UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

THE ROLE OF CIRCUIT MANAGERS IN ENHANCING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

THEMBA THULANI MTHEMBU

FEBRUARY 2014

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BY

THEMBA THULANI MTHEMBU

A dissertation in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Education in the discipline Education Leadership, Management and Policy in the School of Education.

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

(EDGEWOOD CAMPUS)

2014

SUPERVISOR: Mr S. E. MTHIYANE

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This dissertation has been submitted with/without my approval

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February 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincerest thanks and appreciation to:

The Creator, Who is my Provider, my Saviour and my Protector, Who knew that despite all the odds, my time would come.

My wife, Zanele, for inspiring and encouraging me when things got tougher.

All my kids who provided me with all the technical support to complete my studies.

To my supervisor, Mr Siphiwe Mthiyane for believing in me, for his patience and motivation, for pushing me hard and also for providing guidance and support from the beginning to the end. Thank you so much Skhangane. I have never seen a person with such passion for his work. You are indeed an invaluable asset in shaping and making the lives of so many people in our country to be better.

To all our lecturers who contributed with their support, knowledge, skills and guidance in this academic journey. Thank you all, for your commitment and dedication.

Mr Bongani Mncwabe, my colleague, my friend and my brother. You really wanted me to do this because you felt I have the potential. Your slogan which says *"Let us get things done no matter what"* always gave me the reasons to hold on and the strength to forge ahead.

To Bongi Bhengu and the entire staff at the Research & Higher Degrees Post- Graduate Office of UKZN- Edgewood campus for your guidance, assistance and friendliness.

To my fellow cohort members for their friendship and support. They helped me to realise that teamwork and sharing of ideas are recipe for success.

All the colleagues who agreed to participate in this study by contributing with their in-depth knowledge and vast information. Without your willingness to give it all, the successful completion of this study would not have been possible.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to all those who have made me who I am today, my colleagues, learners and parents at a school where I spent all my teaching life. I also dedicate this study to my church that taught me to be resilient and granted me the opportunities to unleash my God given talents.

This study is also dedicated to my late sister, Fikile, who when I was on the verge of completing this study, passed on. I know you were always so proud of me. How I wish you were around to see your dreams come true. I will always miss and love you, my dearest sister.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the role of the circuit managers in enhancing instructional leadership practices in schools. The study explored what circuit managers actually do to support effective teaching and learning in schools. It explored the practices of circuit managers in leading, managing and supporting instructional leadership practices in schools. It also elicited the circuit managers' views on the challenges they experienced as they support instructional leadership practices in schools. The study also investigated how circuit managers navigated the challenges they experienced as they support instructional leadership in schools. The research in this study was approached from an interpretive paradigm. The design of this study was qualitative and it employed a phenomenological strategy of inquiry. The sample selection of three circuit managers, one from the three divisions of the education district of Umlazi, was an attempt by the researcher to generate a balanced view from school circuits with different demographics and socio-economic backgrounds. Semi-structured interviews, documents review and observations constituted the research instruments for data generation. Local and international scholastic works on the instructional leadership practices of circuit managers were interrogated to compare and contrast what different literature said with what actually obtained. The study was underpinned by two theoretical frameworks, namely the instructional leadership and distributed leadership theories.

The analysis and the discussions of the generated and presented data led to the findings that although circuit managers stand a better position than any other education district official to improve instructional leadership practices in schools, their involvement does not meet the demands and expectations of the position as prescribed by the policy documents. The findings were utilised as the basis for making conclusions. A significant conclusion that was gleaned from this study was that circuit managers should have as their primary focus student achievement and they needed to assume greater responsibility for improving student achievement. It was also concluded in the study that circuit managers face significant barriers in their attempts to support effective teaching and learning in schools. Recommendations, informed by the conclusions were presented to facilitate how each theoretical conclusion can be translated into workable practice of ensuring that circuit managers contribute meaningfully in supporting effective teaching and learning in schools.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

With the seemingly endless demands and pressures being placed by policy-makers, politicians, news media and parents on schools and districts to deliver quality results, a deeper and a richer understanding of the instructional leadership practices of the circuit manager have become more crucial. Political changes in South Africa have resulted in the public to have high expectations and demands for schools and districts to improve the quality of life by providing better education. Through numerous acts and policies, the state has stipulated requirements and benchmarks that schools and district should achieve for increasing learner performance (Pustolka, 2012).

According to Davidson (2005), schools that fail to make adequate progress in increasing the percentage of learners performing proficiently on the tests and examinations are subjected to a host of sanctions, including public notification of schools' perceived inadequacies, forced school choice for parents that prefer not to have their children attend schools designated as underperforming, and possible takeover by the state. For the common tests and examinations set by the national or provincial education offices, both the schools and the district offices are held accountable for the performance of the learners (Davidson, 2005).

It is in this context that Togneri (2003) suggests that administrators at both the school and the district levels, are therefore called upon to align their practices with the measurable outcomes on which they and schools will be judged. Mitgang (2013) aptly states that principals are still in charge of their buildings, but they can no longer do the job in isolation, because leading a school is a total team effort.

The Policy Document on the Organisation, Roles, and Responsibilities of Education Districts (2013) states clearly that circuit managers are, as a core function, expected to provide instructional support to the education institutions. The document spells it clearly that circuit managers have to assist school principals and educators to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their institutions through school visits,

classroom observations, consultations, cluster meetings, suitable feedback reports and other means.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Observations show that performance or non-performance of schools is commonly associated with the leadership and the vision that is provided within the school, by the principal and the teachers. On the contrary, Davidson (2005) posits that the current context of school leadership is the one in which leaders at all administrative levels are expected to provide for continuous and marked gains in measurable academic achievement for nearly all learners. Davidson (2005) further states that although the circuit manager is not directly involved in work at the classroom level, he or she is increasingly held accountable for guiding and shaping the organisational vision and ultimately the organisational culture, to the degree that the norms of the organisation reflect an ongoing commitment to constant improvement in the academic performance of all learners.

This view is supported by Wildy (2009) who adds that the investment in the provision of instructional leadership by the circuit manager engenders priority being given to helping principals of schools to develop their expertise in evidence-informed decision-making for improving learners' literacy and numeracy. An effective school requires an effective leader but great school leaders rarely just happen. They are cultivated and nurtured. The Wallace Perspective (2013) draws on a decade of foundation research and work in school leadership to show how the circuit manager can play a major role in ensuring that school have leaders who can boost teaching and learning in troubled schools.

According to Leithwood (2005), circuit managers arguably possess the widest scope of influence over educational outcomes of students in a school district. While teachers influence achievement outcomes of individual students and principals influence achievement outcomes at the campus and classroom levels, the circuit manager is the single individual in the school system with the potential to impact the achievement of all students in the district.

Although extensive research has been conducted relative to the instructional leadership role of the school principal, the instructional leadership influence of the circuit manager has been studied to a much lesser extent (Crankshaw, 2011). He further states that much research has defined the role of the principal's instructional leadership and learner achievement, while considerably less is known about the link between learner achievement and the instructional responsibilities of the circuit manager. We live in an era and environment in which results and the performance of schools and districts are closely scrutinised by all stakeholders in education. Davidson (2005) is of the view that the failure of a number schools and districts to deliver quality service is a great concern to all stakeholders. A number of factors have been attributed to the alarming high rate for the failure of schools and district to deliver, despite various acts and policies that are in place to ensure that educational outcomes are achieved. It is noticeable however, according to Davidson (2005) that while many factors are cited for the slow progress especially in school effectiveness and improvement, the instructional leadership role of the circuit manager is an area that has received limited attention.

In addition, Morgan and Peterson (2002) are of the view that managerial and administrative responsibilities frequently draw the attention of the circuit manager away from matters relating to instruction. The fundamental problem that this study seeks to address is how circuit managers do enact their roles in leading, transforming, supporting and managing instructional leadership practices in schools in line with the new imperatives.

1.3 Purpose and rationale for the study

My personal experience as a former school principal and as current circuit manager has made me to be concerned about the persistent lack of instructional support by the district officials, especially the circuit managers. My observation and direct experiences of the instructional practices of the circuit managers as direct supervisors of schools, contradicts the views stated by Waters and Marzano (2007) who contend that the effective circuit manager embraces his or her function as the primary instructional leader for all the schools under his or her supervision. They further state that he or she prioritises learner achievement and effective instructional practices as the foremost goals for schools assigned to him or her.

While I was a principal of a school, in our circles as school principals, we always voiced our concern about the lack of instructional support from the circuit Managers, who were supposed to be the immediate supervisors of the principals. In addition, policies like the *Occupation Specific Dispensation (OSD) Collective Agreement* (2008) and *Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document* (1999) indicate clearly that one of the key responsibilities of the circuit manager is to provide curriculum guidance, support and learning area and subject advisory services to all teachers in order to improve teaching and learning. Speaking to the media, the KwaZulu-Natal Head of Education ,Dr NSP Sishi (Education News,KwaZulu-Natal Dept. of Education, 2012) was emphatic when he stated that circuit managers are principals of all principals and have to motivate people for better performance, support the classroom, measure what is done and set standards for both school and learner achievement.

The significance of the instructional leadership role of the circuit manager is further emphasised by Alsbury and Whitaker (2007) who posit that the success or failure of public schools is directly linked to the influence of the district officials mainly the circuit manager, particularly in the way she or he provides instructional leadership. The study support the views held by Halverson (2003) and Leithwood (2005) that the circuit manager arguably possesses the widest scope of influence over educational outcomes of learners in a school district.

Bredeson and Kose (2007) claim that the field of research on what the circuit managers actually do to provide instructional leadership to schools under their supervision, is limited. According to Thomas (2001), literature on the circuit manager's effectiveness as an instructional leader at a school district level, remains very sparse and leave much to be desired. Additionally, according to Thomas (2001), measuring a circuit manager's effectiveness can be challenging due to politics and the instability of the position. According to Waters and Marzano (2007), there is empirical evidence that circuit managers can have positive effects on learner achievement such as by empowering all schools under his or her jurisdiction with a goal-oriented culture. However, there are very few studies conducted specifically on the impact that the circuit managers have on the implementation of district-wide

instructional programmes that aim to improve student achievement. This study aims to close that gap and provide information about the link between the success or failure of public schools and the impact of the circuit manager's instructional leadership practices.

1.4 Significance of the Study

School leaders, especially circuit managers, will find value in this study if they reflect upon their own instructional leadership behaviours as the Department of education, legislative mandates and other stakeholders perceive them. Research from this study attempted to find the relationship between the instructional leadership practices of the circuit manager and learner achievement. Prior research also supports that instructional leadership is a specific and an important function of the leadership of the circuit manager.

Information from this study will help to guide circuit managers as they consider the professional development of teachers, and the critical role that they play to support and share in the organization's vision and common goals for school reform and improved learner success. Therefore, this study will also provide an opportunity for both the circuit managers and principals to reflect on specific actions they must take as they work to build effective school systems for schools and learners.

1.5 Key research aims / objectives and questions

This study seeks to achieve the following aims:

- To explore the practices of circuit managers in leading, managing and supporting instructional leadership practices in schools.
- To elicit the circuit managers' views on the challenges they experience as they support instructional leadership practices in schools.
- To investigate how circuit managers navigate the challenges they experience as they support instructional leadership in schools.

This research project seeks to answer the following questions:

- What do circuit managers do to enact their roles as they lead, manage and support instructional leadership practices in schools?
- What are the challenges faced by circuit managers as they lead instructional support in schools?
- How do circuit managers navigate the challenges they experience as they support instructional leadership practices in schools.

1.6 Clarification of key concepts

1.6.1 Education District

An education district is the geographic area within a province which has been demarcated by the provincial Minister of Education for purposes of effective education management and service delivery. It is the first level of administrative sub-division within a province. (DoBE, 2012). According to policy no district should have fewer than 75 schools or more than 300 schools. It must comprise of no less than 5 and no more than 10 education circuits (Government Notice 180 of 2012).

1.6.2 Education Circuit Office

According to the *Policy on the Organisation, Roles and Responsibilities of Education Districts* (2013), an education circuit office must be responsible for no less than 15 schools and no more than 30 schools.

1.6.3 Circuit Manager

A circuit manager, in terms of *Occupation Specific Dispensation (OSD),* is the head of the circuit office whose function is to support principals, school management teams and school governing bodies in the management, administration and governance and facilitate curriculum delivery

1.6.4 Instructional leadership

Leithwood (1995) posits that instructional leadership denotes a form of leadership that is designed to affect classroom quite directly, through, for example, supervision, coaching, staff development, modelling and other such means of influencing teachers' thinking and practice. For the purpose of this study instructional leadership will mean a form of leadership where the circuit

managers exhibit a clear sense of direction for their schools and prioritise and focus attention on issues that really matter in terms of enhancing teaching and learning in schools. Furthermore, instructional leadership is about developing the capacities of the principals and the teachers in order to sustain improvement and change in schools.

1.7 Literature review

The study reviewed literature on the instructional leadership practices of the circuit manager and focused on what research covered on what the circuit managers actually do to support instructional leadership in schools. The study also explored the gaps both in international and local literature on what circuit managers actually do to provide instructional leadership in schools they supervise.

Although research on school leadership (e.g. the leadership of the school principals) is abundant, research on what superintendents of education management (circuit managers) actually do to enhance school effectiveness and improvement is relatively sparse. Montenegro (1999), surmises that little is known about the circuit manager than about any other set of the chief executives in the nation. Lashway (2002) agrees with this view when he explains that the circuit manager is the ultimate person in charge of schools, but circuit managers actually do remain vague. Cuban (1998) is of the view that circuit managers struggle to create coherence of the numerous and sometimes incompatible goals and demands that the public sometimes sets for the schools.

Contemporary research both internationally and locally agree that as instructional leaders, circuit managers bear the ultimate responsibility for improving learner achievement (Cuban, 1998). As managerial leaders, circuit managers have to keep schools under their supervision operating effectively and efficiently with a minimum of friction yet taking risks to make necessary instructional changes. As political leaders, they have to negotiate with multiple stakeholders to get approval for programmes and resources. Lashway (2002) posits that circuit managers should put instructional leadership at the top of the district agenda. While the managerial and political dimensions of the job will not go away, these roles should be aligned with the overriding goal of continuous instructional improvement.

Literature reviewed for this study examined international, continental and local research available on what circuit managers are expected to do and what they actually do. In addition, literature reviewed then delved into the evolving role of the circuit managers during three decades of school reform and focused on the impact of these changing roles through the years on student achievement. The review concluded with the research that dealt with challenges circuit managers face in supporting effective teaching and learning in schools and how they navigate through these challenges

The American Association of School Administration (2006) and Domenech (2009) compare the role of the circuit manager with that of an orchestra who conducts all of the district's educational, financial, and administrative activities and responds to and persuades an audience with varying ideas about performance and leadership of the educational district. A true definition of the position of the circuit manager should reflect a comprehensive and challenging vision of district leadership, a synthesis of managerial and leadership components, interpersonal skills and strategic action assessment (DiPaola & Stronge, 2003). Waters and Marzano (2007) define an effective circuit manager as the one who embraces his/her function as the primary instructional leader for the educational district, prioritising learner achievement and effective instructional practices as the foremost goals of the district.

1.8 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

This study which aimed to explore the role of circuit managers in leading, managing and supporting instructional leadership practices in schools was underpinned by two theoretical frameworks, namely the instructional leadership and distributed leadership theories. In her study of schools success, Mielcarak (2003), explains that a multitude of conceptual models that demonstrate instructional leadership exist. For this study, the *Weber's Instructional Leadership Model* (1996) was used as a lens through which the instructional leadership practices of circuit managers were explored. As the study explored the instructional leadership practices of circuit managers, it was also informed by Spillane's Distributed Leadership Model (2006).

1.9 Research design and methodology

Creswell (2007) defines research designs as plans and procedures for research that span the decisions from the broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. Creswell (2007), further states that the selection of a research design is based on the nature of the research problem, or issue being addressed, the researchers' personal experiences, and the audiences for the study. Three types of research are advanced in most research projects, namely, qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.

A qualitative mode of inquiry was used in this research. This type of inquiry was suited for this research as Merriam (1998) indicates that the focus of qualitative inquiry is based on meaning in context that requires a data generation instrument such as interviewing that will be sensitive to underlying meaning when data is generated and interpreted. According to Creswell (2007) qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Creswell (2007) posits that qualitative research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically generated in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particular to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data.

Mason (2002) states that qualitative research has an unrivalled capacity to constitute compelling arguments about how things work in particular contexts and is capable of producing very well-founded cross-contextual generalities. The open-ended nature of the qualitative inquiry allowed both the circuit managers and the principals to answer from their own frame of reference rather than from one structured by pre-arranged questions.

1.9.1 Research paradigm

Guba (1990) defines a paradigm, which is also referred to as a world view, as a foundation lens which researchers use to interact with the world around them. According to Mason (2013), though paradigms remain largely hidden in research, they significantly influence the approach and practice of research. Paradigms are ultimately a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds. They are shaped by the discipline area and beliefs of the researcher

and past research experiences. The types of beliefs held by researchers will often lead to embracing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches in their research (Patton, 2002). The research in this study was approached from an interpretive paradigm. The participants' views, their interpretations, experiences, perceptions and understandings formed the researcher's primary data source. Individuals formed their own perspectives and constructed realities differently. The researcher had more time to interview the participants in their natural settings in an effort to reconstruct the constructions participants used to make sense of their worlds.

1.9.2 Research approach

The design of this study was qualitative and employed a phenomenological strategy of inquiry. With the primary research focused on ascertaining the instructional leadership practices of the circuit managers, this approach provided for more in-depth inquiry and analysis. A phenomenological study best enabled the researcher to advance the practical goals of the study, and to answer the key research aims and questions. According to Creswell (2009), a researcher undertaking a phenomenological study investigates various reactions to, or perceptions of, a particular phenomenon. The researcher hoped to gain some insight into the world of his or her participants and to describe their perceptions and reactions.

1.9.3 Data generation tools and analysis

The most common sources of data generation in qualitative research are interviews, observations, and review of documents (Creswell, 2009). The researcher used face-to-face interviews with the participants as a means of generating data in this study. The researcher was the primary instrument for data generation and analysis. The sample selection of three circuit managers, one from the three divisions of the education district of Umlazi, was an attempt by the researcher to generate a balanced view from school circuits with different demographics and socio-economic backgrounds.

Patton (2002), states that qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples, which are selected purposefully to permit inquiry, and for understanding a phenomenon in depth. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research paves the way for an interpretative perspective, and this study allowed the circuit managers to

contribute their opinions and views about their own experiences concerning their instructional leadership practices. Data generated through use of the three different tools was carefully analysed using qualitative means.

Taylor and Gibbs (2010) describe qualitative data analysis as the range of processes and procedures whereby we move from the qualitative data that have been generated into some form of explanation, or interpretation of the people and situations investigated. Qualitative data analysis in this study of the role of the circuit manager's instructional leadership practices was based on an interpretative philosophy. The researcher identified the circuit managers' interpretation of the phenomenon instructional leadership. By analysing data, the researcher aimed to understand the point of view of circuit managers and how they came to hold those views.

1.9.4 Issues of trustworthiness

Based on the four criteria that Guba (1990) suggests to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research, this study adopted well recognised research methods, namely interviews, document analysis and observations. Using a phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to elicit the true and the lived experiences of the circuit managers in their instructional practices. Using the different methods as tools to generate data, helped to strengthen the findings of the study. Triangulation also ensured that the effects of the researcher's bias was reduced in the study.

In addition, the researcher had prior engagements with the participants to establish a relationship of trust. As a circuit manager himself, the researcher, as a preliminary step, tested the interview questions on other circuit managers who were outside the intended sample. This gave the researcher the understanding of the direction the study was going to take. Participants were encouraged to be frank from the outset of each session and to be honest in their responses. The researcher made it clear to the participants that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point. This was done to ensure honesty from the participants and establishing a rapport from the beginning.

1.9.5 Ethical issues

The researcher applied for an ethical clearance from the university to seek approval to do the study. Then the researcher sought permission from the Provincial Department of Basic Education through its Research Office. Since the participants in the study were circuit managers who were fellow colleagues, the researcher wrote to each participant a letter inviting him or her to participate in the study. The letter was followed up with a personal phone call or meeting.

In addition, the researcher sought permission from the participants to observe the meetings, seminars and other forms of contact sessions circuit managers organised with the principals they supervise. The researcher indicated in the letter to the participants of the nature and the purpose of the study and the likely consequences and the significance of the study. In the letter, the researcher indicated that the anonymity and of the participant and the schools were to be observed. The letter to the participant seeking consent to the study, stated clearly that participation in the study was voluntary and the participant could withdraw from participating in the study any time. The research observed the rights and obligation to confidentiality and non-disclosure of the research participants and outcomes. Permission was sought from the participants to audio gadgets for recording and to use their documentary materials relevant to the study.

1.10 Limitations of the study

The small sample comprised three circuit managers from the three different zones of the education district. Patton (2002) suggests that sample sizes should be judged according to the purpose and rationale of the study. As such, the issue of trustworthiness, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected than with sample size. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the instructional leadership practices of the circuit managers. The sample size was selected based on the researcher's judgment and expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002). Through in-depth and probing interviewing, the researcher ensured that data generated from the sample of participants provided enough information about the role of the circuit manager in enhancing instructional leadership practices in schools.

Secondly, since the researcher shared a similar professional background with the three circuit managers who were participants in the study, researcher bias could be a threat to the issue of trustworthiness. To overcome this threat, the researcher conducted preliminary interviews with other colleagues, not in the sample, who were also circuit managers, and had a feel of the way and the direction the processes of data generation would take with the chosen participants.

1.11 Overview of the Study

Chapter One gave an orientation of what this study entailed. The chapter was organized into the following major headings: statement of the problem, purpose and rationale for the study, key research aims and questions of the study, clarification of key concepts, summary of the literature review and the theoretical framework, the research paradigm, research design and methodology, limitation of the study, the outline of chapters and the summary of the chapter.

Chapter Two gives an in-depth literature review related to the circuit managers' role as (superintendent of education management) their support instructional leadership practices in schools. The literature review will also focus on the challenges circuit managers face as they provide instructional support to schools and how they navigate through those challenges.

Chapter Three provides details concerning research methods that will be utilized in this study. The methods for the generation of data, analysis of data, issues of trustworthiness and ethical issues will be highlighted.

Chapter Four is about the presentation of the findings, the analysis and the discussion of collected data.

Chapter Five presents an overall reflection on each chapter of the entire research project. Conclusions, premised on the findings outlined in the previous chapter will be foregrounded. Pertinent recommendations, based on the aforementioned conclusions will then be suggested to conclude the prominent aspects of the chapter.

1.12 Chapter summary

This chapter gave an orientation of what the study entailed. It provided the statement of the problem, the purpose and the rationale for the study. Within the purpose of the study, several areas received particular attention, namely, the key research aims and questions, the clarification of the key concepts, a brief review of literature and the theoretical framework. The paradigm that was used in this study was highlighted and a mention of the research design and methodology was made in this chapter. The chapter also discussed the significance, the limitations of the study and ended with the outline of all the chapters in the study. The next chapter will give a comprehensive and in-depth review of literature and the theoretical frameworks in which the study is underpinned.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an orientation of the study which included the purpose, the rationale for the study, the key research aims, questions and a brief synopsis of the research design and methodology. Chapter Two delves into the literature that deals with the role of the circuit managers in enhancing instructional leadership practices in schools. This chapter begins with the review of international, continental and the South African literature on the evolutionary role of the circuit manager. Next, the chapter discusses the current view of the circuit manager's instructional leadership role. This was followed by a review of the challenges faced by the circuit managers as they support teaching and learning in schools.

Included in the chapter will be a discussion of the two leadership theories, namely, instructional leadership and distributed leadership theories which form the theoretical framework of this study. The chapter will conclude by giving a summary of the discussions of all the sub-topics that are covered in the chapter.

2.2 The historical perspective of the role of the circuit manager

Reflecting on the past experiences of the circuit managers was to better enable the researcher to contextualise their current roles. According to Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, and Ellerson (2011), the role of the circuit manager has evolved over time. These researchers state that to fully appreciate the complexity of this pivotal position and its evolution over many years, one must understand how roles and responsibilities have waxed and waned over time. Kowalski, *et al.* (2011) note that a framework for conceptualising the evolutionary role of the circuit manager is essential for understanding the complexity of the position and the knowledge and skills required for effective practice.

Callahan (1966) adds that as free and public schools were established and multiplied, so multiplied the number of circuit managers. According to Cuban (1976), in the early years, duties of the circuit managers included observing classes, employing teachers, conducting faculty meetings, assisting with textbook selection, disciplining children, and conducting

meetings with parents and teachers. Carter and Cunningham (1997) offer a slightly different perspective on the evolution of the position of the circuit manager. They identify four major stages of the position, namely, the clerical role in the early stages, the role of being an instructional leader or master educator when the education system grew more complex. Carter and Cunningham (1997) define the early 20th century circuit managers as expert managers whose focus was more on efficiency and operations than on the emphasis on effective teaching and learning. Later on, there was a formative change in the role of the circuit manager. He or she was called upon to serve as professional advisor to the local school board, a leader of reforms, a manger of resources, and a communicator to the public (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

Ngubane (2006) brings in a very crucial dimension about the evolving role of the circuit manager. He explains that in United Kingdom and in most countries that were colonised by the English, the present circuit manager was and is still referred to as the school inspector. According to Ngubane (2006) the American literature refers to the circuit manager as a school superintendent. Ngubane (2006) further states that the inspectors of the past created the image of fault finder, examiner and guardian of standards. To him the supreme virtues were discipline and order. The examination was all important. There was no time for guidance or advice. The main aim of education was to get all the pupils to conform to a basic standard of competence. Reports to Head Office stressed examination passes and faults observed. The inspection was often an inquisition and the inspector frequently authoritarian. Dogmatic pronouncements with scant respect for the rightful professional rule and prerogatives of his colleagues in the classroom were the order of the day (Ngubane, 2006).

Making a contribution about the role of inspectors in Nigeria, Ijaiya (1997), adds that traditional supervision was said to be coercive, witch hunting and unhelpful to teachers. In his view, the inspectors behaved like tin gods, and their visits were nightmares for teachers. Ijaiya (1997) further states that to carry out their tasks, inspectors needed little direct experience of teaching or schools. They were, according to Ijaiya (1997), government agents who policed, rather than supported the work of schools and not surprisingly, they soon gained an unwelcome reputation. Ijaiya (1997) further posits that the school inspector has been a familiar feature of the educational landscape in all parts of the world.

From a South African perspective, Nkosi (2012), reveals that the political changes that impacted on education dictated that even the name inspector and the role of the inspectors played in education had to change to embrace the new educational dispensation. According to Nkosi (2012), teacher unions will oppose the return of school inspectors as proposed by President Jacob Zuma. Nkosi (2012) further states that the South African Democratic Teachers' Union's (SADTU) opposition to the inspectors stems from their role in schools before 1994. School inspectors were viewed by the teacher unions as fault-finders who policed teachers without playing a developmental role. In addition, the National Teachers' Union (NATU) agrees that school inspectors should not return in their old form because in its view school inspectors were victimising principals and not adding any value to effective teaching and learning (Nkosi, 2012).

2.3 Current view of the circuit manager's leadership

The current view of the circuit management is one that expects the circuit manager to play many roles in the function of a school district – community leader, financial manager, district manager- but no role is more important than that of instructional leader (Crankshaw, 2011). The circuit manager can be regarded as a teacher both in and out of the classroom, guiding staff to new understandings and strategies for improvement (Cuban, 1988). In addition, circuit managers may use their managerial role to support or influence curriculum and the instructional programme if that is the role that they will assume, but he or she must create a culture for establishing a shared vision, common goals and encouraging leadership throughout the organisation (Bjork, 1993).

Likewise, various authors such as Cuban (1998); Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, and Ellerson (2011) and Carter and Cunningham (1997), have all asserted that given a variety of social, political, and economic factors, the position of a circuit manager has become more complex and its challenges more daunting (Wadlington, 2011). A significant role for superintendents in recent decades also involves, according to Leithwood (1995), managing the reduction of conflict between various stakeholder groups. Cuban (1985) expresses the same view when he states that conflict is the DNA of the position of the circuit manager. Cuban (1985) is of the view that negotiating the conflicts and opposing forces requires constant attention to the many influences and demands of employees, taxpayers, parents, state departments of education, and lawmakers. Multiplying demands

and points of crises are, according to Cuban (1985), phrases that aptly reflect the typical day-to-day life of the circuit manager.

Recent international, continental and the local South African literature by researchers like Hanks (2010); Marzano and Waters (2009); Morgan and Peterson (2002) is replete with images of circuit managers overwhelmed with seemingly innumerable political and managerial responsibilities at the expense of their instructional responsibilities (Witt, 2009 & Wadlington, 2011). Yet, current accountability policies make it clear that the consequences of failing to improve student achievement are ignored at one's peril. Furthermore the public demand for reform of the schools has intensified the scrutiny and criticism of the position, and has increased the circuit manager's level of vulnerability (Davidson, 2005). The use of achievement testing as an instrument of accountability, fuelled by factors that are economic, political, and social in origin has led to today's position of the circuit manager to be described as immersed in a vague and uneasy harmony of opposing forces (Davidson, 2005).

All over the world, education systems have legislated accountability mechanisms (national and state curriculum standards and testing) and evaluation methods (i.e. *school report cards and accreditation*) that label districts as successes or failures based on a set of narrowly defined performance indicators and an even narrower interpretation of the results contribute to the challenges the contemporary circuit managers face (Antonucci, 2012). Moreover, the renewed interest in public school accountability that imposes district outcome expectations follows a long history of top-down, process-oriented bureaucracy in public schooling (Davidson, 2005). In the past, educational leaders were expected to simply set the stage for student learning through effective management of fiscal, organizational, and political conditions in their school districts (Davidson, 2005).

It is observed, however, that not much is written in literature about what circuit managers actually do to enhance one key responsibility in education, namely, instructional leadership. This view is supported by many researchers including Schlechty (1990) who asserts that little information seems to be available in the way of studies and research involving the circuit manager as the leader of school improvement. Swayer (2010) and Waters and Marzano (2006) also share the same view that research on the circuit manager's responsibility related to student achievement and impact on student learning is

not as comprehensive as the research on school principals as instructional leaders. Yet, researchers like Crankshaw (2011) firmly believe that circuit managers play a crucial role in the academic performance of both teachers and learners. Davidson (2005) agrees with the view that effective circuit manager's leadership can prove critical to setting the stage by creating an environment conducive to excellence, which helps principals to stay focused on academics. He states that circuit managers who effectively emphasize certain leadership responsibilities can provide necessary pressure and support to keep all schools in their district on track with academic goals.

Sayre (2007) brings an interesting debate about the role of a circuit manager in the overall performance of schools under his or her supervision. According to Sayre (2007) a circuit is only as effective as its weakest school, but a circuit manager's intervention can raise awareness and implement techniques to affect major changes in weaker schools within the district. He argues that islands of excellence can be created by particularly strong and effective principals; however, the individual principals are without the ability to materially impact student achievement in other schools within the district. Sayre (2007) is of the view that the circuit manager's influence reaches all schools directly and through their work with principals who are influenced by the superintendent's academic leadership. The burden of accountability has shifted from the principal at the school level to the circuit manager at the district level (Sayre, 2007).

International, continental and South African literature is unanimous and emphatic on the view that the circuit manager is arguably the most important leadership position in any school district (Devono & Price, 2012; Oyedeji, 2008; Stott, 2013). This study agrees with the notion that for far too long everyone involved in the school, except the circuit manager, is blamed for the persistent problem of low performing and declining schools. This study agrees with view that although the circuit manager has many roles to play in the district, no role is more important than that of being an instructional leader. This view is supported by researchers such as Cuban (1988); Bjork (1993) and Crankshaw (2011). They argue that circuit managers may use their managerial role to support or influence curriculum and the instructional programme. They further point out that the circuit manager must create a culture for establishing a shared vision, common goals and encourage team work throughout the organisation.

My personal experience as principal and now as circuit manager reveals that there is still a huge gap between circuit managers' perception of the importance of issues of curriculum and instruction and their actual involvement in such work. This happens despite the fact that most literature is unanimous about the huge significance and the unique and critical role of the circuit in the execution and implementation of programmes that will improve teaching and learning (Glass & Franceschini). This study agrees with the assertion by Cuban (1984) and Morgan and Peterson (2002) in which they point out that significant school improvement will not result unless there is a high level of involvement in curriculum and instruction activities on the part of the circuit manager. As chief instructional leaders of their school organisation, Davidson (2005) believes that circuit managers bear a direct responsibility to create the organisational conditions and process necessary to reverse patterns of poor student achievement, student drop-outs, and eliminate achievement gaps among diverse groups of students.

Informal conversations with principals of schools and my personal observations in my years as a school principal, is in concert with the studies that have demonstrated that the circuit managers in less effective school districts hardly visit schools they supervise. Morgan & Peterson, 2002). On the contrary Murphy and Hallinger (1986, 1988) contend that districts identified as more effective in an instructional sense are involved in frequent visits to schools and classrooms to monitor progress towards district goals. The study also concurs with the views of Koschoreck (2001) who posits that visits to schools and classrooms often can serve the purpose of furthering organisational learning, as circuit managers, in collaboration with principals, are able to identify and disseminate information about exemplars of effective teaching. Again, supporting my personal observation and the views of school principals is a study conducted by Davidson (2005) which reveals that principals perceive circuit managers as less involved in instructional leadership.

One also observes that circuit managers lack skills, knowledge, drive and ability needed to increase school effectiveness and student achievement. This viewpoint is supported by Sutton (2012) who states helping circuit managers to effectively manage the instructional leadership role requires preparation and training that incorporates a historical role review. Johnson (1996) suggests that as instructional staff are retooling in line with the new methods of teaching and implementing curriculum changes, circuit managers will need to

be aware of what teachers and administrators believe most influence change in the classroom. Kowalski (2005) believes that the new role of the circuit manager is not a skill set that is addressed in formal schooling, but is embedded in a circuit manager's routine negotiating of the demands of different groups within the community while meeting the needs of students and school reform demands.

Although the instructional leadership model is influential, one is cautioned by Hallinger (2003) when he states that it makes instructional leaders to be perceived as "know all", "always right" and authoritative leaders. He suggests that models of shared leadership, learning-centred leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership, and transformational emerged in response to the dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the instructional leadership model. I have observed as a circuit manager that the pressure for schools to achieve good results every year has forced mainly principals of schools to resort to the use of an excessive "top- down" approach which points too exclusively, as Barth (1990) states, to a strong and assertive leader.

2.4 The job description of the circuit manager: the international perspective

From an international perspective, Edwards (2007) found some commonalities in the job descriptions of the circuit managers, like for example, in the United States, Australia and in England. While at the same time acknowledging that the role is quite broad, usually including duties that cover almost every aspect of district operations. These commonalities include the following: (i) leadership and administration; (ii) student services; (iii) personnel; (iv) business; (v) school-community relations; and (vi) curriculum and instruction.

Under curriculum and instruction responsibilities, Edwards (2007) states that the circuit manager has as one of his duties to ensure the implementation of curriculum aligned with state frameworks, student and teacher performance objectives, curriculum standards and proficiencies in all subject areas. The circuit manager must direct the development, evaluation and the revision of curriculum and instruction and assumes responsibility for monitoring the implementation of approved programmes. In her study Edwards (2007) also found that the circuit manager coordinates and articulates curriculum among and between grades. He or she is responsible for the formulation, planning, and

implementation of the professional development programme for teachers and administrators.

Another core responsibility assigned to the circuit manager, is that of working with the administrators in the evaluation of instructional materials, including textbooks, digital resources and other instructional materials. It is the duty of the circuit manager to provide leadership in developing plans for instructional research, pilot studies for curriculum, instruction, and technology. An important instructional responsibility of the circuit manager according to Edwards (2007) is that of assessing results of programmes and addressing areas in need of improvement.

2.5 Job description of the circuit manager: The South African perspective

The Policy Document on the Organisation, Roles, and Responsibilities of Education Districts (2013) clearly stipulates the aims and the core duties and responsibilities of the job of the Circuit Manager. The document states categorically that the aim of the job of the Circuit Manager is to support school principals, school management teams and school governing bodies in the management, administration and governance of schools. The document also states that one of the aims of the job is to monitor the effective management, administration and governance of schools and to facilitate curriculum delivery through support in various ways.

As core duties and responsibilities of the job of the Circuit Manager the following are mentioned in *The Policy Document on the Organisation, Roles, and Responsibilities of Education Districts* (2013): leadership; communication; strategic planning and transformation; research and development; staff development; administrative service to schools and management support to schools. The policy document spells out clearly that the curriculum delivery duties of the circuit manager will include promoting, facilitating and monitoring the implementation of General Education and Training (GET) and Further Education and Training (FET) policies in all learning sites including Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) centres, and independent and home schools. Circuit mangers, as the policy document stipulates, are expected to provide curriculum guidance and support and learning area and subject advisory service to all teachers in order to improve teaching and learning.

It also provided in the policy document, that the circuit manager will support quality education delivery and in particular, teaching and learning, in educational sites for the purposes of both accountability and improvement of learner achievement. He or she will provide specialised education services to schools where necessary. He or she will promote inclusive education and render specialised support in the identification and addressing barriers to learning within the system in schools. The circuit manager will assist in the equitable deployment of staff and resources to facilitate teaching and learning and will provide pastoral support (guidance and counselling) to learners whenever requested by institutions.

Additionally, as stated in the policy document, the circuit manager has as one of his instructional duties, to maintain effective partnerships between parents and school staff to promote effective teaching and learning. He or she is expected to develop systems for monitoring and recording progress made by learners towards achievement of targets set.
The circuit manager has to facilitate curriculum development at institution/District/Provincial/National level. It is one of his responsibilities to provide guidance/assistance in learner assessment and to promote the National campaign on Culture of Teaching, Learning and Service (COLTS). Recently, the document on Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) that was launched in 2008, spells it clearly that circuit managers should take the lead in ensuring that all schools receive the relevant learning and teaching materials in time. The document also envisages a programme for circuit managers in which they will see to it that all schools have their full staff allocation and teaching vacancies are filled without delay.

Despite a myriad of managerial duties and responsibilities that ensnare the Circuit Manager, he or she is still, as Murphy (1995) states, expected to lead and support curriculum and instruction delivery. Bredeson (1996) and Boone (1998) yield evidence of gaps between the circuit managers' perceptions of the importance of issues of curriculum and instruction and their actual involvement in such work. They claim that Circuit Managers are often bombarded with emergencies and distracted from pursuing long-range goals. In their view, circuit managers learn from experience that they will be held more accountable for managing resources and settling disputes than for attempting long-term educational initiatives.

Supporting the view that circuit managers rarely find time for involvement in curriculum and instruction activities, is a study by Duignan (1980) in which he found out that circuit managers spend most of their time on managerial and administrative activities, with little involvement in instructional matters. Cuban (1985) has asserted that significant school improvement will not result unless there is a high level of involvement of the circuit manager in curriculum and instruction.

2.6 The instructional leadership of the circuit manager

According to Hoy and Miskel (2001), teaching and learning, the technical core of education, is the axis upon which education systems revolve. They further contend that education's technical core consists of those structures, strategies, processes, and applications of teaching and learning drawn upon throughout an individual's educational experience. Bjork (1993) asserts the circuit manager's emphasis on the technical core is a key indicator of effective educational leadership. This therefore implies that the new style of leadership required by circuit managers, is less top down and more leadership by consensus. Telling people what to do may accomplish what the circuit manager believes needs to be done, but it may not be the most effective way to build leadership capacity and move the district forward as a professional learning community (Sayre, 2007). The circuit manager is in an ideal position to exert a system-wide influence that would impact all schools within the district. As the top decision maker he or she not only has system-wide reach but also has the power and capacity to place appropriate pressure and support in key areas affecting key positions to raise all boats as the district moves forward together (Sayre, 2007; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Therefore, in this age of reform, accountability and great expectations, circuit managers must act as instructional leaders much more so than in the past where traditional circuit managers' roles and duties aligned more with managerial tasks (Lashway, 2002; Kowalski, 2005). At an international level, legislation like *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) in the USA, has reinforced the need for the circuit manager to be deeply involved in the school district as an instructional leader (Lashway, 2002). From a South African point of view, legislative mandates like the *Occupation Specific Dispensation for Educators and Public Servants (2008), the Integrated Strategic Plan for Teacher Education and*

Development in South Africa, 2011-2026 (2010), Schooling 2025 and *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling* 2025, have placed accountability for high stakes testing at the office the circuit manager. This accountability includes transparency about the progress of all learners including those from poverty, various ethnic backgrounds, second language learners and special needs students (Haycock, 2006). The legislative mandates demand that circuit managers ensure not only access for all learners, but achievement of all learners (Kowalski, 2005).

Literature by Davidson (2005); Lachowicz (2011) and Mart (2011) is unanimous on the view that the core charge of public schools is to educate students, but because of other issues occurring in schools such as student safety, lack of resources, parent concerns and rundown buildings, circuit managers are being pulled in many directions. The focus remains on improving student achievement through effective teaching and learning. Circuit managers and other district officials are more accountable and their roles have become more challenging. Lachowicz (2011) contends that with the public knowledge of testing results, circuit managers are leading in an era of more accountability and are judged by their schools' test and examination results. He adds that although management and leadership are important and necessary qualities of effective leaders, providing instructional leadership to all schools is the most important role of a circuit manager.

Mart (2011) defines effective instructional leadership in six standards: making student and adult learning a priority; setting high expectations for academic and social development of students; aligning content and instruction to standards; creating a culture of continuous learning; using multiple sources of data; and actively engaging the community to share in the responsibility of supporting student success. Being able to evaluate the effectiveness of the alignment of skills and assessments to standards and to be able to evaluate student work for evidence of learning based on the standards, are also roles of instructional leaders. As one of the key roles of circuit managers as instructional leaders, Kowalski (2007) regards commitment to regular classroom visits, understanding, recognizing and improving the pedagogical skills of school leaders as essential dispositions of instructional leaders. He posits that creating learning communities to ensure that school leaders and teachers are sharing ideas, studying effective instructional practices and analysing student data and work to improve their instruction, provides the opportunity for continuous

improvement. Improving school quality is an ongoing process led by the circuit managers with the knowledge and skills to promote the teaching and learning in schools.

According to Mason (2013) and Sayre (2007), expertise of assessments provides circuit managers with the knowledge to support teachers in effectively measuring student learning. Since students arrive to school with different skills, interests, abilities cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, a variety of assessments need to be available for schools and teachers to utilize. Instructional leadership is pivotal for ensuring better understanding of sound assessments to support classroom instruction and improve student learning. An effective instructional leader, according to Sayre (2007), not only has the knowledge of these assessments, but also knows how to align the assessments to skills and standards. As instructional leaders, circuit managers can utilize the data from student assessments to help schools and teachers focus on the strengths and weaknesses of students. This allows the curriculum to meet the needs to students to improve their learning. Instructional leaders knowledgeable of these concepts are the leaders that will successfully orchestrate the professional development, feedback and evaluations of classroom instruction that will significantly impact the increase of student achievement (Lachowicz, 2011).

Moreover, the effective circuit manager embraces his/her function as the primary instructional leader for the district, prioritizing student achievement and effective instructional practices as the foremost goals of the district (DiPaola & Stronge, 2003; Waters & Marzano, 2007). More than simply a cheerleader of good pedagogy, the circuit manager hones a clear and collaborative vision of teaching and learning, one whose goals for student achievement and the instructional programme represents a synthesis of relevant research and the specific needs of the district (Waters & Marzano, 2007). Moreover, the circuit manager plays an active role in evaluating the implementation of district instructional programming: he/she clearly and regularly communicates expectations for learning to faculty, monitors district progress toward student achievement goals, and embeds professional development and coaching into the school day (AASA, 2007). As instructional leader, the circuit manager must also be a leader of data-driven practice: he/she uses student achievement data to identify gaps in learning, examine instructional practice, and inform future curricular and instructional decision making (AASA, 2006; Waters & Marzano, 2007).

Supporting the view above are, Bush, Bell and Middlewood (2010), who contend that leaders need to influence classroom practice if they are to make a real difference to student learning. The low student outcomes in countries like South Africa, is attributed to the separation between leadership and learning (Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu & van Rooyen, 2009). Research acknowledges the plethora of demands placed on the circuit managers and other district leaders, but in the twenty- first century the circuit is manager is the pivot around which the process of effective management of teaching and learning in schools revolve (Edwards, 2007). Hawkins (2006) is of the view that other leadership and management responsibilities, such as managing school finances and staff should be seen as contributing to the overarching objective, namely, teaching and learning.

The link between leadership and learning is emphasised by Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) who claim that leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence to learner learning. Similarly, PricewaterhouseCoopers (2007) suggest that the educational leaders have a vital role in raising the quality of teaching and learning within their districts. Bush, Bell and Middlewood (2010) further add that the quality of teaching in schools has long been associated with the likelihood of successful student outcomes in many nations. In their view, instructional leadership should embrace leadership actions that seek to enhance both instruction and also teacher learning and, in turn student learning. They advocate that successful instructional leaders talk to principals about management of instruction, encourage collaboration between teachers and empower principals to foster decision-making, professional growth, teacher leadership and autonomy. They are of the opinion that successful instructional leaders are able to encourage those conditions that can constitute a professional learning community of learners and teachers.

From a South African perspective Bush and Glover (2009) notices a shift in thinking, where the management of teaching and learning is seen as a key role of educational leaders. However, according to Bush, Bell and Middlewood (2010), most educational leaders have a limited conceptualisation of their roles as instructional leaders. In the United Kingdom, as reported by Southworth (2004), instructional leadership is strongly connected with teaching and learning including both student learning and the professional learning of teachers. In the United States of America the term instructional leadership has

been used to describe a focus on teaching improvement with a view to improving learner outcomes (Elmore, 2000). According to Blasé and Blasé (2004), in USA, the term instructional leadership is now slowly being replaced by the term 'learning-focused leadership'.

2.7 Learning- centred leadership

In his study Southworth (2004) explores six levels of learning across the school enabling the potential engagement and impact of leadership to be more explicit. At a learner level of learning, he explains that leaders may use outcome data to make appropriate interventions. At a teacher level of learning, leaders may create and enable opportunities for teachers to learn from one another so as to improve and sharpen practice. Furthermore, a collaborative staff learning level may be created in which the establishment of structural and cultural changes within the school can be facilitated. At an organisational learning level, professional growth may, according Southworth (2004) enable the characteristics of a learning community characterised by trust and openness to be established. The fifth level of learning is the leadership learning level whereby leaders may actively distribute leadership responsibilities within the organisation. The final level explored by Southworth (2004) is the learning networks level in which leaders may seek external input to further effect improvements in teaching and learning through reference to other schools and agencies.

Another perspective of how learning-centred leaders can influence learning and teaching is given by Hallinger and Heck (1999). They suggest three ways in which learning-centred leaders influence learning and teaching. They explain that learning-centred leaders may influence outcomes directly by personal intervention. Direct effects include, but are not limited to own practice and demonstrating or modelling good practice to co-educators. The actions of learning-centred leaders, as stated by Hallinger and Heck (1999), affect school outcomes indirectly through other people. Indirect influence includes changes occurring at school in response to the way the learning-centred leader monitors teaching and learning and provides constructive feedback. According to Hallinger and Heck (1999) the indirect effects of the learning-centred leaders is the most common because these leaders work with and through others. Reciprocal effects may arise from dialogue and conversations

between learning-centred leaders and schools. The exchange of ideas leads to improved classroom practice (Hallinger & Heck, 1999).

Furthermore, Bush, Bell and Middlewood (2010) contend that learning-centred leaders maintain a strong focus on teaching and learning and appreciate that what constitutes effective teaching and learning may vary from context to context. More than that, they adjust their style to accommodate necessary teacher direction and personal accountability for outcomes against teacher empowerment. Learning-centred leaders are ascribed with the task of helping to create an organisational culture that will foster organisational learning (Bush, Bell and Middlewood, 2010).

In addition, Leithwood *et al.* (2006), claim that educational leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly, and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and supportive working conditions. They further claim that leadership distribution can impact on teachers' decision-making capacity and motivation, and can act positively upon student learning and achievement. This view is supported by Southworth (2004) who advocates the distribution of learning-centred leadership to increase the impact of the focus on teaching and learning throughout the organisation. He suggests that an important task of learning-centred leadership is to enable other leaders and staff to exercise it.

2.8 Professional learning communities

Spillane (2006) argues that the traditional models of instructional leadership that focus on educational leaders as the centres of knowledge, expertise, power and authority cannot deliver the desired educational outcomes in these unpredictable and changing environments. Schools and educational organisations of today require learning that would better develop both their learners and staff (Stoll & Louis, 2007).

Though there is, according Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas (2006) no definition of a professional learning community, there appears to be broad international consensus that it suggests a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting way. The notion, therefore, draws attention to the potential that a range of

people based inside and outside a school can mutually enhance each other's and students' learning as well as school development (Toole & Louis, 2002). According to Seashore, Anderson, and Riedel (2003) the term professional learning community signifies the establishment of a school-wide culture that makes collaboration expected, inclusive, genuine, and focused on critically examining practice to improve teaching and learning.

One criticism against instructional leadership is the dominant position of the principal who is viewed as all-wise and all-competent by the staff on the lower rungs of the power-structure ladder (Hord, 2003). Hord (2003) refers to this notion as the omnicompetence and proposes that it must be ditched in favour of principals' participation in professional development. According to Kleine-Kracht (1993) educational leaders, along with teachers, must be learners questioning, investigating, and seeking solutions for school improvement. He further adds that the traditional pattern that teachers teach, students learn, and administrators manage is completely altered. With the formation of professional communities there is no longer a hierarchy of who knows more than someone but instead there is a need for everyone to contribute (Bjork, 1993). Senge (1990) adds that the principal's job is to create an environment where staff can learn continuously and then in turn the job of the circuit manager is to support and encourage continuous learning among the school leaders. This suggests as Senge (1990) asserts, that no longer can leaders be thought of as top-down agents of change or seen as the visionaries of the organisation but must be envisioned as democratic teachers. Sergiovanni (1994) suggests that leaders must lead by serving and lead by inviting others to share in the burdens of leadership.

Louis and Kruse (1995) maintain that a core characteristic of the professional learning community is an undeviating focus on student learning. They further state that in a professional learning community, students are pictured as academically capable, and staff envisions learning environments to support and realise each student's potential achievement. The same view is shared by DuFour (2004) who states that professional learning communities emphasise three key components, which are: (i) collaborative work among the school's professionals; (ii) a strong and consistent focus on teaching and learning with that collaborative work, and (iii) the collection and use of data for shared inquiry into performance over time. In addition, Busher (2006) suggests that the dynamics of a school learning community involves the voices of educational leaders, teachers,

learners, support staff and other adults with the intention of working to foster student learning.

Finally, literature on how professional learning communities operate at the district level, reveals that most of the districts perceived to be effective, have vibrant, highly functional, and outcomes-based professional learning communities (Hord, 2003). He notes that the implementation of a district-wide approach has engaged educators at all levels in collective, consistent, and context-specific learning to address inequities, and improve results for all students. On the contrary, Fullan (2006) notes that professional learning communities tend to be implemented on an individual school-by-school basis rather than as a strategy for a systematic change. Wells and Feun (2007) are of the view that the role of the circuit manager is to have a full understanding of the significance of the professional learning communities and also to understand their role in leading change at their schools. Halverson (2007 suggests that professional learning community can serve as a means for strengthening ties between leadership and instruction in schools. According to Hord (2003), school and circuit managers are important to the implementation of professional learning communities, however, he indicates that a key component to this success is the process in which circuit managers support professional learning communities.

My personal experiences and observations in the role played by circuit managers in ensuring effective teaching and learning in schools under their supervision is that they cannot achieve this task all by themselves. I support the view expressed by Krug's (1992) five dimensions of instructional leadership which are (i) defining a mission; (ii) managing curriculum and instruction; (iii) supervising teaching; (iv) monitoring student progress; and (v) promoting an instructional climate. I am of the opinion that an important task of the circuit manager is to generate a community of learners among principals and teachers who would actively collaborate, share best practices, and support and encourage one another to become better at the craft of teaching. I agree fully with Sergiovanni's (1992) view in which he indicates that creating schools as communities of learning enables groups within the schools to focus on encouraging the learning and well-being of students. I concur with the view that instructional leadership has to change dramatically and move away from highly directive managerial perspectives towards more collegial engagement characteristics of communities of learners (DuFour & Marzano, 2009).

2.9 Challenges facing the position of the circuit manager

Hanks (2010) states that since the inception of the circuit manager's position one has seen the role change from teacher-scholar to manager to democratic leader, applied social scientist, communicator, chief executive and now to instructional leader. Hank's view is that the role of the circuit manager has changed through the years in response to social and political pressure and the expectations of the nation. With expanded curriculum requirements, expectations for closing the academic gaps between various groups of students and bringing all students to the proficient level, it is clear as Hank (2012) that the bar has been raised for public schools and their leaders.

According to Firestone and Riehl (2005) the time of the circuit manager just making sure buildings are safe and dry, that the buses run on time, teachers are hired and the food is ready at lunch is long past. They further argue that the circuit manager of today must be at the very heart of effective classroom instruction (Firestone & Riehl, 2005). One major challenge faced by circuit managers to function as effective instructional leaders in schools they supervise, is as Bredeson (1996) notes, a myriad, sometimes unscheduled managerial, political, and administrative responsibilities. These, he contends, pull circuit managers' attention away from matters relating to instruction.

The same view is shared by Kowalski (2006) when he explains that in today's educational arena, the circuit manager is responsible for balancing the social, political, economic and legal problems that penetrate the schoolhouse, as well as for managing the tensions surrounding these problems. Kowalski further states that in today's educational arena, the circuit manager is responsible for balancing the social, political, economic, and legal problems than penetrate the schoolhouse, as well as for managing the tensions surrounding these problems.

Another challenge faced by the circuit manager is that usually he or she is all by himself or herself. As Lamkin (2006) asserts, there is no specialised training for the position of a circuit manager. He or she is thrown in a deep end where she either swims through or sinks. What makes matters more difficult for the circuit manager, as observed by Lamkin (2006), is that in many cases the circuit manager does not have the assistance in personnel to successfully manage employee negotiations, to do the complex administrative work,

and the public relations responsibilities. Additionally, the critical challenge is the lack of expertise on subject-related matters to improve instructional performance in schools. Therefore, this lack of assistance and the multiple roles inherent in the position of the circuit manager are an added layer of stress on an already stressful leadership position.

An interesting remark is made by Kowalski (2006, p.91) where he says "Ideally I would like to be the instructional leader of the school system, but reality dictates that I manage and put out fires". This statement by Kowalski is recognition of the many roles a circuit manager has to play in his position. As a direct follow up to this remark by Kowalski (2006) and Cuban (1998) want to know how circuit managers navigate through the leadership maze. Arguing that conflict is the DNA of the position of the circuit manager, Cuban (1998) says that circuit managers struggle to create coherence out of the numerous and sometimes incompatible goals that the public sets for schools. Expected to improve the system, but lacking direct control over the classroom, circuit managers, have, according to Cuban (1998), to create their own personal cause-effect models and rely on luck.

In addition, Cuban (1998) notes that circuit managers must fashion a solution out of three, sometimes conflicting roles: instructional, managerial, and political. As instructional leaders, they bear the ultimate responsibility for improving student achievement. As managerial leaders, they have to keep their circuits operating efficiently, with a minimum of friction, yet taking risks to make necessary changes. As political leaders, they have to negotiate and contend with multiple stakeholders, for example the school governing bodies (SGB's), teacher unions and other community members to get approval for programmes and resources (Cuban,1998).

Another major challenge facing the circuit managers cited in the study by Ngubane (2006), reveals that although circuit managers organise workshops for School Governing Bodies and School Management Teams, it is found that they do not visit the schools on a regular basis and this deprives them of monitoring the effective implementation of instructional activities. Ngubane (2006), observes that circuit managers do not seem to know what is happening in schools, except what they are told by the principals.

Furthermore, Ngubane (2006) cites the issue of the large number of schools circuit managers are required to supervise, as another challenge that impacts negatively on the

instructional leadership role of the circuit manager. As a solution to this challenge, the *Policy Document on the Organisation, Roles, and Responsibilities of Education Districts* (2013) recommends that national norms be established in order to ensure effective service delivery and an appropriate span of control for circuit offices. In addition, the policy documents state that the appropriate size of an education circuit office is best expressed in terms of the number of schools for which the circuit office has responsibility. The document also spells it clearly that in any district the average number of schools per education circuit must not exceed 25. Other things being equal, the policy document recommends that it is better to manage fewer schools than more schools.

2.10 Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

At the start of any research study, it is important to consider relevant theory underpinning the knowledge base of the phenomenon to be researched (Sinclair, 2007). The reason cited by William (2006), for grounding a study on a particular theoretical framework, is that theories are formulated to explain, predict and in many cases, to challenge and extend existing knowledge, within the critical bounding assumptions. William (2006) describes a theoretical framework as the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study. In his view, the theoretical framework introduces and describes the theory which explains why the research problem under study exists.

Instructional and distributed leadership theories constitute the theoretical lens of this study. These theories are discussed below:

2.10.1 The instructional leadership theory

The most used conceptualisation of instructional leadership was formed through the research of Hallinger (2000). His model defines three dimensions of the instructional leadership construct, which are, defining the schools mission; managing the instructional programme; and promoting a positive school-learning climate (Hallinger, 2000).

Notably, is that contemporary definitions of instructional leadership call for all administrators to be learning leaders, rather than instructional leaders (DuFour, 2002). A similar view is shared by King (2002) who understands instructional leadership as anything that leaders do to improve teaching and learning in their schools and districts.

Furthermore, instructional leadership emerged from research on effective schools, and signifies strong, directive approaches to leadership with emphasis on curriculum and instruction, which has become the leadership model of choice among most principals (Edmonds, 1979).

The view held by Anderson and Togneri (2003) about educational leaders' actions that display instructional leadership are that instructional leaders are knowledgeable about instruction; provide support for teachers; provide feedback about the performance of schools; they conduct classroom observations; they emphasize instruction during meetings or evaluations; they design or deliver professional development; review student work and student data to make decisions about how to improve instruction and they hold schools accountable for making improvements in instruction.

Wright (2008) further adds that education reforms have been a dominant topic of debate in policy arenas over the past decade. The critical role of the circuit manager as instructional leaders is often highlighted in research and policy. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) described instructional leadership as attending to school culture and other organizational variables believed to influence the practices in schools as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth and performance of students. The circuit manager's instructional leadership role has also been described by scholars as a critical element in determining the overall effectiveness of schools in the district (Hallinger, 2003).

Having to respond to such ideologically-driven reforms, the work of circuit managers continues to intensify and become more complex. According to the study of The Wallace Foundation (2007) many circuit managers report diminishing levels of quality and satisfaction with their professional lives derived from navigating conflicting demands of all stakeholders and struggling to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Wright (2008) further posits that a number of legislative mandates describe the principal as an instructional leader who, directly and indirectly, influences teaching and learning. She further adds that these legislative mandates provide description of the circuit manager as an instructional leader who requires in-depth knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy to ensure that all students in the district have access to quality teaching and have the opportunity to meet the district, provincial, and national goals of education.

Hallinger (2003) notes that sceptics have questioned whether most school circuit managers possess the high levels of drive, knowledge, and ability needed to increase school effectiveness and student achievement through instructional leadership. He suggests that a model like distributed leadership emerged in response to dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the instructional leadership model, which was seen by many as an approach that was excessively top-down in nature.

2.10.2 Distributed leadership theory

With increasing demand and importance placed on school improvement and implementation of a notable proliferation of innovative reforms, Wright (2008) contends that the days of the lonely instructional leader are over and that substantial participation of other stakeholders in education is required. Promoting multiple and distributed sources of leadership that stretch over complex social and situational contexts, Spillane (2006) disputes positivistic and bureaucratic leadership theories emphasizing specialized roles, behavioural traits, and unilateral functions. Instead, as Yukl (2002) states, leadership must be presented as a shared, social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by leaders and followers over other people to structure activities and relationships in a group or organization.

Considering recent dissatisfaction with traditional models of instructional leadership that focus on the circuit manager as the centre of knowledge, expertise, power and authority, Spillane (2006), promotes leadership as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation rather than as a product of a leader's knowledge and skill. Considering schools operate within complex open systems (Spillane, 2006), it is unrealistic for circuit managers to be experts in all matters. Supporting Elmore's (2002) *principle of comparative advantage*, distributed leadership is premised on people leading when and where they have expertise. Moreover, leaders are dependent on followers and followers are equally crucial in creating practice and understanding leadership dynamics (Spillane, 2006).

Spillane's (2006) *leader-plus aspect* reveals that it is the interactions of people or the reciprocal interdependency between their actions, not solely the actions and expertise of heroic circuit managers that construct leadership practice. Building on organizational theory, Spillane (2006) identifies collaborated, collective, and coordinated forms of

distribution. In each case, Spillane (*ibid.*) presses us to look beyond who takes responsibility for particular functions and routines and points out how leadership practice exists in the intersection of leaders, followers and their situations. Similarly, Wright (2008) emphasizes how attention shifts from people's actions to their social interactions. Different school members emerge and take on leadership functions as dictated by the situation and their own interests and expertise. Leadership becomes socially critical when it does not reside in an individual but in the relationship between individuals, and it is oriented toward social vision and change (Wright, 2008).

According to Spillane (2006), distributed leadership is a non-hierarchical and inclusive leadership approach that fosters collaborative and ethical practice. Spillane (2006) further contends that performance is negatively impacted when people feel alienated and powerless, the ability to empower others leverages the commitments and capacities of organizational members through bottom-up participation of others towards the attainment of organizational goals. When the beliefs and contributions of all stakeholders are considered important, they are also more likely to support school goals (Wright, 2008). Moreover, distributed leadership emphasizes the critical relationship between motives, resources, leaders, and followers (Wright, 2008).

Lastly, Spillane (2006) provides a useful lens to reflect on practice, rather than prescribing a blueprint that defines and limits practice. Acknowledging benefits derived from a multiplicity of leadership approaches, Spillane's theory is inclusive of other leadership approaches (Wright, 2008). He considers schools as *designed (*formal structure represented in designated positions and organizational routines) and *lived* (what happens in daily practice) organizations that frame and shape leadership practice. Denouncing structural-functionalist perspectives, Spillane's model potentially allows for constructivist conversations, reflective thinking, collaborative planning and problem solving to address the perennial problems of education (Wright, 2008).

Without intending to diminish the strengths of the distributed framework, one needs to be aware of the potential limitations of the theory of distributed leadership (Spillane 2006). Discussions of distributed leadership may end prematurely with acknowledgment that multiple individuals take responsibility for leadership within a school (Spillane, 2006). It may be challenging for practitioners to understand the extent to which that situation actually constitutes and defines leadership practice through interactions between leaders

and followers. Moreover, it appears that distributed leadership, when not executed properly or when exclusively implemented in a top-down approach, can be interpreted as misguided delegation or even coercion (Spillane, 2006).

2.11 Chapter summary

The chapter examined the research on the instructional leadership role of the circuit manager. The chapter began by reviewing literature on the historical perspective of the role of the circuit manager. Next, the chapter explored the current view of the position of the circuit manager. Then, the chapter gave an outline of the job description of the position of the circuit manager, drawing commonalities between international and South African literature. Thereafter, a section of the chapter that delved on the instructional leadership role of the circuit manager followed. This section of the chapter was followed by discussions of other leadership strategies that aim to strengthen the process of teaching and learning, namely, learning-centred leadership and the establishment of professional learning communities.

The next section of the chapter focused on literature about the challenges faced by the circuit managers. The last part of the chapter discussed instructional leadership and distributed leadership theories which constitute the theoretical framework of this study. The next chapter provides details concerning research methodology that is utilised in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter delved deeper into literature pertaining to the instructional leadership practices of the circuit manager. This chapter discusses the research design and methodology of the study. The chapter begins with a paradigmatic location of the study focussing on the ontological, epistemological, and methodological position of the paradigm. Next, there is a section in the chapter that provides a justification for the methods that are used in terms of the chosen methodology. Then a discussion of the strategy the study used to generate data is covered. Thereafter, the issue of trustworthiness and ethical considerations are discussed. This section is followed by a discussion of the steps the study followed to analyse data. Lastly, a summary of the chapter is outlined.

3.2 Research design and methodology

3.2.1 Research design

According to Burns and Grove (2003), a research design is a detailed outline of how research will take place. In their view, a research design typically includes how data is to be generated, what instruments will be employed, how the instruments will be used and the intended means for analysing data collected. Creswell (2009) advances three types of research designs, namely, qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. He cautions that qualitative and quantitative approaches should not be viewed as polar opposites or dichotomies. They represent different ends on a continuum. Mixed methods research resides in the middle of the continuum because it incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell, 2009).

For this study, I chose a qualitative research approach because qualitative methods were especially useful in discovering the meaning that people give to events they experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In addition, qualitative data consisting of words (rather than numbers) and emphasising people's lived experiences, were well suited for this purpose. Patton (2002) states that qualitative methods facilitate study of issues in depth and detail. Furthermore, Patton (2002) states that approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of

qualitative inquiry. With the primary research focused on ascertaining the involvement of circuit managers in instructional leadership practices, this approach provided for more in-depth inquiry and analysis. In addition, qualitative inquiry allowed the researcher to inductively and holistically understand the role of the circuit managers in enhancing instructional leadership.

3.2.2 Research methodology

According to Polit and Hungler (2004), methodology refers to ways of obtaining, organising and analysing data. In their view, methodology decisions depend on the nature of the research question. On the hand, Maxwell (2005) considers methodology in research to be the theory of correct scientific decisions. In this study methodology refers to how the research was done and its logical sequence. The main focus of this study was the exploration of the role of the circuit manager in enhancing instructional leadership practices in schools in the district. Merriam (2005) describes methodology as the means or methods of doing something. According to Burns and Grove (2003), methodology includes the design, setting, sample, methodological limitations, and the data generation and analysis techniques in a study. Henning (2004) describes methodology as coherent group of methods that complement one another and have the ability to deliver data and findings that will reflect the research question and suit the purpose of the study. According to Holloway and Wheeler (2002), methodology means a framework of theories and principles on which methods and procedures are based.

In this study the researcher employed a phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology is a science whose purpose is to describe particular phenomena, or the appearance of things, as lived experiences (Streubert & Carpenter, 2003). Thus, phenomenology is an attempt to describe lived experiences without making previous assumptions about the objective reality of those experiences (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). The goal of phenomenological research is to describe experiences as they are lived, in other words, the lived experiences. Phenomenological research further examines the particular experiences of unique individuals in a given situation, thus exploring not what is (reality), but what it is preconceived to be (Burns & Grove, 2003). It is a highly appropriate approach to researching human experience. As a research method, it is a rigorous, critical, systematic investigation of phenomena (Streubert & Carpenter, 2003).

As the aim of this study was to explore and understand the role of the circuit managers in enhancing instructional leadership practices, the phenomenological research approach was used to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of the meaning of the everyday experiences of the participants. The phenomenological approach allowed the participants, through in-depth interviews, to elicit their own meaning of their experiences of being involved in providing instructional leadership in their schools. Phenomenology aims to describe the circuit managers' lived experiences (phenomena) in an attempt to enrich lived experience by drawing out its meaning (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). In the light of the above, the researcher considered phenomenology the best method and approach in this study.

3.2.3 Research paradigm

According to Taylor, Kermode and Roberts (2007), a paradigm is a broad view or perspective of something. Additionally, Weaver and Olson's (2006) definition of a paradigm reveals how research could be affected and guided by a certain paradigm. They contend that paradigms are patterns of beliefs and practices that regulate inquiry within a discipline by providing lenses, frames and processes through which investigation is accomplished. Hermeneutical or interpretive phenomenology concentrates on interpreting the meaning in the phenomenon that is concealed, and thus not immediately revealed to direct investigation, analysis and description (Holloway & Wheeler 2002). This approach concentrates on the need to study human consciousness by focusing on the world that the study participants subjectively experience. This could indicate immediate probing during the interviews.

This study, was based in the interpretivist paradigm and used a phenomenological strategy to explore the circuit manager's role in enhancing instructional leadership practices in schools. The ontological assumptions of this study were that there are multiple realities and that many social realities exist due to varying human experiences, including people's knowledge, views, interpretations, and experiences (Maxwell, 2005). Its epistemological assumption was based on the view provided by Merriam (2005) that the researcher and the participant are interlocked in an interactive process of talking, listening, reading, and writing. According to Guba and Lincoln (2005) epistemological assumptions inquire about the nature of the relationship between the researcher and that which can be known. The

third component of the paradigm, which is the methodology, assumes that research is a product of the values of the researcher (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

In addition, the interpretive paradigm is associated more with methodological approaches that provide an opportunity for the voice, concerns and practices of research participants to be heard (Cole, 2006; Weaver & Olson, 2006). This study allowed, through its incisive interview questions, the circuit managers to do their own reflection, express freely their heartfelt views and daily experiences of their instructional practices and challenges they faced as they attempt to support effective teaching and learning in schools. The researcher acknowledged the point of view of the participants, engaged them, interacted with them and provided them space and opportunity to release their opinions about the studied phenomenon.

3.2.4 Sampling

Morse (2012) defines sampling as the deliberate selection of the most appropriate participants to be included in the study, according to the way that the theoretical needs of the study may be met by the characteristics of the participants. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) assert that in qualitative inquiry, attention to sampling is crucial for the attainment of rigor and takes place throughout the research process. They further state that samples are classified according to the means by which participants are selected from the population. Maree (2007) adds that in qualitative inquiry, this selection procedure is a deliberate rather than a random process. Higginbottom (2004) argues that though many terms may describe qualitative sampling, most of these represent variations of the three major categories of sampling, namely, convenience, purposeful and theoretical.

Convenience sampling is selecting the sample by including participants who are readily available and who meet the study criteria. A convenience sample may be used at the beginning of the sampling process, when the investigator does not know the pertinent characteristics for criteria for sample selection, or it is used when the number of participants available is small (Morse, 2012). Theoretical sampling is a basic tenet of grounded theory and thus should always be understood in that context (Coyne, 1997). In purposeful sampling, the most important guiding principle is maximum variation, that is, researchers should seek to include people who represent the widest variety of perspectives possible within the range specified by their purpose (Higginbottom, 2004).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used purposive sampling to select three circuit managers from each of the three sections of the educational district. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) posit that in purposive sampling, a feature of qualitative study, researchers hand-pick the participants to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their possession of the particular characteristics being sought. They add that in this way, researchers build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs. Purposive sampling was used in order to access knowledgeable people, that is, those who had in-depth knowledge about particular issues, maybe by virtue of their professional role, power, access to information, expertise or experience (Cohen**,** Manion & Morrison, 2011). In this case, the researcher aimed at drawing out all that circuit managers perceived as to what their positions required them to provide to support effective teaching and learning in schools, and what they perceived as the challenges in their role as instructional leaders. No better person other than the circuit managers themselves, could provide answers and explanations about the challenges they face as they provide support to schools to enhance effective teaching and learning.

Similarly, Creswell (2009) adds the selection of participants in qualitative research is purposeful. In his view, participants selected in qualitative research must best inform the research questions and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under study. For the purpose of this study, the researcher hand-picked one circuit manager from the three sections of the district. Decisions regarding the selection of the participants, were based on the research questions theoretical perspectives, and evidence informing the study. This was in line with the suggestion by Sargeant (2011) who posits that one of the most important tasks in the study design phase is to identify appropriate participants.

3.2.5 Data generation tools

The data sources for this study were interviews, documents reviews and observations. By triangulating data, the researcher attempted to provide a confluence of evidence that breeds trustworthiness (Eisner, 1991). By examining information generated through different methods, the researcher could corroborate findings across data sets and thus reduced the impact of potential biases that could exist when relying on a single data generation tool. According to Patton (2002), triangulation helps the researcher guard against the accusation that a study's findings are simply an artefact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator's bias.

3.2.5.1 Interviews

The primary method of data collection was qualitative interviews. There were three persuasive reasons for using interviewing as the primary data source for this study. Firstly, qualitative interviewing is appropriately used when studying people's understanding of the meaning in their lived world (Patton, 2002). In fact, interviewing is the best technique to use to find out those things we cannot directly observe like feelings, thoughts, and intentions (Merriam, 2005). Secondly, qualitative interviews result in thick descriptions of the subject being studied (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011)). Thirdly, interviews allow for triangulation of information obtained from other sources (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). The purpose of interviewing according to Patton (2002), is to allow the researcher to learn about the other person's perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. Patton (2002) states clearly that the reason for interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, and to gather their stories.

For this study, the researcher conducted all the interviews with the circuit managers. Participants were contacted by e-mail and/or telephone to set up a mutually convenient time to conduct the interviews. The circuit managers were interviewed in their respective circuit offices. Each participant was interviewed face-to-face because this approach was most conducive to finding out what was in the participants' minds and according Maree, (2007) it gives added confidence that results have a strong handle on what real life is all about. The purpose of the interviews for this study was to have circuit managers reflect on their practices as they carried out their instructional leadership responsibilities. In order to improve the trustworthiness of the study findings, participants' experiences are explored in depth during interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2006)).

As a first step in the interview process, the researcher reminded the participants of the purpose of the study, research procedures, expected benefits, their rights to withdraw from the study at any time, and protection of confidentiality. In an effort to develop a good rapport with the participants and to demonstrate familiarity with the topic, the researcher identified himself as one of the circuit managers in the district. With participant approval, the researcher audio-recorded the interviews to ensure a complete transcript (Merriam,

1998; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The researcher took handwritten notes during all interviews, enabling him to track key points to return to later in the interview or to highlight ideas of particular interest or importance.

The researcher used the semi-structured interview approach to carry on conversations that elicited rich data that could be used in qualitative analysis. This in line with literature by Miles and Huberman (1994), Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Maree (2007) on qualitative research. They posit that semi-structured interviews give participants more room to answer in terms of what is important to them and to control the introduction and flow of topics. All questions are framed in a manner to provide participants with the flexibility and freedom to explore the phenomenon in depth (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For this study open-ended questions were used throughout the interviews to encourage participants to talk freely and respond openly to queries. Probing questions were used when necessary, to encourage participants to elaborate on or clarify a response.

3.2.5.2 Documents review

According to Corbetta (2003), a document is any substance that gives information about the investigated phenomenon and exists independently of the researcher's actions. It is normally produced for specific purposes other than those of the research, but it can be used by the researcher for cognitive purposes, e.g. letters, newspapers, diaries and websites. Yin (2003) identifies a number of advantages of the documents over other research methods. These are that, it is a non-reactive technique where the information given in a document is not subject to a possible distortion as a result of the interaction between the researcher and the participant, e.g. as in interviews. Furthermore, it helps the researcher to study and understand what has been happening before and that it is a cost-effective method as the information has already been produced (Denscombe, 1998). However, documents may have some limitations in terms of the accuracy and completeness of the data (Patton, 2002).

Although interviews were the primary method of data generation, the researcher also generated data from reviewing documents. The documents analysis consisted of reviewing school improvement plans, the school district's annual education results reports, the department circulars, minutes of meeting circuit managers held with the school leaders and

the school district's education plans. These documents were analysed to support what the participants said was occurring within the school district and schools. The term examinations and analysis of improvement plans, three year education plans, and annual education results, circuit vision and mission statements further defined the instructional leadership expectations of the circuit and individual schools. Improvement plans and three year education plans outlined the beliefs, values, vision, and mission of schools and the circuits. These plans also described the goals of schools and the school districts as well as the strategies to be implemented to accomplish these objectives. Annual education reports identified areas of strength and concerns for circuit managers and schools and held the circuit managers and principals accountable to strive for improvement.

There were several advantages in utilising documents review as part of this study. In examining the circuit and the school documents, the researcher was able to uncover meanings, developed understanding, and discovered insights relevant to the research problem. The researcher used the data generated from these documents to furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, advance new categories and hypotheses, and track change and development (Merriam, 1998). In line with the views of Merriam (1998), the documents used for this study, like interview transcripts were coded, analysed, and interpreted.

3.2.5.3 Observations

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), the distinctive feature of observations as a method of research is that it offers the researcher the opportunity to generate live data from naturally occurring social situations. They further add that the use of immediate awareness or direct cognition, as a principle mode of research, has a potential to yield more trustworthy and authentic data than would otherwise be the case with mediated or inferential methods. Robson (2002) notes that what people do may differ from what they say they do. Observations, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) state, can be of facts, for example, as the case in this study, the number of visitations to schools by the circuit manager. It can also focus on events, the number of visits by circuit managers, specifically for the purpose of enhancing instructional leadership in schools.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used semi-structured observations. The semi-structured observation as stated by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), reviews observational data before suggesting an explanation for the phenomenon observed. The researcher observed the content and the purpose of meetings and the nature of visits of circuit managers to schools. The researcher observed all other forms of engagements initiated by circuit managers which were focusing on improving teaching and learning in schools. As part of the observations, the researcher took notice of the challenges circuit managers faced when they went to schools to support teaching and learning and how they navigate through those challenges.

3.3 Data analysis

In qualitative studies, the analysis transforms the collected data into findings (Patton, 2002). The process of qualitative analysis involves the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal (Patton, 2002). The initial step in the analysis includes reading, organising, and preparing the interview data for analysis (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). The interviews with the participants were digitally recorded, and subsequently transcribed. The researcher read all of the transcripts, which allowed him to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning. Next, the researcher began a detailed analysis of the data, using the interview transcripts, and employing a coding strategy. This involved taking text gathered during data generation, segmenting it into categories, and labelling the categories with a term.

The codes were determined based on various factors, including the following: those that the researcher expected to find based on the literature reviewed and the theoretical frameworks, those that were not necessarily anticipated at the beginning of the study, and those that were of conceptual interest to the researcher. As Creswell (2009) advises, the researcher used both predetermined codes and emerging codes, which were on the basis of emerging information from the participants. The coding process resulted in the development of several themes for the research study, which became the foundation for the major findings of this qualitative study. According to Creswell (2009), the themes should display multiple perspectives from the participants and be supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence. The final step of the data analysis process was the

interpretation of the meaning of the data. This researcher attempted to derive meaning from the findings with information from the literature review and theoretical frameworks. The researcher also confirmed past information and explained how the findings diverged from it and suggested questions raised by the data and analysis that was not foreseen earlier in the study.

3.4 Data triangulation

Triangulation of the data contributes to the trustworthiness of the data analysis (Patton, 2002). Patton defines triangulation as the process of using a variety of methods in combination so as to illuminate an inquiry question. Similarly, Marshall and Rossman (2006) define triangulation as the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point. For this study, the data generated from interviewing the three circuit managers was compared with the documents reviewed as well as observations. This comparison allowed a deeper analysis of what each circuit manager indicated were the instructional leadership practices and challenges in the circuit. Review of the documents gave the researcher another level of analysis as to how the circuit managers were involved with instructional leadership. In addition, the examination of the data from the interviews and document analysis determined the consistencies and inconsistencies as these related to the instructional leadership practices of the circuit manager. According to Patton (2002), finding such inconsistencies ought not to be viewed as weakening the authenticity of results, but rather as offering opportunities for deeper insight into the relationship between inquiry approach and the phenomenon under study.

3.5 Trustworthiness

According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992) interviewing, observations and documents review are important techniques in qualitative inquiry. These three methods of data generation were used in this study. Further, according to Patton (2002), the trustworthiness of the data is much stronger when it has been generated through several data generation methods. The data generated from the circuit managers' interviews was compared and contrasted with the data generated from observations and documents reviewed to determine what the circuit managers said they did in carrying out and providing instructional leadership and what challenges circuit managers faced in instructional responsibilities and how they navigated through these challenges.

Review of the documents provided the researcher with a more complete picture of the instructional leadership practices that are associated with the circuit managers in their circuits. Triangulation of data contributes to the trustworthiness of the data analysis (Patton, 2002). Triangulation of the data from the interviews, observation and document analyses determines consistencies and inconsistencies as these relate to instructional leadership of the circuit manager. Patton (2002) encourages researchers to focus on rigorous techniques of data collection and systematic analyses. Extreme care was taken when generating and analysing data and all procedures were well documented. Yin (2009) states that the goal of trustworthiness is to minimise the errors and biases in a study. For this study, triangulation and trustworthiness were ensured through the use of interviews, documents review and observations as methods of data generation.

3.6 Ethical considerations

In conducting qualitative research it is critical that the researcher respects the rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) also caution that, because the objects of inquiry in interviewing are human beings, extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them. The following safeguards were utilised to protect the participants: the research objectives were clearly articulated so that they were well understood by the participants; an opportunity was provided for participants to ask any clarifying questions that they might have; participants were informed of all data generation methods and procedures; participants' rights, interests and wishes were considered first when choices were made regarding the reporting of the data; participants were asked to voluntarily participate in this study and they were informed that they can withdraw from the study at any time; the edited text of each interview was submitted for participant approval; and participants' anonymity was guaranteed by the researcher. Each voluntary participant was asked to read and sign a letter containing the above information.

The researcher applied for ethical clearance from the university to seek approval to do the study. Then the researcher applied for permission from the Provincial Department of Basic Education through its Research Office. Since the participants in the study were Circuit Managers, the researcher wrote a letter to each participant inviting him or her to participate in the study. Each letter was followed up with a personal phone call or meeting.

The researcher assured the participants that the digitally taped interviews, field notes, and the transcriptions would be maintained in strict confidence and held in a secured place. All data was stored in an anonymous format for possible longitudinal research. The rights of the participants were protected by subjecting the design of this study to the University of KwaZulu-Natal's ethics review. The ethics review process of the identified school district for this study would be honoured and completed. Another ethical matter that was considered and discussed with each participant was the notion that this study involved a single school district. The anonymity of participants' data and all other data were protected through the use of pseudonyms when reporting in the final research report.

3.7 Chapter summary

This chapter described the research design and methodology. It began with the discussion of the research design, followed by the research methodology and the description of the study's paradigm. Data generation and analysis procedures were also explained along with the strategies used to ensure trustworthiness. Ethical considerations and limitations of the study were also dealt with. The next chapter presents analysis of data and findings from the field.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with research design and methodology. Chapter Four discusses the findings and analysis from the data generated through interviews with the three circuit managers. In addition to the discussion and analysis of interview data, this chapter engages with the analysis of data from the documents that were reviewed as well as observations of the instructional leadership practices of the circuit managers. In order to ensure that the participants' voices were not lost, verbatim quotations are also used in the discussion.

4.2 Presentation and the discussion of findings

Based on the data generated from the interviews, documents analysis and observations, the following themes emerged: the circuit managers' understandings of their role in supporting teaching and learning in schools; the circuit managers practices in supporting teaching and learning in schools; how circuit managers support schools in their circuits; programmes that circuit managers have to support teaching and learning in schools; relationships between circuit managers and other stakeholders; how circuit managers influence teaching and learning in schools; how circuit managers influence learner or school outcomes and lastly, the challenges circuit managers face with the various stakeholders and how they mitigate them. These themes are discussed below.

4.2.1 Circuit managers' understandings of their role in supporting teaching and learning in schools

The findings from the data suggested that though circuit managers' duties were so encompassing, they understood that their main role was to support teaching and learning in schools. The instructional leadership duties and responsibilities they mentioned in the interviews included: providing a safe and orderly academic environment; providing a positive and supportive climate for students and staff; maintaining the district vision and setting goals focused on high levels of student learning; maintaining high expectations for students; being visible and accessible to staff and students; communicating effectively with staff; shared leadership, decision-making, and staff empowerment (building capacity); modelling instructional leadership.

The findings also seemed to suggest that circuit managers agreed that although they were not directly involved in the process of teaching and learning, but through various ways, they indirectly played a significant role in influencing the way the programmes of teaching and learning occurred in schools. There seemed to be a common view among the interviewed circuit managers that through their involvement in educational programmes that aimed to enhance teaching and learning, they influenced learner achievement.

These findings were clearly supported by what circuit manager Mr Msomi said when asked about what he understood as his role in supporting teaching and learning.

He said:

> *In my view, behind the success and excellent performance of schools in the circuit, there is excellent and visionary leadership of the circuit manager* (Mr Msomi).

He added that :

> *The bottom line is that as a circuit manager I ensure that first and foremost, all learners learn and teachers teach in schools that I supervise. It is my duty to ensure that a positive climate is created so as to ensure that effective teaching and learning occurs* (Mr Msomi).

Circuit manager Mr Thwala's response was:

> *My main role is to support the principals of schools in ensuring that all systems, structures and programmes that aim to promote effective teaching and learning in their schools, are in place and are implemented. I am the one who brings together all different component parts and make them function for a common goal* (Mr Thwala).

Circuit manager Mr Phiri summed it succinctly when he said:

> *My main role is to support schools in my circuit by providing them with a clear mission and vision on key practices and goals that focus on improving teaching and learning. It is my key function to see to it that that policies of the Department of education that aim to improve teaching and learning in schools are implemented* (Mr Phiri).

Circuit manager Mr Msomi echoed a statement that seems to be common with the other interviewed circuit managers:

> *Though circuit managers are not curriculum specialists or co-ordinators, we work with school management teams and principals to ensure that nothing disrupts the programme of learning and teaching* (Mr Msomi).

Circuit manager Mr Msomi further added to this view:

> *I don't have to know how to teach physics to be able to carry the vision and to support the culture of instruction that we want to take place* (Mr Msomi).

Circuit manager Mr Phiri brought in an interesting viewpoint when he said:

> *We are aware of our responsibilities and functions and we know that through our visibility, guidance and interventions we indirectly influence the academic performance of the learners* (Mr Phiri).

The views from circuit manager Mr Thwala also added another dimension to the way circuit managers understand their role as instructional leaders when he said:

> *I take my role of supervising and evaluating principals seriously (Mr Thwala).*

He added:

> *I support teaching and learning in schools by assisting and monitoring all the processes which ensure that schools use the all available resources maximally* (Mr Thwala).

To a greater extent, findings from the responses generated from the interviewed circuit managers corroborated with the findings from the few documents that the researcher analysed. The extract of job description for office based educators from *Annexure A of Collective Agreement 1, Employment of Educators Act of 2008* clearly indicates that among a variety of functions, the circuit manager has to provide curriculum guidance to schools in order to improve teaching and learning.

The focus on curriculum delivery that appears in the strategic plan documents that are collected from schools, show that circuit managers understand their roles in supporting teaching and learning in schools. The three circuit managers who were interviewed provided the researcher with their itineraries which indicate clearly the daily, weekly and monthly programme. In these itineraries there was an indication of the schools the circuit manager

visited and the purpose of the visits. In addition, the interviewed circuit managers provided a specially designed official document in which the circuit manager furnishes the district manager of the number of schools he or she visited during the term and the purpose of the visit. The documents including the vision and mission of the circuit, school improvement plans, the log entry books, the circuit annual results reports, and the items in the meetings held in the circuit showed that circuit managers understood their role in supporting teaching and learning in schools.

The researcher in his capacity as the acting chief circuit manager also observed that the content and the purpose of the meetings that were called by the circuit managers focussed on issues that impacted on teaching and learning. He observed that circuit managers understood their role as instructional leaders, basing this on the number of visits circuit managers made to schools to engage on issues that impacted on teaching and learning like observation and monitoring of examinations; learner-teacher absenteeism; staffing issues and issues of safety and discipline.

Literature strengthens the findings from the three sources used in this study to generate data. Davidson (2005) clearly states that, if the district-level is to succeed in raising student achievement, it is apparent that the circuit managers must develop trust and a clear understanding of their distinct roles and joint roles and responsibilities as instructional leaders. He further echoes a similar viewpoint expressed by the circuit managers when he states that high achieving districts have at the helm, circuit managers who take seriously their role as instructional leaders. Bjork (1993) adds that success or failure of a public school is directly linked to the influence of the circuit manager, particularly those who maintain a high level of involvement in instructional programs.

The argument that circuit managers play mainly a supportive role in instructional issues is strengthened by Carter and Cunningham (1997); Fusarelli, Cooper, and Carell (2002) who explain that though circuit managers are not directly involved in work at the classroom level, they are increasingly held accountable for guiding and shaping vision, and ultimately the organisational culture that will result in ongoing commitment to constant improvements in the academic performance of all students. A similar view supporting the findings from the interviewed participants is the one expressed by Whitt (2009) who posits that academic success

can be directly attributed to the circuit manager's influence on instructional leadership and subsequently the success and/or failure of a school.

From an instructional leadership theory perspective, the model by Hallinger (2000) speaks directly to the findings generated from the interviews, documents review and observations about the circuit managers' understanding of their role in supporting teaching and learning in schools. His model defines three dimensions of the instructional leadership construct which are: defining the schools mission; managing the instructional program; and promoting a positive school-learning climate (Hallinger, 2000). In defining the mission, Hallinger's model speaks about framing and communicating school goals; managing instructional programme focusing on supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating curriculum, and monitoring students' progress; and promoting a school climate involves protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, enforcing academic standards and providing incentives for students.

4.2.2 Circuit managers' practices in supporting teaching and learning in schools

The findings that emerged were that circuit managers were barely involved in matters that ought to support teaching and learning in schools. Also emerging from the findings was that circuit managers' time seemed to be dominated by administrative activities instead of instructional support. In addition, findings seemed to show that the visits that circuit managers made to schools have little effect in supporting teaching and learning in schools. It also emerged that circuit managers were not aware of the impact their support of teaching and learning could have.

Statements that supported these findings were captured in responses like the one circuit manager Mr Msomi gave when asked about what he actually did to support teaching and learning in schools:

> *You are constantly putting out fires and being distracted by things that have nothing to do with teaching and learning* (Mr Msomi).

This view was echoed by circuit manager Mr Phiri who said:

> *We circuit managers are operating as glorified clerks whose function is mainly to push and receive papers from the higher office.* He elaborates and says:

> *I am just a conveyer belt who dispatches circulars, documents, notices, pamphlets etc either to schools or education offices* (Mr Phiri).

A recurring theme with the participants about the reality about what circuit managers actually did came clearly from circuit Manager Mr Thwala who stated that:

> *Instead of focusing on the core business I always spend my time dealing with the unexpected, which are in most cases issues outside giving support to teaching and learning in schools I supervise* (Mr Thwala).

It also came out from the data generated that to a very limited extent, circuit managers visited schools to inquire about issues that impacted on teaching and learning in schools. This came out clearly from circuit manager Mr Phiri who explained:

> *From time to time I visit schools and check on teachers and learners attendance; availability and utilisation of learner resource materials; academic performance of learners* (Mr Phiri).

Circuit manager Mr Msomi explained that he would love to do more to support his schools in matters of teaching and learning:

> *I get worried when some of my schools do not perform to the expected levels. I visit my schools regularly and address the school management teams and on few occasions and motivate learners* (Mr Msomi).

Documents reviewed like the circuit managers' itineraries, school log books, school functionality reports, minutes of meetings revealed that circuit managers performed visits to schools but the purposes of the visits were not explained. The lack of documents that have details on what circuit managers are expected to actually do to support teaching and learning in schools, corroborates with data generated from the interviews which made it clear that there was less that circuit managers do to support teaching and learning.

Observations made also pointed to the same direction. Issues which I personally observed as the supervisor of circuit managers, which were dealt with by circuit managers, were greatly

about resolving conflicts among various stakeholders, disciplinary issues for both teachers and learners, ensuring the implementation of the department of education policies, collecting and collating statistical information.

Circuit managers were frequently spending their time dealing with crises and putting out brushfires. During the course of any given week there were a million things a circuit manager was called upon to do.

Literature supports and strengthens the findings about what circuit managers actually do to support teaching and learning in schools. Bjork (2009) states that if the circuit manager believes that the most important purpose of his/her role is maintaining organizational stability, then the managerial role will dominate his/her activities and instructional leadership will be viewed as a separate layer of responsibility. In addition, Cuban (1998) posits that circuit managers struggle to create coherence out of the numerous and sometimes incompatible goals that the public sets for schools. In his view, circuit managers are expected to improve the system, but lacking direct control over the classroom they have to create their own personal cause-effect models and rely on luck. Hallinger (2005) is of the view that circuit managers should find the proper balance when performing managerial duties and instructional leadership activities in order to ensure that the core business of teaching and learning is achieved.

From a theoretical perspective, most of the historical models that explained the role of circuit managers in their support of schools, focused on governance, finance and management issues (Mason, 2011). These models focused, as Castognola (2005) argues, on issues that do not impact directly on student achievement. Bredson (1995) attributes the lack of instructional leadership by the circuit manager to time constraints, role overload, the press of other priorities, and lack of personal interest in curriculum and instruction. As a result, circuit managers, historically, had only superficial involvement (e.g. verbal support and delegation of responsibilities) with instructional matters. Farkas (2001) adds that to survive circuit managers had to manage the politics, the daily pressures, and the mandates of their education circuits. This way of thinking resonates with the findings that emerged from the data generated from the three instruments used in this study.

4.2.3 How circuit managers support schools in their circuits

The findings that emerged were that circuit managers strove to establish a common vision and set clear goals for all the schools in the circuits. It also emerged from the findings that not enough was done by the circuit managers to strengthen, the management skills of the principals through professional development strategies. Again, findings seemed to suggest that despite the regular visits and meetings circuit managers made to schools, these appeared not to be supporting effective teaching and learning. Furthermore, findings seemed to point out that circuit managers lacked the capacity to provide instructional support to all schools.

The above mentioned findings were supported by statements like the one expressed by circuit manager Mr Msomi who responded by saying:

> *I think the best support I can provide as a circuit manager is to communicate a vision and set clear goals and expectations for schools in the circuit. If I don't communicate a vision, have clear goals and expectations for this circuit, then I think that negatively impacts the principal under my supervision.* (Mr Msomi).

According to circuit manger Mr Phiri he supported all his schools by visiting them regularly and called them to meetings. He summarised this support as follows:

> *My regular visits to all schools, spending time listening to their different challenges, their achievements, their vision and aspirations, are ways I give support. I ensure that I hold meetings with principals of schools once fortnightly* (Mr Phiri).

Circuit manager Mr Thwala regarded supporting schools in staffing issues and the monitoring the procurement and the delivery of the teaching and learning materials to all schools as the best form of support he offered. He explained this as follows:

> *I see to it that every school has adequate human and physical resources and these are optimally used. I facilitate the availability of both the teaching and non- teaching staff in each school. I also ensure that the basic teaching and learning materials are available in each school* (Mr Thwala).

Another dimension brought forward by circuit manager Mr Msomi was that of giving support to the leadership of the principals. In his response in this regard he stated:

> *Though I may not be giving enough and needed support to schools, I do devote a lot of time conducting workshops for principals and equip them with the necessary skills to*

lead and manage their schools. I organise relevant experts for the induction of the newly appointed principals (Mr Msomi).

Circuit Manager Mr Phiri highlighted a very important point when he said:

I know that as circuit managers we should be giving more support to schools to improve teaching and learning. Other engagements take us away from this important task, but I do acknowledge excellent academic achievements in my schools by giving incentives and awards to best performing schools in my circuit each year (Mr Phiri).

Findings from the school functionality reports, school improvement plans, documents that speak to the vision and mission of the circuits, action plans and strategic plans, matric intervention programmes and year plans that were perused by the researcher, supported the findings generated during the interviews with the circuit managers. It showed from the school functionality reports that every beginning and end of the school term, circuit managers performed school visits to give support. Circuit managers had files that showed their circuit vision and mission and the strategic plans of schools they supervise. Copies that showed programmes and items circuit managers discussed in meetings with school principals attested to the fact that the vision and mission are communicated to schools. Evidence by means of circulars that required each school to submit a strategic plan to the circuit managers indicated that circuit managers made attempts to give direction to schools. On the contrary, school improvement plans that emanated from school evaluation programmes painted a different picture. Schools were submitting these improvement plans to their circuit managers, but the findings were that there were no follow-ups from the side of the circuit managers. These were documents that were lying in the offices of the circuit managers and collecting dust.

Observations supported the findings that were generated during the interviews. The researcher, as a supervisor of the circuit managers, observed that circuit managers were supporting schools by visiting and holding regular meetings. The observation was that important circulars and information were communicated to schools by the circuit managers. The researcher was occasionally invited by circuit managers to the events whose objective was to reward excellence and academic quality in schools, the researcher was also party to engagements between circuit managers and schools on matters that required circuit managers' interventions and support to schools.

From a literature point of view, Waters and Marzano (2006) state that the support from the circuit manager is pivotal for the school to function optimally. They are of the view that the vision and actions of the circuit manager frequently determine whether principals can be effective in leading school improvement. They further argue that circuit managers, by not supporting schools, can create conditions in which even good principals and consequently their schools, are likely to fail. The views proposed by Mart (2011) on the support by circuit managers to schools, resonate strongly with the findings generated through the three tools used in this study. He posits that circuit managers should focus on policies and support services that will enhance each school's ability to achieve its own strategic vision and plan within the context of the circuit's vision. Mart (2011) further adds that the support of the circuit manager should through leading schools to analyse a variety of data beyond test scores so that it discovers the root causes behind student failure or dropping out. In addition, as Morgan and Peterson (2002) state that circuit manager must support schools by developing a system of incentives for the recognition and reward of schools that show significant improvement in meeting new accountability indicators. Furthermore, Leithwood (2005) adds that effective circuit managers support their schools by providing them with high quality mentoring and induction. In his view, successful circuit managers will optimise the use of resources to improve student learning.

An instructional leadership theoretical model that speaks directly to the findings generated in this study is one proposed by Leithwood and Riehl (2005). This model identifies core circuit managers leadership practices that support and give directions to schools. The model proposes the development and articulation of organisational vision, conveying high expectations for performance, fostering an acceptance of group goals, monitoring performance, provision and optimal use of resources and effective communication. In addition, other core leadership practices for giving support, include developing people and organisations through strengthening school cultures, building collaborative processes and managing the environment to enhance effective teaching and learning.

4.2.4 Programmes that circuit managers have to support teaching and learning in schools

The findings that emerged were that circuit managers did not have enough programmes to support teaching and learning in their schools. It also emerged from the findings that circuit managers expected more support to schools from the subject advisors, who in their views,

have more expert knowledge about curriculum issues. Findings also showed that circuit managers lacked capacity to create programmes that were geared to support teaching and learning in schools.

Circuit manager Mr Msomi had this to say in regards to programmes that he had in place for school principals, deputy principals and heads of department:

> *In my year plan I put aside time specifically for the induction of newly appointed senior management teams (SMT's) in the circuit. In these sessions we familiarise the newly appointed SMT's about their expected roles and responsibilities. We provide them with the relevant documents, information and manuals that will assist them in their new positions* (Mr Msomi).

Circuit manager Phiri summed it up by saying:

> *Every year in the circuit, I meet principals fortnightly, deputy principals and head of departments once a term. This, in my view is not enough to support and ensure effective teaching and learning in schools in the circuit, but it does help the SMT's to share expertise* (Mr Phiri).

A different view is provided by circuit manager Thwala when he said:

> *Yes, I hold regular meetings with principals and discuss issues that impact on teaching and learning, but the reality is that our meetings are about managerial issues. My view is that circuit managers should support programmes that are put in place by departmental officials who are experts in curriculum and assessment matters." What deputy principals and heads of department should do and how they should do it to monitor classroom practice and effective and quality assessments, is beyond my capacity* (Mr Thwala).

A document that binds all the stakeholders in education to the delivery of quality learning and teaching is one of the few that is perused by the researcher. This document is the Quality Learning and Teaching Programme (QLTP) which was launched by the national Minister of Education as Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) in 2008. The document spells it clearly that circuit managers will ensure that all schools receive the necessary resources in time for teaching to commence. The document envisages a programme for

circuit managers in which they will ensure that all schools have their full staff allocation, and that vacancies are filled without delay. The document also indicates that circuit managers must have a programme in which they show visits to all their schools on a regular basis. The quality learning and teaching programme require circuit managers to be always available to assist schools, principals and teachers. Most significantly the document stipulates that circuit managers must monitor teacher and student attendance and ensure that no child is out of school. It is expected that circuit managers must have programmes that show how they assist all schools to improve their performance. According to the information in the document, circuit managers must ensure that regular tests are conducted, and results are reported to parents. Together with the minutes of meetings the researcher looked at, there seemed to be supporting evidence that circuit managers had district- aligned programmes to support the underperforming schools. The year plans that the researcher perused, revealed that not all the circuit managers interviewed had programmes for the induction of newly appointed senior management teams in the schools. School functionality reports revealed that circuit managers had systems in place to check and monitor teacher and learner attendance and staff allocation in schools. The gap that was identified in the documents that were reviewed was that they did not show what programmes were put in place by circuit managers to assist schools in the challenges schools face in attempts to meet the mandates of the educational policies.

Observations made by the researcher about the programmes that are put in place by circuit managers to support teaching and learning corroborated with the findings from the interviews and documents reviews. The researcher in his capacity as the supervisor of the circuit manager observed that that there were few programmes that circuit managers had designed to support teaching and learning in schools. Most programmes that were put together by circuit managers to assist schools focused on managerial and administrative issues. The few that existed like induction and mentoring of newly-appointed school managers, were once off and showed no consistency. The programmes that aimed to develop school managers professionally were not user-friendly and were in general, not informed by the actual instructional challenges with which schools were facing. The researcher observed that circuit managers lacked the capacity to put in place effective programmes that would enhance teaching and learning in schools.

Literature supports the findings deduced from the tools used in this study to generate data. Lachowicz (2011) posits that effective circuit managers lead by putting in place programmes like learning communities which will ensure that teachers are sharing ideas, studying

effective instructional practices and analysing student data. Lachowicz agrees with the findings the researcher obtains through interviews, documents analysis and observations, when he states that circuit managers, to a greater extent, do not understand their instructional responsibilities and as a result no programmes that seek to enhance teaching and learning are visible. Davidson (2005) posits a similar view in his study of effective circuit managers. He explains that circuit managers need to put programmes in place in which frequent contacts and networks among principals are organised. In addition, Davidson proposes that circuit managers need to put in place a strategy for improvement that emphasises instructionally-focussed professional development, decentralisation of responsibility for implementation with high accountability for goal attainment by schools. The same viewpoint is shared by Castagnola (2005) and Sergiovanni (1990), who state that schools with superior student performance have circuit managers who are closely involved with curriculum and instruction initiatives and programmes.

From a theoretical perspective the model by Morgan and Peterson (2002) concurs with the findings generated about the programmes circuit managers put in place to support teaching and learning in schools. The model identifies five themes consistent among circuit managers whose programmes focus on teaching and learning. The model clearly illustrates that circuit managers in successful districts have programmes in place that develop principals as instructional leaders, circuit managers lead programmes that facilitate staff development, they have strategies that communicate system expectations, and circuit managers illustrate the importance of instruction through professional development.

4.2.5 Relationships between circuit managers and other stakeholders

It emerged from the findings that circuit managers believed in good and cordial human and interpersonal relationships with the school management teams. It also emerged that circuit managers were of the view that for the effective delivery of quality teaching and learning, a spirit of congeniality was necessary. The other findings that emerged was that an atmosphere of mutual respect, open communication, trust and tolerance were prerequisites for school success in the school circuits.

Circuit manager Mr Phiri described his working relationship with the school management team as follows:

My operation of management and supervision is not 'a top down'. I believe that for me to have full grasps of the challenges faced by schools I supervise, I need to create a spirit of warmth and friendliness (Mr Phiri).

Circuit manager Thwala responded to the interview question about his relationship with the senior management teams as follows:

The finger should be on the pulse and as a circuit manager you should know each one of your schools". He added:
Circuit managers are there to support, guide and complement the school management teams (Mr Thwala).

For Circuit manager Mr Msomi good human and interpersonal relationships between circuit managers and schools were a precondition for school improvement. He responded as follows:

We are colleagues and have a common purpose, that of delivering good and effective teaching and learning in schools. Without mutual trust, mutual respect, openness and transparency the entire purpose and core business in schools is compromised (Mr Msomi).

The *policy document on the organisation, roles and responsibilities of education districts* (2013) confirmed the findings deduced from the interviews. The policy document states clearly that in their dealings with the schools, circuit managers are required to exhibit the *Batho Pele* principles. These involve consultations with the clients, in this case the schools, setting and observing service standards, increasing access to services, ensuring courteous behaviour, acting openly and transparently and redressing sub-standard performance. The document further states that circuit managers are expected to make their services available to the schools and the public even-handedly, without bias or preference, upholding the values of the Constitution. This is in line with the responses from the interviewed circuit managers.

The researcher, in his capacity as the supervisor of circuit managers, observed that schools had confidence in their circuit managers. Meetings and school visits made together with the circuit managers revealed that there is mutual respect and understanding between circuit managers and schools. However, there are instances observed by the researcher where

schools felt that they were not given the expected and the desired level support by the circuit managers. When the researcher interacted with some schools, he observed that the relationship circuit managers had with schools, in terms of giving support in issues relating to teaching and learning, still required some strengthening. For example, in the researcher's own observation, circuit managers seldom interacted with the deputy principals and heads of departments about matters that affect teaching and learning in schools.

Literature supports the establishment of a positive school climate for the delivery of effective teaching and learning. Perry and Dermott (2003) argue that successful circuit managers are those who build the capacity of everyone in an organization like a school. They add that circuit managers influence relationship by clarifying expectations, setting priories, being consistent, creating opportunities for communication, having authentic conversations, modelling, setting clear directions, encouraging collaborative interactions, influencing culture and building accountability. According to Waters, Marzano and McNulty even high-performing schools often fall back when leaders depart because the circuit manager does not act as a holding tank for successful practices and develop local leadership**.**

A theoretical model that concurs with the findings obtained from the interviews, documents review and observations on the relationship circuit managers must have with the school leaders is the one proposed by Hord and Sommers (2007). In the model Hord and Sommers highlight the fact that successful circuit managers always strive to create a shared vision and plan for promoting, enhancing and sustaining a positive school climate. They set policies specifically promoting shared leadership, continuous improvement and shared decision-making and capacity building mechanisms for school managers.

4.2.6 How circuit managers influence school leaders to prioritise teaching and learning in their schools

The findings that emerged from the participants were that in all the school visits and meetings held by the circuit managers, the issue of teaching and learning was always a standing item. It also emerged from the findings that circuit managers used learner-performance data to influence school leaders to prioritise teaching and learning. In addition, findings suggested that circuit monitored the effective utilisation of learning and teaching resources in order to improve teaching and learning.

As a response to the question as to how he influenced school leaders to prioritise teaching and learning in his schools, circuit manager Mr Msomi had this to say:

> *In all my school visits and meetings I hold with the school management teams, the main item in our discussions, will be about strategies to improve and enhance teaching and learning. We discuss strategies to improve academic performance, ways to curb late coming by both teachers and learners, challenges in the curriculum, assessments and other such issues* (Mr Msomi).

Circuit manager Mr Thwala's response to this interview question was as follows:

> *I make it a point that school leaders understand that without the relevant and adequate learning and teaching resources schools will never improve. I always insist that school leaders put mechanisms in place that will ensure that the schools order relevant textbooks and that both teachers and learners have all the necessary support materials they require to improve teaching and learning* (Mr Thwala).

Circuit manager Mr Phiri was emphatic when he responded to the question that required him to explain how he influenced school leaders to prioritise teaching and learning in schools.

> *In our meetings and visits to school leaders, we always discuss test scores, performances of learners per learning area in every school term. We analyse learner performance data, identify discrepancies between current and desired outcomes and share learner achievement data with all stakeholders* (Mr Phiri).

When checking minutes of meetings, items discussed in the meetings with school leaders and log entries that circuit managers made when visiting schools, evidence showed that there were very few instances where matters that focused on teaching and learning were given priority. Documents revealed that circuit managers interacted with school leaders mainly on crisis and conflict management issues. Documents like the itineraries, school functionality reports and the monthly records of visits by circuit managers showed no evidence of the discussions of the school improvement plans, classroom practice, the alignment of assessment, curriculum and instruction, modelling of good teaching and focus on professional development.

Observations corroborated with the findings generated from the interviews and documents review. In his capacity as a supervisor of the circuit managers, the researcher observed that circuit managers discussed issues of examination performance by learners, schools' teaching time tables, academic year plans, teacher and learner attendance, policies on curricular issues, staffing matters and the requisition, delivery and the distribution of learning and teaching support materials to schools. However, the researcher observed that little was done by circuit managers to support school leaders about what should be done to improve classroom practice, model good teaching, implement effective learning programmes and put in place assessments that are aligned with the desired learning outcomes.

Literature confirms most of the findings from the three tools the study used to generate data. For example, Davidson (2005) contends that circuit managers influence school leaders to prioritise teaching and learning by constantly providing guidance and support to school leaders on issues that seek to enhance teaching and learning. He adds that the circuit managers' frequent visits and meetings with school leaders and regular communication about curriculum and instruction, make them prioritise teaching and learning in their schools. Bjork (1993) points out, that success or failure of a public school is directly linked to the influence of the circuit manager, particularly those who maintain a high level of involvement in instructional programs. The findings from the data generated are further confirmed by Mart (2011) who posits that high-achieving school districts have at the helm, circuit managers who take seriously their role as instructional leader by being personally involved in the supervision and evaluation of school leaders. A view similar to the findings from the generated data is expressed by Lashway (2002), who states that circuit managers who are instructionally focused, influence school leaders to prioritise teaching and learning by specifically using resources to increase instructional effectiveness and student achievement, and develop institutional capacity for providing a strong learning environment.

A theoretical model that is consistent with the findings on how the circuit managers influence the school leaders to prioritise teaching and learning, is the one discussed by Edwards (2007). In her model she highlights the fact that circuit managers need to influence school leaders in setting up school priorities that are consistent with the goals and the direction of the circuit. The model also emphasises the focusing of school leaders on results to foster continuous

improvement. It also puts emphasis on circuit managers taking a lead in ensuring that school leaders prioritise the allocation of resources in their schools to meet the circuit performance goals. Edwards' model also regards the formation of strong partnerships and networks among the schools in the circuit and beyond, as another area of focus circuit managers need to explore as a way to influence school leaders to prioritise teaching and learning in their schools. In addition, the model contends that circuit managers need to be more involved in the recruitment and selection of staff to ensure that curricular and instructional requirements are met.

4.2.7 How circuit managers influence learner or school outcomes

The findings suggested that through regular visits and meetings with the school leaders and focusing on issues that enhance teaching and learning, circuit managers influenced learner or school outcomes. It also emerged from the findings that circuit managers contributed to student learning indirectly, through their direct influence on school leaders. In addition, findings suggested that a number of other matters, other than those that are supposed to cause circuit managers to attend to their core business, which is to support teaching and learning, swayed them away from making a meaningful influence to learner or school outcomes.

According to circuit manager Mr Phiri his role in influencing learner or school outcomes was about giving support, guidance and direction. He stated this opinion as follows:

> *My visibility in schools that I supervise means a lot, just to be there when schools need my support, guidance and direction. A simple word of praise or motivation either to teachers or learners when they have performed well goes a long way to make them want to do more* (Mr Phiri).

On the other hand, circuit manager Mr Msomi added to circuit manager Mr Phiri's view when he spoke about the communication of a vision to schools. He aptly expressed his view as follows:

> *I believe that communicating and articulating the vision in all our school during visits and meetings, has a massive influence on attaining the desired outcomes* (Mr Msomi).

Circuit manager Thwala believed that his influence on school outcomes was on facilitating the availability of the required human and physical resources to schools. His view was as follows:

> *I influence learner outcomes through ensuring that schools in the circuit have the required qualified staff compliment. Furthermore, I got all out of my way to ensure that every school in the circuit has adequate and relevant teaching and learning support materials* (Mr Thwala).

Another dimension that was brought in the discussion was the one from circuit manager Msomi who added that he believed that as a circuit manager he needed to take the lead in the creation of structures and opportunities for school leaders to collaborate. This what he said:

> *My influence is through galvanising collaborative support among school leaders in the circuit and beyond. I strongly believe in the sharing of knowledge and skills through networking and team work. I facilitate workshops where school leaders in the circuit share both managerial and academic expertise* (Msomi).

It came out during the interviews that circuit managers lacked the capacity to actually implement what really should happen within the schools and the classrooms that will deliver the desired learner or school outcomes. This perspective is given by circuit manager Mr Phiri when he said:

> *I encourage and urge colleagues who are curriculum experts in our district to visit our school regularly and I allocate them slots and items in our circuit meetings where they give strategies to school leaders about classroom practice, assessment techniques and other issues on curriculum delivery* (Mr Phiri).

The Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document (1999) confirms the findings generated in the study during the interviews about how circuit managers can influence learner or school outcomes. The document mentions that the circuit manager has to assist in the equitable deployment of staff and resources to facilitate teaching and learning. The issue of developing and maintaining effective partnerships among school staff comes out clearly in

the document. The PAM document also refers to the development of systems for monitoring and recording the progress made by learners towards achievement of targets set. Reports on the turn-around strategies for underperforming schools in the circuit, the minutes of meetings held with school leaders and log entries, school functionality reports and itineraries that showed visits and the purpose thereof, all concurred with the findings that circuit managers visited schools and the visits included discussions of issues about teaching and learning in schools.

The researcher observed that despite the visits and meetings circuit managers held with school leaders on matters about teaching and learning, circuit managers lacked the capacity to influence the actual learning programmes and practices in schools. The researcher observed as a supervisor of the circuit managers, that circuit managers were always embroiled in activities that did not allow them enough time with schools on matters that enhance teaching and learning.

Literature by Bush (2007) supports the findings obtained from the three tools used in the study to generate data. According to Bush there is an increasing recognition of the fact that effective leadership and management are vital if schools are to be successful in providing good learning opportunities for students. There was also evidence that high quality leadership makes a significant difference to school improvement and learning outcomes. The view that the leadership of the circuit manager does influence school outcomes is also supported by Leithwood (2004) who states that there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of a visionary leadership from the school district. Also supporting the findings about the influence of the circuit manager on school or learner outcomes is the view by Togneri and Anderson (2003) who posit that by setting directions through charting clear course that all schools understand, circuit managers indirectly influence learner achievement. In addition, Bjork (1993) states that improved districts use data as evidence to monitor results, for making instructional and resource allocation decisions, and for accountability. Circuit managers provide time and training in the use of data and help schools in gathering and interpreting data. The evidence is used to monitor equity, make decisions about alignment, and target professional development efforts. This view is similar to the response circuit managers provided when they explained how they used various forms of circuit data to influence school outcomes.

From an instructional leadership theory point of view, the model by Murphy and Hallinger (1988) seems to fit well with the findings the study generated from the interviews, documents review and observations on how circuit managers influence school or learner outcomes. Strong instructionally-focused leadership from the circuit manager is according to Murphy and Hallinger (1988) the main reason why schools in the circuit perform well. The model puts emphasis on the establishment and enforcement of circuit vision, mission and goals as a way circuit managers can influence school outcomes. It also regards the direct personal involvement of the circuit managers in monitoring performance through school visits and meetings with school leaders as a contributory factor in bringing the desired outcomes in schools. The model also places emphasis on the provision and the alignment of the human and physical resources by the circuit manager to schools as another way of influencing school outcomes. Like the findings obtained about how circuit managers influenced school outcomes, the model includes the systematic use of student testing and other data for circuit planning and instructional improvements as a means by which circuit managers can influence learner outcomes. Also mentioned in the model and similar to the findings, is that circuit managers should provide capacity building, accountability and innovation support to school leaders in order to improve teaching and learning.

4.2.8 The challenges circuit managers face with the various stakeholders and how they mitigate them

The findings suggested that there were certain policy decisions from the Department of education that made it difficult for circuit managers to support teaching and learning. Findings also seemed to suggest that the upper hand and the powers teacher unions had on educational decisions, resulted in circuit managers not being in a position to support effective teaching in schools they supervised. It also emerged from the findings that the lack of clear roles and responsibilities of School Governing Bodies (SGB) and their lack of capacity had negative effects on the instructional responsibilities of the circuit managers. In addition, findings suggested that the lack of leadership skills of school principals resulted in circuit managers focussing on conflict management issues instead of concentrating on giving support to teaching and learning in schools. Findings further suggested that the highly unionised teachers made it difficult for circuit managers to implement policies and mandates that aimed to enhance teaching and learning in schools. Lastly, it also emerged that circuit managers believed they can overcome the challenges coming from the different stakeholders

through adherence to legislation, familiarising themselves with departmental policies and implementing them as required.

Circuit managers had a lot to say when asked about the challenges they faced from the various stakeholders as they attempted to support schools to deliver effective teaching and learning.

Circuit manager Mr Phiri had this to say about the challenges he facesd with the Department of education:

> *While we all understand the rationale for the rationalisation policy of the teaching staff in schools, we as circuit managers are frustrated in our attempts to support teaching and learning when the process is flawed by the placement of teachers who do not meet the curricular needs of schools in which they are placed. Furthermore, the placement of teachers who are not suitably qualified, and the long delays of appointments of the incumbents in the vacant advertise posts does not assist teaching and learning in schools* (Mr Phiri)

Circuit manager Msomi pointed to another area that affects teaching learning negatively:

> *For me, the late payment of salaries for the newly appointed and substitute educators completely demoralises and demotivates teachers and thus militate against all the efforts of the circuit managers to support effective teaching and learning* (Mr Msomi).

A different view was mentioned by circuit manager Thwala about another challenge circuit managers are faced with in their quest to support teaching and learning.

> *The department allows the appointment of incompetent district officials who are thereafter not thoroughly inducted and mentored for the delicate job of servicing schools. There are thrown in the deep end, and they contribute greatly in making schools dysfunctional* (Mr Thwala).

Circuit managers had this to say about challenges they faced with the teacher unions as they attempted to support effective teaching and learning in schools.

Circuit manager Mr Msomi responded as follows:

Some of the issues and demands raised by the teacher unions are genuine and have sense, but the numerous disruptions of teaching and learning in schools and the interference in learning programmes that aim to support teaching and learning in schools have negative effects (Mr Msomi).

According to circuit manager Mr Thwala teacher unions are overprotective of their members. He has this to say:

Teacher unions have caused great damage to the process of teaching and learning. Teacher unions condone unprofessional behaviours of their members, who do not honour class lessons, who absent themselves, who lack content knowledge of the subjects they teach, and do not assess their learners as required. When school leaders confront these teachers and expect them to be accountable, teacher unions come to their defence (Mr Thwala).

For circuit manager Mr Phiri, his concern about teacher unions on the aspect of effective teaching and learning was as follows:

For me, teacher unions are the main reason for the appointments and the promotions of incompetent and ineffective teachers and district officials who cannot deliver quality service to schools. As long as the available vacancies are filled by their members, for teacher unions it is enough, no matter how unsuited the member is for that position. This for me is one of the biggest challenges circuit managers are faced with, as they attempt to support effective teaching and learning in schools (Mr Phiri).

Circuit managers were unanimous about the challenges they face from the School Governing Bodies (SGB) on their mission to support effective teaching and learning in schools.

Their response is best summed by circuit manager Msomi when he says:

The confusion of the SGB's about their roles and responsibilities, their lack of capacity in supporting schools lead to the rise of a series of crisis that cause circuit managers to be swayed away from focusing on instructional matters in schools. (Mr Msomi).

The challenges posed by the principals which caused circuit managers to fail to support schools on issues of teaching and learning, were mainly revolving around the lack of leadership and management skills.

Circuit manager Mr Phiri's response on this aspect was as follows:

> *We are fire dousers instead of being instructional leaders, because of principals who deliberately flout departmental policies and rules. They lack leadership and management competencies. The principal position has these days changed dramatically. Principals need to be transformational leaders and use distributed leadership style as they interact with various stakeholders* (Mr Phiri).

Circuit manager Thwala echoed almost the same sentiment in his response when he said:

> *Principals who do not have vision and are not consultative and willing to learn and develop themselves professionally, make life difficult for the circuit managers in the sense that much time is spent resolving conflicts in their schools instead of supporting effective teaching and learning. (Mr Thwala).*

According to the interviewed circuit managers, teachers were also posing a challenge as circuit managers attempted to support effective teaching and learning.

Circuit manager Mr Msomi had this to say about the challenges they faced from the teachers as they supported effective teaching:

> *Teachers are highly unionised and will deliberately adhere to calls of their unions, despite those calls being in conflict with the departmental mandates* (Mr Msomi).

Circulars from the Department of education like for example, *KZN circular 56 of 2013* states clearly that schools should not make new teacher appointments and must declare vacancies and surplus teachers in their schools. The circular stipulates that where the vacancies exist the department will place surplus educators and educators contracted to the department who are bursary holders. This arrangement puts a lot of strain on schools and have a negative effect on the task of supporting teaching and learning entrusted to the circuit managers. Usually these surplus educators are teachers discarded by their schools because of their inefficiencies and unprofessional behaviours. Recently, the department issued a circular, *KZN circular 51*

of 2013 in which the Head of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of education indicated that from the beginning of the last term of the school year no appointment of temporary and substitute educators should be processed. This presents a massive challenge to circuit managers in their mission to support effective teaching and learning in schools, for it means that learners are to remain attended in the event that schools lose teachers who take leave during this term of the school year.

On the challenges posed by the School Governing Bodies on the instructional responsibilities of the circuit managers, documents like *the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996* do not provide any indication as to the level of qualification, skills and expertise that members who serve on the School Governing Body (SGB) and their sub-committee should have, to carry out sophisticated and delicate school functions like recommending the teaching and the management staff for appointments, if there are vacancies in schools. This affects teaching and learning adversely and is a challenge to the circuit managers.

Observations made by the researcher corroborated with the findings from responses circuit managers gave during the interviews and these findings were supported by the documents that are reviewed. The researcher in his capacity as the supervisor of circuit managers observed that circuit managers were impeded in their instructional responsibilities when the Department of Education takes long to process the appointments into vacant posts and the payment of salaries of teachers. This demotivated teachers and derailed effective teaching and learning. Observations also confirmed that teacher union activities during school time had disastrous effects on the core business of schooling. The work-to- rule campaigns, sit-ins organised by teacher unions contributed to the failure of circuit managers to support effective teaching and learning. In his observation the researcher concurred with the findings about poor leadership from the principals as a contributory factor to the lack of instructional support by circuit managers to schools. The nature of conflicts that usually demanded the intervention of the circuit managers were largely stemming from the lack of vision and the autocratic leadership style of some school leaders. In his observation, the researcher noticed that in schools where the leadership lacks vision, policies are not implemented and there were no control measures and as result there would be crisis and chaos which required circuit managers to intervene. The researcher also observed that most of the conflicts circuit managers were called to deal with, had nothing to do with the core business of teaching and learning.

Another observation that the researcher made was that there was a discrepancy between the Integrated Quality Measurement Systems (IQMS) scores collected by circuit managers from schools and the actual performance of learners. This was a challenge circuit manager faced in their attempts to effect school improvements in schools. The situation was further exacerbated by the number of reviews of the school curriculum in recent years in the South African education system. This researcher observed that these reviews resulted in the change of the textbooks and workbooks and the need to retrain teachers in response to these changes. It became a major challenge for circuit managers to effectively support teaching and learning in schools under these situations.

Literature supports the findings of what circuit managers confront as they attempted to support effective teaching and learning in schools. Edwards (2007) contends that circuit managers are bound by law to implement legislation that has disastrous effects on teaching and learning at schools. This view is expressed in a different way by Davidson (2005), who states that amid the rush towards accountability reforms, the refrain has swelled into a loud chorus demanding every circuit managers to manage bureaucracies effectively, lead principals and teachers in instructional matters, and mobilize political coalitions of teachers, parents, and students to move schools from being inadequate and just good-enough to ones that are excellent. Antonnuci (2001), adds that to survive circuit managers must manage the politics, the daily pressures, and the mandates of their district. It seems that if circuit managers are to accomplish all their instructional responsibilities, strong leadership from all facets of the district will need to rise to the occasion (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2007).

Literature by Pattillo (2012) is consistent with the findings which states that the lack of effective leadership by the school leaders, poses a massive challenge to the circuit managers in their quest to support teaching and learning. Principal Msholoolo is cited in a study by Pattillo (2010) where he states that people serving under a directionless leader get frustrated. He adds that they suffocate but if they have the right people to follow, if they get the right leaders in their workplaces, people will perform. His view is that people like to work, but they need to be managed and given the right direction. Pattillo (2010) is very emphatic in pointing an accusing finger to the teacher unions as a stakeholder that makes it difficult for circuit managers to support effective teaching and learning. He describes the neglect of teaching and learning and the disruptions of classes by the teacher unions as quiet corruption

and in his view this is a major challenge facing the circuit managers as they attempt to support teaching and learning in schools.

4.3 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the findings and analysed data generated through conducting interviews with the three circuit managers from each of the three divisions of the chosen school district. In addition to the discussion and analysis of data generated through interviews, the chapter was engaged with the findings and analyses of data from the documents reviewed and observations of the instructional leadership practices of the circuit managers. It analysed the findings for each of the interview questions and then compared and contrasted the findings with the data from the documents and from observations. The next chapter is the last chapter of this study. It will have an introduction, a summary of the entire study, the conclusions derived from the study and will end with the recommendations and the implications of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented, analysed and discussed the data from the study. In this chapter the summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations are presented. After a careful analysis of data, certain conclusions emerged based on the critical questions formulated in Chapter one. Drawing from the findings outlined in Chapter Four and the conclusions of the study, pertinent recommendations are made.

5.2 The summary of the study

The focus of the study was to explore the role of the circuit managers in enhancing instructional leadership practices in schools.

Chapter One gave an orientation of what the study entails. The chapter gave an overview of the following: the statement of the problem, purpose and rationale for the study, key research aims and questions of the study, clarification of key concepts, summary of the literature review and the theoretical framework, the research paradigm, research design and methodology, limitation of the study, the outline of chapters and ended with the summary of the chapter.

Chapter Two provided an in-depth literature review and the theoretical frameworks that related and threw more insight on the instructional leadership practices of the circuit manager.

Chapter Three discussed the details concerning research methods utilized in this study. The methods for the generation of data, analysis of data, issues of trustworthiness and ethical issues were highlighted.

Chapter Four dealt with the presentation of the findings, the analysis and the discussion of generated data.

Chapter Five presents an overall reflection on each chapter of the entire research project. Conclusions premised and the outlined in the previous chapter are foregrounded. Pertinent

recommendations, based on the aforementioned conclusions, are then suggested to conclude the prominent aspects of the chapter.

5.3 Conclusions

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), conclusions serve to summarise and bring together the main areas covered in the writing. Conclusions also serve to give a final comment or judgement about a particular study. As its key research aim, this study sought to explore the role of circuit managers in leading, managing and supporting instructional leadership practices in schools. It also sought to elicit the circuit managers' views on the challenges they experience as well as to investigate how they navigate those challenges as they support instructional leadership practices in schools. The overarching research question for this study was: *What role is played by circuit managers to enhance instructional leadership practices in schools?*

A significant conclusion that was gleaned from this study's findings was the focus and desire that the circuit managers had in being effective instructional leaders. It however, emerged from the findings that circuit managers have many roles in which they serve as managerial supervisors, educational mentors, political leaders, change agents, as well as primary communicators in their circuits. Serving in all these different roles, it emerged, that this significantly limited the amount of time and energy that circuit managers could direct towards instructional leadership. The circuit managers expressed on several occasions their wish to exhibit and thoroughly carry out instructional leadership duties that were very similar to Krug's (1992) five dimensions of instructional leadership: defining a mission; managing curriculum and instruction; supervising teaching; monitoring student progress; and promoting an instructional climate. The circuit managers were exceedingly reflective of their own practices and actions in this regard and constantly attempted to balance instructional leadership practices with managerial tasks.

Another most obvious finding that emerged from this study was that that though circuit managers are not directly involved in the process of teaching and learning, but through various ways they played a significant role in influencing the way the programmes of teaching and learning occur in schools. Through providing a safe and orderly academic environment; providing a positive and supportive climate for students and staff; maintaining

the district vision and setting goals focused on high levels of student learning; maintaining high expectations for students; being visible and accessible to staff and students; communicating effectively with staff; shared leadership, decision-making, and staff empowerment (building capacity); modelling instructional leadership, circuit managers influence teaching and learning in schools.

The other major finding that emerged from the study was that circuit managers lacked the capacity to provide instructional support to all schools. The study found out that although circuit managers understood their roles and responsibilities in supporting teaching and learning in schools, there were so many events and situations that took them away from executing their core function, which is that of supporting effective teaching and learning in schools. Circuit managers were always bogged down in conflict management situations, disciplinary cases involving both teachers and learners, ensuring the implementation of the department of education policies, collecting and collating statistical information. Despite the visits and the meetings that they made from time to time to schools, it emerged that they lacked capacity to actually give direction as to what should happen to enhance teaching and learning in schools.

Evidence from this study also showed that circuit managers did not have effective programmes to support school leaders so that schools could deliver quality teaching and learning. Circuit managers did not have tangible programmes to support and improve the skills of principals, deputy principals and heads of department who are the actual drivers and implementers of instructional programmes in schools. The study showed that there were no professional development and capacity building programmes for school leaders, that were initiated and organised by the circuit managers to support teaching and learning in schools.

The findings in the study further suggested that there was no synergy in terms of instructional activities and programmes provided by the circuit managers and the other district officials to teaching and learning in support of schools. It emerged from the findings that circuit managers did not communicate and work together with their district counterparts who were also tasked and expected to support teaching and learning in schools.

Evidence in the study also showed that circuit managers did not have the capacity to use learner performance data effectively to analyse, interpret, and apply it for strategic planning

in the circuits and also for school planning. Circuit managers lacked capacity to use the available school and learner performance data to inform decision-making processes that aimed to improve teaching and learning in schools.

The findings indicated that there were significant challenges to instructional leadership for the circuit managers. The findings suggested that there were certain policy decisions from the Department of education that made it difficult for circuit managers to support teaching and learning. Findings also seemed to suggest that the upper hand and the powers teacher unions had on educational decisions, resulted in circuit managers not being in a position to support effective teaching in schools they supervise. It also emerged from the findings that the lack of clear roles and responsibilities of School Governing Bodies (SGB) and their lack of capacity had negative effects on the instructional responsibilities of the circuit managers.

In addition, findings suggested that the lack of leadership skills of school principals resulted in circuit managers having to focus on conflict management issues instead of concentrating on giving support to teaching and learning in schools. Findings further suggested that the highly unionised teachers made it difficult for circuit managers to implement policies and mandates that aimed to enhance teaching and learning in schools. Bjork (2003) agrees with these findings when he states that prevailing norms, values, beliefs, and accepted ways of doing things, leadership deficiencies, and general unfamiliarity with notions of learning communities often inhibit school and school district improvement efforts. Lastly, it also emerged that circuit managers believed they could overcome the challenges coming from the different stakeholders through adherence to legislation, familiarising themselves with departmental policies and implementing them as required.

5.4 Recommendations

Informed by the conclusions above, the following recommendations are suggested:

Recommendation One

In this study the circuit managers frequently referenced the lack of available time, largely created by administrative duties and accountability reporting, as a significant challenge that adversely impacted their abilities to be effective instructional leaders. The circuit managers explained that if they had more time that they could devote to becoming a stronger instructional leader they would use this time to create a more robust learning

communities that would collaboratively strive to improve their skills to manage teaching and learning and as a result improve student achievement. Therefore, the challenge for policy-makers was to endeavour to provide more time for circuit managers and school leaders to actively engage in professional discussions that examine evidence of student learning and develop strategies for improving teaching.

Recommendation Two

The recommendation that was gleaned from these findings relates to the suggestion that a well-developed and comprehensive circuit strategic plan be developed following thorough consultation between schools and the circuit managers. This strategic plan would increase the level of coherency within the circuit, ensure a stronger alignment of actions and the effective utilisation of resources. This strategic plan should be research driven, support systemic reform, be sustainable over time and should use agreed upon data to determine whether progress has been made and objectives have been achieved.

Recommendation Three

Findings from the study showed that circuit managers lacked capacity to provide instructional support to all schools. The study has found out that generally, circuit managers did not understand their roles and responsibilities in supporting teaching and learning in schools. It is recommended therefore that for the person to be a circuit manager he or she should have served successfully as principal of a school for at least five years. This will ensure as Antonnuci (2011) contends that circuit managers must have acquired a number of skills to be successful in their job. In his view the circuit manager's job involves working with school principals and it is as a principal when he or she gains expertise in curriculum and instruction, personnel management, communication and relation-building.

Recommendation Four

It is recommended that circuit managers need not concern themselves with becoming masters of all subject matter as a means of affecting the perceptions of schools of their instructional leadership competence. Facilitating the creation of professional learning communities by the circuit managers can help to sustain circuit-led initiatives for student achievement. The ability of the circuit manager to demonstrate beliefs about the importance of his or her function as an instructional resource could be an important

indication of effective instructional leadership. Through the management of the circuit's instructional mission, the quality of the system-wide curriculum, and attention to the educational needs of the circuit, the circuit manager can demonstrate competence as an effective instructional leader in the eyes of the school leaders.

Recommendation Five

A significant conclusion that was observed from the findings of this study was the realisation by the circuit managers that their circuits' process of professional development had to change if it was to better meet the needs of school leaders. The "one-shot" workshop or professional development sessions used as "information downloads" provide little or no time or opportunity for engaging school leaders in instructional practices. It is recommended therefore that circuit managers get skilled in generating a community of learners among the school leaders who would actively collaborate, share best practices, and support and encourage one another to become better at the craft of supporting effective teaching and learning in schools.

Recommendation Six

The lack of synergy in the instructional activities and programmes provided by the circuit managers and the other district officials as they support schools require that frequent contacts among these district officials be encouraged and be regulated by the district managers. Programmes that will allow discussions focused on assessment data, accountability for student learning, school performance, instructional effectiveness and instructional programme improvement between the circuit managers and the other district officials is recommended. This requires that in school visits and circuit meetings, circuit managers need to work as teams with the other district officials as they have a common goal, that of supporting teaching and learning in schools.

Recommendation Seven

Another recommendation of the findings of this study would be that the preparation programmes for circuit managers provide practical experiences and allow time to develop collaborative solutions for problems of practice. It was evident from the findings that circuit managers lack capacity to use the available school and learner performance data to inform decision-making processes that aim to improve teaching and learning in schools. It is therefore a recommendation that circuit managers work together and formulate

programmes that will equip them with skills that will enable them to analyse, interpret and utilise available learner assessment results for future school improvements.

Recommendation Eight

It is inevitable that circuit managers be not confronted with an array of challenges from the other stakeholders as they execute their instructional duties in schools. For circuit managers to minimise and deal with the serious challenges they face from the school governing bodies, teacher unions, community leaders, the Department of Education, principals and teachers, it is recommended that they keep abreast with the educational policies and involve the stakeholders in decision-making processes. Morgan and Peterson (2002) contend that involvement of stakeholder groups in the development of the circuit' mission does increase the likelihood of community support when difficult decisions need to be made. They recommend that, in light of the arduous and time consuming process of dealing with conflicts and other non-instructional issues, as cited by the circuit managers in the findings, there is a need to develop and implement a consultation process that is streamlined yet still captures the ideas and concerns of the stakeholders.

5.5 The implications of the study

The findings from this study may be of use to circuit managers as they consider the many responsibilities and challenges they face in providing instructional leadership for schools in their circuits. Findings may also be of interest to researchers who are concerned with better understanding the instructional practices of the circuit managers. While this study found out that there is very little contribution made by circuit managers in supporting effective teaching and learning in schools, one implication that emerged was the importance of the circuit manager's actions in modelling an academically-oriented vision for all the schools in the circuit. This implication is supported by the findings that circuit managers in higher performing circuits are more involved in planning for instruction and developing principals as instructional leaders.

In addition this study suggests that circuit managers should not exclude themselves from involvement in instructional planning, but should instead work collaboratively with the district curriculum personnel and involve principals as they are the ones who are directly involved with the monitoring of the implementation and the delivery of effective

instructional programmes in schools. Furthermore, this study also points to the importance of investing time and resources in developing principals' instructional leadership which should be initiated, led and facilitated by the circuit managers. It must be noted that circuit managers supervise principals directly and principals play a critical leadership role in the district's instructional program through their daily interaction with students and teachers. Circuit managers can develop such skills through their involvement in evaluation processes, their influence on the nature and scope of professional development activities, and the manner in which they attend to all school matters that impact on effective teaching and learning.

Mart (2011) posits that it has been only recently that circuit managers were expected to be the educational leaders of the district with responsibility for improving student achievement. To ensure that circuit managers undertake this responsibility in an effective way, the district offices in conjunction with the circuit managers need to develop circuit managers performance goals related to student achievement and these be incorporated into the evaluation instrument. In addition, the implication of study, based on the findings that circuit managers lack capacity and skills to support effective teaching and learning in schools, goal-oriented induction and mentoring programmes need to be designed and implemented, in order to assist the circuit managers.

Lastly, the limited scope of this study should be expanded. A more in-depth qualitative examination of the instructional leadership practices, and challenges to these behaviours, of more circuit managers should be designed and implemented. It would be important to replicate this study to verify whether these specific findings are representative of other circuit managers. In addition, a further examination of this topic with a quantitative review of student achievement data in relation to challenges to the circuit managers' instructional leadership practices would establish a statistical relationship between instructional leadership practices and challenges and student learning. Future research should be conducted to review the processes or procedures circuit managers use and implement to make the transition from being managerially fixated to being instructionally driven.

5.6 Chapter summary

This chapter outlined the main conclusions drawn from the study. Recommendations are then gleaned from the findings and the conclusions that emerged from the study. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the implications of the study and the recommendations for further study are made.

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