



**Principals' Explanations for High Matric Results in Rural Secondary Schools in  
Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal**

*by*

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## DECLARATION

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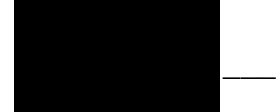


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Signature

## **ABSTRACT**

It is conventionally accepted that education can be key to an individual's future success. Moreover, how and where an individual attains this education can further determine his/her future. Whereas rural schools are often categorised as and associated with providing poor, low and inferior education (du Plessis, 2014), this study set out to explore examples of rural schools which, despite their rurality, managed to consistently produce high matric results. Specifically, the study focused on exploring the role of the principals of selected rural secondary schools in Pietermaritzburg that have been able to produce and maintain high matric results despite their constraints and challenges. The study had four objectives. The study's first objective was to explore principals' perceptions of the ways in which high matric results are attained in rural secondary schools. The second objective was to explore the role that rural secondary principals had in bringing about high matric results. The third objective was to explore principals' behaviours that they perceived were associated with the attainment of high matric results in rural secondary schools. The fourth objective of the study was to explore the internal processes and strategies that rural principals used to attain and maintain high matric results. The study made use of a qualitative research method, with semi-structured interviews being conducted with five secondary schools' principals from rural schools around Pietermaritzburg. Guiding the study and the interpretation of the findings were the contingency theories, particularly Fiedler's model of the contingency theory. This theory provides a framework that explains how organisations function effectively when leaders take into consideration both the internal and external factors that build an organisation (Donaldson, 2001). The findings from the study suggest that several factors and stakeholders contributed to the high matric results produced in the sample of rural secondary schools included in the study. Specifically, the findings suggest that the collective effort and hard work of the principals, matric students, former matric students, school staff, parents, school governing bodies, social workers, psychologists and rural communities at large contributed to the high matric results obtained in these rural schools. These findings are discussed in light of the contemporary challenges that rural schools in South Africa face.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my angel twin baby boys and girls. You will forever be a part of me. I will always love you.

God is love.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
CRDP	Comprehensive Rural Development Plan
DDP	District Development Project
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
EDSU	Education Department Support Unit
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HRSC	Human Science Research Council
IOM	Instrumented Outcome Measurement
KZN DoE	KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education
LPC	Least Preferred Co-worker
MCRE	Ministerial Committee on Rural Education
NDP	National Development Plan
NEPA	National Education Policy Act
NMF	Nelson Mandela Foundation
NSLA	National Strategy for Learner Attainment
PfP	Partners for Possibility
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Plan/ Programme

REQV	Relative Education Qualification Value
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SASA	South African Schools Act
SBRR	Scientifically based reading research
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SGB	School Governing Body
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

## CHAPTER ONE

### ORIENTATION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction

Education plays an important role in the growth and development of economies across the world (Ozturk, 2020). It can serve as an equaliser that is open to all, irrespective of their socio-economic status. Although education is commonly regarded as a tool for socioeconomic transformation and mobility globally, its impact has not been fully felt in South Africa (Kromydas, 2017) nor globally. As a matter of fact, in the contemporary world, there is a direct connection between poverty and poor education (Mood, 2016). Hence, societies that provide poor or unsatisfactory schools to their communities often suffer from inert workforces, unproductive markets and unsteady governing bodies (Warnich *et al.*, 2014). Just like many social policy issues, the significant phases of educational evolution in South Africa have had racialised traces across different stages of history. The inception of racialised education can thus be traced in South Africa from the epoch of colonialism in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to 1947, to the apartheid era, between 1948 – 1990 and finally the democratic era from 1990 to date. The emergence of democracy has bridged a gap for the populace to acquire educational skills, irrespective of their background, whether urban, rural or city dwellers (du Plessis and Mestry, 2019)

Kromydas, T. Rethinking higher education and its relationship with social inequalities: past knowledge, present state and future potential. *Palgrave Commun* **3**, 1 (2017).

du Plessis, Pierre, & Mestry, Raj. (2019). Teachers for rural schools - a challenge for South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 39(Suppl. 1), s1-s9

Ozturk, I. 2020. The Role of Education in Economic Development: A Theoretical Perspective. SSRN Electronic Journal

De Vita, Mari, and Poggesi (2014) note that it is reasonably evident to understand that someone with sound educational skills can access certain economic opportunities and markets. Similarly, in South Africa, a person's career and professional achievements often hinge on his/her educational attainment and level of exposure. The post-apartheid government has aimed to make education accessible to all who live in South Africa, with the specific aim of education performing a refining role in peoples' lives regardless of their social-economic status (Badat & Sayed, 2014). In spite of the efforts made by the postapartheid government and the present ruling democratic government, education has not convincingly reformed the economy of South Africa because illiteracy still persists amongst the citizenry (Khumalo, Sebatlelo & Van der Merwe, 2014).

## **1.2 Background to the study**

Basic education (i.e. primary and secondary schooling) in South Africa follows the same path as that of other countries of the world by proclaiming to create a non-racial and inclusive system of uniformity in their educational quality (Leornard, 2017). However, Higher Education South Africa (HESA) claimed that the South African basic education system in 1994 was not of a good quality, and this situation has made the educational system's quality erratic from then to date (Oosthuizen, 2014). Evidence according to Fryer (2014) has shown that schools in urban areas have a greater tendency and a better performance at matric pass rates in comparison to what can be achieved from rural schools. The latter differential in achievement rates between urban and rural schools can be attributed to learner factors, but probably more importantly, the expertise of the school leaders and educators, and the system of the schools' administration (Wolhuter, 2014).

The quality of education accessed by learners in South Africa thus seems to depend upon race, class and locality. Specifically, white learners and a few students from other races that are predominately from upper and middle-class levels backgrounds in society and who reside in urban areas are able to access better quality education when compared to their counterparts that reside in rural or underdeveloped areas (Mestry, 2014). Limaye

(2016) agrees by emphasizing the factors that influence learners' accessibility to education to include poverty, gender, disability, parents' exposure, and the nonavailability of schools' infrastructural facilities.

In lieu of the barriers mentioned above, the Ministry of Education in South Africa has dissected and categorised schools in the country into five quintiles. The first three quintiles are regarded as no-fee schools because of the socio-economic status of the learners that attend these schools (Taylor & Mabogoane, 2015). The general understanding according to these authors is that schools located in rural areas are positioned in low-income areas, thus allowing parents who send learners to these schools to be relieved of paying fees. Consequently, the target schools reported in this dissertation fit into this category because quintile one to three could be regarded as rural (Leigh & Blakely, 2016). With this logic in mind, "rural" is not strictly about location but also carries with it a socio-economic dimension.

Inclusion and diversity are also important factors to consider in teaching contexts which aim to provide quality and relevant education to all learners. Teachers need to ensure that they design learning experiences that are responsive to learners' individual differences and learning styles. This is particularly true in the multigrade context, where learners are at various age and ability levels ( Taole, 2020).

There is a close relationship between context and leadership, principal preparation programmes should be guided by a deeper examination of contextual factors (Brauckmann, S., Pashuardis, P. & Arlestig, H. 2019 ).

This study intends to explore the specific roles of rural secondary schools' principals in achieving high results, especially in their matriculation classes, despite the constraints encountered within the internal and external structure of the school environment.

### **1.3 Rationale for the study**

Mestry (2014) alludes to the fact that schools situated in rural areas are confronted with numerous barriers such as poor infrastructure, high teacher-learner ratios, no or limited

access to broadband internet and poor socio-economic environments. Despite the hitches encountered by schools in rural areas, some amongst them manage to produce high results with their matriculating pupils. This effect demonstrates the capacity to consistently overcome impediments to achieving high results (Olu *et al.*, 2016).

In South Africa, schools from rural areas are generally considered as having low standards and poor educational outcomes. This is not to say some of these rural or remote-based schools do not make efforts to match the standards of schools in urban areas or cities by obtaining excellent results and producing high students. Also, these efforts, most often, remain elusive because of impediments such as the underperformance or ineffectiveness of teachers, the use of old curricula, and the indisposition of the students to acquire the necessary educational skills like their counterparts in the cities (Dewar, Watson & Todes, 2017). It is on this premise that this study seeks to evaluate these assertions by focusing on researching the rural schools that have been obtaining high matric results. The study aims to achieve the aforementioned by engaging the principals of the excelling rural schools to share their experiences, perceptions, behaviours, roles and strategies used to facilitate their attainment of high matric results.

#### **1.4 Significance of the study**

Fadaunsi and Pelsler (2013) posit that education is one of the key elements needed to ensure sustainable economic growth in the contemporary world. Bayarystanova, Arenova and Nurmuhametova (2014) opine that education is a device that can be used to restore problems such as poverty, abuse, violence, robbery, attack, injustice, hunger and many other behaviours that can cause damage to the living environment. In the view of Hall and Mitchell (2016), education is described as an instrument of survival. Education develops an individual and exposes that individual to skills to enable him/her to make appropriate life choices as a viable member of society. Education is a promoter of a healthier, good life.

Jilcha and Kitaw (2017) state that part of the strategy to ensure sustainable development is to make substantial investment in educating children as they represent valuable resources to make economic growth viable. According to the authors, the pre-emptive factors that can impede acquiring valuable knowledge, skills and good moral behaviour include; political instability, poverty, ignorance, war and famine.

### **1.5 Research problem**

In terms of academic excellence, there is a significant distinction between the performance of pupils learning in rural schools, situated in remote areas as compared to those situated in cities or urban areas (Gomes & Marque, 2013). According to Banerjee (2017), amongst the prominent factors prompting this circumstance is the effect of socioeconomic hardships, which put learners in a destitute state. Banerjee's (2017) review revealed the major factors linking deprivation and underachievement of pupils to include the lack of a positive environment and support. Furthermore, Gomes and Marque (2013) state that food insecurity and a lack of knowledge of health benefits from food is due to a lower level of parental education or minimal resources that hinder the physical growth, health and intellectual development of the pupils.

School principals are faced with new demands, more complex decisions and additional responsibilities than ever before. Their day is usually filled with diverse administrative and management functions such as procuring resources, managing learner discipline, resolving conflicts with parents and dealing with unexpected teacher and learner crises. However it is imperative for school principals to accentuate their role as instructional leaders by emphasising best teaching practices and keeping their schools focused on curriculum, teaching, and assessment to meet learner needs and enhance learner achievements. (Mestry, 2017)

Despite the notable role that education performs, it is disappointing that academic performance in South Africa, like many other African countries and in some parts of the world, is of a low quality. This is not excluding urban and city areas, as well as rural places in different provinces in South Africa, in particular rural secondary schools in the KwaZulu

Natal Province where the academic performance of rural schools is generally low (Atkinson, 2014). Even though qualified educators are employed by the government of South Africa to bridge the knowledge gap between institutions of learning in rural areas to urban or city centres, students' performance has not been encouraging thus far. Hence, a critical look into the causes of the failure rate of matriculants and students in general has to be taken within the internal and external structure of the school environment. Thereafter, it is important to find solutions that can help students schooling in rural areas to perform as well as learners in the city, urban areas and other provinces in the country.

### **1.6 Aim of the study**

This study aims at exploring the role of principals of selected rural secondary schools in Pietermaritzburg that have been able to produce and maintain high matric results, despite their constraints and challenges.

### **1.7 Research objectives**

- To explore principals' perceptions of the ways in which high matric results are attained in rural secondary schools;
- To explore the roles that rural secondary school principals' perceived they had in bringing about high matric results;
- To investigate the principals' behaviours that they perceive to be associated with the attainment of high matric results in rural secondary schools; and
- To explore the internal processes and strategies put in place by principals towards the attainment and maintenance of high matric results.

### **1.8 Research questions**

Based on the above research objectives, the key research questions are:

- What are principals' explanations of the ways in which high matric results can be attained in rural secondary schools?

- What roles do rural secondary principals play in bringing about high matric results?
- What behaviours among principals do rural secondary principals perceive as being associated with the attainment of high matric results?
- What internal processes and strategies do rural secondary principals use to ensure the attainment and maintenance of high matric results?

## **1.9 Methodology**

For this study, qualitative research strategy was used. Qualitative research was used because it gives detailed information on feelings, opinions and experiences of respondents. In addition, it allows the researcher to discover inner experiences of the participants. Furthermore, the researcher can interact with respondents during the processes. This study adopted an exploratory approach with a simple critical design. Neuman (2014) states that an exploratory approach performs the function of describing information in a way that gives a better understanding of whatever it aims to define.

Non-probability sampling In this case a purposive sampling method was used to ascertain the information needed in order to permit drawing inferences for the purpose of this study. This type of method was advantageous to this study because it allowed for the selection of respondents who were instrumental in eliciting the needed data for achieving the purpose of this study. Data was collected with the use of interviews and thematic analysis was used to analyse the study findings.

## **1.10 Structure of the dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into five chapters.

**Chapter One:** This chapter introduces the research, presents the background and context of the study, as well as the rationale for and significance of the study. The chapter also outlines the research problem, aims, objectives and research questions; and the location of the study.

**Chapter Two:** This chapter reviews relevant literature related to the thesis topic. It discusses the history of the South African education system from pre to post democracy

era, examines the Rural Education Draft Policy, and conceptualises leadership and academic achievement in rural schools. The literature explored in this chapter helps in justifying the significance of the current study. The chapter also presents the theoretical framework espoused for this study to attain the aims and objectives.

**Chapter Three:** In this chapter, the methodology adopted for the purpose of this study is presented. Several methodological research aspects are discussed, including the research paradigm, research design, the research sampling method and population, data collection and coding process, and methods of data analysis. The chapter further discusses the validity and reliability of the research method, ethical considerations, as well as limitations of the study.

**Chapter Four:** This chapter presents and discusses the research findings as derived from the research participants' responses. In examining how high results are attained in rural secondary schools, the chapter delineates the discussion under different themes, namely stakeholders' involvement and participation; support rendered and received; and discipline, commitment, hard work and proper conduct. Furthermore, the chapter looks at the role of principals in the attainment of high results in rural secondary schools and the significant behaviours by principals. In view of these, it discusses the themes of good leadership and additional preparation. Before concluding, the chapter presents the different perspectives advanced to justify why schools sited in urban zones perform better than those in rural areas, and also discusses internal processes and strategies.

**Chapter Five:** This chapter is the final chapter of the study. It presents reflective summaries of the research chapters and research discussions and findings, detailing how the research objectives and questions were addressed. The chapter further proffers recommendations, proposes areas of future research, and concludes the study.

## **1.11 Conclusion**

This chapter introduced the study by providing the background and context of the study, the objectives of the study, as well as the questions that can help the focus of this study to be achieved. Also included in this introductory chapter was the location and the structure of the study. The following chapter will present the literature review of this study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

In South Africa as in most countries on the African continent, the history of education spans three different phases, namely pre-colonial or pre-democratic, colonial, and postcolonial or post-democratic. Also, the system of education differs from country to country and region to region, with different stages of advancing from one educational or academic level to another and grading structures of academic performance and

achievements. Noting these, this literature review chapter, therefore, engages in a discursive examination of the history of the South African education system from the pre- to post democracy era, focusing particularly on the basic education system of rural high schools and their academic achievements. The chapter also looks at the Rural Education Draft Policy in South Africa, assesses the central role played by principals in improving academic achievement of matric results in the rural high schools, conceptualises as well as discusses the aspect of school leadership in the same context of academic achievement in the rural schools. The chapter also presents and describes the theoretical framework of contingency theories adopted for this study.

## **2.2 History of South African basic education system**

### **2.2.1 Pre-democracy**

In the pre-democratic era, the South African basic education system was racially fragmented, unequal and exclusive (Madlalate, 2017). Race and other factors such as inequality and injustice played a major role in this divisive and discriminatory education system (Bugra & Akkan, 2019). The system promoted the unequal treatment of learners and educators based on race (Barry, Clarke & Dowling, 2017), and white supremacy was specifically upheld over Black, Indian and Coloured races. Pre-democracy, the South African education system served white schools with resources such as textbooks, stationary, classrooms and qualified teachers. Meanwhile, the black majority were denied physical resources and were deprived of qualified teachers (Bugra & Akkan, 2019). In addition, the education system was designed to provide blacks with a poor quality of education and designed for the purpose of equipping them for labour jobs in agriculture, the mines and , domestic work. These jobs kept the majority of black people out of the modernising sectors of the socio-economy, and especially those reserved for whites (Leonard, 2017). Feith (2016) highlights how Hendrik Verwoed, during his tenure as the Minister of Native Affairs remarked, “What is the use of teaching a Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice?”

Bugra & Akkan (2019) assert that the apartheid education system was not only racially differentiated but also funded differently. This meant that racially favoured schools were highly funded as compared to the schools of those from disadvantaged races. According

to Bugra and Akkan's (2019) research, during apartheid white schools received ten times more funding per pupil as compared to African schools. Furthermore, it was discovered that even post-1994 (the democracy period), the amount of funding reserved for white pupils was two and a half times more than that for a black pupil in the urban townships. For the rural areas, it was three and a half times more than the funding used for a black African pupil (Bugra & Akkan, 2019). This disparity shows the amount of injustice and inequality in the South African education system in the pre-democracy period.

The racial segregation of schools did not only end in issues of unfair funding and unequal resources, but extended to unfair treatment. Black African schools were banned from having educational organizations. Additionally, the practices of discrimination in schools were marked by the mis-recognition and non-recognition of black views and experiences (Waitoller & Annamma, 2017). Moreover, the fact that the curriculum was designed to favour whites, was in favour to legitimate the views of Afrikanerdom and white supremacy (National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) 1993). Furthermore, the language that was used for instruction was Afrikaans and the history textbooks were written to show that whites were superior, while blacks were inferior. This was basically to promote Afrikaner nationalism (National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), 1993).

The inequality, discrimination, segregation and mistreatment of black African students and more especially the imposition of Afrikaans as a language of instruction in primary African schools provoked student uprisings and protests. The 1976 Soweto student uprising is an example of such disregard of pre-democratic South African Basic Education.

Importantly, it should be noted that pre-democracy education also saw the selective location of schools representing different racial groups. White schools were located in white areas where white South Africans resided. This also applied to Indian schools, which were sited in areas where Indians resided and black schools were also located in the black communities where black people stayed. There were also legislative acts to clarify these identifications. Some of these acts were the 'Education for Indians Act of 1969; Education for Coloured People's Act of 1965; The Christian National Education Act

of 1962 for “white” South Africans; and the Bantu Education Act of 1953. Later, there existed the Education Training Act of 1978 for Africans.

### 2.2.2 Post-democracy

After 1994, a number of changes took place within political parties, organizations and government departments. Within the Department of Education, the same changes were also applied. A major priority in post-democratic South Africa was the move to build an education system based on principles of democracy, human dignity, equality and social justice. Moreover, the government intended to establish an education system that would enable South Africans to be academically equipped and also to respond to its major economic and social challenges (dos Reis, Venter & McGhie, 2019).

Moreover, there was a need to build a unified education system (Department of Education (DOE), 1996). This meant that the systems and structural policies and procedures which had been in use prior to 1994 needed to be changed. In fact, one of the early initiatives adopted by the new education ministry was establishing an Education Department Support Unit (EDSU) whose responsibility was to “strengthen management and enhance educational quality in provincial systems”. The DOE also established the District Development Project (DDP) which was mandated to improve administrative and professional services at the district level where the education system interfaces directly with learning sites and the Education Management and Governance programme which created an inter-provincial network to effect staff and governance development programs (dos Reis, Venter & McGhie, 2019). In addition, the Ministry created sound legislative policy frameworks for educational transformation, and Table 1 includes a summary of the key policies and legislation for the post democratic South African Education System.

Table 1: Legislation and policy framework

Mandate/Act/Policy	Responsibilities
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<p>The Constitution of South Africa, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996)</p>	<p>The Constitution requires education to be transformed and democratized in accordance with the values of human dignity, equality, human rights and freedom, non-racism and non-sexism. It guarantees basic education for all, with the provision that everyone has the right to basic education, including adult basic education.</p>
<p>The National Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996) (NEPA)</p>	<p>The NEPA inscribed into law the legislative and monitoring responsibilities of the Minister of Education, as well as the formal relations between national and provincial authorities. It laid the foundation for the establishment of the Council of Education Ministers, as well as the Heads of Education Department Committee (HEDCOM) as inter-governmental forums that would collaborate on the development of a new education system.</p>
<p>South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act 84 of 1996) , as amended (ISASA)</p>	<p>SASA provides for a uniform system for the organization, governance and funding of schools. It ensures that all learners have the right of access to quality education without discrimination and makes schooling compulsory for children aged 7 to 14 years.</p>

<p>Employment of Educators Act 1998 (Act 76 of 1998)</p>	<p>The Employment of Educators Act provides for the employment of educators by the state and for the regulation of conditions of service, discipline, retirement and discharge of educators. This Act and the resultant professional council, the South African Council of Educators (SACE) regulate the teaching profession.</p>
<p>Education White Paper 1</p>	<p>The fundamental policy framework of the Ministry of Basic Education is stated in the Ministry's first White Paper, <i>Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa: First Step to Develop a New System</i> (February 1995). This document adopted as its point of departure the 1994 education policy framework of the National Congress. After extensive consultation, negotiations and revision, it was approved by Cabinet and is a fundamental reference for subsequent policy and legislative development.</p>

**2.2.2.1 The National Planning Commission (2012)**

The National Planning Commission (2012), in reviewing the basic education system in South Africa and coming up with the means to improve the 2013 targets, argued that the priorities in basic education are human capacity, school management, district support, infrastructure and results-oriented mutual accountability between schools and community (National Planning Commission, 2012).

Although the Commission acknowledged several gains and challenges since 1994, it also contended that in order to improve basic education, some basic areas still needed improvements. These areas included recognising and enhancing the potentially significant role played by teachers, principals, other stakeholders, and parents and districts in basic education. Also, infrastructure and information and communication technology (ICT), curriculum, incentives, inclusivity and language issues needed attention. The Commission also identified that institutions of basic education should be capacitated to implement policy and improve capacity, while principals and schools' management members should be capacitated to provide leadership in curriculum, administration and management. Moreover, teachers must be of high teaching and professional standing and be recognized for it through promotions, awards and retention. (National Planning Commission, 2012).

The institutional and structural components of the basic education system were also deemed to require refurbishment. It is uncontroversial that proper infrastructure is an ancillary to quality school performance. As such, the Commission proposed that all schools must meet minimum standards of infrastructure to facilitate optimum performance with support given to no-fees schools. Equally, ICT infrastructure should be incorporated into teaching and learning and be improved (National Planning Commission, 2012). According to the Commission, there should be minimal destructive changes to the curriculum, provision of inclusive education and the institutionalization of sports, physical education and career guidance (National Planning Commission, 2012).

Of relevance for this study, the Commission emphasized the role of quality school management and results-oriented mutual accountability in basic education. Hiring appropriately qualified and motivated principals must be achieved by ensuring that candidates undergo aptitude assessments to determine their suitability. Trade unions, as much as they are an essential part of the South African labour system, were regarded by the Commission as having undue influence in nominating principals and this should be limited. In addition, all senior management should receive performance contracts, and those who fail to meet their targets should be penalised. On the other hand, those

principals who succeed should have their discretionary powers increased to allow for enhanced control of their school (National Planning Commission, 2012).

In addition, the Commission asserted that schools must create moral interaction within their communities, and establish a framework of results-based mutual accountability between schools and stakeholders. This should be done within the context of appreciating that in poor communities, parents are intimidated to engage with schools regarding performance. As such, a forum that expedites these conversations must be ensured. Schools must be accountable to parents and districts, and this could be achieved if every school has annual goals and targets upon which it will be assessed and held accountable. This mutuality must also extend to broader stakeholders of business, government, labour and NGOs in an Education Pact (National Planning Commission, 2012).

#### **2.2.2.2 Rural Education Draft Policy**

The Rural Education Draft Policy is a policy relevant to this study dealing with rural secondary schools. Discussing this policy in a summary is therefore of significance and of important value. The Rural Education Draft Policy was created in 2017 and consists of seven chapters. The aim and purpose of the policy as discussed in the introductory chapter is to improve access to education, as well as the quality of education for all in rural school. The policy gives a framework for the development of context-specific, relevant and sustainable strategies to deal with the challenges in rural schools whilst drawing on strengths in rural communities; and improving the quality of education in rural schools that will allow the creation of appropriate strategies and practical interventions to improve the quality of education in rural schools. The other purpose of the draft Rural Education Policy is to address the disadvantages associated with rural schools in South Africa. As mentioned above, the issues associated with rural schools are insufficient resources, shortages of educators, absenteeism, learners' drop out and most importantly, poor educational outcomes. What is to be observed regarding how these issues are tackled is the way that policy acknowledges the role of the community and the interrelationship that exists between the community, the school and stakeholders. In addition to the aim of this policy, is the ability to highlight the realities of rural communities

which have an influence on rural schools. Hence the need for a framework that enhances the development of content-specific and sustainable interventions.

The rationale used to draft the Rural Education Draft Policy was political and international influence. The Rural Education Draft Policy also has an international influence in that South Africa is a signatory to several international protocols such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in which one of its aims is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UN, 2015). The National Development Plan (2011) also influenced the draft of this policy. However, some other reports also influenced the rural draft policy, namely:

1. A report from a study on rural schools commissioned by the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF), *Emerging Voices* (2005), argued for a holistic response to the special circumstances facing rural communities. It recommended that state provision of rural schooling should be resourced and organized differently from urban schools as a necessary measure to meet the needs of rural learners.
2. The 2005 report of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education (MCRE) made recommendations on the policy environment relating to rural schools. Rural education was to be re-visioned away from a focus on deficits to one that examined opportunities for transformation within rural communities, in order to promote a participatory and democratic governance and management process.
3. The MCRE report recommended a special focus on rural education that would recognise the uniqueness of the rural landscape. Its task was to consider policy formulation to address the special needs of rural schools and to oversee implementation. Such a structure is needed to monitor the implementation of this rural education policy.

Overall, the Rural Education Draft Policy was informed by the principles found in the Constitution, namely the right to basic education, equity and the dignity of learners and teachers. However, the principles used for the draft were not only from the Constitution but also from the South African Schools Act (SASA), which includes combating unfair discrimination, upholding the rights of all learners and contributing to the eradication of poverty. Furthermore, the policy aims to address the isolation, disconnectedness, shame and distrust, as well as the lack of development that is often associated with the rural communities and schools.

### **2.3 Contingency theories - Conceptualising leadership, management, and academic achievement in rural schools**

The roles of principals are generally quite varied, but mostly focused on leading and ensuring smooth running and performance of their schools. Principals' roles as leaders put them in a position where they can exercise a strong influence on their school's ability to produce good results.

Contingency theories are a class of behavioural theories which argue that there are no best ways to organise, manage or lead organisations when it comes to goal achievement (Andersen, 2018). The optimal styles of organising, managing or leading thus depend on sets of internal factors, as well as external factors, which vary from organisation to organisation and place to place across time (Gil & Pinto, 2018). Contingency theories are thus a support to the *built-for-purpose* approaches, which is based on a process of environmental stock-taking within which organisations operate or function (George, Van de Walle & Hammerschmid, 2019). External, exogenous factors are the broad environments within which organisations function, and these are influenced by the organisation directly or indirectly. They also include the socio-economic, political and legal factors that characterise the communities in which the organisation functions. Internal, endogenous factors are those embedded in the organisation, such as staffing, finance, organisational cultures and policies and other internally determined affordances (Borland, 2017).

Additionally, contingency theories provide room for leadership agency. Specifically, they accord significant emphasis to the roles and functions of leadership within organisations in determining the responsiveness of organisations to their internal and external factors (Kano & Verbeke, 2019). This is done through the medium of relationships, which depends on the orientation (task-orientation versus relationship orientation) of the concerned leaders and are basically meant for organising internal approaches and for navigating external factors (McCleskey, 2014). Internal factors can be managed in response to external factors to a level of optimality essential for realising organisational targets.

Contingency theories may differ from other leadership theories because they emphasise the internal and external situations in which the leaders find themselves (DaSilva & Trkman, 2014). Hence, the core idea behind contingency theories is that different situations demand different styles of leadership (Iqbal, Anwar & Haider, 2015). Kim *et al.* (2015) allude to the fact that people who have confidence in the contingency theories propose that one of the skills of a good leader is the ability to switch to different leadership styles as the situation demands. However, leaders emulating this kind of style may experience the uncertainty that a method of governance used in solving a particular problem does not prevail for a long period of time or extend to other types of problems. Joslin and Müller (2015) mention the part of the construct that might impact the most suitable operative leadership style to include the level of maturity of the subordinates, the level of cordial relationship between a leader and his/her subordinates, the approach of handling tasks without ambiguity by subordinates, the degree of power held by the leader of a team, or the extent of power accredited to each position in the organization. In addition to that, are the ethical values that guide the conduct of the organization, as well as the time frame and speed required to carry out a project or complete it. Contingency theories may be useful in conceptualising leadership in schools because of the theories' importance in accounting for leadership effectiveness of the principals as heads or leaders of their schools. In the case of South Africa, contingency leadership theories are useful in determining whether the leadership method used by secondary school principals are based on their duties and responsibilities or go beyond to ensure effective leadership

styles and performance. Whether the principals or teachers are found in positions of authority, what matters most is the application of leadership strength to handle events of occurrence without the abuse of power.

Although there are various types of contingency theories, three models are most prevalent in contemporary literature. These three models use different approaches to determine how different leadership styles relate to different situations (Yang, 2015). Even though these three contingency theory models are popularly studied, Fiedler's contingency model is the most widely recognised model (Schippers, West & Dawson, 2015). Fiedler's contingency theory will be examined in the following section. In addition management skills possessed by the principals which are necessary for the contingency theories used by principals in running rural schools will also be explained under section 2.3.2 below.

### **2.3.1 Fiedler's Contingency Theory Model**

Fiedler's (1967) contingency model of leadership effectiveness presents a framework for the factors that determine how a leader's personal attributes affect group performance. One of the central factors of the model is the group environment, and whether this makes it relatively easy or difficult for the leader to influence the members of his/her group. For example, the environment in which a leader is working in has an influence on how they treat their members. If the environment is good, then the leader is happy and thus is more likely to treat his/her members well. Fiedler's (1967) model further reveals that in as much as effective leadership is required and necessary, group members need to be interdependent in obtaining a common goal, and not to be distinctive in goal attainment. The applicability of this theory to this study is largely due to its emphasis on both individual agency (i.e., the role of principals) as well as institutional or organisational processes (i.e., processes relevant to rural government schools in KwaZulu-Natal) in mitigating internal and external opportunities and challenges. In this study, principals are seen as secondary school managers who employ considerable influence over the day-to-day running of the school organisation. They should thus possess the agency to organise internal factors

such as resources and staff through their relationships in order to enhance educational outcomes as pertaining to achieving high results.

Fiedler's contingency theory model recognises external factors which fall outside the influence of school leadership and their internal processes (Curry, 2019). These include socio-economic factors such as electricity, sanitation, student catchment area, funding disbursements, and educational returns, amongst others. In this regard, the school leadership is obliged to work on their internal processes in order to mitigate the environmental factors that may likely hamper accomplishing educational objectives (Curry, 2019). In this sense, the theory provides the study with a conceptual framework through which the roles of principals can be understood without neglecting internal processes, as well as external factors and their impacts on envisaged educational outcomes.

The relevance of the contingency theories particularly Fiedler's contingency theory model in this study, focuses on the leader's approach to management and the application of a model of situational control (see sub-section 2.3.1.1 below). In this study, the leadership style (see sub-section 2.3.1.2 below) and situational control of school principals are important factors that were considered in finding out how they can be a determinant factor to the production of high matric results in rural secondary schools.

In addition, the theory may assist in understanding how the leader-member relationships between the principals and other school stakeholders could evolve. Furthermore, the theory helps explain how inculcating task structure and position power can assist the performance role of principals and teachers within and outside the school environment with the aim of facilitating high matric results. The following section will thus detail the importance of situational control. The emerging concepts that hence makeup Fiedler's contingency theory model can be classified into situational control and leadership style (Singh, Bohra & Dalal, 1979).

### **2.3.1.1 Situational Control**

According to Fiedler (1984), situational control is the degree to which the leader has control over the group's tasks and outcomes. In order to maintain effective leadership and excellent group outcomes, the type of tasks allocated to the group must correspond with the leader's approach of governance. Situational control can be dissected into three main variables, namely, leader-member relations, task structure, and position power.

Leader-member relations can be defined as the group atmosphere and the degree of confidence, loyalty, support, co-operation, friendliness and attraction that subordinates feel for their leader (Farzeena, Ahmad & Anwar, 2015). Previous studies by John, Ni, Yam and Pounder (2018) revealed that principals in rural schools are regarded as leaders even in communities and parents and former students look up to them for advice as well as guidance. Thus they work together in the development of the school and the community at large. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, leader-member relations are the relationships between the principal with staff and also with the stakeholders. In the event of a conducive working environment, employees typically do not hesitate to work towards attaining team or organisational objectives, the result of which occurs as a result of good relationships that occur between employees and leaders. On the contrary, where the relationships between a leader and his/her group members are difficult, the work atmosphere tends to be unfriendly and will always be confrontational in the group owing to an absence of trust and co-operation (Awan & Islam, 2015). As Bakotić (2016) observes, the interpersonal relationship between a leader and his/her followers appears to be the most important determinant of the group process. The effectiveness of this relationship could be measured by the social acceptance of the leader by his/her group and by the leader's rating of the group's atmosphere.

The second form of situational control (i.e., task structure) refers to the tasks that a group of people in this case learners or the educators are doing. The leader provides standard instructions and details of what needs to be achieved and how well the task is being performed (Syaffi *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, employees who are required to perform the task have to be made aware of the instructions. They have to be provided with a guide on

the procedural framework of the task that is to be completed. In addition, they should as well have the drawings or descriptions of finished products (matriculants) with the performance indicators for the task (Tomastika, Strohmandlb & Cechc, 2015). Vaishya, Jha and Srivastava (2016) explain that the path to completing the task should have few alternatives, and there should also be a limited number of correct solutions to the task that employees are required to achieve. Tasks that are more structured (“high” task structure) tend to give more control to the leader, whereas unstructured and unclear tasks, low task structure reduce the leader’s ability to control and be focused (Vincente *et al.*, 2016). The teachers are given study guides and course outlines with which they have to create tasks for the students for the day. They also get past examination papers which they use to prepare the students for the final matric examinations.

The third form of situational control (position power) refers to the inherent power of a leadership position (Laschinger, Wong & Grau, 2013). Position power enables a leader to articulate his/her authority over subordinates and the degree to which his/her authority is supported by the organisation (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). The power possessed by any leader is sometimes acquired based on his/her competence, emotions and experience level or his/her ability to give direction, implement plans and motivate people. Irrespective of the type of leadership system exercised by a leader, whether it is authoritarian leadership, democratic leadership or laissez-faire leadership, what makes a leader distinct from other employees is his or her ability to display leadership power for goal congruence and achievement.

### **2.3.1.2 Leadership Style – Instructional leadership**

Contingency theories largely focus on the perspective of leadership and look at effects of the conditions or circumstances on the accomplishment of a leader (i.e., the school principal in this context). The question about a school principal's effectiveness greatly depends on the duties he or she is expected to execute and whether or not they will execute these efficiently. This however, does not mean that the theories completely disregard their personality. The theories consider it but not as the most important factor determining the success of the school principal as a leader. The approach employed in

guiding other people (subordinates or workers but staff members in this instance) is referred to as leadership style (Meier *et al.*, 2013). Fiedler looks at the leadership style to mean leadership personality as well. So, leadership style amongst other functional roles, emphasizes task motivation and relationship motivation (Laschinger, Wong & Grau, 2013). Task motivated leaders focus more on achieving the goal, while leaders who are relationship motivated concentrate on building, developing and maintaining close relationships amongst group members (Leroy *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, a balance of both is crucial for a functional school, with instructional leadership being task oriented.

Instructional leadership is a major potential strategy that a school could use in order to be successful in its organisation and in order to enhance student results (Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016). Dou, Devos & Valcke (2017) denotes instructional leadership as the actions that principals embrace to develop a productive and satisfactory working environment for teachers, as well as desirable learning conditions to make learning easy for pupils. Some of the key elements of instructional leadership include prioritising teaching and learning, focusing on curriculum alignment, analysing data for the purposes of improving learning and performance, and inculcating a culture of continuous professional development for teachers.

While leaders cannot neglect other duties, teaching and learning (and assessment by implication) should be the area where most of the leader's scheduled time is allocated. In addition, if student achievement is being measured via standard-based assessment, then the curriculum, instruction and assessment must all be aligned (Ni, Yan & Pounder, 2018). If there is a disconnection among these elements, then student achievement will not be evident. Instructional leaders also make use of multiple sources of information in order to have a clear assessment of learners' performance (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Moreover, principals can use data (such as formative assessment results) to help guide the instructional focus and professional development of teachers. Research also indicates that effective principals have a view of instructional improvement as an ongoing process (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016). Leaders who value learning as a priority will make provision for teachers to attend relevant training, thus providing the support that sustains new learning (Coburn & Penuel, 2016).

Principals as heads of schools are expected to be open-minded problem solvers who are pace-setters. Principals should also have the ability to take correction and correct others in the event of mistakes, while shaping the vision of academic success for all students (Sebastian, Allensworth & Huang, 2016).

In conclusion, to maintain an effective change, a principal as the head must at all times think of how to positively impact change in their community of practice or work environment, such as ensuring the proper monitoring of daily activities and emerging issues. This goes along with creative change. If the school's management authority is to function efficiently, their style of leadership must give room for creative changes within and outside the structure of the school system. To lessen the burden of the work-load associated with the principal's dutiful obligation to the school, the principal as a visionary leader must communicate the performance, development and growth of the school to the teachers while seeking their opinion on the system to put in place to promote the good image of the school.

### **2.3.2 Management skills**

Directing the affairs of the workplace as an administrator, leader or a teacher necessitates some set of skills to shine or accomplish the goal congruence of the institute (Edwards, 2019). The set of vital skills needed to be embraced by a leader or follower if effective governance in schools or any respectable organization is to ensue are discussed below.

**Integrity:** Snyman *et al.* (2014) integrity is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. When a leader has integrity it gives them the ability to set records either as a leader or follower which makes other people (outsiders) put trust in the event of occurrence without having doubt. Leaders operating with integrity keep their word and they practice what they say (Macfarlane, Zhang & Pun, 2014). In the event where integrity is deficient in a leader or followers, there tends to be elements of suspicion or mistrust, as to whether they can deliver an effective quality service by end-users. This effect can be detrimental to the growth and development of the organization in question (Tomastika, Strohmmandlb & Cechc, 2015). This can also be seen in schools if the principal and teachers do not have sufficient integrity the results and growth of the school is affected.

Teamwork: Being impartial in thought and in judgement is one of the key features expected of a competent leader (Trivellas & Reklitis, 2014) this will ensure that all staff members or workers in a team are treated equally. To actualize a satisfactory performance in terms of key responsibility areas of staff, experienced and knowledgeable co-workers are essential to work alongside any upright leader if they are to succeed as an entity (Visnjic, Wiengarten & Neely, 2015). There is a need for school stakeholders to work as a team so that there is success within the school. It is probable that principals need to work closely with the teachers in order for the school to help the learners obtain good matric results. Furthermore, a good leader must therefore not discriminate based on one's racial group or ethnicity, age, gender, nationality, as well as other differences which may also include disabilities. This should be the case when searching for competent hands to reinforce achieving common goals (Yang, Stoeber & Wang, 2015). In a nutshell, there must not be racism within the schools based on any differences among the staff members.

- i. Positivity: An active leader must operate with a strong sense of belief, especially in the moment of initiating change while inspiring other contemporaries towards supporting the plans and verdicts of the school. There is a need for principals to believe in the activities and changes which they initiate at school (Yang, 2015).
- ii. Active listener: Giving audience to employees can be often beneficial as they can offer advice that may help in reviving the work system back to its normal shape especially in times of crisis (Yalegama, Chileshe & Ma, 2016). The ability of employees to procure such needed advice can be a result of their closeness or interpersonal relationship with the people or organizational clients (i.e., learners).
- iii. Emotional Intelligence: This is the ability of a leader to tweak his or her wisdom to the positive side of achievement although winning is not a guarantee. In the event of a loss, a leader must learn to handle his/her temperament in order to avoid the recurrence of irredeemable mistakes with the belief that life is full of

- ups and downs (Connelly *et al.*, 2018). For example, principals must be able to handle their emotions so as to avoid over reacting to mistakes and situations around the school.
- iv. Inspires and motivates others: This involves the ability of a leader to have a convincing clear vision towards goal realization in the foreseeable future (Minh *et al.*, 2017). In achieving it, a leader must be able to think and come up with a good strategy. Meanwhile, Mikkelsen, Jacobsen & Andersen (2017) emphasize that the communication of information and orientation on goal achievement of each or target project must be communicated to subordinates. This is to allow work-load to be shared amongst the team members and subordinates and mostly motivating employees to work harder where people are able to work with competence and acquire more knowledge for their experience level (Matemilola & Elegbede, 2017). Principals must motivate teachers to work hard implementing different activities so as to have good matric results.
  - v. Solves problems and analyzes issues: In due course, leaders are employed, trained and selected to unravel organizational crises and to take advantage of the opportunities around them (Lyria, Namusonge & Karanja, 2017). This entails not only being high on analytical abilities, but also to have aboveaverage people skills (Lee, Longhurst & Campbell, 2017). School principals must have problem solving skills so that they are able to work with the different stakeholders.
  - vi. Drive for results: Whilst some people prefer not to do anything, others are energetic and strive towards impacting meaningfully on the establishment they work for (Krylova, Jolly & Philips, 2017). Great leaders in this case principals possess higher levels of perseverance and support activeness. They have a passion for work and are always willing to go an extra mile so as to get good results for their schools.

- vii. What they do and are more determined than anyone else in the sector they represent. Above and beyond that, they can be trusted and relied upon, especially when it involves getting things done (Northouse, 2018).
- viii. Builds relationships and develops others: The foundation level on which a business is built can be categorized into trust and relationship (Connelly *et al.*, 2018). Without these combined elements, an organization may suffer a deficiency with regard to successful achievement (Bolton *et al.*, 2018). It is pertinent that leaders of an organization create time daily to build relationships with people like team members and employees, amongst others. This is because the stronger the relationship built with people of the working community, the better a leader will be (Bouwmeester & Kok, 2018). Principals must build relationships with the stakeholders so that they get support and become better leaders.

In conclusion, it is imperative for an effective leader to handle his or her work affairs with intelligence and be an active listener to others whilst inspiring them to work with integrity as their basis of operation. Moreover, it should be noted by the leader that the ideas of the people they are governing cannot at all times be nullified. Meaningful extraction of ideas that can be to the advantage of the organization must be made by leaders while having brainstorming sessions with their operators (teachers) in order to ensure the smooth running of their operations whilst working in joint effort (teamwork) towards positive aims. In the process of making creative change, a leader must at all times carry his or her followers along through communication on any transformation that occurs in their work environment. This is to give workers assurance or a sense of belonging to the institution they work for.

#### **2.4 Roles that school principals play**

The South African Schools Act (1996) states that management of schools is done by the principal under the authority of the Head of Department of Education. It is the principal's responsibility to take steps necessary to make sure that functional activities of the school will be effective. The principal as an educational manager is responsible for management

of the day to day school activities. In addition, the principal needs to comply with laws and regulations prescribed to them. Everything that happens at the school is the principal's responsibility (Steele & Whitaker, 2019). The principals play a managerial role in which they are required to ensure that both individuals and school needs are fulfilled. The managerial role involves policy making and control, delegation, planning, leadership, motivation, guidance and decision making. The principal need to be able to motivate and support stakeholders (De Jong, Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2017).

Principals play an important role in school improvement and educational change. Even though the principal plays an important role they rely on the support of other staff members. The principle can delegate certain functions to staff. However, this does not mean that the principal is no longer in charge, he or she still needs to support and assists the person with the work. The effectiveness of a school depends on the professional conduct of the principal and their leadership roles (De Jong, Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2017). The principal needs to be able to perform leadership to his or her staff, learners and all the other stakeholders. For a school to be effective and get high results, the principal need to provide both instructional leadership and transformational leadership (Mavimbela & van Niekerk, 2015).

As an instructional leader the principal needs to create conditions to ensure that learners get quality instruction both in and out of the classroom. With this approach the principal focuses more on the learner to achieve good results. However, this does not mean that the principal needs to assume responsibility for teaching a class but he or she needs to improve teaching and learning. The principal can only improve teaching and learning if they understand what learners and teachers are doing both in and out of the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Principals who spend most of their time in the office are not directly involved with students and thus they are not aware of what is happening and this affects the results the school achieves. Whilst those principals who spend time with learners achieve high results because they know the learners needs and address them (Myende & Maifala, 2020).

As a transformational leader the principal's role is to transform the staff and everyone in the school. The principal pays attention to developing their needs. The principal needs to define the need for change, create visions and inspire others and need to focus on long term goals so that the school gets high grades (Gallagher & Thordarson, 2018). The principal needs to inspire, motivate and support all role players within the school so that they understand and accept any changes. By doing this the principal will be empowering others to act, grow and be leaders (Mavimbela & van Niekerk, 2015).

Furthermore, the principal plays a role as a communicator. The principal communicates with stakeholders, learners' and teachers. The principal should allow for a two way communication so as to know the needs of the learners and how the school can assist. It is also the role of the principal to communicate with parents in case learners need assistance especially those who will be doing their matric. This helps principals to know the kind of students they have and the kind of challenges they face. In addition, communicating with parents also allows the principal to be able to create opportunities for parents to communicate with the school (Steele & Whitaker, 2019). Moreover, the principal should always see that lines of communication are always open by ensuring that learners, teachers, parents and other stakeholders are free to communicate with the principal (Du Plessis, 2017).

Andrews (2020), states that the classroom is a microculture where the different cultures of learners and teachers meet to form one complex and unique classroom culture. Learners coming from different cultural backgrounds to those of the teacher and or dominant culture might experience cultural isolation Great cultural isolation can lead to the matriculants failing or even dropping out of school. Research has shown that the closer learner's culture is to that of the teacher, the more their chance of academic success. Hence it is the role of the teacher and principal to bridge cultural gaps which may exist in the classroom and within the school environment. This is because the effect of cultural conflict may have a negative influence on interpersonal relations, thus leading Grade 12 learners to lose concentration which may influence their

performance negatively. However, if the principal plays a good role high results are achieved within the school.

Another role that principals play is the role of acquiring and managing resources. The principals need to ensure that resources are allocated in a way that is consistent with the needs and goals of the school. Resources need to be aligned with the activities and programmes happening in the school. In addition, the principal needs to pay attention to the developing resources to meet new needs and challenges. This enables the school to always be up to date with trending stuff thus influencing on the results as well since students always have their needs met (Steele & Whitaker, 2019). Moreover, it is vital for the principal to manage his or her human resources properly. Human resources need to be developed and supported (Gallagher & Thordarson, 2018).

## **2.5 Principal's capacity to cope and adapt to rapid changes**

### **2.5.1 Principals' leadership capacities**

According to Bhengu & Myende (2016), the leaders of rural schools are in need of skills which will enable them to handle complex situations which arise because of the environment they operate in. Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane (2015) point out that rural education is usually in a bad state because these areas are less developed thereby leading to less efficiency within the schools. Generally, schools in the rural areas of South Africa underperform when it comes to the performance grades (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). However, there are some schools in the same situation that are having high results regardless of the problems presented by the environment. This is a result of the leadership's ability to adapt to changes and finding sustainable solutions to improve the functioning of the rural schools. Previous literature (Huber 2004; Hallinger, 2011; Bush, 2008) revealed that there is a direct relationship between good leadership and the success of rural schools. Thus, high matric results in rural schools are only possible when the leadership puts in policies that are able to improve the students' performance.

Bhengu & Myende (2016) also pointed out that there is a need for the principals to work hand in hand with the school governing bodies so as to have high matric results. By so

doing, power is also given to the parents to ensure that they instill the behaviour and performance they want in their children. Thus, the governing of the schools will also include the societies they are in and this allows every member of the community to contribute in improving the performance of the students. Thus, principals in such rural schools must be in a position to share their leadership with the chosen team by the community thereby aiding in transparency. Every person in the community will be responsible for the welfare of the students and this will ensure discipline as well as boost the results of the students. However, Bhengu & Myende (2016) also noted that the strategy of the schools involving the school governing bodies is not a strategy that works at every school but rather it works where there is support from the community.

In addition, Bhengu & Myende (2016) also pointed out that the principals' capacity to improve the matric results is hindered by government policies which generalize all the schools as equal with the similar resources and in similar environments. This is detrimental to the rural schools because they face different problems to those in other areas and they need to have their own policies which are practical and suit their own functionalities. For instance, some students and teachers have to travel long distances to get to school and there is no readily available transport. This has an effect on the punctuality and it also increases absenteeism which negatively affects the results.

A previous study by Ross & Cozzens (2016) pointed out that there are skills that are needed by the principals in South Africa and such skills are applicable to the South African context. These include planning skills, ability to maintain harmony in relations at school, negotiation skills, problem solving as well as decision making skills, organizing skills, controlling, leadership and motivational skills. However, these skills are applicable to all managers thus there is a need for the principals in rural schools to inculcate their local factors when using the skills so that they can be effective in improving the results in their schools (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Most policies would have been copied from where they would have worked well especially in developed countries hence; rural principals have to make sure that they apply such policies in consideration of their situation and the state of their schools.

## **2.6 Principals' perception on ways which hinder the attainment of high matric results in rural secondary schools**

### **2.6.1 Poor infrastructure**

A study by Darling-Hammond (2017) revealed that several rural schools have similar infrastructure problems. These problems include the absence of laboratories hence students do not have anywhere to conduct their practical education. In addition, some schools have no libraries thereby limiting the chances of students getting better results. Furthermore, ablution facilities in most of the schools are in bad condition or the toilets are not enough to cater for the demand of the whole school. Darling-Hammond (2017) also revealed that there are also shortages of classrooms and staff rooms in some of the rural schools. Thus, the basic needs that result in efficiency in teaching are not met in the rural schools. Therefore, the lack of infrastructure in rural schools tends to be one of the biggest factors, which result in the schools' nonattainment of high results.

### **2.6.2 Parental support**

According to Darling-Hammond (2017) were of the opinion that principals' leading capabilities in rural areas face the set back of the lack of the involvement of parents in the education of their children. Most parents in the rural areas believe that it is only the duty of the school to educate the child and they only have to pay the fees. On the other hand, some parents would be working far away from their homes hence; they cannot be involved in the learning and education of their children. Finally, some students would have lost their parents and they would have no one to support them in their studies. The absence of parental support for pupils in matric is also another major cause for non-attainment of good results in matric for rural schools. Thus, principals in rural areas might fail to cope and adapt to changes because of the lack of support from the parents and guardians of the students and this has a negative impact on the performance of matric students. Mavimbela & van Niekerk (2015) suggest that some parents in rural areas want to support their children but some of them do not have any form of formal schooling which is a barrier to help their children with homework. However, such parents can be wise to teach their children good manners and also discern between right and wrong (Odoh et al., 2017).

### **2.6.3 Democracy**

Darling-Hammond (2017) found out that some principals in the rural schools are of the opinion that both teachers and students have too many rights, which makes it hard for them to be good leaders. They went on further to point out that it is difficult to instill discipline in the students and teachers because of the fear of infringing their human rights. Thus, they cannot push the educators and the students to be efficient because of human rights (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Bhengu & Myende (2016) also suggested that principals must now influence and motivate educators and students to do their work efficiently rather than pushing them.

### **2.6.4 No sense of urgency**

According to Mavimbela & van Niekerk (2015), most schools in rural areas have students and teachers who have no respect for punctuality thereby leading to a negative attitude towards learning. This leads to a habit of late coming by both teachers and pupils and this will in the end result in the absenteeism of students. Such habits cannot be easily broken. The habit would lead to teachers not completing the syllabus in time and this will negatively affect the results of the school. Thus, when the students and teachers have no sense of time then the school's results will also be bad.

### **2.6.5 Tradition and culture**

According to Darling-Hammond (2017) some principals in rural areas face challenges with some senior students who would not want to respect female educators or principals. There are some cultures and societies, which still view females as lesser humans thus the students would not be willing to accept the authority of female teachers or principals. Thus, it is even harder to work with the parents in such societies because of their primitive views. Therefore, the society's beliefs and norms can also influence the way the learners respect their educators. The society's beliefs and norms are also another factor that affects the attainment of high results in rural schools.

On the other hand, there are some communities in the rural areas who also expect educators and the principals to be the people who would have grown up within the area or who have their roots in the area (Odoh, et al., 2017). The community can only be cooperative when they are dealing with someone whom they know his or her roots. This in turn would have negative effects on the pass rate of the school because of the negativity the educators will be getting from the community. The negativity will also be passed on to the learners and thereby leading to chaos in the schools (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Furthermore, in rural communities there is prevalence of rational practices such as initiation schools (Mavimbela & van Niekerk, 2015). The initiation schools interfere with the management of the schools as some ceremonies are conducted in the midst of the school term. Such practices make the management of the rural schools difficult as they disrupt school attendance. According to (Mkuzo, 2020) the initiation schools negatively affects the pass rate of rural schools because the learners as they come back from the ceremonies they might be difficult to discipline as they want to be treated as adults. The other hindrance is that the traditional ceremonies are not communicated with the schools; otherwise, the concerned parties would have found a way that is beneficial to both parties so that the high matric results are maintained.

## **2.7 The principals' behaviours that they perceive to be associated with the attainment of high matric results in rural secondary schools**

### **2.7.1 Servant leadership**

Rural schools require principals who are role models of everyone in the society and one who leads by example following the servant leadership style (Mavimbela & van Niekerk, 2015). The servant leadership model is characterized by the spirit of caring for one another and being considerate of the other person's concerns. In the context of rural schools, servant leadership allows for the holistic approach to work, encouraging the collective making of decisions as well as sharing one's views with the community and also it is grounded on trusting and having faith in people (Odoh, et al., 2017). Hence, with this type of leadership there is transparency and wide participation which allows every member to give ideas in the governance of the school, which makes problem solving

easier. This model inspires parents, teachers, community leaders as well as the learners so that they work together to improve the value and quality of learning and teaching (Mavimbela & van Niekerk, 2015). A school with such qualities has the power to produce high results because students can freely interact with their teachers and this makes learning easier.

### **2.7.2 Ensuring discipline and availability of resources**

According to De Jong, Grundmeyer & Yankey, (2017) it is the duty of the principal to make sure that there is discipline within the school. The principal has to ensure discipline of the teachers as well the students. This includes that they attend to their lessons and that they get to school on time. Absenteeism from both students and teachers has to be communicated and there has to be a valid reason for not attending. In addition, the principals have to make sure that there are ample learning materials, which include text books and laboratory equipment (Smit, 2017). The principal also has to find donors to fund for additional resources that may be needed at the school together with ensuring that students are up to date with fees payment (Mkuzo, 2020). These are some of ways principals in rural schools ensure that their schools attain high results for matric.

### **2.7.3 Securing the school**

High matric results can be attainable when the school premises are kept safe and the school's resources are secured. Principals in rural areas have to make sure that there is enough security for the school to prevent any burglaries and the stealing of school furniture. The shortage of furniture and overcrowding in schools is another determinant of the high failure rates in schools. Therefore, ensuring that the present resources are secured can be a great way of improving the probability of attaining high matric results. According to (De Jong, Grundmeyer & Yankey p, 2017), principals in rural areas often use the transactional approach with the community to ensure school security. The principals would hire security guards from the community or offer the community some part time jobs at the school and this way the members of the community would value the school and ensure that it is secure.

#### **2.7.4 Good communicators**

When the principals in rural schools are good communicators then it is easier to attain high results. The principals would be able to communicate with parents, teachers, community leaders and the learners and make them work together towards the improvement of the matric results (Mavimbela & van Niekerk, 2015). When all the stakeholders of the rural school work together towards a goal then it is easier to attain the goal. Principals would be able to motivate students to value their education and on the other hand, they would be able to motivate the teachers into improving their teaching standards. Parents would also be motivated to support the learners necessary. De Jong, Grundmeyer & Yankey (2017) pointed out that communication by principals is important in rural schools because in such areas there is limited availability of most sources of information such as education offices, post offices and accessibility to the internet when compared to other areas. Regardless of the given difficulties, stakeholders in the school still want to be given timely information and it is the duty of the principals to give the people the information in time. People usually comply and are motivated when there are clearly defined objectives (Mavimbela & van Niekerk, 2015). If principals in rural areas communicate clearly with the given stakeholders then they can all work together towards the attainment of high matric results.

### **2.8 Strategies put in place by principals towards the attainment and maintenance of high matric results.**

#### **2.8.1 Development of a creative culture at the school**

Myende & Maifala (2020) revealed that every school has its own distinct organizational culture that emanates from the school's philosophy, norms and beliefs, which are also a reflection of the policies, mission and the vision. Thus, a school has its own culture regardless of the school's effectiveness. According to Annor (2016), organizational culture dictates the way in which the activities at school are run and how the school sets its priorities. The overall appearance of a school is usually linked to the culture of the school. For instance, dilapidated and old buildings as well as facilities are usually associated with

a poor organizational culture, which has an effect of affecting the school's effectiveness negatively.

Annor (2016) also pointed out that the general outlook of the buildings of schools have substantial influence in the way people behave particularly in interacting, communicating and carrying out their tasks. A school that has proper care does not have graffiti on walls nor would the learners play truancy. Therefore, the school's culture has some form of influence over its general performance. Kruger and Steinmann pointed out organization culture in school is the way the school community conducts things at the school in networking and interacting as individuals or in groups whether formally or informally and this often results in the boosting of morale for both the students and the teachers.

According to Myende & Maifala (2020) the school's culture is important and it gives direction which leads to efficiency thereby providing a great learning environment. The shared culture makes it easier for principals to delegate and it gives the teachers a sense of purpose, which improves their effectiveness. A positive organizational culture in schools provides consistency and makes it easier to make complex decisions, solve problems, and coordinate as well as controlling the school (Smit, 2017). Hence, it is one of the principals' main roles to cultivate a strong culture within the school since the culture brings with positive attitude towards work and this in turn leads to the attainment of great results.

### **2.8.2 Provision of a good climate in the school**

Smyth (2016) defines school climate as the quality and frequency of interaction between all the people that are connected to the school. The concept of climate is usually associated with the corporate workplace and it is used to give a stable and efficient working environment. The climate in the school is reflected in the interpersonal relations of the teachers particularly in the attitudes of the people, how motivated they are and the achievements of the people working at the school. Myende & Maifala (2020) points out that the effectiveness of a school is dependent on its organizational climate. According to (Darling-Hammond, 2017) a good school climate is one that gives learners various routes

of development caringly and where students are free to take risks and are confident in their efforts. This is of great importance especially in rural schools. A good climate in a school provides a platform for effectiveness in both teaching and learning since it deals with absenteeism and late coming. Learners and teachers alike are motivated to be productive and they put all their effort.

In addition, a good climate at school has an effect of boosting the morale of teachers thereby leading to improved performance. Mavimbela & van Niekerk (2015) revealed that the high morale of teachers is a breeding ground for high results as it provides a conducive learning environment, which keeps the positive school climate. However, the school climate can be negatively affected by the lack of resources in rural schools. The shortage of textbooks, overcrowding in classrooms, and late supply of learning materials as well as low assistance from district offices may lead to the negative impact on the climate of the school. This in turn leads to the poor performance of the school because of low attendance by both learners and teachers, little support from the community and it often leads to the vandalism of the school property (Myende & Maifala, 2020).

### **2.8.3 Emotional intelligence**

Emotional intelligence is defined as the capability of a person to identify and understand not only his or her own emotions but also the others' and then take action accordingly (Smit, 2017). According to Myende & Maifala (2020) emotional intelligence is the management of emotions in a way which leads to constructive relationships that leads to the attainment of goals. Thus, the principals and teachers must be emotionally intelligent in order to have effective communication in the schools, which leads to the success of the school. Louis & Murphy (2017) concur that principals who are emotionally intelligent can easily direct their energy to positive behaviour and they are able to listen to everyone's queries and they also have good negotiation and conflict resolution skills. Therefore, they can easily motivate the staff and students to work harder towards the fulfilment of the given goals set by the school, which includes having good matric results. Principals in rural areas have to possess this skill or must aim to improve their emotional intelligence because of the challenges they face on a daily basis. Steele & Whitaker (2019) supports

that there is a need for emotional intelligence because working in rural areas presents difficult challenges and this calls for the management of moods and emotions of staff. Thus, there is a need for them to keep their stress and anxiety levels in check as well as those of the teachers too. This in turn would improve the job satisfaction of the teachers, which is closely related to the productivity of the teachers (Myende & Maifala, 2020).

#### **2.8.4 Working with School Management Teams**

School management teams allow for the decentralization of power such that the power is not consolidated on one person who is the principal. According to Murenga (2017), school management teams allow for the sharing of power whereby the School Management Team and teachers are also involved in the school's decision-making processes. School management teams add more ideas in problem solving and decision-making and this has a positive impact when coming with solutions to problems faced by principals in rural schools. However, the effectiveness of school management teams lies in the cooperation of the education department (Bhengu & Myende, 2016). A study by Mogashoa (2013) found out that schools in urban areas had adequate supplies of learning materials and teaching support materials when compared to the rural schools. This shows that there is a need for the department of education to work hand in hand with the school management teams so that there can be high matric results.

#### **2.8.5 Information and Technology literacy**

According to Murenga (2017), most rural schools are lagging behind when it comes to information and technology. Information and communication technologies are important in this digital era where students can access virtual learning materials and can interact virtually with peers thereby improving their chances of attaining better results. Principals in rural schools strive to get funds for equipping their schools with computers so that students can be educated when it comes to the field of information and technology. Principals in rural schools can source for donations so that the schools can have adequate computers to educate the students. Most schools in the rural areas have no access to electricity so it is impossible for learners to be educated in information and technology.

Thus, principals in such rural schools are in constant communication with the government so that it speeds up the development of such areas, which would create a platform for them to source the needed computers for information and communication technologies learning. In addition, the students in rural schools have no public libraries as compared to the ones in urban areas and this influences the students' results. Principals are constantly taking their problems to the department of education even though there is very little that is being done to attend to their problems (Smit, 2017). The principals in rural schools also work with Non-Governmental Organisations in trying to help students in rural areas to be educated in information and technology (Mdlongwa, 2012). Thus, principals in rural areas are always making their problems known by the relevant authorities and this in turn creates the needed attention, which leads to action by the responsible authorities. The rural schools have limited funds so they rely on external funding for huge projects such as the information and communication technology project (Murenga, 2017).

## **2.9 Concluding summary**

This chapter presented relevant literature and theory pertinent to the objectives of this study. It highlighted in detail the responsibilities of a principal and what effective principals need to have as a collection of skills in order to ensure high academic achievement from learners. It touched on many difficulties faced by rural schools and what challenges they have to overcome on a daily basis. There were suggestions provided in terms of national strategies, as well as internal strategies that the school can use to overcome some of these challenges. However, this study aimed at finding out how the principals in Pietermaritzburg rural schools are able to attain their academic achievements in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds. The next chapter presents the methodology for the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter seeks to explain the methodological technique used in undertaking this study. It details the plan as well as the implementation process of data collection for the research questions of the study. Chapter three also provides an overview of the paradigm within which the study is conceptualised. Different aspects of the research design such as the methods, strategies, population and sampling are detailed, and the basis for selecting them is equally explained. This is to provide a clear understanding of the findings and conclusions. Additionally, the chapter discusses the decisions made to ensure that this study observes the principles of ethical conduct of social science research.

#### **3.2 Research Paradigm**

A research paradigm is an approach used to conduct research. A paradigm is a set of beliefs, which are shared between researchers and how problems can be addressed. It is important because it creates a holistic view of knowledge and how the researcher sees themselves in relation to the knowledge and methods used.

For example, a positivist paradigm is a framework in which the researcher sees people as phenomena to be studied from the outside. Behaviour will be explained based on facts and observations, which the researcher gathers. Researchers separate themselves from the participants so that they remain neutral and are able to reason without being biased (Nyandoro 2016:69). In addition, the researcher is concerned with testing theory using quantitative research approach methods (Hacket, 2018).

Advantages of the positivist paradigm are that the researcher is independent. Furthermore, the researcher focuses on facts and generally attempts to gather and manage large samples. It can also provide wide coverage for different situations and for an affordable budget (Leavy, 2017). However, the positivist paradigm cannot capture the rich fullness of the individuals as it focuses on facts that the researcher gathers (Durdella, 2017).

With the phenomenology paradigm the researcher is part of what is being studied. The researcher seeks to understand what is happening in a situation and the meaning people derive from, the situation. This paradigm uses data capturing methods, which are more natural. The researcher has the ability to adjust new issues and ideas. There is use of a small sample with this paradigm (Rahi, 2017).

In addition, the analysis and interpretation of the data is difficult since the data is qualitative in nature. There are difficulties in making generalisations because the process is subjective. The amount of data collected is huge and this is time consuming for the researchers (Hacket, 2018).

Critical theory (and a critical paradigm) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) is regarded as a group of theoretical tradition that straddle post-positivism and constructivism. Mertens (2010) argues that while post-positivism ontological assumes one objective reality that can be probabilistically known and constructivism assumes multiple realities that can be captured through multiple constructions, a transformative paradigm (which is Mertens' approximation of critical theory) rejects cultural relativism while elevating the role of power, pleasure and influence in positing objective reality. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), critical theory is based on the ontological assumption that reality exists independent from one's consciousness, even though this reality is mediated by history and social structures (political, economic, ethnic, age, gender). To have a clearer understanding, a critical paradigm brings together several theoretical traditions that are concerned with exploring the interaction of multiple systems, cultures, actors and belief systems, and their relevance in knowledge production and shaping societal realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2010).

The relevance of critical theory and a critical paradigm in this study is its assumption of the ontology of historical realism in which human experience is a product of contextual (social, cultural, economic, political) factors (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The education system in South Africa cannot be understood sufficiently outside of the socio-political development that the country and society went through. It is therefore important that any credible assessment of the developments within the education sector, and also within

post-apartheid society, should be cognisant of these historical developments. To ascertain this reality therefore, a discursive engagement between the researcher and the researched is necessary. Critical theory argues that it is only through this “value mediated” transactional interaction between the researcher and the researcher that reality can be re-constructed from individual narrations and constraints of historical contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The aim of a critical inquiry is the understanding, critique and transformation of contextual structures. The analytical theory values multiple perspectives and cultural complexities as a source of new informed insights (Mertens, 2010).

### **3.3 Research strategy**

There are three major types of research strategies, which are quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. Qualitative research is contextual and it involves exploring meaning through observation, interviews and analysing documents. It involves dealing with non-numerical data (Wang *et al*, 2017). According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, (2016), qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live. Qualitative research gives detailed information on feelings, opinions and experiences of respondents. In addition, it allows the researcher to discover inner experiences of the participants. Furthermore, the researcher can interact with respondents during the processes (Harry & Lipsky 2014). However, there is use of a small sample, which makes it difficult to generalize the results. In addition, data analysis techniques for qualitative research are more difficult (Meyers, Guast & Guarino, 2016).

Mixed methods is a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative methods in one study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). In addition, Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler, (2014) define mixed methods design as a method that includes both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis in parallel form. The mixed method provides strength, which offset the disadvantages of both quantitative and qualitative methods. It gives a more comprehensive understanding of the study problem (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016). However, this method is complex and it takes much time and resources.

In addition, it can be difficult to plan one method from the results of the other (Steele & Whitaker, 2019).

Quantitative research involves numerical data and it focuses on variables, relationships between variables and analysis of patterns (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner, 2012). Leavy (2017), states that quantitative research methods do not involve the investigation of processes but stress the measurement and analyses of causal relationships between variables within a value-free context. According to Saunders et al, (2016) quantitative research is vital in collecting numerical data that explain a particular phenomenon. Quantitative findings can easily be generalized to a whole population because there is involvement of a large sample. In addition, this method of data analysis is less time consuming and there is softwares, which can be used. Furthermore, data collection is quick and less time consuming (Carroll & Bailey 2016). However, quantitative research fails to get deeper meanings and explanations of why and how respondents feel. There is lack of interaction between the researcher and respondents when data is being collected (Dannels, 2018).

For this study, a qualitative research strategy was used because qualitative research allows for detailed information on feelings, opinions and experiences of respondents to be generated. Furthermore, it permits the researcher to interact with respondents during the research process, and this is important because the researcher gets to see how respondents will be reacting and also get their personal opinions.

### **3.4 Research design**

Wang *et al.* (2017) define research design as the plan of how the researcher will systematically collect and analyse the data that is needed to answer the research question and the sub questions. As identified in Chapter One, the research questions for this study were

- What are principals' explanations of the ways in which high matric results can be attained in rural secondary schools?

- What roles do rural secondary principals play in bringing about high matric results?
- What behaviours among principals do rural secondary principals perceive as being associated with the attainment of high matric results?
- What internal processes and strategies do rural secondary principals use to ensure the attainment and maintenance of high matric results?

Research design is described as a manner by which the requisite data can be gathered and analysed to arrive at a solution for the questions (Leavy, 2017). There are different types of research designs (e.g., descriptive, explanatory and exploratory). A descriptive design is mostly used to get responses to the when, who, how and where questions. It is used mostly to show a descriptive image (Wang *et al.*, 2017). Descriptive research design is a method in which the researcher observes and describes the behaviour of the respondents without interfering in any way. The respondents are in a natural environment. This design is used to describe and explain objectives for a certain group of people (Sekaran & Bougie 2014).

Explanatory design is used when the study problem has not been well researched before. This design focuses on explaining the study aspects (Sekaran & Bougie, 2014). Identifies causal links between factors that pertain to a research problem. This design helps find the problem and understand it more efficiently. It helps the researcher determine how and why things happen (Leedy & Ormrod 2015).

This study adopted an exploratory approach which Neuman (2014) explains as performing the function of describing information in a way that gives a better understanding of whatever it aims to define. However, this type of research approach only helps to provide a better understanding of the problem identified and is not necessarily intended to be used to substantiate or offer a conclusion (Snyder, 2019). Therefore, any exploratory study conducted with the aim of providing conclusive evidence is deemed to be subject to bias. This is because the interpretation of qualitative data from exploratory research that arrives at such conclusive facts may not represent the target population in

an adequate manner, and as a result, the findings cannot be generalized to reflect the perspectives or views of a broader population (Reiter, 2017).

An exploratory design is often used through the use of focus groups, secondary data or surveys with open ended-responses which seek to get an in-depth understanding from the participants (Mura & Buleca, 2014). Researchers or organizations that use exploratory methods in conducting research do so because of the nature of its flexibility and its focus on making the objective realizable. Likewise, this kind of research is a preliminary study that explores the research topic, which could be, not only a starting point or foundation for more conclusive research, but also serves as a factor in influencing the kind of research design, sampling and data collection methods adopted for a study (Leavy, 2017).

In line with the above, the researcher also noted that different approaches to research, in other words paradigms, do accompany different research methods. So, the methodology adopted for this study was informed by the critical theory paradigm. This paradigm, as applied in this study, assumed what Kivunja & Kuyini (2017) refer to as the transactional epistemology, wherein the researcher interacts with the participants, and an ontology of historical realism. In the case of this study, historical realism relates to the assertions about the history of the underperformance of rural schools as compared to those in the urban areas (Legotlo, Maaga & Sebego, 2002; Hlalele, 2012; Spaul, 2013). This study further drew from some of the attributes of the critical paradigm as described by Guba and Lincoln (1988) and Mertens (2015). In extending these descriptions of a critical paradigm, Kivunja & Kuyini (2017) note that it includes “the concern with power relationships set up within social structures; the conscious recognition of the consequences of privileging versions of reality; the respect for cultural norms; [and] an examination of conditions and individuals in a situation, based on social positioning” (p. 35). Therefore, building on these characteristics of research carried out within the framework of the critical research paradigm, this study was concerned with three things.

### 3.5 Sampling, the Sampling Frame and Respondents

Sekaran & Bougie (2014) describe the population of the study as the whole sum of collective elements that form the total number of the respondents. The population of a study can otherwise be termed as an aggregate or collection of individuals or objects with common attributes such as age, sex or health condition that is the focus of an investigation or for the benefit of which the study is conducted. Nevertheless, owing to the bulky proportion of populations, investigators in most cases cannot assess the entire population because it is too costly and onerous in nature. Therefore, researchers count solely on sampling methods.

Sampling is the process of selecting a group of individuals who have the relevant information concerning the matter that is under study. Researchers mostly make inferences about a large group of people by using information from a small sample (Wang *et al.*, 2017). A sample on the other hand simply connotes the subset of the whole population that is to be studied, whereby the researcher identifies a unit to represent the entire population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2014). In most cases, sampling is carried out for the reason that researchers may not be able to generate the needed information about the population under study, but to ensure the realization of precise outcomes. In a state where the sample of a study is too small or excessively large, the evidence or verdict obtained in the course of the study might result in improper conclusions. Based on this, the division of sampling can thus be categorised into two major forms (Neuman, 2014), namely: random or probability method of sampling and non-probability sampling.

A non-probabilistic sample is a sample where the choice made on sampling is based on the selection of the researcher (Hair *et al.*, 2015). In this regard, a researcher only chooses the precise collection of elements or people with the intention that the selected group will not represent the wider population. The adoption of this is mostly used when the research does not intend to generalise the acquired result within the limit of the selected sample. There are various types of non-probability sampling which are snowball sampling, convenience sampling, quota sampling and purposive sampling.

Convenience sampling is a technique where samples are selected because they are conveniently available to the researcher. This method is used because it is easy to recruit and the researcher does not consider choosing a sample that represents the whole population. This technique is quick, cost effective and there is easy availability of the sample (Taherdoost, 2016).

Quota sampling when the researcher chooses a certain strata within the population. Quota is a combination of convenience and judgement sampling. Census data is used to classify population according to relevant characteristics. People with the same characteristics are selected to make a quota (Taherdoost, 2016).

Purposive sampling is when elements are selected subjectively by the researcher to be a representative of the population. The researcher selects the sample with the best knowledge or experience of the research subject. This method is used when subject specific information is required from the sample (Taherdoost, 2016).

In the account of this study, a non-probability or purposive sampling method was used to ascertain the information needed in order to permit drawing inferences for the purpose of this study. This type of method was advantageous to this study because it allowed for the selection of respondents who were instrumental in eliciting the needed data for achieving the purpose of this study.

Ethical clearance to conduct the research study was obtained from University of KwaZulu-Natal's Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix E). The KZN DoE was then contacted to request permission to execute the research study. A permission letter was granted (see Appendix D) and submitted to targeted schools with the invitation letter to participate in the research study.

A request for KZN school pass rate statistics was made to the KZN DoE. The criteria by which the rural secondary schools were selected for the study was determined by three factors, which the researcher developed in collaboration with her supervisor while interrogating the pass rate statistics from the KZN DoE. Firstly, it was decided that the overall number of learners who sat for matriculation examinations in a school needed to

be greater than 15 in order for the school to be eligible for inclusion in the study. Secondly, the pass-rate of the school over a period of five years must have been above or equal to 80%. Thirdly, the school needed to be located in a rural region.

After the selection of the schools, ten principals were contacted telephonically and those that had email addresses were also emailed the invitation to participate in the research study. Appointments were scheduled in order to also hand deliver their invitations for the benefit of those that did not have email access. However, only six of the ten participants responded, and one later withdrew from participating in the study. The agreeing principals were contacted via telephone, email and in person. They were invited to participate in the study and a participant information sheet (see Appendix C) was sent to them. The principals who agreed to participate in the study were met at their places of employment for an interview. Prior to the start of the interview, the principals were invited to read and sign an informed consent form (see Appendix B) and were specifically asked for their consent to allow the interview to be audio-recorded. Thereafter, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant. Face-to-face interviews involving the researcher were conducted through a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix A). At the same time, the respondents were asked certain questions and probing was done where necessary to elicit the answers towards the study's research questions.

In this study, the researcher conducted the interviews herself, after being involved in the formulation and testing of the instrument prior to field work. Testing was done with other colleagues and researchers in her discipline. Given the researcher's proficiency in both isiZulu and English, participants were invited to speak both languages, and to switch between the two languages when necessary, during the interviews. Prior to conducting the interviews, it was also assumed that the participants would be mother-tongue isiZulu speakers. In addition, it was also assumed that, due to the nature of their employment (i.e., senior staff member in the KZN DoE), the participants would also be proficient in English. It was expected that should one of the participants not understand the contents of the information sheet, informed consent form, or interview questions in English, the researcher would then be in a position to conduct the interviews in isiZulu as the interview

questions were also translated into IsiZulu (see Appendix A1) . However, the need for translation was not vital because virtually all participants expressed that they understood the contents of the relevant information and the consent forms. The interviews were therefore conducted in English with very minimal isiZulu words expressed by the participants. Table 2 below shows the participants’ information:

Table 2: Participants’ Profile

<b>Participant pseudonyms</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Years as an Educator</b>	<b>Years as a Principal</b>
Mr Gwala	Male	High School A	30 years	13 years
Mr Nzimande	Male	High School B	35 years	19 years
Mr Dlamini	Male	High School C	31 years	10 years
Mr Phali	Male	High School D	36 years	16 years
Mr Simelane	Male	High School E	33 years	23 years

### 3.6 Data Collection

Singh & Masuku (2014) describe data collection as the system of accumulating information about the variables of the study or interest in a conventional manner that allows an individual to respond to the probable questions of the study, or to appraise the outcomes of the study and to test research hypotheses. The method of data collection may differ, depending on the approach or discipline with which an investigator desires to apply it. Irrespective of the grounds of study through which data is defined, whether it is quantitative or qualitative, it is essential to maintain data accuracy and integrity. Tyrer & Heyman (2016) note that where the collection of data is deficient, certain disadvantages may abound. These include the inability or reluctance of the respondent to give honest

answers or information to the questions of the study; the incapability of the researcher to repeat the data collection process and reproduce accurate data to validate the findings of the study; and wasting of time, effort and resources that result in partial conclusions. Other complications in this light may also include confusing other investigators or academic scholars in following the trail of unproductive outcomes of investigation; compromising inferences for public policy, especially because conclusions need to be drawn from respondents' responses to inform policy opinion; and creating loss to individual respondents that makes participation in the study ineffective (Tyrer & Heyman, 2016).

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

During data collection, field notes were taken during the interviews with the respondents and were later used by the researcher in the process of data analysis. In addition, observations made during the data collection process were documented in order to avoid the loss of information useful for subsequent data analysis purposes. The process of making field notes and documenting observations are regarded as a form of data analysis because they involve the researcher making interpretive decisions about what to make a note of, and what to document as observations. Furthermore, a voice-recording device was also used to record all the interviews. The audio recordings were then transcribed and translated into English. The transcription and translation processes are also understood as forms of analysis given the role that the researcher plays in transforming the data from interpersonal exchange (in the form of an interview) to text-based data form. Data analysis is described as a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of data collected (Wang *et al.*, 2017). For the purpose of this study, thematic analysis was used in order to sort the data into emergent themes obtained from the responses or narrations. According to Leavy (2017), thematic analysis refers to any number of qualitative analysis techniques which interrogate textual data (data that has been transcribed) for patterned genres and looks for common threads in texts that describe or explain the phenomena under question, guided by the main questions of the study. Similarly, thematic analysis is described as a descriptive presentation of qualitative data which is theoretically flexible and suits questions related to people's experience,

views and perceptions Meyers, Guast & Guarino (2016). As such, the themes that emerged during data collection with the principals assessed, identified, and depicted their perspectives, and the findings of the study addressed the research questions

Once the data had been transcribed and translated, the research engaged in an extensive process of data coding. Woods *et al.* (2016) explains data coding as representing a primary step towards assessing and analyzing data. This is because data in qualitative research, especially the primary data, is generally obtained in unprocessed form (i.e., transcribed and translated phrases of exchange between the researcher and participant) and coding the data constitutes an important part of the qualitative research process that must be made in the context of each individual's research study (Elliott, 2018).

Therefore, processing the data from qualitative research through coding, is a central component of the data analysis process that helps in the identification and mapping of the information in the text or other data items, identifying ideas and perceptions, and finding links between them (Elliott, 2018). In order to reach a reasonable conclusion, data regarding the study at hand was refined and analyzed to yield an inference on which a decision was made, while noting that the coding process itself is viewed and conceptualized by most researchers as a decision-making process. The classification of coding can therefore take two forms or dimensions, open coding and axial coding. Open coding, especially at the initial stage, emphasizes that the researcher must be able to establish diverse ideas about the concepts and categories in the data, which will formulate the basic units of analysis. In other words, it is an approach of classifying data into different groups such as first level concepts or master headings, and second-level categories or sub-headings. Open coding, research is engrossed principally with the text to describe ideas and groupings. (Vaughn & Turner, 2016).

Wildemuth (2016) alludes that in axial coding where concepts and categories are used, the researcher re-reads the text to assure that concepts and categories truly embody interview replies, as well as to ensure discovery on whether concepts and categories are connected. In fact, in order to observe whether concepts and categories are connected, the researcher needs to ask clear questions regarding the study at hand. These may

range from inquiries focusing on the conditions that influence the concepts and categories, as well as their associated effects or consequences.

As identified above, data coding forms part of the data analysis. However, as the coding process started coming to an end, the next process of data analysis comprised summarising the data collected into themes, as interpreted by the researcher to coherently relate to the questions and objectives proposed for the study. Since the study aimed at exploring school principals' perceptions, behaviours and explanations on how rural schools attain high matric results, using thematic analysis as a relevant qualitative research method, was appropriate. Thematic analysis comprises two components:

Firstly, "the mechanical, whereby the researcher physically organises and subdivides the data into categories" and secondly, the "interpretative whereby the researcher determines meaningful categories in terms of the questions being asked" (Goering & Anton, 2015:17). This form of analysis involved what Ayiro (2012) assert as; identifying, organising, analysing, and explaining the themes that arise from the data collected. The use of the thematic analysis methods was also advantageous because using themes helped to capture something vital and significant about the data in relation with the research questions within the data set (Goering & Anton, 2015). This method was further useful for this study, as the themes that were identified during analysis were critically informed, purposefully selected and explained to align with the study's research questions and objectives.

The relevance of using this method of data analysis also lays in the fact that it helps the researcher, as stated by O'Leary (2014), to coherently and expressively present the meaning of each theme, the theories that underlie the theme, as well as and conclusions that is derived from each of the themes. According to Sekaran & Bougie (2014) this method of analysis also exposes the researcher to perspectives and observations of the research, which otherwise analysed, might not have been identified. These reasons are logical in terms of why thematic analysis was used for this study, more so because it allowed for the establishment of a balance between the respondents' responses and

perspectives and the study's presentation and discussion of them as the research findings.

### **3.8 Validity, Reliability and Rigour**

The terms validity and reliability are important elements of all research. However, these terms are widely operationalized and considered as components more suited to quantitative research than qualitative research (Cypress, 2017). This is because quantitative research often emphasizes the measurement and the analysis of causal relationships between variables, in which case statistical processes are the procedural norms towards generating findings and drawing conclusions (Curtis & Drennan, 2013). From a quantitative viewpoint, valid methods and measures are those that produce consistent and accurate findings over time (Sekaran & Bougie, 2014). Reliability pertains to the accuracy of the measurements themselves of an intended phenomenon (Leavy, 2017). Meanwhile, this is not to say, for the fact that qualitative research does not use measurements, the terms reliability and validity are not key aspects of qualitative research.

Qualitative methods espouse a view that intends to harvest data from the world in a context-specific way without attempts at managing or manipulating whatever phenomenon might be under study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2014). It therefore does not arrive at findings based on statistical procedures. Rather, qualitative methods require a different criterion of ensuring quality which is embedded in dependability, neutrality and confirmability.

Wiid & Diggines (2013) observe that dependability speaks about clarity through which the presentation of results can be followed for logical consistency or an inquiry audit progression from the inception of the study. Confirmability is vital, whereby the researcher's phenomena of interest have indeed been presented in the way various respondents described or discussed – at least prior to analysis. It should be noted, however, that over a hundred criteria for qualitative measures of reliability or validity exist, with their different applications within the qualitative paradigm (Northcote, 2012).

In this study, validity and reliability are prioritised through the aforementioned notions of dependability, neutrality, and confirmability terms. The research process includes a comprehensive description of the data collection and analysis techniques deployed, which included proper and secure data storage for further peer scrutiny should such a need arise thus ensuring the study's dependability. Confirmability and neutrality was ensured by documenting the researcher's interpretations carefully as part of the analysis reporting phase, and descriptions of phenomena discussed by respondents were presented in a manner that best represents the experiences and opinions of the respondents. In light of this, the researcher discussed all the relevant findings in the data analysis chapter, including observations, while ensuring through dependability, neutrality and confirmability that the themes accurately reflect the data collected and supported by relevant secondary information as well. Thus, the element of confirmability and neutrality, as there were no prejudiced or foregone conclusions on the part of the researcher because the findings built on the participants' responses.

In terms of dependability the researcher attempted to write up findings in such a way that they are logical, consistent, can be sourced back to the raw data, so that researchers reading the findings might evaluate the findings as logical and dependable, and thereby feel confident to use the findings in their own contexts. Besides, the data analysed also drew insight from previous studies to ensure the findings consistent.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

The question of what is morally proper or not in conducting research that especially involves dealing with or engaging people and using documented data (Nather, 2015), resonates with the subject of research ethics or ethical considerations. Also, ethical consideration requisites like informed consent from gatekeepers and participants, confidentiality, maintaining anonymity or the protection of the participants' identity are all important factors to be considered and understood when conducting research (Curtis & Drennan, 2013).

In line with these, this study adhered to the ethical considerations and requirements as outlined by the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Ethical clearance was applied for and granted for this study by UKZN's Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) (see Appendix E). Gatekeepers' permission was also applied for and granted by KZN DoE (see Appendix D), granting the needed permission to use the selected population as the sample for this study. Before conducting the interviews, the purpose of the research was clearly explained to the research participants and both verbal and signed consent was obtained from them (see Appendix C). Informed consent is permission which is granted providing full knowledge of the risks and benefits of a research to the participants (Ayiro 2012). The study provided respondents with a consent form which they signed before the interviews were conducted.

Furthermore, assurance was given to the respondents to ensure the protection of their confidential information with the guarantee that no names of participating principals, parents, learners and even curriculum advisors would be revealed. Participation was strictly on a voluntary basis and participants were free to withdraw without penalty against them. Confidentiality is the concept of privacy and respect for autonomy. It involves keeping private the information that respondents give. It removes traces of identity thus reducing risk of participation (Durand & Chantler 2014). In the study respondents were not asked for any personal information. Data collected was used for research purposes and was not available to the public. Anonymity is when responses cannot be identified to a particular respondent from the data set (Walliman 2011). Anonymity was ensured by having clear guidelines and instructions in the interview schedule.

In addition, in keeping with the confidentiality clause and the need for protection of data as an ethical consideration, the data gathered from the research participants and transcribed has been preserved in the researcher's computing system and the hard copies of the data safely stored and locked in the supervisor's office. These data, as prescribed by the UKZN policy would be deleted and destroyed after a minimum period of five years.

### **3.10 Limitations of the study**

This study set out to explore school principals' perceptions, behaviours and explanations on how rural schools attain high matric results. Findings derived from the data collection process have attempted to respond to the research questions; however, the findings are limited and cannot be generalized to represent the realities of all the secondary schools in South African rural areas. This is because data was only collected from purposively selected and high achieving secondary schools under the region of Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal. This delimitation to rural secondary schools in Pietermaritzburg only, owed to the lack of sufficient financial resources to draw primary in person information from all the rural schools in the country. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized.

### **3.11 Concluding Summary**

This chapter outlined the research design and methods employed by this study, which is, the qualitative research methodology. The chapter also outlined and explained the reasons for using this research method and designs to collect data on the subject of school principals' perceptions, behaviours and explanations on how rural schools attain high matric results. Generally, on the research methods, the chapter discussed the research paradigm and design, the sampling method and sampled population for the study, the data collection and thematic analysis methods, validity and reliability of the research findings, ethical issues, and limitations of the study. The chapter that follows presents the research findings, discussions, and analyses.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The classification of schools in South Africa according to their location and the socioeconomic status of the learners can be described as a move that set some schools at a disadvantage (Nyoni, Nyoni & Bonga, 2017). This study set out to explore the explanations provided by principals from rural secondary schools in Pietermaritzburg, about how their schools achieve high results at matric level. The findings from the study will be articulated in themes derived from the responses of the five study participants who are rural secondary school principals from high achieving schools. These responses are categorized into themes that intended to answer the four principal research questions of the study.

Accordingly, this chapter is divided into five major sub-sections, with each section being aligned with the research question accordingly. Chapter 4 begins with an overview of the study's participants

#### **4.2 Participants**

Five participants who are principals at different rural secondary schools took part in the study. They have been in service as principals for ten years and above. The details of the participants are provided in Table 2 in chapter 3.

#### **4.3 Attaining high results in rural secondary schools**

With regard to the first key research question, which seeks the principals' explanations of the ways in which high matric results can be attained in rural secondary schools, the following three sub-sections present and discuss the findings based on the researcher's interviews with participants. As a caveat, the researcher calls to mind the fact that some

of the themes overlap and an effort has been made by the researcher to avoid repetition and to provide a concise but deep synthesis and discussion of respondents' answers.

#### **4.3.1 Theme 1: Stakeholders' involvement, participation and support**

Theme 1 (i.e., stakeholders' involvement and participation) asserts that although the principals attributed their schools' ability to attain high academic results to a combination of several factors, several of them specifically explained that relying on stakeholders' involvement and participation was a key factor. In the context of responses provided by the research participants, stakeholders refer to parents, the school governing board, past pupils and persons with direct interest in the school.

##### **Sub-theme 1.1: Identifying the stakeholders**

According to the National Planning Commission (2012) there is a need to identify and enhance the potentially significant role played by teachers, principals, other stakeholders, and parents and districts in basic education.

Mr Simelane: When the [stakeholders] look at these social problems, they identify them and then involve relevant professionals to deal with the issue if it is beyond their control. They also work with the police in some cases. They just phone them and they also work with NGO'S and Lifeline as well as SANCA.]

In the context of responses provided by the research participants, stakeholders refer to parents, the school governing board, past pupils and persons with direct interest in the school. In addition, other stakeholders like the police and NGOs were also identified. As shown in a comment by Participant 5, Mr Simelane, the school works with the police and NGOs in order to help students when certain circumstances arise. Such circumstances include when there are students involved in drug abuse and when there is provision of food aid to the students.

## **Sub-theme 1.2: Stakeholder involvement and participation**

Sub-theme 1.2 focuses on the involvement and participation of stakeholders in rural secondary schools for high matric results. Specifically, the principals explained that the way the stakeholders are involved and participate in the school influences the results of the students. The participants brought their different opinions on how the stakeholder involvement and participation impacted them as principals. For example, Mr Gwala noted that:

[My] parents are passionate about the school. They love the school. When a parents' meeting is called, even at short notice, they attend and participate. This was achieved through complying with Batho Pele principles, which entails consultation. I make sure that I consult the different stakeholders. My reason for doing such is to let them know that they are all part of the school. We also have a parents' day every three months. During the parents' day, we recognise the top ten learners in the presence of their parents. I particularly find this to be a way to motivate the learner. I strongly believe that parents should also be part and parcel of the school.

Similarly, Mr Simelane indicated:

"I owe a lot of gratitude to the parents of the learners of my school. They provide a lot of support to us. During some of our weekend classes, some parents make themselves available to help in any way they can. Some even go the extra length of offering their homes to the volunteer past learners that come from far places."

Mr. Gwala felt that stakeholders' involvement and participation is also a sign of how much his school is loved. On the other hand, Mr. Simelane echoed the participation and role of stakeholders and their link to the success of learners. According to him, his school invites past matric learners (as stakeholders) to come to the school to help the current learners with their subjects after school hours. Some parents were also involved in the after-school hours' support provided by past matric learners by overseeing that these classes run

smoothly. Some of these parents offer their support by providing accommodation for some of the volunteer past matric learners who resided far from the school. In terms of Fiedler's contingency theory model, the concept of leader-member relations is evident in relation to the theme of "stakeholders' involvement and participation." Leader-member relations refer to the group atmosphere and the degree of confidence, loyalty, support, co-operation, friendliness and attraction that stakeholders feel for their leader (Farzeena, Ahmad & Anwar, 2015). When all the stakeholders of the rural school work together towards a goal then it is easier to attain the goal. Principals are able to motivate students to value their education and on the other hand, they are also able to motivate the teachers into improving their teaching standards. Parents are motivated to support the learners necessary. The principals are able to communicate with parents, teachers, community leaders and the learners and make them work together towards the improvement of the matric results (Mavimbela and van Niekerk, 2015). Thus, principals in rural areas communicate openly with their stakeholders and they are supported and work together towards the attainment of high matric results.

### **Sub-theme 1.3: Stakeholder support**

Another important sub-theme that the researcher identified in the participants' responses was that of stakeholder 'support'. The stakeholders offered a number of different types of support to the students at the rural schools. Some offered support in terms of accommodation while others provided the different services like providing food stuff, counselling, career guidance and moral support to make sure that the students are well supported. The study participants reportedly received different aspects of support from different stakeholders. There are various forms of support which include support offered to the school and principals from parents and stakeholders, support to the learners as well as support to all the members of staff. The theme is further sub-divided on the different support offered.

### **Sub-theme 1.3.1: Support offered to the principal**

The sub-theme on support offered to the principals refer to how principals were supported to make sure that they do their required jobs effectively. There were a number of ways in which the principals were supported. With regard to the personal support that school principals get from their families one of the participants Mr. Dlamini for instance explained that the support he got from his family was one of the contributors to his school's academic success. He accedes that the demands of his job take him away from spending time with his family and while this could have been a problem, he stated that his family understands and gives him all the support he needs. The participant's comment also shows that he is a task motivated leader who loves planning, setting goals and delegating tasks. In his words:

“My job takes a lot of my time and it is my family that suffers. However, they understand that I have to be away. So, I must say that their understanding and support allows me to give my all to my learners. In addition, I set goals for myself and I delegate some of the tasks to fellow teachers. I also plan most of the activities ahead of time to avoid getting overwhelmed or making mistakes and this adds in achieving high results.”

Other forms of support attributed to the success of their schools' attainment of high results for matric include support from the School Governing Body (SGB), the Learner Representative Councils and the Department of Education. All the five study participants identified the aforementioned support during their interviews. For Mr. Nzimande and Mr. Phali, they also cited the support the school gets from the community in the form of keeping the school safe. Mr. Phali, for instance, reports that:

“Sometimes when I leave work late or go to work early in the morning, I see some of the learners' parents or old male relatives patrolling around the school premises. We used to have a problem with these 'nyaope' boys coming to do their drugs around school premises. So, these learners' family members patrol because they do not want their kids to be learning around such an environment”

In addition to all the support mentioned, Mr. Dlamini includes support from the Ward Manager who helps with any challenge that the school encounters. According to Mr Dlamini:

“There are times when we have problems like [sic] a broken window or some of our utilities are not working. I have the Ward Manager’s number and I call him and report to him about anything that needs to be fixed. He is always quick to respond because he also shares the belief that learners should have an environment that should be good for them to learn.”

This emerging theme of ‘support offered to principals’ is suggestive of the kind of leadership style employed by the principals in this study. Specifically, the findings suggest that the principals got support from their families and other stakeholders. According to Murenga (2017), school management teams support principals and they allow for the sharing of power whereby the School Management Team and teachers are also involved in the school’s decision-making processes. School management teams add more ideas in problem solving and decision-making and this has a positive impact when coming with solutions to problems faced by principals in rural schools. However, the effectiveness of school management teams lies in the cooperation of the education department (Bhengu and Myende, 2016). Furthermore, the principals were able to garner and sustain certain kinds of support for themselves, their school, and their learners in response to the kind of leaders they reported to be. A contingency theory approach suggests that the principals’ leadership styles were both task motivated and relationship motivated (Laschinger, Wong & Grau, 2013). This is shown in the efforts the principals put in planning and setting tasks so that they achieve their goals, in this case producing high matric results. They are relationship oriented since they focus on maintaining and building positive relationships with stakeholders.

### **Sub-theme 1.3.2: Support offered to the learners**

Within the theme of stakeholder’s involvement, participation, and support and the subtheme stakeholder support, a further sub-theme of support offered to the learners became evident in the data.

The findings highlight that for high matric results to be achieved in rural areas there is a need for offering the learners with support. Specifically, the principals in the study highlighted how learner support, and especially psychosocial support was pertinent. Mr. Phali, according to him:

“Some of the challenges faced by my learners included drug use and alcohol abuse. The family dynamics of some of the learners was also identified as a barrier to their learning and achievement outcomes. To help these learners, the school takes students on educational camps, which were attributed to positively changing the learner’s attitudes and in turn was regarded as instrumental in the successful performance of these students.”

A similar view is shared by another participant, Mr. Simelane stating that:

“Some of these learners grow up with their grandmothers and the community has to deal with the issue of ‘woonga’. I know that when these kids are in school, they are my responsibility. But I also know that their performance in school is affected by their experiences at home and in the community. So sometimes, I make sure there are psychologists available to give like a seminar to these kids and since I know some of these learners personally, I usually encourage them to go speak to these psychologists after some of the seminars.”

The role of holistic support as a contributor to success and the achievement of high results by learners is also evident when a participant, Mr. Nzimande mentioned that:

“Offering out of school assistance and support to learners was also cited as another contributor to their successes. Mr. Nzimande further emphasises that “I am aware that we need to support these learners not just academically, but also psychologically, emotionally and socially because this community battles with a lot of social problems like drug use and alcohol abuse.”

The findings showed that support to learners was not just of an academic nature but also psychological. Furthermore, support in the form of students meeting at educational camps was also mentioned. In addition, the use of NGOs and other community-based

organizations to provide extra and all the needed psycho-social help to these students is also considered by the principals a way of ensuring that students are able to perform at an optimal level. The efforts of these principals to ensure that their learners get psychosocial support are a display of these principals' level of commitment to their work. This ability or the agency of these principals to organise internal factors such as resources and staff through their relationships to enhance the capabilities of learners has been shown in this study to concomitantly positively influence educational outcomes in these rural schools. Part of the contingency theory that applies to this analysis therefore is the leader-member relationship, which is one of Fiedler's (1967) situational control variables. The leader-member relations allow the principal to offer support to students, members of staff and the community at large. It is this variable within the principals in rural schools that allow them to offer students support which is more than that of an academic nature but also psychologically. John, Ni, Yam and Pounder (2018) revealed that principals in rural schools are regarded as leaders even in communities and parents and former students look up to them for advice as well as guidance. Thus, they work together in the development of the school and the community at large.

### **Sub-theme 1.3.3: Support from staff**

The theme of stakeholder support also encompasses the sub-theme, which talks about support from staff members. It is very important for the principals to have support from their staff members. This also shows the kind of relationships within the schools thus help better the matric results.

All study participants lauded the support of their staff members as instrumental to the success of their schools. As stated by participants below:

Mr. Dlamini for instance echoes the views of all the other study participants "when I acknowledge that the success of the school is due to a collective effort and the hard work of the educators and all the staff".

Mr. Simelane: "The greatest support I am getting is mainly from the management and the educators, as well as the department even though it is not enough. But

that is not the least of my worries, the School governing body does also support me”.

Mr. Gwala: “My team most importantly, is the best. None of this would be achieved without them. They are united as the school and that really goes a long way. They no longer treat each other like co-workers but family. They are the most supportive team I have ever come across”.

Essentially, it was identified by the researcher that staff support to both the principal and learners is an integral factor that contributes to the success of the learners and their high achievement. The principals mentioned the support from their teams as the best. They even work as a family and this brings so much productivity towards student results. Leader-member relations can be defined as the group atmosphere and the degree of confidence, loyalty, support, co-operation, friendliness and attraction that subordinates feel for their leader (Farzeena, Ahmad & Anwar, 2015). In addition, Bakotić (2016) observes that the interpersonal relationship between a leader and his/her followers appears to be the most important determinant of the group process. The effectiveness of this relationship is measured by the social acceptance of the leader by his group and by the leader’s rating of the group’s atmosphere. On the contrary, where the relationships between a leader and his/her group members are difficult, the work atmosphere tends to be unfriendly and will always be confrontational in the group owing to an absence of trust and co-operation (Awan & Islam, 2015). According to Gurler & Simsek (2018) the results of a school are better when there are high leader member exchanges at the school. These exchanges give the teachers who are the members of staff more voice behaviour. By so doing the teachers offer their input about work issues since they feel that the principal considers them as important assets and they in turn give their full support. According to Day, Gu & Sammons (2016) the support from staff is dependent on the principal’s effort to uphold the good relations and also improve the leader-member exchange with the teachers.

### **4.3.2 Theme 2: Playing the role of a good leader**

Theme 2 focused on playing the role of a good leader. There are certain characteristics and roles which the principals talked about which denote a good leader. Playing the role of a good leader was taken by the participants to be an important role they should enact in steering their school. The principals identified that they should be good leaders for the school (i.e., the learners and staff) and the community they live and work in. Good leaders were regarded as helping to make the schools reach their objectives of attaining excellent results. For example, Mr. Gwala believes that his leadership role primarily involved providing support (i.e., supportive leadership). He emphasizes that supporting the learners is key. In order to provide the requisite support, he mentioned that he makes efforts to understand and place himself at the level of the learners. This is in order for him to gain perspective into their problems and be able to help them deal with whatever issues they come across within and outside the school. Second to his notion of supportive leadership is the view that he needs to facilitate a motivating school environment, which he contributes towards achieving by inviting outsiders to give motivational talks. Inviting outsiders to give motivational talks could, however, also be conceptualised as part of the theme of stakeholder involvement. He also provided resources to learners and he tried to be there when he was needed. Specifically, he explained,

“Leading by example: being passionate so that teachers become passionate, even the learners become passionate in that sense”.

In a similar comment another participant, Mr. Nzimande affirms that his role is that of ensuring that teaching and learning takes place in this school (an emphasis on the academic management dimension of leadership). He claims that he achieves this through monitoring all academic and extra-curricular activities within the school. Additionally, he also regards himself as a father figure, not only to the learners but to the entire staff. Regarding himself as a father figure is perhaps an example of Mr. Nzimande providing supportive leadership. He has an open-door policy for both his staff and learners, and he identified that this policy probably encourages effective communication. He also reported that he does his best to avail himself should anyone need him. His availability transcends

from academic to personal issues. The decision to deal with the personal issues of his learners and staff members is underscored by the understanding that an educator or member of staff or learner who has a problem of whatever nature cannot give their best in anything. His learners therefore give their best because they have all the support they need from him and their educators, who are also happy to be teaching them.

“I have an open door policy for both staff and students. I am always available to support and assist them where need arises”.

For Messrs. Dlamini, Phali and Simelane, the concept of leadership by example was also emphasised in their responses. There is an implicit understanding from the responses of these participants that the needs of their learners go beyond just academic to other social needs. Their efforts at producing excellent results stem from a need to understand the different challenges that these learners encounter and to offer them the requisite support. Mr. Dlamini also stated that due to the location of the school (i.e., in a disadvantaged area), a situation where the needs of the students go beyond just academic needs arises. According to him:

“It is important to understand the impact of the socio-economic situation of these students and how that can be managed to improve their academic performance. As a school you do not only provide teaching and learning. At times you need to involve social workers and assist learners who do not have adults looking after them at home. So, we eventually end up supporting them in their psychosocial needs too. Some of these learners are faced with many issues. As a school, we feel the need to support them in those issues because we believe that if they do not receive the necessary support, it might affect their performance at school. We also believe that they are the future and they will overcome their situations with education”.

Mr. Nzimande: “I make sure that all the tasks are communicated fully to the teachers. I also tell them the expected time of completion.”

The findings illustrate how the leadership capability of the principal and specifically understanding the needs of his learners overlaps somewhat with the importance of

stakeholders' involvement, such as social workers. The findings concur with literature and shows that the principals as heads of schools are expected to be open-minded problem solvers who are pacesetters. Principals should also have the ability to take correction and correct others in the event of mistakes, while shaping the vision of academic success for all students (Sebastian, Allensworth & Huang, 2016). In addition, instructional leadership is a major potential strategy that a school could use in order to be successful in its organisation and in order to enhance student results (Day, Gu & Summons, 2016). Robinson (2010) denotes instructional leadership as the actions that principals embrace to develop a productive and satisfactory working environment for teachers, as well as desirable learning conditions to make learning easy for pupils.

The findings also mentioned the issue of effective communication in a good leader. This concurs with literature by Mikkelsen, Jacobsen and Andersen (2017) which emphasize that the communication of information and orientation on goal achievement of each or target project must be communicated to subordinates. This is to allow workload to be shared amongst the team members and subordinates and mostly motivating employees to work harder where people are able to work with competence and acquire more knowledge for their experience level (Matemilola & Elegbede, 2017).

Mr. Gwala: "I always give instructions and tasks to both teachers and learners so that we have a productive school environment. This also helps me have control over the things that are happening within the school. I do not discriminate over my staff members. I treat all of them equally when giving them tasks".

The notion of a good leader, as identified by the participants, can be conceptualised within a situational control and leadership style perspective (within Fiedler's contingency theory model). Situational control is the degree to which the leader has control over the group's tasks and outcomes (Fiedler, 1984). In addition, the participants' perceptions of the schools getting high matric results appeared to also be guided by the concept of instructional leadership, which is regarded as the actions that principals embrace to develop a productive and satisfactory working environment for teachers, as well as desirable learning conditions to make learning easy for pupils (Dou, Devos & Valcke,

2017). In most of the responses, the three situational control variables: leader member-relations, task structure and leader position power are evident. Furthermore, a good leader must therefore not be racist or discriminating to others irrespective of their gender, nationality or ethnicity, as well as other differences when it comes to searching for competent hands to reinforce achieving common goals (Yang, Stoeber & Wang, 2015). The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) concurs that principals, as leaders, must uphold equity together with cultural responsiveness and also to be people who embrace changes by being creative, inspiring subordinates and students so as to make the schools a place where students succeed. Thus, the principal as a leader must provide direction for the school and exercise his or her influence (Albritton, Huffman & McClellan, 2017).

Mr Simelane: “I always support my learners in both their academic and nonacademic activities. I also provide guidance like what a father does to both staff and learners. This helps them gain confidence and it influences the results we get as a school”.

The statements that showed the participants' positive leader-member relations include the issues of providing support to the learners (which all the participants agreed was key to student achievement); motivating learners; providing resources; and being father figures to the learners as well as the staff. The reasons for referring to these issues as positive leader-member relations was that the degree of confidence, support, loyalty, cooperation of the learners and teachers when working with the principals was evident. Thus, the type of leadership style that suits this description is relationship motivated.

Leaders who are relationship motivated concentrate on building, developing and maintaining close relationships amongst group members (Leroy *et al.*, 2015).

The statements that showed that the participants were task structured, and that they prioritised having goals completed include ensuring that teaching and learning takes place and monitoring of academic and extra-curricular activities. This analysis directly points to a task motivated type of leadership style, which focuses more on achieving the goal (Leroy *et al.*, 2015). The third situational control variable, 'leader position power' did not strongly

appear in this theme of “playing a role of a good leader”. However, the fact that the participants who are the leaders in this study exercised power to be able to organise, manage and lead the subordinates, who in this study would refer to the educators, stakeholders and learners is an indication that the participants had strong position power and authority.

Mr Gwala: “I always invite motivational speakers to motivate the learners; psychologists and social workers who assist in addressing the emotional and social needs of the learners. These ensure that teaching and learning took place by monitoring all academic and extracurricular activities.”

The kind of leadership that the leaders display matters in any organisations as it determines the success or failure of the organisation. The South African Department of Education (2004) defined leadership as “the ability and the potential to influence any group or organisation towards the achievement of the identified goals”. The concept of instructional leadership emerged strongly in this theme. The participants’ responses showed that instructional leadership was the kind of leadership inherent in them. All the responses attributed to the participants most of the key characteristics and elements of instructional leadership. From these responses, the participants appeared to be goal oriented, open-minded, problem solvers and culture builders (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). In addition, all key elements of instructional leadership: prioritisation; scientifically based reading research; focus on alignment of curriculum; instruction; assessment and standards; data analysis; and cultivate a culture of continuous learning were elements drawn from the responses found in the theme of “playing a role of a good leader.” The participants attested that they provided support to the learners in terms of making the needed resources available. This includes inviting motivational speakers to motivate the learners; inviting psychologists and social workers who assisted in addressing the emotional and social needs of the learners. These ensured that teaching and learning took place by monitoring all academic and extracurricular activities. They also ensured that there is effective communication with the learners, educators, school staff and stakeholders.

### **4.3.3 Theme 3: Instilling discipline, commitment, hard work and “proper” conduct**

Discipline, commitment, hard work and “proper” conduct seemed to be regarded as the basis for general success by the participants. This theme illuminates how discipline, commitment, hard work and proper conduct seem to be the foundations of the success in rural schools. These behaviours are instilled by the principals to the learners. The presence of these qualities within the students helps the schools achieve their goals of excelling. This was revealed by a comment by Mr. Gwala:

“Most of these kids come from single-headed households and some are raised by the Gogos. They are not used to being corrected or being responsible. The first thing I teach them is for them to be on time, to tuck in their shirts and small things like that.”

Other participants mentioned that discipline is like a flowing river; once the current starts, the flow continues. Once they learn the habit of coming to school on time, they will cultivate the habit of being on time in every other thing, even if I am not there to remind them.

“Sport for me is another way to promote discipline. If you are playing soccer and someone tackles you hard, you do not fight them with your fist, you wait for the referee’s decision and even if the decision doesn’t go in your favour, you do not scream at the referee. Instead, you are encouraged to shake hands with your opponent and continue”.

With regard to discipline and hard work another participant mention that:

Mr. Dlamini: Attributes the success of his school to the discipline and commitment of his staff members. According to him, “the success of the school is hinged on commitment, teamwork and sacrifice. He stated that a lot of sacrifice goes into his learners’ success. He mentions that in this way, learners get all the necessary support to excel in their work. He also cited that at the school, they make sure that they prepare learners fully for their examinations. They motivate them to strive for

distinctions and not just for a pass mark. They believe in a quality result and not in an “I just made it result”.

The above findings showed how discipline, commitment, hard work and “proper” conduct were instilled into the learners by the different principals. The findings showed that for Mr Gwala, instilling and cultivating a culture of discipline was an indispensable ingredient in his recipe for success. Discipline in the form of encouraging a good dress code and encouraging a culture of interaction based on respect amongst staff and learners are factors perceived to be pertinent to the success story of Mr Gwala’s school. He also reported encouraging students to engage in sports and productive extra-curricular activities. Furthermore, Mr. Gwala cited that there is a strong sense of ownership at his school. Learners have an attitude of “it is my school; it is my classroom no matter how poor we are”. He also made reference to how everything in his school was intact, including the windows. He indicated that his learners do not vandalise the school and explained that although the learners are poor and their resources are insufficient, they look after what they have and have a sense of ownership and pride of being part of the high school. In addition, the findings also showed that discipline and commitment of the staff members had an influence on the discipline of the learners as stated by Mr Dlamini. According to De Jong, Grundmeyer & Yankey (2017) it is the duty of the principal to make sure that there is discipline within the school. The principal has to ensure discipline of the teachers as well the students. This includes that they attend to their lessons and that they get to school on time. Absenteeism from both students and teachers has to be communicated and there has to be a valid reason for not attending.

#### **4.3.4: Theme 4: Facilitating additional preparation**

Theme 4 was on facilitating additional preparation, there was a need for additional preparation for students to improve and get good results. The theme looked at ways in which the principals made the additional preparations. Theme 4, “Facilitating Additional Preparation”, is a theme that builds up from the theme on “playing a role of a good leader.” In this theme, participants engage with the strategies of fulfilling and completing the goal, which in this regard is attaining high matric results. According to all the participants, the

strategy is clear and straightforward, hence the theme “Facilitating Additional Preparation.”

All participants regarded leading their students to make additional preparations as a factor that aids their schools in achieving high results. All participants stated that they organised extra classes during the holidays and on weekends for these students in order to provide additional time for examination preparation for the students. A participant stated that:

Mr. Dlamini: stated that he is involved in teaching mathematics and accounting during the holidays and in weekend classes. They make past examination papers available to learners and go through each examination paper thoroughly with the learners. Principals equip them with skills of how they should answer questions because from experience and even working at marking centres in the past, he learnt that most of the time learners fail because they do not know how to answer questions. Mr Dlamini mentioned that in most situations, these learners will have the correct information but fail to answer the questions correctly because they do not have the right approach.

All five participants concur that matric students need extra time for examination preparation, even after school hours. The importance of providing additional adequate preparation is emphasised in the response of Mr. Phali:

Mr Phali: mentioned that his school starts as early as 7 am for the matriculants. There are also midday classes from 3 pm for those who could not make it to the early morning class. In addition to that, he ensures that his syllabus is covered on time and a significant amount of time is spent on revision. Again, in order to adequately prepare learners, he goes as far as offering Saturday and Sunday classes to learners.

Literature supports the view that there is a need for additional preparations for there to be improvement results in schools. However, the additional work must be communicated well with the staff and learners so that they will make the necessary arrangements. Mikkelsen, Jacobsen, & Andersen (2017) emphasize that the communication of information and orientation on goal achievement of each or target project must be communicated to

subordinates. This is to allow work-load to be shared amongst the team members and subordinates and thus making the meeting of goals possible. The contingency theory concepts that would apply to the responses in this theme would be one of situational control variables and one of leadership styles (Farzeena, Ahmad & Anwar, 2015). Preparing the learners and adding more time for the examination point to saying that the participants were task motivated, because obtaining high matric results was the ultimate motive. The standard procedures the participants implemented, such as making past examination papers available, making sure the syllabus was finished to give extra time for revisions and taking part in the teaching and learning preparation periods, indicates that the tasks were structured well.

#### **4.4 Concluding summary**

This chapter has presented findings in the form of five broad themes. The advent of the theme emanated from the interviews conducted with the participants and the representation of collated data. The themes included: stakeholders' involvement and participation; support; discipline, commitment, hard work and proper conduct; good leadership; and extra preparations. These emerging five themes complemented each other. For instance, while stakeholder involvement includes the positive participation and contribution of different stakeholders to the success of the learners, it will however take a good leader to be able to understand that a learner needs such support. Similarly, while it emerged that extra preparation was pertinent to the success of these learners, such preparation comes at a cost and in most cases, the preparation can mean getting other forms of support from other people, such as the family of the respondents in the event when they have to work late hours and during the weekends.

Basically, the themes broadly captured different factors that contribute to the achievement of high results by these rural high schools. The themes as a unit communicate that through the leadership efforts and support received from the family and the community, the

commitment of teachers or educators as well as the provision of extramural classes help in achieving the corporate goal which is an excellent matric result. Additionally, the chapter highlighted that the motivation from leaders and their approach to governance assists schools to produce high matric results. Meanwhile, incidents such as emotional trauma from a broken family, sexual abuse, alcohol abuse, gangsterism, poverty, hunger and other illicit acts that can cause environmental unrest were highlighted as the factors that hinder achieving academic excellence as pertains to the matric results.

Following from the presentation and discussion of the data, it was also noted that rural secondary schools produce high matric results because of the collective work of the school management, the principals particularly, and the rural communities at large. Therefore, the hard work of the principals, matric students, former matric students, parents, staff members and all the stakeholders, as deciphered from this chapter, should not be taken for granted as all of this contributes to the excellent and high matric results. Also, the students' wellbeing as drawn from the discussion in the chapter is important, given that it determines the kind of results the schools will produce. Hence the need for social workers and psychologist involvement in the school for the student.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter concludes the study, with the key aim of exploring the extent to which the role of principals in rural secondary schools of Pietermaritzburg in the KwaZulu-Natal Province can be an enabling factor to producing and maintaining high matric results in their schools, despite the challenging drawbacks encountered in their system of administration. The widely reported failure rate of the outgoing matriculants nowadays required a study of this form (Lamb & Snodgrass, 2017). The South African government is trying to support the educational system in the country in terms of finances and other necessities such as infrastructural facilities, mainly to improve the standard of educational quality. However, what is disappointing is that the state of educational quality is deteriorating compared to the way it was in the earlier days, the evidence of which is clearly seen from the outcome of the matriculation exams conducted nationwide. For this reason, an assessment of the causes has to be done in order to determine the factors that militate achieving successful academic matriculation results of secondary schools, in particular those sited in the rural region of Pietermaritzburg in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa.

The study generally comprised five chapters, in which the first chapter provided a conceptualisation of the study, with the background and context of the study. The second chapter presented the literature review and the theoretical framework applied to the study. The third chapter was a discussion of the methodology. Chapter Four presented the research findings and discussion using themes that emerged from the findings. The fifth chapter, being this chapter, restates the research objectives and questions, presents the summary findings and discussion of the study, makes recommendations and identifies areas for further research, as well as the concluding statement of the entire study.

#### **5.2 Recap of the research Objectives and Questions**

The aim of this study was to explore and understand rural secondary school principals' explanations on how they attain high results at matric levels despite the disadvantages

associated with rural secondary schools. Thus, the objectives and the questions that directed and underpinned this study were varied and were evaluated using a semistructured interview, to which five out of six selected rural secondary schools' principals responded. The study's four objectives, included:

- i. To explore principals' perceptions of the ways in which high matric results are attained in rural secondary schools;
- ii. To explore the roles that rural secondary school principals' perceived they had in bringing about high matric results;
- iii. To investigate the principals' behaviors that they perceive to be associated with the attainment of high matric results in rural secondary schools; and
- iv. To explore the internal processes and strategies put in place by principals towards the attainment and maintenance of high matric results.

Based on the research objectives, the research questions that guided the conduct of the study included:

- i. What are principals' explanations of the ways in which high matric results can be attained in rural secondary schools?
- ii. What roles do rural secondary principals play in bringing about high matric results?
- iii. What behaviors among principals do rural secondary principals perceive as being associated with the attainment of high matric results?
- iv. What internal processes and strategies do rural secondary principals use to ensure the attainment and maintenance of high matric results?

### **5.3 Summary of findings and discussion**

This study was an explorative qualitative research. For this study, contingency theories were argued as appropriate theories to apply in understanding the articulations of the rural secondary schools' principals. To collect data and produce findings to the research objectives and questions recapitulated above, the study made use of semi-structured interviews. Participants were interviewed individually. Four major themes were identified

in the data produced. These themes were aligned to the research questions and objectives. The first theme that emerged was "Stakeholders' involvement and participation" in which rural school principals shared that high matric results were efforts, involvement and participation of the schools' several stakeholders namely: parents, former matriculants and the nearby communities at large. The point and fact that the rural school principals were making on this theme was that every effort and contribution made by stakeholders, whether big or small, was directed to attaining high matric results. For example, the help in terms of accommodation which were given by parents to former matriculants who came from far places to ensure that they were able to assist the matric students.

The second theme, 'Support' was one of the central and major findings of the study. Similar to the first theme, rural principals shared that it was the support from several people that resulted in the schools producing high matric results. The different kinds of support reflected by the sub-themes were; support to the principals and the schools. In this regard it was personal support given to the principals by family and individual community members and the collective support given to the schools by the school governing body, department of education and learner representatives. Support given by the school staff to the principals and learners was also largely recognised as a major contributor to high matric results. In addition to the academic support given to the matric students was psychological, social and emotional support, which the principals shared were essential support systems to obtain matric results.

The third theme that emerged was 'discipline, commitment, hard work and proper conduct. According to the rural secondary schools' principals; discipline, commitment, hard work and proper conduct of the students and the teachers were invaluable tools for producing high matric results. The fourth and final theme that emerged was 'Good leadership.' In this regard, the rural schools' principals emphasised that one must possess good leadership skills as a rural school principal if one has to produce high matric results. Good leadership skills, from what the rural schools' principals shared, went beyond being a principal in the office. Rather, it involved being with the students and the school staff

always and attending to the needs that arose within the school, particularly those that affected matric students.

Looking at the themes that emerged and how they addressed the research objectives, it is then noted that the first and second theme was a response to the first and second objectives of the study, as restated above. The third and fourth themes were responses to the third and fourth study objectives in which rural secondary schools' principals' behaviours, internal and external strategies were explored and investigated in order to understand how they contributed to producing high matric results. The findings of the study portrayed that the developments of the progress made in rural schools since democracy did not seem to match with the results of this current study. It emerged from the data analysis that the only pull-backs or challenges encountered by rural schools were social issues or influences of illicit or immoral behaviour outside the school's confines, such as drug (nyaope) issues, the influence of alcohol, robbery and theft, amongst others. These are the major causal factors that affect the attainment of high matric results. Issues such as poor infrastructure, inadequate resources, under-qualified or unqualified teachers, a lack of ICT skills, etcetera, as mentioned in most of the literature, did not emerge in this current study. Another study discovery was that the participants, the rural school principals either than the family issues they mentioned about the family life suffering because of the job demand there were no other major challenges and difficulties they encountered in their leadership roles. Their teams, the educators, school staff, learners, parents and other stakeholders all seemed to be co-operative and supportive.

An outstanding observation of the study was the network of relationships the participants created and maintained, which largely portrays the manner in which rural communities relate. The spirit of 'ubuntu' was positively displayed. There was appreciation, respect and love between the principals and stakeholders. In addition, from what the participants shared, rural school learners appeared to be disciplined and peer pressure seemed to be less. Furthermore, even though the study's focus was on the principals, the parents and the rural community at large seemed to all want to achieve the main goal, which was to contribute in all the ways they can in assisting matric learners to attain high results.

With respect to how the themes identified the research questions were addressed, the findings from primary dataset were as follows. In view of the first question, the study found that the principals ascribed their schools' ability to attain brilliant academic results to the involvement of stakeholders in the schools' management, in particular in the course of parent and teacher association meetings. The suggestions and proposition of ideas and advice from these stakeholders contributed to the decision-making process that added and continue to add value towards the attainment of excellent performance in the matriculation examination and exercise.

In respect of research question two, the study's primary findings included the detail that the principals were able to contribute to the attainment of high results owing to the support received from the government under the platform of the Department of Education, family members and their employees, while more support was received from a few members of the community. However, from the findings of the study, efforts of the principals for the students undergoing exams can be affected by the influence of external factors, such as family problems and background, abuse from rape, violence, drugs, robbery, poverty and malnutrition, amongst others. The effect of this can be detrimental to achieving positive results in the exams, as the examination candidate can be affected by the psychological state of mind and emotional stress. This can jeopardise the chance of the candidate being successful in their educational career.

Primary data collected from the participants in response to research question three presaged that indiscipline in students' habit affects their academic achievement, commitment to studies, and proper conduct. This was attributed to several factors, including the upbringing of the students, the result of which is traceable to having a single or no parent at all, or students raised under the custody of the grand-parent. The response of the participants from the primary data collected signified that their style of approach as a leader or a mentor contributes significantly to the attainment of high matric results in their schools. Likewise, their followers are content with their style of organizational administration, the effect of which has earned them confidence, loyalty and full cooperation from their followers.

## 5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to enhance the efficiency of the schools' principals, educators, mentors or teachers.

The first recommendation pertains to exploring principals' behaviour associated with achieving high results in rural secondary schools. The principals, mentors or teachers can achieve high academic records and excellence if they can extend a hand of friendship to their students in such a manner that they can gain their trust, confidence and belief. In the scenario where any of the students suffer incidents owing to environmental unrest that is typified by external factors, either on emotional abuse; psychological abuse such as rape, violence, drugs, robbery, poverty or malnutrition; the principals, mentors or teachers can help victims to stand back on their feet to fight trauma, fear of rejection or any psychological trauma. This can be done through guidance and counselling in order to revive them from low self-esteem and their shame. In addition, the introduction of life skills orientation or subjects in the schools' curriculum should also be ensured to expose youngsters to a moral way of living.

The second recommendation focuses on the efforts made by principals in assuring high matric results in rural secondary schools. The essence of sending learners to school is for them to acquire educational skills and ethical systems of living in order to be productive and contribute positively to their environment or community at large. There is no doubt that teachers and school principals strive to impart good values in their learners, but what can be helpful is to engage the parents or guardians in a public enlightenment programme or at a Parent and Teacher's Association meeting for the purpose of creating and emphasizing working relations between the teacher and parent for the benefit of the learner. The functional duty expected from parents and guardians is to teach their children good home training or etiquette in order to balance their skills attained from school with the training they receive from home. This will enable them to be cautious in terms of behaviour and human relationships in the society where they live. Importantly, basic necessary points to bear in mind if the aim of achieving high results of the students are to be attained, include:

- **Accountability:** That at all levels of management and operation, learners must always know that they are accountable to parents and teachers if they must excel in their educational pursuits.
- **Basic functionality:** Work ethics must be abided by everybody that forms the school community, from the principal down to the students. This is a call to duty where people (teachers and principal) are punctual in their responsibilities and learners can imbibe the ability to work while parents provide support to both the school's management and their students.
- **Initial identification of students at risk of failing:** Implement tailored intercessions explicitly for the students, starting from the beginning of the year.
- **Teacher development:** The appointment of teachers must be done based on fair selection and merit. Likewise, weaker teachers should be coached and mentored in order to develop their level of experience in line with the management's capacity.
- **Build learners' self-esteem:** The principal, teachers and the parents of students should endeavor to help learners build their confidence where they are able to trust in their own ability to succeed, and create awareness of possibilities beyond their negative circumstances.
- **Tactical method of managing the school:** The principal and teachers need to develop and sustain a strong vision. In addition, they must make a clear assertion on the school's purpose and aims and know what values help the learners will achieve them. Inclusively, the principal must engage with teachers and other stakeholders to change their behavior if need be and keep everyone moving in the same direction. What is pertinent as a leader is to be visible and always inquire: "why and for what purpose are the actions of learners or teachers instigated?"
- **Inspection:** The Ministry of Education should make an effort to inspect by sending a delegate or representative to visit rural schools in order to establish if the educators measure up to standards in teaching with the government's prescribed

syllabus. Also, to enquire on the needs of the school that are yet to be met by the government while making sure that all the amenities needed to make learning conducive are provided for, and proposed projected materials allocated to students are sent to them promptly.

- **Monitoring and Supervision:** To assess the progress of performance as to whether educators are on the right track of teaching, the principal as the sole administrator of the school can establish this by requesting educators to submit a record of their work at each end of the week. Where teaching performance is substandard, a principal can look into the matter and suggest possible ways to meet with the uncovered areas that teachers fail to impart to students.
- **National workshops:** Compulsory training sessions must be held for the teachers, expressly at every quarter of the year so that educators from rural areas can be of equal match with their counterparts in urban and city areas, especially to certify uniformity on what to teach the students. Similarly, after attending the meeting, the principal must endeavour to have a brainstorming session with the designated attendees of training in the form of feedback to observe if the workshop training has a positive impact on them or adds value to their wealth of experience.
- **Decision-making:** Making strategic decisions for development is the duty of the principal and his or her assistant. In making decisions, the effort of the teachers must not be snubbed as they all have a contributory effect on the development of the school. Upon other decisions that go beyond the power of the principal and the school's management, it is pertinent to seek the approval, opinion and illumination of the school's board where required.

In addition, the study suggests that government schools and institutions and other places of learning should establish a syllabus on Life Skills Orientation as a course of study. This would allow students to have knowledgeable ideas on how to make some decisive choices, as well as independent decisions pertaining to their lives. This in particular, would boost their sense of reasoning especially when they find themselves relating to people of the outside world. Equally, salaries of teachers must be paid promptly and consistently,

as well as other bonuses and allowances that are accrued to teachers. This would serve as a means of encouragement to them to put in their best effort and dedication towards offering their best capacity and impact on students and the knowledge to achieve academic excellence.

In a situation where there is a misunderstanding or conflict between the principal and the teachers, the issue of contention must be solved amongst them without affecting the studies of students. Poor school management can equal poor classroom management.

### **5.5 Proposed future research**

It may be suggested that over and beyond the span of this dissertation, other researchers or academic scholars should research more on the influence of environmental unrest as it affects the academic achievement of the school learners in this contemporary period. Furthermore, researchers can conduct more investigation into the effect of Life Skills Orientation as a determinant to leaving good moral behaviour and a healthier life-style in this present-day rigour.

### **5.6 Conclusion**

This study engaged principals from rural secondary schools in order to find out how they manage to produce high results at matric level. The principals' perceptions, behaviours, roles and strategies were the focus of the study and arrived at several conclusions.

Summarising from the chapters' presentations, this study concludes that rural secondary schools produce high matric results because of the collective work of the school management, the principals particularly and the rural communities at large. Therefore, hard work of the principals, matric students, former matric students, parents, staff members and all the stakeholders should not be taken for granted as it all contributes to the excellent and high matric results. In order to attain these results, the students' wellbeing is important as it determines the kind of results the schools will produce. Hence the need for social workers and psychologist involvement in the school for the student, as shown in the study. This study also wraps up by highlighting that while several constraints

and challenges of rural secondary schools, such as poor infrastructure and a lack of resources, are issues that often impede high performance, some of the rural secondary schools were and are not hindered from attaining high matric results because of these.

This study also presented from its findings the importance of leadership within schools, especially the schools' principals who throughout the study are recognised as key players in the effective leadership and management of the school. From this, the study further concludes that positive leadership styles lead to positive high results for learners. It should be noted that children who are introduced to the habit of reading will typically achieve success compared to those that do not have the privilege. Parents who pay intense attention and schedule time to deliberate school activities with their children perform importantly in the attitude of the child towards their education. Fair enough, a school that has a strong level of administration always performs better than those with weaker systems of administration. Thus the conclusion that a school with high levels of administration often strives to create an environment encouraging good performance, and support from stakeholders and staff to the principals to be effective leaders, is very important.

Within the scope of this study, there were also limitations, as is the case with many other research. However, findings of this study serve as theoretical and practical contributions to literature on the subject. Likewise, the recommendations proffered are invaluable to the subjects of this study and the department of education as well. To these, the study concludes by adopting the saying that 'it takes a village' to produce high matric results, therefore, the contribution of all stakeholders involved is vital for attaining success and outstanding performance.

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## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

### **Semi-structured interview schedule for principals**

#### 1) Background and Introduction

- Tell me a bit about how you came to be principal of this school?
- How long have you been working as a principal at this school?
- What does your work as principal entail?
- Can you describe a typical day in your work?
- How does your work intersect with your family/personal life?
- Can you tell me a bit about your career history?
- Where have you worked before?
- Length of service?

#### 2) Specific questions

- How is it that your school has attained such high matric results over the past few years?
- What do you understand your role to be in relation to matric learners attaining high results in their final matriculation examinations?
- What do *you do* to help your learners excel in their matriculation examinations?
- What internal processes and strategies do you deliberately put in place to help your matric learners excel?
- What support do you get in fulfilling your duties as principal?
- Can you tell me about any other specific factors that you think influence your matric learners' attainment of high results? (e.g. teachers, community, etc)

## **APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT**

Social Sciences, College of Humanities,

University of KwaZulu-Natal,

Pietermaritzburg Campus,

Dear Participant,

### **INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

I, Sithembile Promise Xaba, am a Masters student in the Psychology Department at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus, South Africa.

I am interested in exploring Principals' perceptions of the ways in which high results as educational outcomes are attained in rural secondary schools. Through your participation, I hope to understand your perceptions of the ways in which high results as educational outcomes are attained in rural secondary schools. Your school meets the criteria of my case studies.

To gather the information, I am interested in asking you some questions.

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 15-20 minutes.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for the purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

I can be contacted at:

Email: Sithembilex@gmail.com

Cell: 078 145 5437

My supervisor is Dr. Nicholas Munro, who is located at the School of Applied Human Sciences, Pietermaritzburg campus at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details: email: Munron@ukzn.ac.za Phone number: 033 260 5371

You may also contact the Research Office through:

P. Mohun

HSSREC Research Office,

Tel: 031 260 4557 E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

## **DECLARATION**

I..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**

**DATE**

## **APPENDIX B (11)**

Social Sciences, College of Humanities,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Pietermaritzburg Campus,

Sawubona Mhlanganyeli

Incwadi yesivumelwano

Igamalami nginu Sithembile Promise Xaba, ngingumfundi weMasters eNyuvesi yakwa Zulu- Natal, ngaphansi koMyango wePsychology, esikhungwini saseMgungundlovu, eNingizimu Afrika.

Nginesifiso sokucwaninga imibono yoThishanhloko mayelana nezindlela ezisiza noma eyakha imiphumela evelele ezikoleni zasemaphandlani.

Ngokuvuma kwakho ukuba ingxenye yalolucwaningo, ngifisa ukuqonda kangcono imibono yakho ngembangel yokuzusa imiphumela evelele ezikoleni zasemaphandleni.

Isikole sakho singezinye sezikole esingena kwimibandela yalolucwaningo. Nginesifiso sokubuza imibuzo emibalwa.

Qaphela loku:

- Imininingwano yakho izongcinwa iyimfihlo, uvolwakho luyosentshenziswa ngaphandle kokuth iudalulwe.
- Imibuzo ingathatha phakathi kwemizuzu engu 15-20.
- Uvolwakho aluzosentshenziswa ngokukululaza, kodwa uzosentshenziselwa ucwaningo.
- Imininingwano phecelezi data, izogcinwa endaweni ephephile ebese ishabalaliswa emvakweminyaka emihlanu.
- Unelungelo lokuvuma nokungavumi ukungena kuloluncwaningo. Akuzokululazaloku.
- Ukungenela loluncwaningo kungokukufunda akunanzuzo yemali kulo. • Uma uvuma kanye ungavumi ukungenela loluncwaningo nokuba uma unikezela imvumo yokuba uqoshwe uvolwakho, uyacelwa ukuba ukhombise ngezansi.

	ngiyavuma	angivumi
Umshini wokuqopha inkulumo		

Ngiyatholakala kulemininingwano:

Imeyilil: Sithembilex@gmail.com

Inombolo yamakhala ekhukhwini: 078 145 5437

Umpathi wami uDr.Nicholas Monru osebenzela esikoleni seApplied Human Sciences, esikhungwini saseMgungundlovu eNyuvezi yaKwaZulu-Natali.

Utholakala kulemeyili: Munron@ukzn.ac.za inombolo yocingo: 033 260 5371

.

Ungathinta ihovisi locwaningo:

P. Mohun

HSSREC Research Office,

Tel: 031 260 4557 imeyili: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Siyabonga ngombono wakho kulolucwaningo. .

## **APPENDIX C**

DECLARATION OF CONSENT

PROJECT TITLE:

RESEARCHER

SUPERVISOR

Full Name: Sithembile Promise Xaba  
Nicholas Munro

Full Name of Supervisor: Dr

School: Applied Human Sciences  
Sciences

School: Applied Human

College: Humanities

College: Humanities

Campus: Pietermaritzburg

Campus: Pietermaritzburg

Proposed Qualification: Masters by Thesis  
5371

Contact details: 033 260

Contact: 078 145 5437  
Munron@ukzn.ac.za

Email:

Email: Sithembilex@gmail.com

#### HSSREC RESEARCH OFFICE

Full Name: Prem Mohun

HSS Research Office

Govan Bheki Building

Westville Campus

Contact: 0312604557

Email: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

I, Sithembile Promise Xaba, Student no.200307259 am a Masters student, in the Psychology Department at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled: Principals' Explanations for High Academic Achievement in Rural Secondary Schools of Pietermaritzburg, Kwa-Zulu Natal.

The aim of the study is to explore principals' perceptions of the ways in which high results as educational outcomes are attained in rural secondary schools. Through your participation, I hope to understand your perceptions of the ways in which high results as educational outcomes are attained in rural secondary schools.

I guarantee that your responses will not be identified with you personally. Your participation is voluntary and there is no penalty if you do not participate in the study. Please sign on the dotted line to show that you have read and understood the contents of this letter. The interview will take approximate 15-20 minutes to complete.

#### DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I..... (Full Name) hereby confirm that I have read and understand the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project has been clearly defined prior to participating in this research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Participant's

Signature.....

Date.....



## APPENDIX D



education

Department:  
Education  
**PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1004

Ref:214/8/881

Miss SP Xaba  
34 Snyman Road  
Westgate  
Pietermaritzburg  
3201

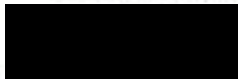
Dear Miss Xaba

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "PRINCIPALS EXPLANATIONS FOR HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF PIETERMARITZBURG, KWAZULU-NATAL", in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 15 August 2016 to 01 December 2017.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Connie Kehologile at the contact numbers below
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

uMgungundlovu District

  
Adv. MB Masuku  
Acting Head of Department: Education  
Date: 23 August 2016

#### KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

POSTAL: Private Bag X 9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa  
PHYSICAL: 247 Burger Street, Anton Lembede House, Pietermaritzburg, 3201. Tel. 033 392 1004 dedicated to service and performance  
beyond the call of duty  
EMAIL ADDRESS: [kehologile.connie@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:kehologile.connie@kzndoe.gov.za) / [Phindile.Duma@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:Phindile.Duma@kzndoe.gov.za)  
CALL CENTRE: 0860 596 363; Fax: 033 392 1203 WEBSITE: [www.kzndoe.gov.za](http://www.kzndoe.gov.za)

## APPENDIX E



30 September 2016

Miss Sithembile Promise Xaba 200307259  
School of Applied Human Sciences  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Miss Xaba

Protocol reference number: HSS/1549/016M  
Project Title: Principals' explanations for High Academic Achievement in rural secondary schools of Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal

#### Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 30 August 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application 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.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

Cc Supervisor: Dr Nicholas Munro  
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor D Wassenaar  
Cc School Administrator: Ms Ms Nondumiso Khanyile

---

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

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Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3547/030044307 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4009 Email: [sis@hssc.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:sis@hssc.ukzn.ac.za) / [academic@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:academic@ukzn.ac.za) / [ethics@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ethics@ukzn.ac.za)

Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



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## SXaba final dissertation

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