 and 4 may not be occupied. So, the DH has to move around, at the same time has to be in his class.

The issue of losing instructional time was also shared by Mr. Rama from Marikana Secondary School who highlighted that one on-one-parental meetings were the ones that competed for most of his instructional time. Instead of having parents' meetings with all the affected parents at the same time, he had to conduct one on one meetings with the parents as they had to observe

social distancing and minimise the number of visitors who were at school at the same time as mandated by COVID-19 school health protocols.

As visitors were discouraged to visit the school, if ever I had a challenge with the learners, I was forced to call their parents on one on one basis. While conducting these one on one meetings with parents, they consumed a lot of my time as compared to when [if] I called that their parents at once to discuss issues such as learner performance then it would have been easy if I get them at the same time.

What is emerging from the participants is that COVID-19 pandemic has created additional priorities that had an impact on the DHs instructional leadership practices. These additional priorities that have demanded their attention include regulations imposed on schools such as moderation school-based assessments for subjects and all tasks, observing COVID-19 health regulations, and the limit imposed on the number of visitors allowed in the school premises. These are additional priorities that seem to compete for time with the other traditional DHs' instructional leadership practices.

From the literature perspective, Tapala et al. (2020) document in their study that researched instructional leadership barriers in secondary schools that the DHs struggle with priorities that yearn for their attention as they cannot perform all of them at once. Traditionally, as argued by Pinkelman et al. (2015) and Seobi and Wood (2016), DHs traditionally prioritised conducting meetings, monitoring and moderation of learners and educators work, including SBA assessment tasks, personnel-related matters, conflict and decision-making. However, amid COVID-19 pandemic, additional priorities have emerged which are preventing DHs from performing their duties effectively.

4.4.2 Insufficient support from school leadership

The evidence from the generated data suggests that there was insufficient support that the DHs received from the school leadership, and that posed a challenges they had to contend with. Their instructional leadership practices were impacted by the insufficient support they received from other school leaders in their schools. While Miss Bophela promoted teamwork among her educators in her phase to ensure effective teaching and learning, the same cannot be said about support from school leadership. When responding to the question of support from school leadership, her response suggested that the limited cooperation among the SMT and the role

played by the principal in coordinating the cooperation between the SMT and SGB placed some of her instructional practices in jeopardy, such as the organisation of intervention classes. Mr. Rama and Mr. Good were also of the view that the insufficient support in their schools handicapped their practices as DHs. On this issue, this is what Miss Bophela had to say:

In other schools the SMT and SGB share plans, but here at school, there is a bridge that has been built by the principal. He has built a wall on all fronts and turning us against each other as if we are enemies. When we request some resources he hides behind the SGB, but on a serious note, the SGB can never say no to extra resources to help learners to improve. As an SMT, we have never had a formal meeting with the SGB that makes it difficult for myself to request some things that require financial support from the SGB.

On the same issue of support received from the school leadership, data generated from Mr. Rama of Mrikana Secondary School was silent on the role played by the SMT to offload the workload on the educators who were overburdened with the workload. His school seems to completely lack the support from the school leadership that was demonstrated by the other participants' schools. He said the following:

Due to the increase in the number of classes, we had educators that had to attend 11 periods per day which was impossible. So, because of the lack of manpower, we were not able to solve this challenge. It remains unresolved. To make matters worse, even the SMT does not come to the party even though some have much lesser loads. They are reluctant to offload some of the work of these educators who are carrying many hours. I can say that I do not receive any support from my SMT.

In a similar vein, Mr. Good indicated that there was insufficient support in his school among the school leadership. He had the following to say:

There is no support in the school among ourselves as the leadership which makes it difficult to implement other things especially during this period of the pandemic. Sometimes I feel handicapped.

The indication from Mr. Zeze's extract is that there was no support among the SMT at his school. The intervention classes they organised had to be monitored by the members of the SMT, however, they did not avail themselves, this was challenging for Mr. Zeze as he would be left with a huge workload. These were his utterances:

We have a timetable that we have to follow for these intervention classes. It signed off at circuit and district office, so we may say they are compulsory. The challenge starts when we have to monitor the attendance during these classes, my colleagues in the SMT are reluctant which makes it difficult for me as I cannot monitor these classes alone, I already have a lot on my plate.

While the above participants demonstrated limited support from their school leadership. Mr. Donald pointed to the role played by himself and his other colleagues in the SMT. When they organised extra classes to cover up the content that has been lost due to COVID-19 enforced lockdowns, the members of the SMT assisted by monitoring these classes. This made it much easier to organise extra classes as the school leadership was able and willing to assist even though this created additional work for them.

COVID-19 has forced us to have many extra classes to cover up the lost content... extra classes timetable is compiled by the principal and the DH. On monitoring, the SMT supports us by coming in and monitor the extra classes which is more work for the SMT just as it is more work for the educator who has to teach during the hours he is supposed to be resting.

The generated data suggests that the lack of teamwork at schools impacted negatively on the DHs' abilities to properly enact their instructional leadership roles. It is emerging that during the period of COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of support from the school leadership created confusion and uncertainty as denoted by Mr. Good and Mr. Zeze. Mr. Good shared that insufficient support in his school created uncertainty as it was challenging to implement other things without the buy-in of all the members of the school leadership. For Mr. Zeze, confusion was created when educators did not report timetable clashes timeously. Having the support and buy-in of the SMT is of significant importance. This is evident in Mr. Donald's response that the SMT in his school played an important role by availing themselves to monitor extra classes in the school. This made it much easier to organise these extra classes for learners to be able to catch up on the content they have lost during lockdowns. During this period of COVID-19 pandemic which demands creativity and innovation, Leithwood (2016) argues that insufficient support from school leadership leads to a lack of innovation from DHs. Where support from the school leadership is limited, DHs may be reluctant to act alone and be overwhelmed as discussed in Tapala et al. (2020). For this barrier to be overcome, the SMT, principal and DHs must work in close cooperation with each other.

4.4.3 Being over-utilised by principals

Data generated from this study postulates that one of the challenges that impacted on the DHs' instructional leadership practices was being over-utilised by their principal. It is emerging that the DHs felt being over-utilised by their principals, more especially during this period of COVID-19. They complained that the principals delegated a lot of duties to them while they still had their own duties to fulfil. This consumed the limited time they have to execute their instructional leadership duties as DHs. When asked to comment on whether he felt over-utilised by his principal Mr. Good had the following to say:

COVID-19 has caused us to be over-utilised as DHs. For instance in my school I am being deployed to do duties that are supposed to be directly done by the principal, because he is too occupied, he then delegates a lot of duties to me. This makes it very difficult for myself to do my own work thoroughly.

Mr. Donald from Forest Secondary School had the following to say on the matter when asked to share his views on the utilisation by his principal:

There is too much to do. Right now, due to COVID-19, I am doing more than I would normally do because there is so much to do. I end up doing more than I am supposed to do. If you were to come to my school you would swear I was the principal because most of the time I hold the fort.

Miss Bophela also shared her experiences on the matter of being over-utilised by her principal. She said that at her school she felt like the deputy principal because of the amount and type of work delegated to her by the principal. She said she is the one that writes reports that are to be sent to the district. This is what she had to say on how she is being over-utilised:

I am now practically the deputy principal of the school. I'm over-utilised actually. 90% of the things I'm doing are not for DHs. For one, I am the one who is writing reports for the district and the circuit. They would send and request information, I am the one who will write these reports most particularly that are have to do with COVID-19.

In a similar vein, Mr. Rama also uttered a similar experience about his utilisation by his principal. He also highlighted that while working on what has been delegated by his principal, his own duties are left unattended. This is what he uttered:

I am very much over-utilised here to be honest with you. When I am busy with what the principal has delegated as I am a subject teacher my classes suffer because of that. At times I cannot even do what I am supposed to do as a DH.

The above voices suggest that the selected participating Departmental Heads are obeying the instructions from their principals. However, while obeying the instructions from their principals and respecting the hierarchy, this seems to compete greatly with their instructional leadership practices. This is because whatever additional duties they receive from their principals absorb the little time they have. Instead of channelling all their time and energies into being effective instructional leaders, they have to play an additional role in assisting the principal. In this period of COVID-19 where DHs were leading blind, they needed all the time available to plan and execute their plans effectively without disturbances. The voices of the participants seem to suggest that the manner their principals utilised them consumed the little time they have to enact their instructional leadership practices. The principals should be stationed to support their DHs as per Mestry's (2017) study. That support should assist the DHs to enhance their expertise (Leithwood, 2016). The manner the school principals utilised their DHs in this study seem to have done more harm than good as their role hindered the DHs from executing some of their instructional leadership practises efficiently.

4.4.4 Internet connectivity as a barrier

It was apparent from the data generated from the participants that the lack of reliable internet connectivity from their schools acted as a barrier to their instructional leadership practices. The impact of the lack of internet connectivity ranged from receiving crucial information late to not being able to attend content workshops. In one of the schools, DHs recalled how their educators were forced to attend a virtual workshop in the bushes because of the lack of internet connectivity at the school. Other participants noted the impact internet connectivity had on the development of educators as some educators would request to go home to attend these workshops. The challenge noted by these participants was that the educators would only logon into the meetings and not bother to listen in. Another challenge that emerged from the participants was that the internet connectivity acted as a barrier to their wish to conduct extra classes to cover the instructional time lost during nationwide lockdowns. While the above-mentioned challenges were evident across almost all participants, Mr. Zeze and Mr. Good shared that they had reliable internet connectivity at their schools. On the impact the lack of

reliable internet connectivity had on her instructional practices, this is what Miss Bophela had to say:

The challenge is that we do not have reliable internet connectivity. So, for us to connect to the internet we needed to go out in the bushes to find the signal in order to attend virtual meetings. That on its own is a challenge because once you go out to look for that network, you stay there from 13h00 till 16h00 trying to find the signal. If the school had a network signal, educators would stay in school and not lose so much contact time with their learners.

Mr. Rama shared similar experiences. His school also lacked a strong internet connectivity signal; hence, he had educators who requested to attend these online workshops at home where there is better connectivity. This resulted in the loss of instructional time as these educators would be gone for the whole day. This is what he shared:

You know there is a difference between logging into the meeting and attending the meeting. Because we do not have a strong reliable internet connectivity signal here at school, I had educators who requested to go home in order to attend these virtual workshops. Most of them do not come with reports of what was discussed as they only log in into the meeting for the sake of logging in and then they attend to their personal errands without listening in to what is being discussed.

On how the lack of internet connectivity challenged his school and his instructional leadership practices, this is what Mr. Donald had to say:

Firstly what we need to establish is that the school on its own does not have an internet connection. We wait for the principal to come with the information, so sometimes we receive the information very late which results in late implementation of some things.

On how it affected teaching and learning in his school, he had this to say:

The lack of internet connection is very challenging, especially when it comes to learners because learners cannot access the kind of information that they would. On the other hand, it makes it difficult for our educators to integrate technology in their teaching and learning.

While the participants shared similar views on how network connectivity acted as a barrier in their instructional practices, Mr. Good voiced diverging views on the matter. While he admitted that they faced challenges of internet connectivity, he however, shared that they were able to

use digital methods to advance their teaching and learning during COVID-19 related school closures. This is what he said:

We did have challenges when it comes to internet connectivity. However, we used WhatsApp and Microsoft Teams to deliver our lessons. So, because we are in a rural area, we also experienced challenges of reliable internet connectivity and some learners did not have data to log in to the classes, so they fell behind in some lessons.

In Mr. Zeze's school, they also did not seem to experience the challenge of internet connectivity. He narrated that his school had reliable internet connectivity which made it possible to receive and implement teaching and learning-related information. The following were his utterances when asked to respond to the question of the impact of internet connectivity in his school:

No, we have reliable internet. We do not have a challenge of connectivity. We receive information on time and were able to communicate it on time. Our educators also started to project videos for the learners to try and speed up teaching and learning process.

The Departmental Heads are alluding to the impact the lack of reliable internet connectivity had on their instructional leadership experiences. All the participants alluded to negative experiences regarding internet connectivity in their schools. Only Mr. Good shared that in his school he did not experience issues with internet connection. He used creativity and his technological prowess to utilise technological models such as WhatsApp and Microsoft Teams for teaching and learning. This left me to wonder how the other DHs adapted to the challenges brought by COVID-19 pandemic. Based on reviewed literature, many areas in the country do not have the high-speed delivery systems needed to make online technologies work best. In some cases, rural schools do not have the capacity to use the technology available (du Plessis, 2014). This study used three rural secondary schools as research sites, however, only one school had the capacity to utilise the available technological models to their advantage. According to Hinostroza (2018), technology should be integrated to teaching and learning to prepare learners for the 4th Industrial Revolution, however, the participating schools and their DHs seem to struggle in this regard.

4.4.5 Scholar transport as a barrier on intervention classes

It is emerging from the participants that their school relied heavily on scholar transport as the primary means of transporting their learners to and fro school. This over-reliance on scholar transport impacted on their ability to organise and conduct intervention classes for their Grade 12 learners. Scholar transport is only operational during school hours which is challenging for Departmental Heads to organise these intervention classes to complete syllabus on time as some learners stay very far from school. On how scholar transport has affected her ability to organise these extra classes, this is what Miss Bophela had to say:

Relying on scholar transport has its own challenges because we have Grade 12s that have to attend and complete the syllabus on time. So, it becomes a challenge because we cannot attend to these learners as we are supposed to. Scholar transport is only operational during school hours after that these learners struggle to organise their private transport as they stay far from school. At the same time we were also hesitant to have them on private transport unattended as we had reservations about adherence of COVID-19 regulations.

On the same issue, Mr. Rama averred similar sentiments to those shared above by Miss Bophela on how the reliance on scholar transport affected his ability to conduct intervention classes to recover lost teaching time. This is what he said:

It is difficult to plan, organise and conduct intervention classes after school. The learners use different modes of transports, others use scholar transport. Some stay very far from the school to an extent that enroute to their homes they have to walk in the bushes in groups without anyone observing their adherence to COVID-19 protocols, so it was not safe health-wise.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Mr. Good shared that there was a lot of teaching and learning time that was lost due to lockdowns. They had to organise intervention classes to recover lost teaching and learning time. He had the following to say:

COVID-19 affected us negatively. It was a disaster when we had to plan for intervention classes since we had to have these classes as they are partly compulsory. Because learners use scholar transport, we were forced to have these classes at most three time per week. That not even close to what we would have wanted.

Mr. Zeze had to be creative and persuasive in his school to mitigate the impact of scholar transport. Scholar transport affected the manner he planned and organised intervention classes. He had to go an extra to convince the bus drivers and parents to allow the school to utilise this scholar transport. This is what he said:

You know it was very challenging, when we are this reliant on scholar transport it becomes problematic because it dictates what must be done and at what times. So to overcome that challenge I would then request the bus drivers to do additional trips on some days so we can have these intervention classes.

Departmental Heads in this study alluded to the reliance on scholar transport as a hindrance to their ability to plan, organise and conduct intervention classes. To overcome this challenge posed by over-reliance on scholar transport, the participating DHs had to organise these intervention only for a limited period which restricted their impact. Available literature (e.g Bell & McKay, 2011; Porter et al. 2012 and Kubayi et al. 2013) highlight that over-reliance on scholar transport has limitations on the DHs' instructional leadership as alluded by the DHs in this study.

4.5 Strategies employed by the Departmental Heads in rural secondary schools to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their instructional leadership role

It emerged from this study that the Departmental Heads employed multiple strategies to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their instructional leadership practices. It emerged from participants that they instigated teamwork among their educators as one of the strategies they employed. They tried to form some sort of teamwork among educators who shared common subjects. These educators assisted one another when the workload became too much as a result of the additional classes brought by COVID-19. This theme is presented under the following sub-themes: drawing on teacher collaboration, drawing on parental and SGB support and drawing on support from district officials.

4.5.1 Drawing on teacher collaboration

The data extracted from the participating DHs indicate that they employed the strategy of teacher collaboration to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their instructional leadership roles. The DHs shared that they instigated and promoted collaboration among their educators to be one of the strategies they exerted to maintain effective teaching and learning in their schools. In the midst of COVID-19, out-of-field educators had to be allocated additional classes/subjects to teach due to the need to observe social distancing. This proved a challenge when allocating subjects to educators. As Departmental Heads, they then had to ensure there was teacher collaboration in their departments and phases. They achieved this by requesting educators to assist one another in an effort to ensure teaching and learning were not hindered by the challenges brought by COVID-19. When commenting on how he solved the challenge of additional classes, Mr. Donald had the following to say:

We had some out-of-field educators whom we allocated to assist us where we had manpower challenges. So, to speed up their subject knowledge, we also requested the original subject teachers who are responsible for this subject to collaborate with the out-of-field educators whom we have requested to assist with the classes that have been added.

A similar response was shared by Mr. Zeze. His response also placed a great emphasis on collaboration among his educators and himself, this is what he said:

We relied on the original teachers of the subject to assist, but they too did not have enough time to assist. As a DH, I had to go the extra mile. Sometimes, I had to do the lesson preparation with the out-field educator who has been allocated the new subject. We would go to class together and deliver the lesson even if it's not up to standard, we did it for compliance. The main aim was to ensure that learners have someone in front of them.

The above comments by the two participants were also shared by Mr. Good who had a similar arrangement in his school to assist the new educators assigned to the subjects as a consequence of the need for social distance. The following were his comments:

We asked the original subject teacher to assist the new out-of-field educators to assist them to catch up with the content... I would then run a workshop with these educators to tell them what is expected from them and what they are expected to teach since they

are not familiar with the content of the new grade. I would also invite them to come and observe me in class while I present a lesson.

Miss Bophela of Marikana Secondary School also mentioned the need to work together, she also focused on the collaboration of the new subject educator, the DH, and the original subject teacher. She shared the following view:

Because of the additional classes we had, for instance in some subjects, a teacher from Grade 8 or Grade 9 was allocated to assist in the subject of the same discipline in the higher grades. Because we took someone from their comfort zone in the lower grades, we had to workshop this new educator. The DH and the original subject teacher collaborated to ensure the out-of-field educator was workshopped.

According to Harries and Jones (2010), teamwork is based on the premise of collaboration where teachers work together towards attaining a common objective. It is about working together as a staff to achieve a predetermined goal and enhance efficiency. It is emerging from this study that the Departmental Heads relied heavily on teacher collaboration to mitigate the challenge of additional classes imposed by COVID-19 pandemic. The DHs in this study induced collaboration in order to ensure there was no interruption in the teaching and learning in their schools. This was done by allocating new educators to subjects that have a large number of learners. Original educators of these subjects were requested to assist these newly allocated educators and work in close proximity with them, thus strengthening collaboration among them. This action can be viewed from the Hallinger and Murphy (1985) instructional leadership model. This model posits that DHs should protect instructional time. The DHs in this study ensured this by ensuring that additional classes that are as a resulting of the need to social distance had educators to teach them. The DHs did not allow the pandemic to disrupt teaching and learning in the classrooms, hence, out-of-field educators were requested to be stop gaps in these classes.

4.5.2 Drawing on parental and SGB support

The data generated from participants revealed that they drew on support from parents and the SGB. The DHs sought support from the SGBs by seeking financial assistance. This financial assistance was mainly sought to assist educators with transport fare to and fro intervention classes. The SGB's support was also drawn to assist educators with connectivity data and

digital devices to log in to the virtual workshops which have been necessitated by COVID-19 pandemic. The DHs also sought support from parents by requesting them to provide alternative reliable transport for their children whenever they had to attend intervention classes. Miss Bophela said that she drew support from both the parents and the SGB. As per her earlier assertion, her school is secluded and in an area without reliable transportation. This made it impossible to plan, organise and conduct intervention classes beyond school hours. The parents came on board by organising private transport for their children. She said:

As I said earlier, we cannot have our learners (Grade 12) whenever we want them, so their parents have to come on board. Parents are then able to organise transport for their children. Due to this arrangement, we can now have the learners Monday to Thursday from 15H00 to 17H00 because now they can use their transport. We can now also have them on Saturday and Sunday to attend these extra intervention classes that we want. It becomes easy to organise these intervention classes because the parents have intervened and assisted with transport arrangements for their children.

The SGB also assisted teachers with transport allowance when they had to attend intervention classes in the afternoon, over the weekend and during school holidays. On the support she received from the SGB she said the following:

We requested our SGB to reserve in their budget funds for intervention programs to assist teachers with transport fare. On weekdays we assist them with money to home since they were already here. On weekends we assist them with transport fare to and from the school. This helps us to motivate the educators to honour and respect these intervention classes.

In support of the foregoing, Mr. Donald from Forest Secondary School had the following to say about parental involvement in his school:

The involvement of parents is very important. They have to know where their children are. They have to make it a point that their children come to school, because odd hours are being used, so, the involvement of parents is key. They are very much involved during this time. That is why we have requested them to make transport arrangements for their children so they can be at school whenever they are needed.

The latter part of his response focused on the support he drew from the School Governing Body to assist by ensuring the school get the resources needed to ensure quality teaching and learner

is taking place. Mr. Donald said sometimes he extends invitations to external educators to come and teach at his school. This is what he said on how the SGB came on board:

The SGB in our school is involved and they come in to assist because at times we have to outsource someone to come and teach. The SGB has to come on board to see to the transportation of that person because that person cannot come at his/her expense. It should be at the expense of the SGB.

On the same breadth, similar assertions were shared by Mr. Zeze who said they have a similar arrangement with the SGB at his school, the minor difference was that at his school the SGB compensated educators for working additional hours to ensure they are always motivated. This is what he had to say:

We have extra classes every day. The school knocks off at 14H30, from that time to 15H30 we hold our extra classes. Our Grade 12 stays behind again and leave at 17H00 that is where the SGB comes in, they compensate the educators for attending to the intervention classes.

On how the SGB at his school assisted him, Mr. Good had the following to say:

When attending the virtual meetings, educators were encouraged to use their own devices and data. The SGB would then reimburse the educator based on a standard rate that we had agreed up on.

The participants reflected that they heavily relied on support from parents and the SGB. COVID-19 pandemic has induced numerous unique challenges that have required unique solutions. The participants conceptualised rurality as an area that is secluded and without reliable transport; this thus made it difficult for the DHs in rural areas to enact their instructional leadership roles. They had difficulty in arranging intervention classes to recover content gaps experienced during COVID-19 related school closures. They thus relied on parents to play their role by sourcing private transportation for their children to be able to attend intervention classes even at odd times.

It is emerging that not only parents played a crucial role in assisting DHs during COVID-19, but the SGBs of the participating schools also played crucial roles in assisting the DHs. COVID-19 pandemic has changed the scope of education as we know it. Virtual meetings have replaced physical meetings and workshops. The DHs requested SGBs to fill this gap by

sponsoring educators with internet connectivity data bundles to connect to the virtual meetings. This support from the SGBs has made it possible for DHs and educators alike to make a swift transition from physical to virtual meetings. Parental support refers to parent involvement in all the school procedures and functional activities. Fullan (2001) states that the involvement of stakeholders in schools assists in the development of the learning organisation. Another important stakeholder of the school is the SGB. The work of the governing body is to ultimately support the school. It is of paramount importance for the optimal running of a school to have a good relationship between the SGB and the management team of the school, by extension – Departmental Heads.

The Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky's (2009) adaptive leadership model's characteristics of adaptive change demands that known tactics and strategies must be constantly changed. The DHs were faced with an unprecedented challenge, they resorted to changing their tactics and strategies in order to ensure their instructional programmes were not disrupted by COVID-19 pandemic.

4.5.3 Drawing on support from District officials

The participants in this study drew on support from the district officials. The need for social distancing forced schools to have additional classes while they had limited appropriate human resources. The DHs manoeuvred this challenge by seeking the assistance of other educators from grades that did not experience a spike in their workloads. To capacitate these educators, the DHs requested support from subject advisors (CI) and cluster leaders as experts of the subject to come and workshop these educators who have been assigned new subjects. This process ensured that these educators were up to date in the contents of the subject. On the above-discussed issue, this is what Mr. Donald had this to say on how he sought support from the Subject Advisors.

To assist that teacher who was not familiar with the subject just to speed up their subject knowledge requested the help of CIs (Subject Advisors), we invited CIs to come and develop these teachers. We also even invited cluster leaders to come and assist.

A similar view was voiced by Mr. Zeze who said he also requested assistance from the Subject Advisors at the beginning of the new subject allocation. He shared his experience of this in the following manner:

If it's a teacher who has a new subject I told them that they should come to me and we will prepare the lessons together and also deliver it together in class. At first CI's assisted us a lot to lay the foundation which made things easy.

On how he drew support from the Subject Advisors, this is what Mr. Rama had to say:

Educators attend developmental workshops with CI's and unfortunately when they are supposed to bring back feedback they don't bring it, but they do attend.

Mr. Good shared that in his school they sought support from the cluster leaders. He shared that he is also a cluster leader himself. This is what he said:

We requested the cluster leaders to come and assist us. I'm also a cluster leader myself, there was a mandate from the district office that we should run workshops for these out-field educators before they started teaching the new subjects.

In a similar vein, Miss Bophela shared that she also encouraged her educators to seek advice and support from cluster leaders on what has changed and how implement it. This is what she narrated:

At the start of each term I encouraged my educators to ask for help, especially now that there is so much confusion around the programmes of assessment. It was the cluster leaders who provided the assistance in this regard on what is to be done and not be done. So, we relied on them a lot as they know more about the subject.

According to Mgxeka (2019), Subject Advisors are district-level-based officials who extend assistance to teachers in the delivery of the curriculum and ensure that the curriculum coverage by the teacher is on par with the policy. The subject advisors also hold the responsibility of organising content enrichment workshops to develop teachers in the subjects they are responsible for. The objective of the content enrichment workshops is to guide teachers on how to teach the topics to be covered in that particular quarter. Some participants sought the support of Subject Advisors and cluster leaders to render support to the educators they had allocated new subject during the height of COVID-19 pandemic. This strategy ensured that these newly assigned educators can have the best support possible.

This view is in line with Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) who asserts that instructional leaders should mobilise other school stakeholders with the intention of tapping into their expertise and knowledge. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) further allude that involvement

of various stakeholders will help to generate new solutions as different people view things differently. The departmental heads mobilised the support of subject advisors by seeking their knowledge and expertise.

4.6 Knowledge and skills required by the Departmental Heads when leading in the midst of a crisis

When leading in the midst of an unprecedented crisis such as COVID-19 pandemic, the participants noted few skills that they believe assisted them to navigate through this pandemic. Under this theme, two sub-themes will be discussed, namely; leading by example and strategic planning.

4.6.1 Leading by example

Data from participants is revealing that another skill that the participants required when leading in the midst of a pandemic is leading by example. The participants shared that due to the extra workload arising from the need for social distance, they had to take some of the workloads as their schools did not have the capacity to hire new educators. While leading by example achieved the desired goal of persuading the other educators to take additional workloads, this added to the participants' competing duties. They saw it necessary to be the first to accept and welcome the new changes as to influence their educators. On this issue of leading by example this is what Mr. Zeze had to say:

I allocated myself teaching time that is equal to other teachers. If I did not take the extra load, some teachers would not have bought into the idea of taking additional classes and subjects. They would have complained it was too much, but they saw I was also burdening myself so they followed suit. I had to lead by example to win them over. If you act as 'the boss' you never win them over.

Similar sentiments were also shared by Mr Good who shared that when COVID-19 surged, he had to take additional classes like other educators. This is what he said:

When COVID-19 came, I was forced to take additional classes. The number of classes I am teaching has now multiplied which makes it difficult for me to do my administrative work as expected.

In his articulations, Mr Donald articulated that because of the additional classes that have been necessitated by COVID-19, he had to constantly monitor the classes which would be left unattended as at his school they did not have the manpower to attend to all classes. The following are his views:

We had a challenge where we had teachers who had additional classes due to the nature of the subject. As a DH, if we had these additional classes that means some of these classes will not be occupied. So, a DH, I had to move around and maintain order.

Miss Bophela shared her experiences by noting that she also had to teach additional hours to accommodate the mismatch of the timetable. This is how she narrated her experience:

It was a challenge. We couldn't timetable it because it added everyone's classes. If Mr Khabazela had more classes with Geography, as an Economics teacher I was also forced to have double periods so I can utilise these learners who do not do Geography. There was a time where Mr Khabazela would be in Class A and Class B would be unattended, we don't want that so I had to go in. That's an additional hour for me.

Data elicited from Mr Rama was silent on the additional classes he had to take due to COVID-19, however, he did mention that he played a sterling role in put in place mechanisms to capacitate educators who have been assigned new subjects. This is what he said:

I have been very vocal to say when we need to call subject meetings to capacitate almost everyone in the subject because there are people who majored in subjects but can't even deliver. There are others who have also been given new subjects but they have not been assisted.

It is emerging from the data solicited from the participants that they lead by example during this period of COVID-19 pandemic. The main aim was to influence educators under their leadership to accept COVID-19 imposed challenges. In order to influence their educators, they reflected that they needed to be seen doing more than they were used to. For instance, Mr. Zeze reflected that he had to take additional classes and subjects in order to influence his educators. This shows that he had to lead by example. This view is forgone by Boiral et al. (2015) who forgoes leading by example as sets a precedent of significance by demonstrating commitment. Integrity provides additional motivation by fostering trust and creating an alignment between the leader's recommendations and actions (Eisenkopf, 2020). The actions words of demonstrating and motivating are what Mr. Lukhele and Mr. Khumalo hoped to achieve when

they allocated themselves additional subjects. As leaders, the role they play is very crucial into ensuring that that new changes are accepted by the wider spectrum of educators.

4.6.2 Strategic planning

Strategic planning was one of the strategies exerted by the DHs to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. Miss Bophela emphasised the need for planning. Planning was done in advance so that she could ensure that time would be properly allocated for the various tasks that were planned. She shared that she used her free time to plan her duties strategically in order to have efficiency. On how she strategically planned, Miss Bophela shared that effective planning assisted her to ensure she does her work effectively. She had this to say:

What is important is planning. The workload is always there, as you can see there are many papers there waiting for moderation. But when you are strategic with your planning then it becomes easier. You need to understand that as DHs we do not carry the same teaching load like PLI educators. We have two or more hours free almost every day. So, it is important to utilise these two or more hours to properly our tasks. Planning is very important... Already there is a plan that on Saturday we are continuing with intervention classes. To plan my tasks helps, and it helps to manage the workload.

Three other DHs shared that they strategically encouraged their educators to plan ahead for extra classes to recover any lost content and to be on par with the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP). On this issue of using free time to plan ahead, Mr. Zeze had this to say:

I highlight the gaps to the teacher and I advise that they plan lesson effectively. If they are behind I suggest they take extra classes. I also use the strategy of setting dates of when I will check progress and implementation of the report that will come thereafter.

On how he planned ahead in order to ensure effective utilisation of time, Mr. Rama had the following to say:

We plan together with the educator to create enough time for extra classes. Either after school or call them on Saturdays to ensure they catch up. If the educator does not create enough time, the learners will always be behind.

Mr. Donald articulated that he planned extra classes in his school to ensure that educators had enough time to revise catch up. He articulated the following when responding to how he planned ahead in his school:

At my school, I normally organise extra classes. Extra classes are the order of the day to try to cover up. Which even comes to Saturday and Sundays and evenings. We try to use these periods to revise and catch up.

Data emerging from Mr Rama was slightly different from what was shared by the other participants. He shared that while he also encouraged educators engage in extra class to recover lost content, he also encouraged them to engage the learners in extra classes during school hours. Some learners use scholar transport; hence, engaging them outside school hours may attract its own challenges. This is what he said:

When I advise an educator, I advise them that when there is an absent educator that they should utilise those periods to ensure they catch up. Another thing, when wanting to conduct extra classes after school, the learners use different transports, others use scholar transport. Some stay very far from the school to an extent that enroute to their homes they have to walk in the bushes and it is not safe.

It is emerging from the participants that they regarded planning strategically as one of the skills that they require to mitigate the impact of a pandemic similar to COVID-19. The participants' views on strategic planning are also corroborated by literature. Taking a definition from reviewed literature, strategic planning is defined as a formal, ongoing process for developing goals and implementing actions for positioning the organisation in the best possible position (Fantauzzi, Colasanti, Fiorani & Frondizi, 2021). This definition implies that planning is a "process" that involves both the development and the implementation of a systematic plan. This process is important because it assists in setting directions, asserting goals and finding ways to attain them (Strom et al., 2016). It is emerging from this study that DHs strategically planned their duties to ensure efficiency in their departments despite the challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic with the intention of positioning their departments in the best possible position. The views of these DHs can also be viewed from the Hallinger and Murphy (1985) perspective. Planning strategically assist the DHs to determine the aspects that require immediate attention and work towards attaining those goals.

4.7 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I presented and discussed the data generated from telephonic interviews with the DHs. The findings were presented and discussed under the following themes; Departmental Heads' understandings of rural school; Departmental Heads' experiences of their instructional

leadership roles in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic; Instructional leadership challenges faced by DHs in the midst of COVID-19; Strategies employed by DHs in rural secondary schools to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their instructional leadership role and learning and knowledge and skills and knowledge required by DHs when leading in the midst of a crisis. The next chapter presents and discuss the conclusions that are drawn from the findings discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a detailed discussion and presentation of the data that were generated through semi-structured interviews. This chapter presents the summary of the study, conclusions from the findings presented in the previous chapter and recommendations emanating from the study. After restating the research questions, I will then provide a summary of the findings and the conclusions that emanated from them. Lastly, this chapter provides recommendations based on the findings and conclusions that emerged. The main research questions were as follows:

- What are the Departmental Heads' experiences of their role as instructional leaders in rural secondary schools during COVID-19 pandemic?
- What challenges do the Departmental Heads encounter in enacting their instructional leadership role during COVID-19 pandemic?
- What appropriate strategies do the Departmental Heads in rural secondary schools employ to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their instructional leadership role?

This Chapter is presented in the following format. I commence by providing a brief summary of the study, followed by conclusions guided by each research question and then the recommendations.

5.2 Study summary

This study was conducted to explore the instructional leadership experiences of Departmental Heads in rural secondary schools in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. This study notes and acknowledges that COVID-19 pandemic has brought about numerous challenges to the basic education sector. As a researcher, I then set out to explore how three rural secondary school Departmental Heads have experienced their instructional leadership practices in the midst of

the challenges brought by COVID-19 since they are in a context that is not favourable to effectively deal with these challenges. Conducting the study was therefore, to explore how the Departmental Heads experienced their instructional leadership roles during this period of COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter One supplies a broad overview of the study and provides the background of the study, a rationale (as briefly outlined above), the research objectives and research questions, and an outline of what would be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two is based on the literature reviewed in consideration of the key research questions. The review focused on the details of leadership, management, instructional leadership, Departmental Heads as instructional leaders and leading during a crisis. The literature review offered insight into the instructional leadership of Departmental Heads that supports and enhances teaching and learning. I presented international and local empirical studies on pertinent issues on the instructional leadership roles of the DHs. The theoretical framework was then discussed. This section entailed the discussion of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership model and Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky's (2009) adaptive leadership model as the two theories which framed this study.

In Chapter Three, I then moved on to discussing the research design and methodology of the study. The study was informed by the interpretive paradigm, which allowed me to understand the socially constructed multiple realities. This paradigm was chosen because of its potential to assist in the understanding of the reality of the existing situation, thus, DHs instructional leadership experiences. This section was followed by a detailed explanation of the case study as the methodological approach that underpinned this study. Instructional leadership experiences of rural DHs are a case in this study. Hence, the utilisation of real people as participants to in a real situation to provide a unique example of a case. Telephonic semi-structured interviews were the primary method of generating data from the participants. The data that emerged from these interviews were then analysed, and the emerging themes were discussed in the following chapter. This chapter also discussed issues surrounding trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four provides a discussion and analysis of the data that emerged from the semi-structured interviews. Themes and sub-themes then emerged. In the data presentation section of this chapter, *verbatim* quotes of the participating DHs were used to reveal data and make sure that voices did not disappear. In the first research question, the participants reflected on

the impact that COVID-19 has had on their instructional leadership practices. Findings that emerged from the second question showed that to mitigate the challenges that have been brought by COVID-19 pandemic on their instructional leadership practices, the DHs have had to rely on teacher collaboration and the support they drew from the parents, the SGB, and the Subject Advisors and cluster leaders to enhance teaching and learning during the era of COVID-19. Findings on the third research question reflected on how the DHs relied on leading by example and strategically planning ahead in order to maximise time.

5.3 Conclusions and discussion

Maree (2011, p.113) describes the significance of analysing the findings and the interpretation of data by researchers as a “bounded conclusion”. Conclusions are drawn to finalise judgement against the existing knowledge and the findings generated by the study (Maree, 2011). Having provided the summary of the study in the above section, this chapter thus presents the learnings that emerged during this research journey together with the main findings of this research study in the following manner; Departmental Heads experiences in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic; strategies exerted by Departmental Heads to mitigate challenges of COVID-19 pandemic.

5.3.1 What are the Departmental Heads’ experiences of their role as instructional leaders in rural secondary schools during COVID-19 pandemic?

Significant findings were gleaned from this research question. This question highlighted above aimed to elicit empirical data around the Departmental Heads’ instructional leadership experiences in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing from the data presented in Chapter Four, it is emerging that COVID-19 pandemic had challenges that had an impact on the DHs’ instructional leadership experiences. While they experienced challenges in some of their instructional leadership practices, they were still able to enact others without meaningful challenges. Reviewed literature shows that the DHs have raised concerns regarding the limited time they have to enact their instructional leadership practices. The limited time they have makes it difficult for them to ensure efficiency in the execution of their roles. When COVID-19 pandemic surfaced on our shores, DHs were already engulfed by these underlying

challenges of limited time to enact all of their instructional practices efficiently. COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated this challenge of limited time by creating additional priorities that demanded and competed for the DHs' time and attention. These additional priorities impacted on the manner they enact their other instructional practices.

The findings to this research question seem to corroborate available literature. Tapala et al. (2020) for example, found in their study that competing priorities hinder the DHs from performing their duties. The DHs may know what is expected of them as shown by the responses from the participants, however, they struggle meet their obligations due to the workload (Ogina, 2017). While the DHs were still able enact their instructional leadership responsibilities, additional priorities induced by COVID-19 pandemic competed with their instructional leadership roles, thus, making it difficult for them to effectively carry out their traditional instructional leadership responsibilities effectively. These new priorities that emerged from this study include the need to constantly observe COVID-19 health regulations within the school premises, being over-utilised by principals and wandering around the school. These are new practices that seem to compete for the time and attention of DHs.

Another finding that emerged from this research question was that the DHs felt over-utilised by their principals. COVID-19 pandemic has caused an increase in everyone's workload. When the principals felt the pressure of their increased workload and duties they quickly delegated some of their workload and duties to the DHs. This created additional pressure and burden for the DHs and such pressures took them away from their instructional leadership functions. While the DHs seem to appreciate this trust from their principals, it however, cannot be denied that these delegations affected the efficiency of the enactment of their instructional leadership roles.

Some of the conclusions to be made is that the emergence of COVID-19 has seen the emergence of various additional priorities that DHs are forced to foreground in their leadership practices. These priorities seem to have had a negative impact on the DHs instructional leadership practices as they are time consuming. While the DHs were still able to enact their instructional leadership practices despite these new additional priorities, the pandemic affected them as they shared that there were differences in the enactment and experiences of their instructional leadership practices during and pre COVID-19 pandemic.

5.3.2 What challenges do the Departmental Heads encounter in enacting their instructional leadership practices during COVID-19 pandemic?

This question assisted me to obtain a better understanding of the challenges that the participants were experiencing when enacting their instructional leadership practices during COVID-19 pandemic. The data generated from the participants revealed a number of challenges, of which some were similar across the participants while some were diverse. The following challenges emerged; competing priorities during COVID-19, internet connectivity as a barrier, insufficient support from school leadership and dependency on scholar transport. The study concludes that numerous challenges are experienced by the DHs when enacting their instructional leadership practices during COVID-19 pandemic in rural secondary schools.

With the competing priorities that have emerged during this period of COVID-19 pandemic, this study identified that that COVID-19 pandemic has created additional burden on the instructional leadership work of the DHs. The DHs have to focus on new priorities which compete for time and focus. Being over-utilised by their principals was also identified as a challenge that impacted on the DHs' abilities to enact their instructional leadership role during this period. While it emerged that they obeyed additional instructions and delegated work, this however, competed greatly with the roles they are expected to play as instructional leaders. The work delegated to them consumed a lot of their time to be able to do their own work effectively and efficiently. It also emerged that during COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of support from the school leadership created confusion and uncertainty for all involved, most particularly the DHs. The other challenge is dependency on scholar transport. Lastly, internet connectivity as barrier was also identified. Only Mr. Good was able to develop creative means to ensure internet connectivity was not a barrier to his instructional leadership role.

The challenges discussed above and emerging in this study are linked to the nature of COVID-19 pandemic and the DHs experiences during this period. Departmental Heads see these challenges as having hindrances to their abilities to their instructional leadership roles. From the literature perspective, it is documented in Tapala et al. (2020), for instance, that the DHs struggle when they have to attend to multiple priorities that all demand their attention as they

cannot perform all of them at once. That is why it has become clear from this study that the DHs have to strategically plan ahead. This will allow them to not be overwhelmed as they will know what to do at what time, and thus, utilise their time effectively. What this study concludes is that the participants were able to adapt their activities in response to an emergent, unpredictable circumstances in line with Adaptive leadership theory as advanced by Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009). For instance, Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009, p.14), define adaptive leadership as “the practice of mobilising people to tackle tough challenges through debates and creative thinking, identifying opportunities to thrive.” My conclusions are that the participants (DHs) enacted their leadership in line with this conceptualisation of adaptive leadership.

5.3.3 What appropriate strategies do the Departmental Heads in rural secondary schools employ to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their instructional leadership role?

It emerged from the participating DHs that they employed various strategies to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their instructional leadership practices. They instigated and promoted collaboration among their educators; they drew on parental and SGB support and lastly drew on support from district officials. The Departmental Heads in this study facilitated and encouraged collaboration among educators in order to ensure there was no interruption in the teaching and learning in their schools. This was achieved by allocating new educators to subjects that had a high number of learners. Original educators of these subjects were requested to assist these newly allocated educators and work in close proximity with them, thus strengthening collaboration among them. It was therefore, concluded that when confronted with a crisis, the DHs facilitated and encouraged collaboration among their educators in order to ensure there was no interruption in the teaching and learning in their schools.

This study also found that during this period of COVID-19 pandemic, Departmental Heads drew support from parents and the SGB. Since a considerable amount of time was lost due to the pandemic, the DHs then sought the support of the parents by seeking their involvement, most particularly, in the provision of transport for their children to be able to attend extra classes. The parents then came on board to provide transport for their children after being

required to do so by the DHs. The departmental heads did not only seek the support of parents. They also sought the support of their SGBs in the form of financial assistance.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations were suggested based on the conclusions that were drawn from the findings of the study. The recommendations are directed at the Departmental Heads and the research community.

5.4.1 Recommendations directed at the Departmental Heads

The findings and conclusions clearly indicate that the DHs were highly committed to their work of teaching and learning and the enhancement thereof, through the use of instructional leadership. The findings have also shown that when COVID-19 attacked the whole country and national lockdown was imposed, teaching stopped for many schools in rural communities. However, when teaching and learning resumed although on a limited scale (Platooning of learners and social distancing), the DHs introduced other means of continuing with teaching and learning and the processes of supervision and monitoring. Some DHs even organised training workshops for the staff. However, it has also emerged from the findings that not all the DHs were sufficiently creative in terms of adapting to the current realities of COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the scenario painted in the above paragraph, it is recommended that the DHs should attend workshops to equip themselves with technological skills on how to utilise technological models such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom Meetings for teaching and learning as these have been found to be helpful in facilitating teaching under the unfavourable conditions such as those imposed by COVID-19 pandemic. The Departmental Heads leading in rural schools should not use the context they work in as an excuse to go the extra mile. Integrating technology in their teaching is possible as shown by the strides taken by Mr. Good.

5.4.2 Recommendations to the research community

This was a small-scale study based on the instructional leadership experiences of only five Departmental Heads' leading in rural schools in the midst of a pandemic. Therefore, the findings cannot represent the experiences of the rest of the DHs leading in rural secondary

school during a pandemic. The issues addressed by this study are too important to be left unexplored on a bigger scale so that a comprehensive understanding of the effect of COVID-19 on instructional leadership duties of DHs can be known. Because the current study cannot be generalised, it is imperative that a large-scale study should be conducted to address various angles of this phenomenon.

5.5 Chapter summary

The study focused on the instructional leadership experiences of the Departmental Heads in rural secondary schools and was guided by the three research questions. The study revealed that the instructional leadership challenges experienced by Departmental Heads in rural schools in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic were not insurmountable. The evidence suggests that the DHs found their way around the challenges they faced, and to a certain extent, succeeded. This is the last chapter which has presented conclusions and made recommendations.

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APPENDIX A: PERMISSION LETTER TO MPU DoE

316

Mpuluzi

Mayflower C

2335

6 September 2021

Attention: The Superintendent-General

Department of Basic Education

Mpumalanga Province

Private Bag X11341

Nelpruit

1200

Dear Sir

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

My name is Sokesimbone Ngcobo, a Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus), specialising in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy. As part of the Master's degree I am required to conduct a research. I therefore seek permission to conduct research in three secondary schools under your jurisdiction in the Gert Sibande District (Breyten and Mpuluzi circuits).

The topic of my research is: Exploring Instructional Leadership in the Midst of Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Departmental Heads in Rural Secondary Schools. This study aims to explore how school departmental heads have experienced leadership during the unprecedented period of Covid-19. The results of the study could provide insights about how departmental heads exert their roles in a period of a crisis. This study can bring about strategies that can be useful to the department of basic education officials in understanding in-depth the experiences and challenges facing departmental heads in rural schools when faced by a pandemic. Participants will be departmental heads of these three school and in the purposive selected schools. Semi-structured interviews that will last approximately 45-60 minutes will be

used at a convenient time for participants to avoid interrupting teaching time. Interviews will be voice recorded and data will be kept in a voice recorder. In analysing data, responses will be treated with confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be used instead of school and participant's names. Participation will always be voluntary, meaning withdrawal can be done at any time without any harm. The study is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.

You may contact my Supervisor Dr B.N.C.K Mkhize, [REDACTED] and e-mail: mkhizeb3@ukzn.ac.za . My contact number is [REDACTED], 215014680@stu.ukzn.ac.za

You may also contact the Research Office through:

HSSREC Research Office,

Tel.: 031 260 8350/4557/3587

E-mail: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Thanking you in anticipation

Yours sincerely

Ngcobo SN

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

316 Mpuluzi

Mayflower C

2335

12 December 2020

The Principal

LETTER SEEKING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY

My name is Sokesimbone Ngcobo I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and currently registered for a Master of Education Degree in Educational Leadership Management and Policy. One of the requirements in completing the degree is to conduct a study. I am requesting the permission to conduct a study at your school. The school was purposively selected because it is situated in a rural setting and is in close proximity from where I stay. I request the permission to interview your HODs. The interview will take approximately one hour and it will be Zoom-recorded. The information that will be generated will be purely for research and the audio-recording will be safely stored at the University for the purposes of security. Please fill in the declaration form consenting to my request to conduct a study.

PLEASE TAKE NOTE THAT:

- There will be no financial benefits that participants may accrue as a result of their participation in this research project.
- The identity of participants will not be divulged under any circumstance/s, during and after the reporting process.
- All the responses, observations and reviewed documents will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Pseudonyms will be used to represent the school and names of the participants.
- Participation will always remain voluntary which means that participants may withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime if they so wish without incurring any penalties.
- Participants will be purposively selected to participate in this study and they will be contacted well in advance for interviews.
- The interviews shall take place via Zoom and will be recorded to assist in concentrating on the actual interviews.

Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated. Should you need further information regarding the matter, you may contact me, my supervisor and the Research Office of the University.

CONTACT DETAILS

Researcher: Ngcobo Sokesimbone,

Email: 215014680@stu.ukzn.ac.za/ Sokegeorge21@gmail.com

████████████████████

Supervisor: Dr BNCK Mkhize,

Email: Mkhizeb3@ukzn.ac.za

████████████████████

Telephone: 031 260 1398

You may also contact the Research Office through:

HSSREC Research Office,

Tel.: 031 260 8350/4557/3587

E-mail: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Ngcobo Sokesimbone

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

316 Mpuluzi

Mayflower C

2335

28 January 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Sokesimbone Ngcobo. I am a Master's student in education studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Education (Edgewood Campus). As part of my degree requirement, I am required to conduct research. My study title is: **Exploring Instructional Leadership in the Midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Departmental Heads in Rural Secondary Schools.**

The purpose of this study is to explore the instructional experiences of departmental heads who are leading in rural secondary schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. You have been purposively selected to participate in this study. I therefore kindly request your permission to be one of my research participants. The dates and times for the recorded semi structured interviews will be organized with you in advance.

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 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 penalised 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, 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 | | |
| Zoom recording | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | |
|--|--|--|

For further information on this research project, please feel free to contact my supervisor or the research office whose contact details are provided below.

Thank you in advance for your contribution to this research.

Yours sincerely

Researcher: Sokesimbone Ngcobo

Email: 215014680@stu.ukzn.ac.za

████████████████████

Supervisor: Dr BNCK Mkhize,

Email: Mkhizeb3@ukzn.ac.za

████████████████████

Telephone: 031 260 1398

You may also contact the Research Office through:

HSSREC Research Office,

Tel.: 031 260 8350/4557/3587

E-mail: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

APPENDIX D: DECLARATION

Declaration

I..... (Surname and initials of the principal) of ----- (School name) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study: **Exploring Instructional Leadership in the Midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Departmental Heads in Rural Secondary Schools**. I have received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and I consent voluntarily for the school to be part of the study. I understand that the school is at liberty to withdraw from research at any time should the school so desire.

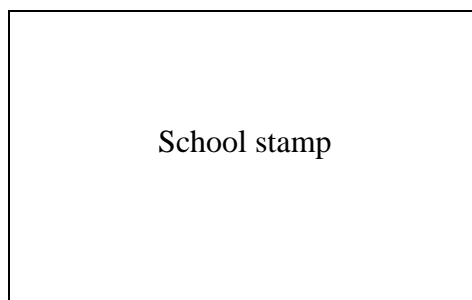
I **agree/ do not agree** for the use of audio recording device.

Signature of Principal

Date

.....

.....



APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Interview Schedule

Research title: Exploring Instructional Leadership in the Midst of Covid-19 Pandemic: A case Study of Departmental Heads in Rural Secondary Schools.

Questions

- What effects has the virus had on teaching and learning in your school?
- What strategies have you put in motion to mitigate the challenges of covid-19?
- What do you understand to be instructional leadership?
- Has the Department of Education provided with adequate resources/knowledge to adapt to the challenges of Covid-19?
- How has rurality impacted on your strategies of mitigating the effects brought by the virus?
- If any, what opportunities have been brought by the pandemic?
- To what extent has government regulations affected/assisted teaching and learning?

Proposed interview dates

| Date | School | Session time |
|-------------|---------------|---------------------|
| 24 May 2021 | Forest High | 18H00 |
| 25 May 2021 | Marikana High | 18H00 |
| 26 May 2021 | Marikana High | 18H00 |
| 27 May 2021 | Forest High | 18H00 |
| 28 May 2021 | Marikana High | 18H00 |
| 29 May 2021 | Comprehensive | 12H00 |

APPENDIX F: TURNITIN CERTIFICATE

The screenshot displays the Turnitin Feedback Studio interface. The main document area shows the title "INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE MIDST OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY OF DEPARTMENTAL HEADS IN RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS" by SOKESIMBONE NGCOBO. The document is structured into "CHAPTER ONE" and "INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND". The first section, "1.1 Introduction and background", contains a paragraph starting with "The Covid-19 pandemic is first and foremost a global health crisis, Undeniably, it has had a tremendous impact on schools, students and teachers alike (Almanthari, Maulina & Bruce, 2020). The pandemic required drastic measures to be pursued as means of curbing the spread".

The right-hand side of the interface features a "Match Overview" panel. At the top, it shows a total match percentage of 15%. Below this, it lists five matches with their respective percentages:

| Match Number | Source | Percentage |
|--------------|---|------------|
| 1 | researchspace.ukzn.ac... Internet Source | 5% |
| 2 | hdl.handle.net Internet Source | 5% |
| 3 | ukzn-dspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source | 1% |
| 4 | www.tandfonline.com Internet Source | 1% |
| 5 | Tshepo T. Tapala, M. P. ... Publication | <1% |

At the bottom of the interface, there is a status bar showing "Page: 1 of 95", "Word Count: 37542", and "Text-Only Report". The system tray at the very bottom indicates a temperature of 24°C, mostly cloudy weather, and the date 2021/12/21.

APPENDIX G: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



15 July 2021

Mr Sokesimbone Nimrod Ngcobo (215014680)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Ngcobo,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002624/2021
Project title: Exploring Instructional Leadership in the Midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Departmental Heads in Rural Secondary Schools.
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 17 March 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted FULL APPROVAL.

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

This approval is valid until 15 July 2022.

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

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

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

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

