



*Leading Teaching and Learning: Lessons from Two Secondary
School Principals Leading in a Deprived Context*

By

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I, **Nothando Zungu**, declare that:

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As the candidate's Supervisor, I agree to the submission of this thesis.

Signed:

Dr Nokukhanya Ndlovu

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I would like to thank God for giving me the courage and strength to embark on this journey, indeed all things are possible through God.

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ABSTRACT

The role of principals has significantly evolved. In modern schools, principals face multiple responsibilities. Today's principals are often likened to CEOs, as they are tasked with leading and managing complex organisations while performing managerial, instructional, and political roles. This multifaceted role is especially challenging for principals, as they work in environments fuelled by constant changes and heightened accountability. Furthermore, the context in which schools are situated heavily influences leadership. Some schools are located in environments that are supportive and conducive to effective leadership. However, many others are situated in deprived contexts where multiple factors collude to making the task of leading and managing more challenging.

This study explored the leadership practices of principals leading schools in deprived contexts, focusing on how they navigate these challenging environments. It also aimed to identify the factors that constrain and enable their leadership, utilising the Leadership for Learning model as its theoretical framework. Adopting a case study methodology, the study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. Two principals from secondary schools situated in deprived contexts were purposively selected for this inquiry.

The thematic analysis of the data revealed that the principals employed various strategies to promote effective teaching and learning in their schools. These strategies included fostering collaboration with the school community and adopting the three-legged approach to ensure active participation from multiple stakeholders. The principals also prioritised strengthening the instructional core by ensuring full curriculum coverage, delegating monitoring responsibilities, and assigning the most effective teachers to Grade 12. In addition, the principals went beyond their traditional roles by taking on extra responsibilities, such as teaching, marking and other administrative tasks, to address the challenges of resource constraints and ensure the continuity of teaching and learning. While the principals demonstrated adaptability in navigating leadership challenges, the study also highlighted significant systemic obstacles, such as inadequate resources and bureaucratic delays in procurement processes, which negatively impacted teaching and learning. Despite these challenges, the principals identified parental involvement and support from internal and external stakeholders as critical enablers of their leadership practices.

While current scholarship asserts that principals shape and are shaped by the contexts they lead, this study extends knowledge by illustrating that the principals have contextual literacy, which cultivates contextual awareness, guiding leadership practices. We also learn that though deprived contexts pose various contextual challenges, principals are able to draw on assets within their school-community and set high standards for their schools. Not oblivious to contextual challenges, principals are able to identify these prejudices and find various ways to navigate leadership.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATP Annual Teaching Plan

DBE Department of Basic Education

HODs Heads of Department

LFL Leadership for Learning

MD Multiple Deprivation

MDI Multiple Deprivation Index

NSNP National School Nutrition Programme

SGB School Governing Body

SMT School Management Team

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction and background to the study

Section 29(1)(a) of the South African Constitution Act No.108 - of 1996, recognises education as a fundamental human right. The preamble of the South African Schools Act No, 108 of 1996 further states that all schools must “provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners” (p. 3). Although access to education is considered a right, and the issue of quality is emphasised, there are growing concerns about the inadequacy of certain South African schools to fulfil this provision (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015; Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019; Nortje, 2017).

The education landscape in South Africa is often described as a tale of two distinct realities, captured by the “two-nation metaphor” (Maringe et al., 2015, p. 364). This metaphor suggests that South Africa has two separate and unequal education systems, reflecting the country’s historical apartheid legacy. One system is characterised by well-resourced, high-quality schools often attended by students from affluent communities. While the other system is marked by under-resourced schools, typically attended by students from deprived contexts. According to Chikoko et al. (2015), in South Africa, a mixture of first-world and third-world institutions exist within the same national borders. On one hand, there are well-resourced, high-performing schools that rival the best in developed nations (Chikoko et al., 2015). These schools boast modern facilities, qualified teachers and robust learning environments, offering their learners opportunities comparable to those in wealthier countries (Chikoko et al., 2015). On the other hand, a starkly different reality exists in dysfunctional schools, plagued by a lack of resources, understaffing and crumbling infrastructure (Chikoko et al., 2015; Fleisch, 2008). These schools, often located in deprived communities, struggle to provide even the most basic educational necessities (Maringe & Moletsane,2015). These challenges perpetuate the cycle of disadvantage, making it difficult for students from deprived communities to access quality education and break the cycle of poverty. Amongst other things, contexts with multiple deprivations are characterised by a lack of relevant infrastructure; high poverty levels; income, material, capability and nutrition challenges; and distance from basic public services, which negatively impact teaching and learning (Chikoko, 2018). This is troubling because while there are silos of excellence in deprived contexts (Pepper & Nettle, 2017), the educational outcomes and opportunities available to their learners’ pale in comparison to their privileged

counterparts. It is these schools that often find it challenging to meet their mandate of providing quality education (Chikoko et al., 2015).

Maringe and Moletsane (2015) highlight that more than three-quarters of schools in South Africa are in deprived contexts and are dysfunctional. Cimen (2021) adds that a majority of learners come from these disadvantaged communities struggling with various forms of deprivation (Cimen, 2021). This stark divide within the South African education system raises critical questions about equality of access and opportunity. As such, there is an urgent need to address the systemic inequalities that perpetuate this two-nation reality and ensure that every child, regardless of their background, has access to quality education.

Given this reality and the expectation to provide quality education, principals are tasked with leading schools and ensuring that they fulfil their educational mandate, regardless of the context. It is also widely acknowledged that principals are crucial to the success of their schools (Day et al., 2016; Fullan, 2023; Mestry, 2017). The South African Standard for Principalship outlines the key competencies of principalship. Amongst these, principals are expected to be Leading the Learning School and Shaping the Direction and Development of the School (RSA, 2014). However, in deprived contexts, there exists multiple challenging factors which conspire to render teaching and learning challenging (Myende et al., 2020), and providing a satisfactory, fit-for-purpose educational experience for learners is a constant struggle (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). This is not surprising because context influences leadership, and contextual factors could facilitate progress, while others might hinder it (Hallinger, 2018).

Secondary schools in South Africa operate in diverse socioeconomic conditions, and principals must adapt their school leadership and management approaches accordingly (Zuze & Juan, 2018). Hallinger (2018, p. 7) asserts that irrespective of contextual constraints, “principals must find ways to respond creatively and coherently to all of them”. Similarly, Zuze and Juan (2018) aver that principals must overcome these challenges while still striving for high-quality educational outcomes. In light of this complex terrain, this study explored how principals lead teaching and learning in secondary schools located in deprived contexts.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Sustainable Development Goal Four states that all schools must ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The Action Plan to 2014 – Towards the realisation of schooling 2023 (Action Plan) (RSA, 2011, p. 47) states that in accordance with the national curriculum by 2025, a principal must be able to guarantee that:

teaching in the school takes place as it should and understand his or her role as a leader whose responsibility is to promote harmony, creativity, and a sound work ethic within the school community and beyond.

In order to meet this objective, amongst other competencies, The South African Standard for Principalship states principals must be Leading the Learning School. This competency is elaborated, stating that:

At the heart of the principal's role is a fundamental responsibility for the management of the curriculum, the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning and the raising of levels of learner achievement. While every key area within the principal's role is directed at the promotion of quality teaching and learning; the leadership and management of the learning school focuses directly on the principal's responsibility for the creation and maintenance of a learning culture for all learners and staff. This is built upon high expectations and supported through ongoing monitoring and evaluation of learning outcomes and a commitment to continuous improvement (p. 10).

The above underscores that all schools should provide quality education that is fit-for-purpose to serve all learners such that they meet their potential, and principals should ensure that their leadership leads to these desired outcomes.

Against this expectation, schools in deprived settings grapple with multiple challenges. In deprived settings, challenges such as child-headed households, food insecurity, diseases resulting from unsuitable living conditions, inadequate or overcrowded dwellings, and fractured families collectively exert a detrimental impact on the learning experiences of learners (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). Moreover, some schools in deprived contexts grapple with issues like alcohol, drug abuse and sexual exploitation, particularly in areas where employment opportunities are scarce and parental support is limited (Faulkner, 2015). In this challenging environment, young girls are especially vulnerable to unsafe and underage sex,

leading to instances of teenage pregnancy, which further compounds the challenges within schools (Faulkner, 2015).

In confluence, these factors contribute to a decline in the quality of teaching and learning, consequently negatively influencing learner outcomes (Chikoko et al., 2015), thereby making the task of leading these schools more challenging. While principals are expected to lead schools for success, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) lacks an educational policy that provides guidance to schools facing multiple deprivations on how to effectively function (Kundu & Bej, 2021; Maringe et al., 2015; Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017). The government's overarching policy framework falls short in addressing the contextualised challenges that schools encounter (Maringe et al., 2015; Tian & Huber, 2021). Given these complexities, the current study sought to explore the experiences of secondary school principals leading schools located in deprived contexts.

1.3 Research questions

1.3.1 How do secondary school principals in a deprived school context lead teaching and learning?

1.3.2 What factors constrain the leadership of secondary school principals in a deprived school context?

1.3.3 What factors enable the leadership of secondary school principals in a deprived school context?

1.4 Rationale for the study

I grew up in a deprived context where I had to travel a long distance to get to school. Some learners would travel over 5 kilometres on foot each day. The journey to education was not easy. These circumstances affected the learners as they would arrive late at school. As a result, since the school had rules which they abided by, learners would be punished and sometimes get locked out of the gate. This affected teaching and learning because the learners would miss some of the classes that are taught in the morning, or the whole day of school if they were locked out. These learners suffered consequences for situations that they had no control over. Many learners came from disadvantaged backgrounds, where their parents worked on farms, lived on government grants, or had no source of income at all. Several learners were not able to complete school due to the challenges they faced at home. Some of the learners looked at

their background and did not see anything good come out of their situation. Studying further at a tertiary institution was a dream for most of the learners, but for some, it was a dream that never came true. These experiences and observations troubled me. I observed that the contextual factors inherent in deprived communities negatively impacted learners and teaching and learning. I then wondered, how principals in these schools lead to ensure that learners are provided quality education as envisaged in the Constitution. This is what has brought me to this study.

This was still the case when I pursued a career in teaching and went to one of the schools in the area for her teaching practice. The conditions were still the same for some of the learners. I observed late coming, a lack of the correct uniform and extreme poverty as some of the learners would come to school on an empty stomach because there is no food at home. This negatively impacted teaching and learning because they would not be able to concentrate in class for the morning classes until they get the food which is provided by the feeding scheme during lunch time. While engaging with the other teachers who had been in the school longer, they stated that the socioeconomic challenges and constraints experienced by learners negatively impacted teaching and learning. Given these experiences and observations, I became curious about how principals lead teaching and learning in school contexts grappling with multiple deprivations.

Several scholars, including Ndlovu (2023), Bhengu and Myende (2015), Chikoko et al. (2015) and Maringe et al. (2015), have delved into the complexities of leading teaching and learning in deprived contexts. For instance, Ndlovu (2023) focused on the lived experiences of novice principals leading in deprived school contexts. Bhengu and Myende (2015) focused on how leaders navigate policy changes in such settings. Cruz-Gonzalez (2020), Lumby (2015) and Faulkner (2015) examined leadership dynamics in schools within communities facing multiple challenges, particularly focusing on women principals in South Africa. Chikoko et al. (2015) explored effective school leadership practices in South African regions marked by deprivation. Colman (2020) scrutinised school leadership, inspection and micropolitics related to compliance and resistance, emphasising policy enforcement in deprived contexts. Moreover, Myende et al. (2021) examined the leadership practices of successful school principals leading teaching and learning in the deprived contexts of Nigeria, while another work by Myende et al. (2022) focused on leadership for learning at the district level, drawing insights from circuit managers leading in deprived areas. While this body of literature exists, multiple deprivation

has a significant impact on a myriad of South African schools (Maringe et al., 2015; Myende et al., 2018; Zulu et al., 2021).

The collective influence of various deprivations on learners' learning remains inadequately comprehended in the public sphere, and school principals contending with multiple deprivations encounter a range of challenges that are insufficiently understood (Hunter, 2019; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). Moreover, despite previous research, the challenges associated with leading teaching and learning in deprived contexts persist, highlighting the necessity for further exploration in this area. This study thus adds to the existing scholarship by further illuminating the experiences of school leaders in such contexts.

1.5 Clarification of concepts

This study is underpinned by two key concepts, namely multiple deprivation and leadership. The section below briefly describes these two concepts, particularly in relation to their application to the study.

1.5.1 Multiple deprivation

According to Bhengu and Myende (2016), deprived contexts, often termed as socio-economically disadvantaged or low-income communities, are characterised by limited access to resources, higher rates of poverty, and various socio-cultural challenges. Similarly, Maringe et al. (2015) state that, in a deprived context, a range of poverty indicators collude to diminish livelihood and the quality of life. Maringe and Moletsane (2015) indicate that the idea of multiple deprivations implies a confluence of several elements that impair learning and present unique difficulties for leaders. In this study, the term multiple deprivations allude to the intersection and cumulative impact of various socio-economic and environmental factors that hinder individual and collective well-being. The terms 'multiple deprivation and deprived context' will be used synonymously in this study.

1.5.2 Leadership

Leadership refers to the process of guiding and influencing individuals and organisations toward the attainment of educational goals (Leithwood & Sun, 2022). Similarly, Bush (2007, 2020) defines leadership as the process of influencing the behaviour of others to achieve desired goals. In this study, leadership refers to a process of guiding and influencing stakeholders for the attainment of organisational goals.

1.6 Overview of the dissertation

This dissertation has five chapters. The synopsis of each chapter is presented below:

Chapter One presented the overview of the study. Firstly, the introduction and background to the study was presented. This was followed by the statement of the problem. The research questions were then presented, followed by the rationale which was discussed on three levels: the personal, professional and theoretical. The chapter also clarified some of the key concepts underpinning the study, namely multiple deprivations and leadership.

Chapter Two reviews the literature, drawing on local and global perspectives. Hallinger's (2011) Leadership for Learning Model, which is the theory underpinning this study, is then presented.

Chapter Three outlines the research design and methodology. It provides a detailed discussion and justification of the instruments and tools employed to generate the data needed to address the research questions in this study.

Chapter Four presents and discusses the data generated from school principals, focusing on their experiences of leading teaching and learning in contexts of multiple deprivations. The chapter is guided by the key research questions that shaped the study. It explores the main themes and issues that emerged from the semi-structured interviews.

Chapter Five concludes the report. It begins with an overview of the study, followed by the conclusions drawn from the findings. Finally, two recommendations based on these conclusions are presented.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented an overview of the study. This chapter presents the review of literature. The review is presented in four themes. Firstly, I delineated multiple deprivation, adding onto the conceptualised definition provided in Chapter One. The second part of the review discussed the domains of deprivation, namely income and material deprivation, employment deprivation, health deprivation, education deprivation, and living environment deprivation domains. The discussion then delves into multiple deprivation and schooling. Lastly, as part of the review, the chapter discusses what is known in terms of leading schools in deprived contexts. Following this, the chapter presents the theory underpinning the study, which is Leadership for Learning. The components of the model will be discussed, namely leadership focus, vision and goals, academic structures and process and people capacity. Lastly, the conclusion of the chapter is provided.

2.2 Delineating multiple deprivation

The concept of multiple deprivations is inherently complex. Olivier (2018) defines the term as the interaction of various poverty indicators that collectively diminish people's quality of life. The complexity lies in that there is no consensus on the precise number of dimensions that constitute multiple deprivations (Patel et al., 2020). Myende et al. (2022) adds that unlike the concept of difficult conditions, multiple deprivations emphasise quantifiability and comparability across populations, addressing the challenges of subjective interpretations and vague definitions.

In order to enable a measurable and comparable analysis of living conditions across different communities, the concept of multiple deprivation was developed. Ngidi (2019) notes that this approach aims to capture the conditions of the smallest community units, thereby avoiding over-generalisation and misrepresentation in assessing poverty and disadvantage on a national scale. Accordingly, multiple deprivation highlights how poverty manifests in various forms simultaneously, creating unique challenges (Lumby, 2018). Maringe et al. (2015) describe multiple deprivation as the collective impact of several poverty indicators on individuals' quality of life. Myende et al. (2021) further clarify that deprivation entails the absence of essential social, human and material capital, such as adequate housing and other basic

necessities. Griffin et al. (2021) reinforce this view, defining deprivation as the lack or denial of material benefits considered fundamental in a given society.

In this study, the domains of multiple deprivation will be explored to provide a detailed understanding of how these overlapping disadvantages impact school leadership and management. Drawn from Noble et al. (2020), these are income deprivation, material deprivation, employment deprivation, health deprivation and living environment deprivation.

2.3 Domains of multiple deprivation

Multiple deprivation (MD) is a concept that emerged out of concern for how poverty affects communities around the world (Chikoko & Naicker, 2015; Nzimande, 2019). The overall estimates of poverty derived from a specific set of census facts were unsatisfactory. Then, it was proposed that smaller units, like municipalities, should have a good understanding of the level of poverty within their borders in order to implement effective interventions to improve the quality of life for the underprivileged communities in such towns (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). The concept of Multiple Deprivation Indices (MDI) was then proposed. The MDI counts the number of residents in a certain area who suffer from various types of deprivation (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). The first MDIs were calculated in 2004 and later refined in 2007 (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). The South African government adopted the English MDI model but changed it to five dimensions, namely the income and material deprivation domain; the employment deprivation domain; the health deprivation domain; the education deprivation domain; and the living environment deprivation domain (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). Each of these will be discussed below.

2.3.1 Income deprivation

The percentage of the population that experiences deprivation due to low income is measured by the Income Deprivation Domain (Knies & Kumari, 2022). Maringe and Moletsane (2015) concur with this as they identify the indicator of income deprivation as the lack of adequate financial capacity as a result of low parental income. According to Chan and Wong (2020), the term "low income" encompasses both individuals who are unemployed and those who are employed but earn a low salary. Other factors that contribute to this deprivation, including inadequate earnings, insufficient social security payments, growing living expenses, and a lack of paid employment (Knies & Kumari, 2022). Children growing up in income-deprived households are more likely to face educational challenges, perpetuating intergenerational poverty (Tomasi & Volkow, 2021). This is because income-deprived families may have

limited access to good schools, extracurricular activities, tutoring services, technology, and literature as educational tools (Munir et al., 2023).

The public schools are divided into income levels of the community around them by the new South African government because they understood the extent of inequalities in the country (Chikoko, 2015). Schools in quintile 5 are located in the more affluent areas, while quintile 1 schools are in the poor communities. The schools that fall under quintiles 1-3 are no-fee paying schools and are considered as being in a deprived context (Chikoko, 2015). Due to their inadequate resource bases and lack of school fees, these schools have few prospects for advancement (Chikoko, 2015). According to Cluver and Steinert (2018), South African schools are severely impacted by income deprivation, which has an effect on both the learners and the quality of education. This leads to increased drop-out rates, especially amongst adolescents as they have to take care of their siblings or support their families financially. Due to social exclusion brought on by income deprivation, learners find it challenging to fully engage in school activities (CSDA, 2019).

2.3.2 Material deprivation

Material deprivation refers to a person's ability to obtain the material and social resources thought to be required in order to prevent living conditions that are too low (Townsend et al., 2023). When individuals or households experience material deprivation, they are more likely to face social exclusion, poverty and reduced well-being. According to Carstairs (2019), material deprivation is the inability of individuals or households to afford those consumption goods and activities that are typically available in a society at a given point in time. Material deprivation frequently presents itself in the form of inadequate housing conditions, encompassing issues such as overcrowding, sub-standard living environments, and homelessness (Knies, 2022). These circumstances have the potential to contribute to various health concerns, including respiratory ailments and mental health disorders, whilst also impeding children's educational progress by hindering their study capabilities (Schulte-Korne, 2016).

Additionally, Shamrova and Lampe (2020) state that material deprivation may give rise to food insecurity, where individuals and families encounter difficulties in obtaining sufficient quantities of nutritious food on a consistent basis. This can subsequently lead to malnutrition, stunted physical development, cognitive deficits, and sub-par academic achievement in

children (Coetzee et al., 2020). Furthermore, Oeri et al. (2023) indicate that material deprivation might obstruct individuals from receiving necessary medical care due to financial limitations or geographical obstacles, resulting in untreated illnesses, preventable health conditions, and diminished overall well-being. Addressing material deprivation and ensuring access to quality healthcare is crucial for promoting health equity and overall well-being.

Moreover, material deprivation can restrict access to educational materials such as books, technology and school supplies (Kutu et al., 2020). In addition, deprivation of essential resources can impede learners' full engagement in their educational pursuits, potentially resulting in academic underperformance and limited prospects for future advancement (Omoniyi, 2021). In regions where material scarcity is prevalent, transportation options may be scarce or financially burdensome, thereby impeding individuals' access to employment opportunities, healthcare services and educational institutions (Crous, 2017). This perpetuates cycles of poverty and societal exclusion.

Material deprivation can also curtail individuals' participation in leisure and recreational activities, such as sports, cultural events and social gatherings, consequently fostering feelings of isolation, diminished self-worth, and decreased overall quality of life (Gross-Manos, 2018). The ramifications of material deprivation transcend immediate physical needs and extend to individuals' well-being, social integration and prospects for socioeconomic advancement.

2.3.3 Employment deprivation

Employment deprivation signifies the state in which individuals or groups encounter restricted or non-existent opportunities for gainful employment (Fryer, 2019). This is influenced by a range of factors that hinder individuals from engaging in the labour market or obtaining suitable employment, resulting in economic instability and social marginalisation (McCartney et al., 2023). Employment deprivation manifests most prominently as unemployment, where individuals willing and able to work cannot secure jobs (Kahn, 2022). This may result from economic downturns, industry shifts, job scarcity, or mismatches between skills and job requirements (Kiley, 2022). Underemployment, where individuals work fewer hours than desired or in roles below their qualifications, also contributes to financial instability, limiting income potential and career growth (Bell & Blanchflower, 2021; Gradín et al., 2017).

McCartney et al. (2023) state that limited access to education, training and skill enhancement programs can exacerbate employment deprivation by hindering individuals from acquiring the necessary qualifications and competencies to effectively compete in the job market. South African schools are significantly impacted by employment deprivation, especially in deprived contexts. Families may have less money when parents are unemployed, which makes it harder for them to pay for even the most basic of needs, let alone schooling (Noble et al., 2013), which also affects learners' educational outcomes. Studies have indicated that learners from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds perform badly in important disciplines like science and mathematics (Cluver & Steinert, 2018).

2.3.4 Health deprivation

Townsend et al. (2023) state that health deprivation pertains to the state in which individuals or communities are deficient in access to adequate healthcare services, resources or conditions essential for maintaining optimal physical and mental well-being. It encompasses a variety of factors that hinder individuals from achieving and sustaining good health. Health deprivation often manifests as limited access to healthcare facilities, medical professionals, medications, and treatments, stemming from geographical, financial, or infrastructural barriers. Even when available, healthcare services may be substandard, poorly equipped, or understaffed, leading to delayed or ineffective treatment and misdiagnoses (Carstairs & Morris, 2019).

A lack of health education further exacerbates health deprivation by hindering the adoption of healthy behaviours, preventive care, and timely medical attention (Jones & Wildman, 2018). Environmental factors such as pollution, unsafe drinking water and toxin exposure increase vulnerability to infectious diseases, respiratory conditions and chronic illnesses (Carstairs, 2019). Health deprivation increases illness and mortality rates, exposing affected populations to higher risks of infectious diseases, chronic conditions and preventable illnesses, which reduce life expectancy and quality of life (Leese et al., 2018). It also diminishes productivity, increases absenteeism and raises healthcare costs for individuals and governments, thus deepening poverty and inequality (Marsh et al., 2010). Socially, health deprivation can strain relationships, isolate individuals due to stigma, and negatively impact mental well-being and social integration. It perpetuates a poverty-health cycle, where poor health exacerbates poverty, and poverty worsens health outcomes, reinforcing socio-economic disparities (Gireesh et al., 2018). Additionally, health deprivation contributes to healthcare inequities, disproportionately

affecting marginalised groups, including racial and ethnic minorities, low-income populations and rural communities, who face unequal access to care and poorer outcomes (Touitou et al., 2017).

In South African schools, health deprivation has a significant effect on learners' attendance, academic performance and general well-being (Maringe et al. 2015). Maringe et al. (2015) mention that the lack of access to healthcare; food insecurity; housing instability; exposure to violence or trauma; and poverty can all have an impact on learners' capacity to concentrate in class and succeed academically. Cognitive development is impacted by poor nutrition, which lowers focus and academic performance (UNESCO, 2018). Learners who suffer from chronic illnesses like diabetes, TB or HIV/AIDS that are not properly treated or managed may miss school frequently, feel exhausted and be less productive (Spencer et al., 2023).

2.3.5 Living environment deprivation

According to Arribas-Bel et al. (2017), living environment deprivation pertains to insufficient access to secure, hygienic and conducive living conditions that are essential for overall well-being. It encompasses a range of factors related to housing, neighbourhood quality and environmental elements that impact the quality of life for individuals.

Sub-standard housing, which is defined by unsafe or insufficient living circumstances, such as overcrowding, inadequate ventilation, a lack of sanitary facilities, structural flaws, and exposure to environmental hazards like lead, mould, or asbestos, is a clear indication of living environment deprivation (Güven, 2023). It can also take the form of homelessness, which is when someone does not have a permanent place to live and ends up living in cars, transit shelters or the streets. People who are homeless are more likely to experience substance misuse, mental and physical health problems, and social exclusion (Mahlangu & Kgadima, 2023).

Living in areas with high rates of crime, violence or social disorder can exacerbate the deprivation of living conditions for inhabitants, making them feel uncomfortable in their neighbourhoods and restricting their access to public places, mobility, and social contacts (Drukker & van Os, 2013). Living environment deprivation also includes limited access to essential services like clean water, electricity, heating, sanitation, transportation and recreational facilities, adversely affecting comfort and the quality of life (Cabana et al., 2020).

Living environment deprivation is linked to poorer physical and mental health, increasing risks of infectious diseases, chronic illnesses, injuries and mental disorders due to unsafe neighbourhoods, inadequate housing and pollutants (McElroy et al., 2019). Social disadvantages such as stigma, discrimination and exclusion further limit access to education, employment and social interaction, thus perpetuating poverty and marginalisation (Drukker & van Os, 2013). For children, unstable housing and unsafe neighbourhoods can harm well-being and academic performance (Arribas-Bel et al., 2017). Financially, living environment deprivation raises healthcare costs, reduces productivity, devalues property, and strains public resources. High concentrations of poverty, homelessness and environmental degradation weaken social cohesion, destabilise neighbourhoods and hinder local development, lowering property values and quality of life (Kearns et al., 2018).

2.4 Multiple deprivation and schooling

The previous section examined the domains of deprivation, outlining the factors contributing to these conditions and their effects on those experiencing them. This section shifts the focus to explore the impact of multiple deprivation on schooling. Multiple deprivation affects schools all around the world¹. Locally, it also contributes to educational inequality (Maringe et al., 2015). For instance, schools in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape province often lack essential services like electricity and proper sanitation, and students may have to travel long distances to attend school, hence impacting their learning opportunities (Ramatsui, 2022). Despite these difficulties, there are initiatives in place to address educational disparities in South Africa, such as the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), which provides meals to students from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve attendance and academic performance (Ngcobo, 2020).

According to Maringe et al. (2015), schools in deprived contexts frequently deal with a wide range of issues that can have a significant impact on learners' educational experiences and results. One of these issues is infrastructure. Myende and Blose (2021) reported that educational institutions in Africa, especially those located in deprived contexts, encounter significant infrastructure challenges. Schools in areas such as Soweto face obstacles with inadequate facilities, overcrowding and limited resources, which reinforce educational disparities (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). Similarly, in other deprived parts of sub-Saharan Africa, numerous schools are faced with insufficient classrooms, inadequate sanitation

¹ (Abel et al., 2016; Dinham et al., 2016; Knies and Kumari, 2022; Lumby, 2015)

facilities and limited access to safe drinking water (Zickafoose et al., 2024). For instance, in remote areas of Ethiopia, learners are often compelled to study in overcrowded classrooms with dirt floors and scarce learning resources (Olivier, 2018), thus making it difficult for all stakeholders to either effectively teach or effectively learn. Similarly, in a study by Zikhali and Perumal (2016) on disadvantaged schools in Zimbabwe, it was revealed that many schools lacked adequate infrastructure and the necessary educational resources, which also negatively impacts teaching and learning. Dinham et al. (2016) also found that some schools in the rural parts of India operate without essential utilities like electricity and running water, which presents obstacles to effective learning for students.

Another factor that impacts schooling in deprived contexts is the lack of parental involvement. According to Romero et al. (2018) and Durisic and Bunijevac (2017), in deprived contexts, parental involvement in education may be decreased because of a number of factors, such as a lack of resources, time, parental work schedules, lack of transportation, limited awareness of the importance of parental engagement and education. Insufficient parental engagement can impede endeavours to bolster learner education, tackle behavioural concerns, and cultivate collaborations between educational institutions and households (Lupton, 2018). Durisic and Bunijevac (2017), further mention that limited parental involvement can hinder efforts to support student learning and address behavioural issues effectively.

Disciplinary issues are also a prevalent issue in schools situated in deprived contexts. Research (Akkus & Cinkir, 2022; Gagnon et al., 2021) revealed that schools in underprivileged areas often experience higher rates of learner misbehaviour, disciplinary issues and absenteeism. Gradín (2013) highlights that factors such as poverty, unstable family environments, and exposure to adverse circumstances contribute to disruptive behaviour, classroom interruptions and challenges in maintaining a supportive learning environment. In the same vein, Klein et al. (2020) state that factors such as poverty, trauma and exposure to adverse environments can contribute to disruptive behaviour, leading to interruptions in learning and decreased academic engagement.

Learners in underprivileged schools often exhibit disparities in academic performance, graduation rates, and college preparedness (Lupton, 2020). Persistent achievement gaps between learners from deprived contexts and their more affluent counterparts remain a

widespread challenge (Garcia & Weiss, 2017). A key contributor to this disparity is the dysfunctionality of many schools in deprived contexts, which struggle to provide an adequate and effective educational experience (Chikoko et al., 2015; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). This dysfunctionality is often linked to the breakdown of the core function of schools, reflected in a weak or non-existent culture of teaching and learning (Chikoko et al., 2015; Naicker, 2018).

As a result, there is a stark contrast between the realities faced by schools in deprived contexts and those in more affluent areas (Bhengu & Myende, 2016). Learners in disadvantaged schools frequently perform worse academically compared to their peers in well-resourced schools (Kendrick & Royal, 2018). This achievement gap is often reflected in lower grades and slower rates of academic progress (Chmielewski, 2019).

2.5 Leading schools in deprived contexts: What do we know?

Leading schools in deprived contexts presents unique challenges and opportunities for educational leaders (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). These schools often serve students with diverse needs, such as socio-economic challenges, language barriers and varying learning abilities (Chikoko et al., 2018). Effective leaders understand and address these needs by implementing strategies to support students' academic, social and emotional growth (Culduz, 2023).

Strengthening the culture of schools in multiple deprived contexts is essential for fostering an environment where both students and educators can thrive. School leaders in these contexts can establish high expectations for academic achievement and behaviour, thus creating a culture of excellence (Perumal & Moyo, 2019). For example, Dzimiri (2018) documented how a principal appointed to a struggling school in a deprived area collaborated with stakeholders to craft a shared mission and vision, encapsulated in the school motto, "*ZPS leads, and the rest follow*". This collective focus on the motto transformed the school culture, resulting in a remarkable improvement in the Grade 7 pass rate, which increased from a mere 15% to an impressive 95% within five years (Dzimiri, 2018). As evidenced above, successful leaders can cultivate a supportive and inclusive environment that fosters a sense of belonging, respect and academic excellence amongst students and staff (Lupton & Thrupp, 2018).

Acknowledging and respecting the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of learners is crucial for engaging them in their education. Integrating culturally relevant content, teaching

methods and celebrations into the curriculum helps learners feel connected to their learning. This can include training on trauma-informed practices, culturally responsive teaching, and differentiated instruction (Fullan, 2014). Recognising and celebrating the accomplishments of students, teachers and the school community reinforces a positive school culture. This can involve awards ceremonies, student performances, and public acknowledgment of achievements. Regular assessments and reflections on school culture allow for continuous improvement. This may be through gathering feedback from stakeholders, analysing student data, and adjusting policies and practices as needed (Batra, 2017). By prioritising these strategies, schools in multiple deprived contexts can cultivate a culture of excellence, equity and support that empowers all members of the school community to succeed.

Principals must advocate for the fair distribution of resources to ensure that all students have the support and materials necessary for success, regardless of their socio-economic status (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2022). They should cultivate a positive and inclusive school environment where all students feel valued, supported and safe. This involves fostering a sense of belonging, nurturing positive relationships amongst students and staff, and embracing diversity within the school community (Killeavy, 2016).

Myende (2018) indicates that despite resource constraints, including limited funding and staff shortages, skilled leaders maximise resources, seek external support, and advocate for additional resources to meet the needs of their school community. Community engagement is also essential, as building strong partnerships with families, local organisations and businesses can provide additional support for students and enhance their educational experience (Harris, 2019). Principals may seek external support to address specific challenges, building capacity, networking and collaboration. School principals thrive on establishing and maintaining school-community connections through an asset-based approach and they believe in collaboration (Myende & Bhengu, 2016). In Basson and Mestry's (2019), principals leading in deprived schools collaborated with SGBs and SMTs to establish transparent, trustworthy and socially cohesive relationships.

Additionally, they may seek support through professional development opportunities, which include conferences, workshops and online courses to enhance their skills and knowledge. Investing in the professional development and support of staff is key for leading schools in

deprived contexts. Effective leaders provide ongoing training, mentorship and resources to empower teachers and staff to meet students' diverse needs effectively (Bush, 2020). This can be achieved through mentorship programs, effective communication and opportunities for collaboration (Gu & Johansson, 2018). Providing ongoing professional development for teachers and staff also ensures that they have the necessary skills to effectively support students (Robinson et al., 2018).

Myende et al. (2021) and Ndlovu (2023) highlight how principals in deprived contexts enact a leadership of care, emphasising the relational nature of their leadership. Noddings (1992, 2013) describes care as a set of relational practices that foster mutual recognition, growth, empowerment and community building. It is rooted in virtues such as compassion, empathy and respect (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Reflecting these principles, principals in deprived Nigerian schools prioritised learners' well-being by going beyond the provisions of the school nutrition feeding scheme, offering additional food, uniforms and even financial support (Myende et al., 2021). Ndlovu (2023) reported that principals enacted care by being context responsive leaders who implemented policies in contextualised ways considering the school context. Blackmore and Sachs (2017) indicate that prioritising social and emotional learning (SEL) initiatives is important to support students' well-being and academic success. Incorporating SEL curriculum, offering counselling services, and fostering a supportive school environment where students feel valued and respected are some of the ways in which this can be done (Mhlanga, 2019). Such approaches align with Lumby's (2015) observation that principals in such contexts must actively safeguard learners' rights—both present and future—through education, despite the persistent challenges posed by environments where these rights are often overlooked.

According to Hallinger and Heck (2019), principals in deprived context settings play a vital role in the leadership of teaching and learning to guarantee that all students have access to a quality education. They prioritise instructional leadership by setting clear academic objectives, offering support to teachers, and closely monitoring student progress (Hallinger & Heck, 2019). This includes regularly observing classrooms, providing constructive feedback to teachers, and implementing evidence-based instructional methods to address students' needs (Heineke, 2015). According to Marshall et al. (2017), principals should utilise data for decision-making at all levels of the school, from instructional planning to resource allocation, which can be done

by analysing student achievement data and implementing evidence-based practices to improve teaching and learning.

Principals should promote a culture of continuous improvement where all school community members are dedicated to ongoing learning and development. For example, seeking feedback from stakeholders, reflecting on successes and challenges, and effecting adjustments to enhance teaching and learning practices over time (Oduro et al., 2018). By implementing these strategies, principals in deprived context settings can effectively lead teaching and learning to ensure that all students have the opportunity to reach their full academic, social and emotional potential.

2.6 Model underpinning the study: Leadership for Learning

Leadership for Learning (LFL) is a prominent model within educational research, particularly in exploring effective school leadership. It refers to the strategies that educational leaders use to achieve significant educational goals, with a primary focus on enhancing student learning (Hallinger, 2011). This approach entails a wide range of actions designed to create and sustain supportive environments for teaching and learning, going beyond merely providing direct instructional guidance (Hallinger, 2011). At its core, Leadership for Learning emphasises a shared vision, collaborative leadership and a commitment to fostering the academic, social and emotional growth of every learner (Murphy et al., 2007).

The model of Leadership for Learning emerged from decades of research responding to the complex demands of educational reform (Ahn et al., 2021). This model integrates elements of distributed, transformational and instructional leadership, blending these approaches to achieve improvements in teaching and learning (Bowers, 2020; Hallinger, 2011; MacBeath, 2011). It extends the principles of instructional leadership by emphasising the means or pathways through which leadership enhances teaching and learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Leadership for Learning also accounts for the broader social, cultural and institutional contexts within which school leaders operate, emphasising the importance of leveraging external opportunities and mitigating risks to ensure school success (Hallinger, 2011).

Leadership for Learning has been widely used to explore effective leadership practices in diverse contexts, including deprived settings. Studies such as those by Buthelezi (2017), Chiororo (2020) and Myende et al. (2022) have drawn on this model to examine how school

leaders support teaching and learning in challenging environments. The model underscores the importance of a clear, shared vision for teaching and learning embraced by all stakeholders (Buthelezi, 2017). Leaders foster collaborative professional learning communities, provide resources and mentorship, and use data-driven decision-making to guide school improvement efforts (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2018; Caldwell, 2012). Central to this model is the belief that schools should be spaces for ongoing learning and growth for both students and educators, with leadership viewed as a collective responsibility for achieving student success (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2010). The model is presented below in Figure 1.

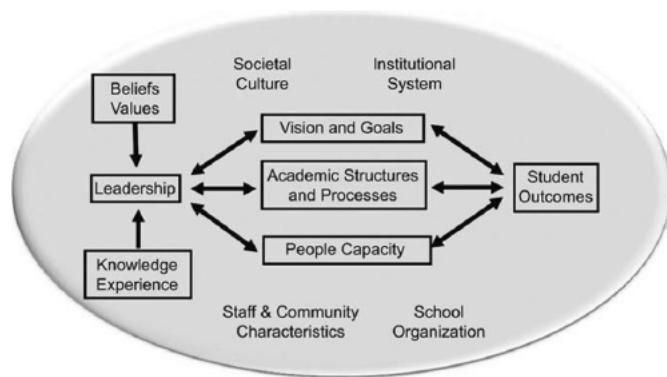


Figure 1: Hallinger's (2011) Model of leadership for learning

Hallinger's (2011) model of Leadership for Learning has four dimensions. They are values and leadership, leadership focus, context for leadership, and sources of leadership. According to Hallinger (2011) principals enact their leadership through their knowledge, experience, values and beliefs, aligning these with the needs and goals of their schools. Hallinger (2011) emphasises that school leaders operate within broader contexts shaped by social culture, community dynamics, staff and community characteristics, and institutional systems. Their leadership performance is not isolated but influenced by their ability to leverage opportunities from these external environments whilst addressing potential risks that could undermine their schools' success. Although leadership may not directly impact student learning, it indirectly influences essential components such as academic structures, processes, vision, goals and the capacity of people within the school organisation (Leithwood et al., 2004). The Leadership for Learning model highlights the reciprocal relationship between leadership practices and these school-level components, illustrating how leadership both shapes and is shaped by its context (Hallinger, 2011). This dynamic interplay is explicitly directed towards achieving specific

learning objectives and fostering student development. These are discussed briefly below, explaining how they are linked to this study.

2.6.1.1 Values and leadership

According to values-based leadership, the primary goal of leadership is to enhance student learning (Hallinger, 2011). The personal traits of the leaders themselves also influence how they practice leadership. Attention is drawn to leaders' individual values, beliefs, knowledge and experience as sources of variance in their leadership practices (Hallinger, 2011). Beliefs and values are core principles that shape leaders' decisions and behaviours, and influence how they view and perform their roles and responsibilities (Hallinger, 2011). These beliefs and values create a structure for their leadership practices, and they are continually influenced and refined through their leadership experiences (Hallinger, 2011). When leaders are in charge of an organisation, their values and beliefs are demonstrated by their actions, mostly through the way that daily operations are carried out (Healthfield, 2018).

Knowledge and experience are considered vital assets for organisations operating in dynamically competitive environments (Hayat et al., 2015). Additionally, knowledge is seen as a useful tool for assisting the organisation in achieving success. According to Hallenbeck (2022), experience and knowledge are crucial for leaders because they enable them to hone their abilities and expand their capacity for leadership.

2.6.1.2 Leadership focus

According to Hallinger and Heck (1996) and Leithwood et al. (2010), the phrase "leadership focus" describes the "means" by which leadership influences learning in an indirect manner. In the model, this indirect influence is through the vision and goals, academic structures and processes and people. Each of these are discussed below.

2.6.1.2.1 Vision and goals

Vision represents the overarching direction that a school aims to take, outlining how it seeks to educate learners (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). In contrast, goals are the specific, actionable objectives necessary to realise that vision (Hallinger, 2011). According to the Leadership for Learning model, school leaders play a critical role in shaping the vision and goals of their institutions, which in turn significantly influences student outcomes (Hallinger, 2011).

Moreover, this relationship is reciprocal, as student outcomes also shape and influence the school's vision, goals and leadership practices (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

The emphasis on vision and goals within the Leadership for Learning model underscores the responsibility of school leaders to focus their efforts on enhancing student outcomes. This makes the model particularly appropriate for the current study, as the objective is to explore how principals' visions and goals influence their leadership practices within schools. By examining the ways in which principals develop and implement these components, the study seeks to uncover how their leadership impacts teaching, learning and ultimately, student success.

2.6.1.2.2 Academic structures and processes

Academic structures and processes relate to curriculum design and implementation, instructional strategies, assessment and feedback. The academic competence and abilities of any school are shaped and mediated by how the learning and leadership of the school relate to each other (Robinson et al., 2008). Academic structures that foster staff collaboration and teamwork, reduce conflict to produce positive synergies, and provide school staff a direct say in teaching and learning processes are all supported by effective leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). The Leadership for Learning model emphasises how academic structures and processes allow leadership to have an indirect impact on student achievement (Hallinger, 2011).

As with vision and goals, the double-headed arrows in the figure indicate that academic structures and processes influence student outcomes, and student outcomes, in turn, influence academic structures and processes. The model was appropriate for this study as this study explored the approaches used by leaders in leading teaching and learning. It was assumed that such leadership entailed indirect influence on various processes that facilitate teaching and learning.

2.6.1.2.3 People capacity

People capacity refers to the development and empowerment of staff to enhance their ability to support student learning and drive positive change (Hallinger, 2011). It emphasises strategic resource allocation, professional development and capacity building to strengthen the skills and effectiveness of staff members (Hallinger, 2011). When leadership effectively prioritises

these areas, staff are better equipped to contribute to improved student outcomes and foster meaningful transformation within the school environment (Hallinger, 2011; Robinson et al., 2008). Consequently, capacity building is about people as much as the institution (Hallinger, 2011).

In the study, the aim was to explore how principals lead teaching and learning. Recognising and building the capacity of their staff members was important in order to highlight their priorities in relation to organisational and human development, and whether they manage the learning of all stakeholders to improve academic achievement.

2.6.1.3 Context for leadership

Understanding student learning outcomes and leadership requires a deep comprehension of the school context (Hallinger, 2011). The school context is shaped by factors such as the organisational structure, the traits of the staff, power dynamics, and the resources available—all of which define the environment in which school leaders operate (Hallinger, 2011). Since each school context is unique, different leadership styles are necessary to address the specific challenges faced (Hallinger, 2011).

The model underscores that leadership occurs within the broader organisational and environmental context (Hallinger, 2011). These contexts form an open system that includes the societal culture, institutional system, community and staff characteristics, and school organisation. Societal culture in this sense refers to the shared values, norms, principles and practices that define a community, influencing how individuals interact (Hallinger, 2011). According to Hallinger (2011), the institutional system in the context of LFL refers to the formal and informal structures, cultures and processes that shape the functioning of an educational institution or school. Staff and community characteristics play an important role in influencing learner outcomes and shaping the learning environment. The school organisation represents an important factor in understanding both leadership and student learning outcomes (Bossert et al., 1982).

This highlights that leadership is not conducted in isolation but is deeply embedded within a specific context. Leaders must therefore must effectively respond to these conditions in their leadership practices (Hallinger, 2011).

2.7 The appropriateness of the model for the study

The Leadership for Learning model was an appropriate framework for this study as it provided a lens through which to explore the leadership practices of principals in deprived secondary school contexts. The model assumes that leaders are shaped by their beliefs, values, knowledge, and experiences, which in turn influence how they enact leadership. This was particularly relevant to the study, which sought to understand how principals lead their schools and the factors that shape their leadership practices.

The model's core assumptions such as vision and goals, academic structures and processes, and building people capacity were central to the study. Effective leadership in teaching and learning requires principals to strategically influence these elements to enhance student outcomes. Furthermore, the study aimed to examine the role of context in shaping leadership practices. The Leadership for Learning model recognises the significance of context and its dynamic relationship with leadership, making it a suitable framework for analysing how principals navigate the challenges of deprived school environments.

2.8 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the literature review. Firstly, I discussed the conceptual framing of multiple deprivation. This was followed by a detailed discussion on the five domains of multiple deprivation. The discussion then delved into a discussion on multiple deprivation and its impact on schooling. The leadership practices of leaders in deprived contexts then followed. The last part of the chapter looked at the model underpinning the study, which is the Leadership for Learning model. This was discussed in detail using the components of this model. The next chapter will focus on the research design and methodology that was used in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the literature review and model underpinning this study. This chapter discusses the research design and methodology. Firstly, I will discuss the paradigm adopted in this study, followed by a discussion of the qualitative research design. Thereafter, I will discuss case study, which is the methodology used in this study. This will be followed by a discussion on the selection of participants and profiling of the research sites. Semi-structured interviews as the data generation method will then be discussed. The criterion for trustworthiness will then be discussed, followed by ethical considerations adhered to in this study. Lastly, a conclusion for this chapter is drawn.

3.2 Interpretive research paradigm

Research paradigms are fundamental assumptions that shape one's worldview (Goulding, 2019). They guide the research process and steer researchers towards appropriate research methodologies (Gichuru, 2017). This study is underpinned by the interpretive paradigm, also known as the interpretivist or qualitative paradigm, which is centred on comprehending social phenomena from the viewpoints of the individuals involved (Wilson, 2017). It emphasises the subjective meanings, experiences and interpretations that individuals attribute to their social environment, rather than aiming to establish universal laws or objective truths (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2018). This paradigm was appropriate for the study as it explored principals' individualised experiences of leading schools in deprived contexts. It aimed to make sense of these subjective experiences to understand how they enact leadership.

One of the ontological assumptions of this paradigm is that it acknowledges that individuals interpret and comprehend their social reality subjectively, as influenced by their distinct perspectives, beliefs, values and experiences (Phothongsunan, 2020). As such, reality is not singular and objective, but diverse and socially constructed. This assumption indicates that principals' subjective experiences are not merely anecdotal. However, they provide crucial insights into the meanings they attach to their leadership. The paradigm was appropriate as the study aimed to understand these meanings. Additionally, this paradigm posits that researchers aim to grasp these subjective meanings by engaging with participants in their natural settings and contexts (Putnam & Banghart, 2017). In this study, the data was generated in the principals' schools where they lead.

According to Alvermann and Mallozzi (2010), the interpretive paradigm emphasises the importance of understanding social phenomena within their specific contexts, considering historical, cultural and situational factors. Its epistemological assumptions suggest that knowledge is neither objective nor universal, rather, it is contextually situated and emerges from specific circumstances (Gichuru, 2017). Knowledge is subjectively constructed, culturally derived and historically situated (Cohen et al., 2011; Scotland, 2012). It is not a pre-existing entity waiting to be discovered, but a product of human construction (Scotland, 2012). This paradigm embraces personal ideologies as part of the interpretive process rather than being dismissed (Scotland, 2012).

The interpretive paradigm emphasises the importance of rich, qualitative data that captures the complexity and nuances of human experiences and social interactions (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). In interpretive research, the voices and perspectives of participants are central to the investigative process (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2018). In this study data was generated from the principals through semi-structured interviews. This ensured that rich, descriptive data was generated to bring insights into the phenomenon in this study.

3.3 Qualitative research approach

The research approach serves as a framework for addressing research questions (Sileyew, 2019). The types of research approaches that are most frequently utilised are qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods (Rezigalla, 2020). This study used the qualitative research approach.

Qualitative research is a methodological approach used to explore and understand social phenomena by examining the subjective meanings, experiences and perspectives of individuals within their natural contexts (Hennink et al., 2020). It aims to gain a deep understanding of social phenomena by exploring the perspectives of individuals within their specific contexts (Fossey et al., 2017). Qualitative research was appropriate for this study as it enabled an in-depth exploration of the contextualised experiences of principals leading in deprived school settings.

Additionally, Fosse et al. (2017) assert that the qualitative research approach is particularly useful for studying complex social issues where context, meaning and interpretation play a significant role. It was thus particularly effective in capturing the complexities and nuances of

leadership within this context. Hennink et al. (2020) further state that it is well-suited for exploring topics like culture, identity, social relationships and lived experiences, where numerical data alone may not provide a comprehensive understanding (Hennink et al., 2020). Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research emphasises the richness, depth and complexity of human experiences and interactions (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). Thus, in qualitative research, the voices and perspectives of participants are central to the inquiry process (Pathak et al., 2018). The phenomenon explored in this study is complex as it sought to elucidate on the intersection of leadership and context. This approach thus served well as it was able to excavate the depth of this complex experience.

3.4 Case study methodology

This study used a case study as its methodological underpinning. A case study is a comprehensive and detailed examination of a specific instance, situation, individual, group or organisation within its real-world context (Hartley, 2014). Similarly, Bertram and Christiansen (2014) characterise the nature of case studies as a style of research that aims to describe what it is like in a particular situation and context. This methodology was appropriate for study as the study explored the experiences of principals leading secondary schools in deprived contexts. The case in this study was principals leading secondary schools in deprived contexts.

Case studies effectively illustrate how particular phenomena or issues occur in real-world settings, thereby demonstrating the practical applications of theories or concepts (Woodside & Wilson, 2018). This research methodology is frequently utilised in the social sciences to investigate complex phenomena by concentrating on specific cases, thereby facilitating the generation of insights, and the identification of key themes and issues (Gagnon, 2020). By focusing on a defined system or particular case, such as a school, specific individuals or a community, case studies allow for an in-depth exploration within that context (Widdowson, 2021). This methodology was appropriate as this exploration required a comprehensive understanding of their leadership practices, seeking to comprehend how these practices were shaped by the context in which they are enacted.

3.5 Selection of participants

Sampling is the process of choosing a portion of people, things, or units from a larger population in order to conduct research or gather data (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). Purposive

sampling was used in this study. Tongco (2017) highlights that purposive sampling does not include random selection. Instead, the sample is selected using the researcher's judgment and discretion. It is sometimes referred to as judgmental or selective sampling (Rai & Thapa, 2015) because the researcher purposefully chooses people, groups, or situations according to particular standards that are pertinent to the goals or research issue (Rai & Thapa, 2015). Choosing participants for purposeful sampling entails choosing those who fit particular requirements that are thought to be pertinent to the study's goals or subject (Obilor, 2023). These requirements could include knowledge, experience, skill, or original viewpoints on the subject of the research.

The primary selection criterion for participants was that they must serve as principals at secondary schools that are situated in deprived contexts. Specific indicators of deprivation, such as the percentage of students from low-income families, accessibility to learning materials and quintile category, were utilised to define what constitutes a deprived context. The information that proved that the selected schools are in a deprived area was confirmed by the SA-SAMS documents in the schools. This showed that the learners are from low-income families and fall under quintile 1. Two principals were purposively selected. The primary objective of qualitative research, particularly in a case study framework, is to prioritise depth over breadth (Aspers & Corte, 2019). A limited sample size facilitates a thorough exploration of each participant's experiences, insights and leadership practices. That being said, the sample size of two is still relatively small.

3.6 Data generation method

In this study, data was generated through semi-structured interviews. Karatsareasm (2022) states that semi-structured interviews are a qualitative data generation method in which the interviewer follows a flexible structure, combining both pre-determined questions and the freedom to explore new topics that emerge during the conversation. Unlike structured interviews where the interviewer sticks rigidly to a set list of questions, or unstructured interviews where the conversation is more free-flowing, semi-structured interviews strike a balance, offering both consistency across participants and flexibility to probe deeper into specific issues (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). They provide a flexible method of generating data since they enable the interviewer to elicit more information and elaboration from participants (Harrell & Bradley, 2016). Additionally, they permit participants to speak freely and allow researchers to see participants' body language (Roulston & Choi, 2018). This enables the

emergence of rich data because semi-structured interviews provide participants the freedom to express themselves and make decisions that they might not have made in a structured interview (Minhat, 2015). Semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this study because they allowed me to probe into issues that emerged during the conversations. This resulted in the generation of rich, descriptive data which was able to capture the complexity of the phenomenon.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face, which are important because they allow for more thorough inquiries; more questioning to acquire more data during the interview; and a greater response rate as compared to administering questionnaires (Alshenqeeti, 2018). Moreover, Byrne (2020) adds that the benefit of face-to-face interviews is that they are excellent at generating thorough information. As a result, fewer participants are needed to produce data that is rich and interesting.

The face-to-face interviews were also conducted on a one-on-one basis at the convenience of the participants and lasted 60 minutes each and were audio-recorded. I explained the purpose of the interview again and reassured the participants about confidentiality and how the data will be used, whilst also letting them know that they can skip questions or stop the interview at any time. The interviews started with simple questions before moving on to more challenging and delicate subjects. This helped to establish trust, which is crucial when discussing potentially sensitive topics, such as the challenges of leadership in a deprived context. According to Forinash (2018), participants may feel more at ease, gain confidence and rapport, such that the interview may produce rich data as a result if there is progression in how the questions are asked, and this helped the researcher during the interviews. As the interview progressed, I used probing questions to explore important points in more detail. Probes help clarify responses, explore new themes and encourage deeper reflection. While following the interview guide, I stayed open and adaptable to the direction the conversation may take.

3.7 Data analysis method

The process of data analysis encompasses data processing, organisation, summarisation, categorisation and description to facilitate a clearer understanding of data (Sgier, 2019). It involves procedures such as data cleaning, inspection, manipulation and modelling to highlight significant information, support decision-making, and draw conclusions (Ravindran, 2019). Three methods for analysing information from an interview transcript are thematic analysis,

content analysis and discourse analysis (Lochmiller, 2021). In this study, thematic analysis was used.

Thematic analysis is the process of identifying, examining and interpreting patterns, themes and meanings within qualitative data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). It is a systematic method for identifying, organising and gaining insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). By focusing on meaning within the data set, thematic analysis enables researchers to understand collective or shared meanings and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This approach involves methodically organising and categorising the data to uncover underlying themes and concepts that emerge (Clarke & Braun, 2017). In this study, I used Braun and Clarke's six phases to guide my analysis. They are discussed below.

3.7.1 Phases guiding the analysis

The phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), guiding data analysis are familiarisation, initial coding, The first phase is familiarising oneself with the data, which involves transcribing the data, reading and re-reading it, and noting initial ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this phase I listened to the audio-recording from the interviews. After listening to them, I transcribed the data verbatim and then immersed myself in reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. Whilst engaged in this process, I also cleaned the data by correcting language and grammar. I then began to note down initial ideas. The second phase involved generating initial codes. This included assigning preliminary codes to the data to identify key concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data was separated according to how it answers each of the research questions and was then grouped together according to their relevance to each question.

The third phase included searching for themes which includes collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the ideas were grouped together, I collated the ones with the same ideas to identify possible themes. The fourth phase is reviewing themes, which includes checking if themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic map (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In fulfilling this step, I checked if the themes were in line with the data set. The fifth phase is defining and naming themes which involves ongoing analysis for refining the specifics of each theme and the overall story that the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In fulfilling this phase I defined and named each theme,

taking into consideration the contents of each theme according to what the participants provided as their experiences. I then gave all the themes names which fit their content.

The last phase is producing the report, which involves selecting vivid, compelling extracts and examples and a final analysis of selected extracts, relating to the analysis of the research questions and literature, thereby producing a report of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I first presented the literature that links to the data set and used it to theorise the findings according to the model that underpins the study. I then presented the report of the literature relating to the themes to answer the research questions. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), reporting comprises the analysing process and the results through models, conceptual systems, conceptual maps or categories, and a story line. I finally reported the data that was now constructed in a meaningful way. By following these steps, I was able to conduct a systematic and rigorous data analysis process.

3.8 Ensuring trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the concepts of credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability are crucial for establishing trustworthiness. These will be discussed below.

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the level of confidence in the authenticity of research findings (Cope, 2014). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), ensuring credibility is one of the most important criteria for establishing trustworthiness. Sufficient time was invested in the research setting through meaningful engagement with the principals and a thorough understanding of their school environments. This approach enhanced credibility by providing a comprehensive insight into leadership practices in deprived contexts.

To further enhance credibility, as recommended by Bertram and Christiansen (2014), a tape recorder was used to capture all interviews verbatim, ensuring more accurate transcripts. Shenton (2004) highlights that this method is an important step in promoting credibility as it conveys the actual situations explored and the surrounding contexts. The recordings were personally transcribed and replayed to ensure that the interviews were accurately captured.

3.8.2 Dependability

Adler (2022) highlights that dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research process. Similarly, Rule and John (2011) emphasise that dependability evaluates the methodological rigor and coherence applied in generating findings and case accounts, ensuring that they are credible and accepted within the research community. Shenton (2004) suggests that dependability can be achieved by providing thorough and detailed coverage, enabling readers to assess whether appropriate research practices were followed.

In alignment with the guidance of Shenton (2004) and Rule and John (2011), the research design and methodology chapter include extensive information on the research design, its implementation and the methods used for data generation, thus ensuring transparency and methodological rigor.

3.8.3. Transferability

According to Connelly (2016), transferability refers to the degree to which the findings of a study can be applicable in different contexts. In qualitative research, the objective is not to generalise results to a broad population, but to offer insights that may be relevant in comparable environments. In this study, transferability was enhanced by providing comprehensive descriptions of the context in which the principals lead. This enables other researchers or educators to evaluate the potential applicability of the findings in other underserved educational settings. Although the study examines the experiences of only two principals, the insights gained from their leadership in deprived contexts can still provide valuable guidance to other school leaders encountering similar obstacles, thereby ensuring that the findings remain relevant and applicable in practical settings.

3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which research findings are influenced by the participants and the data itself, rather than by the researcher's biases, motivations or assumptions (Mandal, 2018). This concept ensures that the conclusions drawn from the study are impartial and firmly rooted in the data gathered. To uphold confirmability, I engaged in reflexivity by recognising any biases or preconceptions that could potentially affect the research (Gunawan, 2015). I remained cognisant of how my own perspectives on leadership and education in underserved environments might shape the interpretation of the data. Similar to dependability, maintaining

an audit trail contributes to confirmability by systematically documenting the processes of data collection and analysis, thereby allowing others to verify that the findings are derived from the data itself rather than being influenced by the researcher's personal viewpoints.

3.9 Ethical issues

Arifin (2018) define ethical concerns as a set of moral rules because their goal is to prevent damage. Suri (2020) highlights that researchers must keep in mind that they are occupying the private spaces of the research participants while they are carrying out their work. As a result, Akaranga and Makau (2016) iterate that the researcher must respect the needs, values and preferences of their participants.

Gaining access to the research site was the first ethical step in the study. This involved obtaining formal permission from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to enter the schools and conduct the research. I applied to the DBE and once permission was granted, I applied for ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN) Research Ethics Committee.

After obtaining permission from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and gaining ethical clearance, I began engaging with potential participants to secure their informed consent. Informed consent refers to the process of ensuring that participants are fully informed about the nature and purpose of the research, allowing them to carefully consider the potential benefits and risks of participation (Cacciattolo, 2015).

I first approached the participants and explained the study and their role in it. I addressed issues of confidentiality and anonymity, informed them of their right to withdraw at any time, and clarified that there were no monetary benefits for participation. I then met with them to provide an informed consent form, which outlined the research process, how their privacy would be protected, and their right to withdraw. We discussed each of these points to ensure they fully understood what they were consenting to, and the participants signed the form once they were satisfied.

3.10 Limitations of the study

The study focuses on just two principals, which restricts the breadth of data, and the range of perspectives captured. While the small sample size allows for an in-depth exploration of the two principals' experiences, it limits the ability to draw broader conclusions about leadership

in deprived contexts across different schools or regions. This limitation could not be circumvented as two of the participants withdrew their participation due to time constraints.

3.11 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the research design and methodology and highlighted the research procedures and processes used for data generation. The research paradigm utilised in the study was explained through its ontological and epistemological assumptions, and the appropriateness was justified. The methodology and rationale for using the case study approach was provided. Data generation and data analysis methods were also discussed. This included an explanation of the phases guiding the data analysis. The chapter then discussed ensuring trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. The chapter ended with the presenting ethical issues and study limitations. The next chapter will focus on the data presentation and discussion.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research design and methodology for this study. This chapter will present the data and discuss the findings. From the data generated through semi-structured interviews and analysed through thematic analysis, eight themes emerged. In response to Research Question One which asked, “*How do secondary school principals in a deprived school context lead teaching and learning?*” three themes will be discussed. These are: working with the school community, leading the instructional core and going the extra mile. Following this, the chapter will discuss the themes that respond to Research Question Two (2), which asked “*What factors constrain the leadership of secondary school principals in a deprived school context?*”. The themes that will be discussed are: lack of resources, red-tape in processes and challenges with undocumented learners. Two themes emerged in response to Research Question Three, which asked “*What factors enable the leadership of secondary school principals in a deprived school context?*”. These are parental support and systematic support.

4.2 Strategies for leading teaching and learning in deprived school contexts

This theme discusses the leadership strategies of principals leading schools in deprived contexts. Three themes emerged from the data. The first theme is working with the school-community. The second theme is leading the instructional core, and the third theme is going the extra mile. These themes are discussed below.

4.2.1 Working with the school-community

According to Sergiovanni (2015), a school-community refers to an inclusive and collaborative environment where learners, teachers, parents and other stakeholders work together to promote students’ learning and well-being. The principals shared that they work with various stakeholders. They work closely with the School Management Team (SMT), the School Governing Body (SGB) and other principals. Additionally, they seek support from external stakeholders to enhance their efforts.

Principal One shared that he worked closely with the School Management Team (SMT). He said:

As you can see these chairs here, I had a meeting with the SMT. The meetings are held regularly to ensure the smooth running of the school. We were meeting so that we draft the timetable for the school holidays.

Additionally, Principal One shared that they opted to modify procedures prescribed by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). This change involved shifting from one-on-one meetings with DHs to a collaborative approach for conducting these meetings. He shared the following in this regard:

Instead of doing the one-on-one meetings with the Departmental Heads, we have adopted a strategy where we call a collaborative meeting with all the Departmental Heads so that we can share problems and solutions collaboratively. We share the challenges as a group and see how we can help each department with their challenges and use some of the strategies that other departments have used to overcome those challenges.

Principal One further provided the rationale behind using the collaborative approach. He said:

Working together makes our job easier because you may find that I am still thinking about the answer, and someone in the group would come forward and say how they overcame that challenge, they then propose strategies that worked for them. We then agree to try and use those strategies to resolve the challenges.

Planning for staff participation is a crucial task for school management teams (Buthelezi & Gamede, 2019). Dzimiri (2018) asserts that such an approach is indicative of shared leadership. He further adds that shared leadership brings together diverse stakeholders and their expertise, creating a strong alliance where everyone contributes to the advancement and growth of the school, especially in deprived contexts. This is also evidenced by Principal One who states that working with others through shared leadership alleviates leadership burdens and creates room for a diverse range of voices through which challenges can be resolved.

The findings align with the principles of Leadership for Learning, emphasising the role of school leaders in fostering collaborative learning environments that prioritise continuous professional development. The Leadership for Learning theory asserts that leaders should promote the establishment of professional learning communities (PLCs) where staff collaboratively reflect on their practices, share knowledge, and engage in sustained professional growth (MacBeath, 2019). Principal One's approach of conducting joint meetings with department heads (DHs) echoes the PLC model. By creating structured opportunities for collective reflection and knowledge-sharing, this approach embodies a core tenet of Leadership for Learning, where leadership actively supports a culture of learning and improvement through the enhancement of people capacity. Through these meetings, Principal One not only facilitates collaborative problem-solving but also underscores the value of shared professional

accountability, thus enhancing the quality of teaching and learning across the school by positively influencing academic structures and processes.

Working with others was also demonstrated through the use of what the principals termed the 'three-legged approach'. The principals described this approach as a multi-stakeholder approach to leadership.

Principal Two drew guidance from the Department's directive of including teachers, parents and learners. Stating this, he said:

The department has introduced the three-legged approach that basically says there should be a teacher, parent and child involved in the learner's education. That is why I try and include the parents in the things that we do, so that they always feel welcome because should something go wrong, they will say that they were never told. The learners are also included in matters pertaining to their education.

Similarly, Principal One involved parents, teachers, the learners and the SGB.

What we always emphasise is that the Zulu pot is three-legged. In the case of the school setting, it is made of the parent, teacher and the learner. There are parents who are proactive and the SGB also helps us. The learners are also active in their matters and are willing to learn.

Principal Two also shared how working with parents ensured that they were vested in their children's education. He voiced how the parents' involvement resulted in parents organising learner transport to ensure that their children could get to school on time. He stated:

Some learners live very far from the school. The parents who are able to afford have hired cars that transport the learners to school so that they can make it to school on time.

In South African schools, especially those in deprived contexts with limited resources, multi-stakeholder collaboration is essential (Maringe et al., 2015). Fullan et al. (2015) highlight that working with others enhances the available capital for schools, making collaboration a key factor for success. In a study by Chikoko et al. (2015), the principal of a school in a disadvantaged area described engaging the leadership of the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) alongside members of the School Management Team (SMT) to jointly oversee afternoon study periods. This "three-legged approach" aligns with the practices of other principals operating in similar contexts.

A notable finding is the high level of parental involvement. Studies, such as Bhengu and Mkhize's (2018), often point to a lack of parental engagement in deprived contexts as a missing component. However, these findings challenge that perspective, as principals from both schools reported strong parental support. While economic resources are scarce in deprived

areas (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019), the findings reveal that parents still recognise the importance of supporting their children's education. Despite their limited financial means, these parents actively participate, underscoring the critical role they play in their children's educational success. Cetin and Taskin (2016) state that parental involvement is one of the most significant factors in improving educational outcomes, with a child's development being shaped by both home and school environments. Research by Castro et al. (2015) further supports this, showing that parental engagement enhances learning and academic achievement. This reinforces the idea that partnerships amongst school leaders, educators, families and communities are essential for the success and sustainability of educational institutions (Olaoeye et al., 2024).

Principal Two also shared how the SGB was actively involved in school governance issues. He stated the following:

We recently wrote a letter to one of the business people in the area asking for donations, but we were not successful as we did not receive any assistance. The SGB assisted me in writing the letter for assistance.

This is another surprising finding. Contrary to the common view that SGBs in deprived areas are ineffective or merely symbolic (Smith, 2015; Nxumalo et al., 2021), the principals in this study report that their SGBs actively contribute to school governance. This challenges the perception that SGBs in such contexts lack meaningful participation, instead highlighting their ability to provide hands-on support in school operations and demonstrating the positive impact of community involvement in school leadership.

In addition to working with internal stakeholders, Principal Two voiced that he works with a principal from a neighbouring school. He expressed that this collaborative relationship provided him with a valuable resource person with whom he could deliberate on ways to improve his school. He stated:

What helps us and our school to achieve 100% is that we have networked and at the end of the day we are able to achieve the 100% pass rate. I have a good relationship with one of the principals from a neighbouring school that also performs well. We meet and discuss ways on how we can improve our schools even though we are in a deprived context.

Drawing from support outside of the school, Principal One leaned on the departmental officials. He also mentioned receiving assistance from the municipality. He uttered these sentiments:

We get the support from everyone, the teachers, parents and the Department of Basic Education through the Circuit and District Office. When we ask for help, we always receive it. Just last week we were approached by the Municipality, and they asked if we could bring the names of

those learners that are more deprived than others so that they can buy them some school uniform and other necessities. We do get some organisations who lend a helping hand.

Further to these stakeholders, Principal One worked with other community stakeholders within the Disciplinary Safety and Security Committee. He explained as follows:

We have a Disciplinary Safety and Security Committee. It involves different stakeholders' traditional leaders, police officers and medical practitioners.

Principal Two further mentioned that the strategies that they use within the school are not always formed internally but are sometimes taken outside of the school if the need arises.

The strategies we plan to use to lead effective teaching and learning are formed with the teachers. If we see that some of them need to be taken outside of the school, we then include SGB and then network with other stakeholders and see how we can get help.

The findings suggest that the principals use an asset-based approach to increase social and educational capital by drawing on community resources and fostering collaboration. This approach, which views schools and their communities as inseparable entities, leverages local skills, knowledge and assets to enhance the school's capacity for delivering quality education (Myende, 2017; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). It focuses on the strengths and resources within a community (rather than its deficits or needs) to promote positive change (Ennis & West, 2020). The idea is to leverage existing assets—such as local knowledge, skills, institutions and relationships—to enhance social and educational capital. By engaging externally and internally, principals mobilise resources otherwise unavailable, empowering the community to drive educational initiatives (Myende, 2015).

Overall, the findings suggest that principals recognise that leadership should be shared and that working with others is essential. Sharing leadership involves including others in decision-making (Murphy, 2011). This aligns with the principles of the Leadership for Learning model where collaborative leadership strengthens learner achievement. No single leader will possess all the abilities necessary to carry out the variety of leadership responsibilities in an increasingly complicated and demanding environment (MacBeath, 2019). Both principals share the sentiment of sharing their leadership responsibilities with different stakeholders, including teachers, the SGB and other community stakeholders. The DBE is also in support of sharing leadership and the findings show that they believe in the three-legged approach, where the teacher, parent and learner are involved in the learners' education. The principal's only choice is to put his trust in his co-workers and foster an atmosphere where that trust is returned

(MacBeath, 2019). In sharing leadership, there must be mutual trust between the principal and stakeholders involved.

4.2.2 Leading the instructional core

Leading the instructional core emerged as another practice enacted by the principals. They mentioned that they regard teaching and learning as the core function of the school. They placed emphasis in leading the instructional core by showing dedication and commitment in making sure that teaching and learning is prioritised in their schools. In leading the instructional core, the principals emphasised curriculum coverage, monitoring, allocating the best teachers for Grade 12 and setting high standards.

4.2.2.1 Curriculum coverage as a strategy to strengthen the instructional core

In this study, the principals aimed to not only ensure curriculum coverage, but they further aimed to complete the syllabus early to ensure that sufficient time was available for revision. Curriculum coverage helps ensure that teachers address all required material, giving students ample opportunities to study and ultimately aiming to enhance student achievement (Bertram et al., 2021). Their voices are presented below:

Our primary focus is on covering the syllabus. We typically aim to complete it by the end of July with any remaining material completed in August. However, we do not encourage this approach. (Principal One)

Principal Two also emphasised the completion of the syllabus before the prescribed time. Despite staff shortages, teachers worked against the tide, demonstrating commitment by having extra classes during holidays to complete the syllabus on time.

We are understaffed; however, the teachers are dedicated. We take these learners as our families now. We have extra classes even during holidays so that we can complete the syllabus.

Similar sentiments were shared by Principal One on extra classes. He said:

Since the schools are closing on Friday we are not closing, and we will be using the timetable we drafted for those extra classes.

Additionally, Principal One mentioned the rationale for the earlier completion of the syllabus. Early completion of the syllabus gave the teachers sufficient time to engage in revision in preparation for the exams. He shared the following:

The reason is that we want to have more time for revision so that we can be ready for the exams at the end of the year. We will start revision with the tests that the learners have written.

The findings indicate that both schools focus on finishing the curriculum before time. Bertram et al. (2021) suggest that completing the curriculum ahead of schedule can be advantageous as

it allows students full engagement with the syllabus. The approach of early completion suggests that the principals engage in thorough planning to ensure that these objectives are achieved. According to Leithwood et al. (2020), successful leaders consider planning to be an effective tool to set direction and influence the instructional core. Additionally, the success in ensuring curriculum coverage and early syllabus completion was a result of collaborative efforts within the entire school community. According to Sempe (2021), principals should collaborate with all stakeholders involved in the management of extra classes. As illustrated by the principals, this involved commitment from both teachers and learners.

4.2.2.2 Monitoring as a strategy to lead the instructional core

Monitoring emerged as another approach used to strengthen the instructional core. Both principals worked closely with their DHs, delegating monitoring activities but also receiving updates through reports to ensure it was done. They shared the following:

Departmental Heads must monitor the work. They must make sure that the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) is done, the curriculum is covered, and written work is there dark or blue. They will then check the work weekly. Those who have checked their work need to bring it back to me so that I can see that what needed to be done was done. I do this fortnightly. (Principal One)

The Departmental Heads assist me with monitoring the work in the school within their departments. They then report to me every week and I have to write my own report based on what they have given me. (Principal Two)

The principals' voices indicate a strong emphasis on monitoring the quality of work produced within their schools. In a study of principals leading deprived schools, Mkhize and Bhengu (2018) also found monitoring as a crucial activity that plays a critical role in teaching and learning as it ensures effective curriculum delivery. Bush and Glover (2016) assert that in environments where there is minimal oversight and feedback, teaching quality deteriorates, leading to poor student performance and low engagement. Similarly, Hallinger (2011) adds that without structured instructional leadership, the gap between planned curricula and what is taught becomes wider, disproportionately affecting learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Huerta and Zuckerman (2019) thus state that school principals play a key role in institutionalising quality control mechanisms, such as monitoring.

In this study, monitoring was a collaborative effort, with principals relying on Departmental Heads to oversee activities within their departments. Additionally, principals monitored the work of Departmental Heads to ensure accuracy and effectiveness. According to Mkhize and Bhengu (2018), effective curriculum delivery necessitates the monitoring of both teachers and students. In contexts of deprivation, monitoring becomes particularly challenging due to

constraints related to time, personnel and space, requiring principals to be especially adaptable (Mkhize & Bhengu, 2018). While this may be the case, the principals in this study did not express these sentiments. The focus on monitoring aligns with leadership for learning. The model suggests that leaders influence learner outcomes through indirect means (Hallinger, 2011). The principals focus on monitoring indicates that they influence academic structures and processes as one of the ways to enhance teaching and learning and positively shape learner outcomes (Hallinger, 2011).

4.2.2.3 Allocating the best teachers for Grade 12 and setting high standards

In addition to the above practices, Principal One mentioned that they prioritised Grade 12 learners by allocating the best teachers. This is not surprising given that the performance of secondary schools is judged by the Grade 12 pass rate. He stated:

When you set up a soccer team you always build a team that will win. In Grade 12 we want a winning team. We place people who are dedicated and who have the passion and love for teaching. Luckily, we do have those teachers.

This approach, while seemingly reasonable, warrants closer scrutiny to assess the quality measures implemented in earlier grades. Recent research highlights the importance of considering the entire educational process, rather than prioritising Grade 12 alone (Billings, 2022). Schools often allocate more resources to Grade 12 students to meet graduation requirements and university admission criteria (Kuiper et al., 2020). However, this emphasis can result in unequal resource distribution, potentially disadvantaging learners in lower grades.

Principal Two shared that the school sets high standards for themselves in terms of what they want to achieve. He asserted that they believe in providing quality, regardless of the context in which the school was located. He shared the following:

We believe in quality regardless of the school condition. This year I would like us to maintain 100% pass like we did last year but due to circumstances, I may or may not overcome some challenges.

The Leadership for Learning model requires school principals establish a vision and have goals (Hallinger, 2011). Vision and goals entail establishing the institution's goals and direction and coordinating them with more general educational objectives and community needs (Hallinger, 2011). In this study, what emerges is that the principals have a vision of excellence, thriving to obtain high pass rates irrespective of the contextual challenges inherent in deprived schools. Both principals emphasised focusing more on the Grade 12 learners, which could stem from a certain vision and goal that the participating schools have chosen.

4.2.3 Going the extra mile

The data revealed that the principals were willing to go above and beyond, going the extra mile and often taking on responsibilities beyond their assigned duties. They shared that in addition to their leadership responsibilities, they regularly stepped into classrooms to teach, just like the other teachers. This dual role is a result of the challenges faced by their schools, where principals are often expected to take on teaching and administrative duties as well.

Principal One shared that in order to share the load with teachers, he marked the scripts for learners with the assistance of Educators Assistants (EAs). He then submits the work to Mrs X, who is one of the teachers for recording of SA-SAMS.

I am done with my marking for the subjects that I teach for the term, the EAs really do help us. I just need to go submit the marks to Mrs X so that she can record them in her laptop for SA-SAMS

Principal Two also mentioned that he takes some of the classes and does some of the clerical work since they do not have a designated Administrative Clerk in the school due to a shortage of staff.

You cannot even say that you are a principal because you find yourself having to take classes, do clerical work and perform the duties of the principal.

Serving as a principal in the 21st century is a specialised role that requires a diverse set of skills and extensive knowledge (Bush et al., 2011). Research highlights the ability of principals to take on varied roles as a reflection of their awareness of the complexities inherent in their position (Leithwood et al., 2020; Lai & Cheung, 2015). In this study, staffing challenges significantly influenced principals' need to go the extra mile. While their willingness to take on additional tasks is commendable, Ademola et al. (2021) warn that time spent on clerical duties diminishes the time available for critical aspects of school leadership. Furthermore, Grissom et al. (2013) found that principals who prioritise instructional leadership over administrative tasks have a more positive impact on student achievement. Principals ought to have knowledge and experience in order to perform their leadership roles (Hallinger, 2011). The findings presented above suggest that the principals have these components as they can teach and perform other duties within the school.

As earlier alluded to in the previous theme, principals led by example and engaged in school activities and were present during extra classes. Both principals shared similar views about

going the extra mile, highlighting that they hold extra classes and dedicate additional time at school to ensure that the syllabus is fully covered. Their voices are presented below:

The normal school starting time is from 07:45 to 14:45 but we start at 06:30 and leave at 16:00. This is done for the Grade 12 learners. The teachers alternate. Those that come in in the morning do not come for the afternoon classes. The teachers and learners also come on weekends, Saturdays and Sundays. (Principal One)

For the grade 12 learners, we have extra classes where they come in at school at 06:30 and then add another hour after school. The school comes out at 3pm but the grade 12s leave at 4pm. But it also depends on how far behind the teacher is, they can even ask their learners to leave at 5pm. (Principal Two)

In addition to extending the school day, the principals mentioned that they hold classes during the holidays. Principal One shared that their school remains open during certain holidays to provide extra support, helping students achieve the best possible results. He said:

We will remain operational during the upcoming Easter holidays. We have evaluated the academic schedule, noting that the matriculants will conclude their tests today, while the other classes are set to commence tomorrow. Each teacher will be allocated a full day to focus on their respective subjects during the holidays, ensuring comprehensive coverage and support for our students.

Principal Two expressed similar views, explaining that their school also remains open during holidays and follows a set timetable for extra classes.

There is no time to rest. Even when I am at home, I am always thinking about the schoolwork. We don't even get time to spend with our families. For example, the schools are closing this coming Friday for the 1st term, but we cannot close, we do not have that privilege. From the 3rd to the 6th we will be here at work without getting any compensation or incentive, we are just doing voluntary work because we are trying to make sure that we promote effective teaching and learning.

Principal Two also acknowledged the dedication of teachers in this regard.

Some of the teachers are not from the area. They came in January. They would like to go home to be with their families for Easter holidays, but they can't because they have to work. They have committed themselves to the school and learners. They sacrifice spending time with their family during holidays to put in extra work so that they can obtain good results at the end of the year. I also make the same sacrifices. I do not get to spend quality time with my own kids and family because I have to rush the schoolwork.

He further mentioned that teachers are dedicated to attending the extra classes. This suggests that the teachers work as a team to achieve the desired outcomes.

The teachers feel obligated to participate in the extra classes, as they don't want to be left behind when others are involved. They feel that if their students fail, it will reflect poorly on them because they chose not to teach while others did. To formalise these extra efforts, a timetable has even been created for the Easter holidays (Principal Two).

Principal Two also problematised the DBEs approach of being oblivious to some of the contextual challenges that impact the leadership of principals in deprived schools. He stated the following:

The DBE requires us to submit our work the same time as the schools that are in urban areas, even though we are not on the same level as them in terms of resources. This means that I must work extra hard with limited resources in order to meet the demands of my duties as a principal.

This commitment to going the extra mile is evident as principals and teachers work beyond their official duties without additional compensation. They sacrifice time with their families during holidays to prioritise teaching and learning, reflecting their dedication. In deprived contexts, both teachers and principals frequently exceed their expected responsibilities (Mkhize & Bhengu, 2018). Hoosier's (2019) study on the leadership practices of primary school principals in South Africa's deprived schools found that some principals collaborated with other school stakeholders to provide academic support. This included extending instructional time by starting classes earlier (Hoosier, 2019), a similar approach used by principals in this study.

Additionally, Leithwood et al. (2020) argue that leading by example, what they describe as modelling the school's values and practices, is a key leadership approach employed by successful principals to show responsiveness to their working contexts. The principals' participation in extra classes demonstrates their understanding that they must make the same sacrifices and exhibit the same commitment as those they lead. Similarly, Juntrasook (2014) asserts that modelling is an effective leadership practice that distinguishes extraordinary leaders. Principals who lead from the front are not only active in the daily running of the school but also serve as a source of inspiration and support for teachers (Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017).

These findings align with those of Hallinger (2011), where he emphasises that leadership must be understood within the specific context in which it operates, and it plays an important role in shaping the leadership practices that promote learning. Leadership practices must be sensitive to the local culture and societal norms (Hallinger, 2011).

In addition, Principal Two shared that going the extra mile does not only include teaching and learning, but he, together with the teachers, "adopt" the needy learners and provide them with the essentials for school so that they do not drop out because of their deprivations at home.

We have adopted system where 7 permanent teachers take 11 learners each as their own. There are 80 grade 12 learners, and each teacher “adopts” learners that are more needy than others. This helps the learners to not think about the sad situations at home. This is normally done for grade 12s, where the principal and teachers take from their own pocket to provide financial support and assistance to the learners.

In deprived contexts, many students face external challenges such as poverty, food insecurity and unstable home environments that directly impact their ability to learn (Milne, 2016). Principals are often responsible for identifying these issues and addressing them, either by connecting students with social services or implementing school-based initiatives like feeding schemes and mentorship programmes (Dann, 2022). In resource-limited schools, employees frequently go beyond their formal duties to ensure success (Nutov & Somech, 2017).

Ndlovu’s (2023) study on novice principals in deprived contexts revealed that principals often demonstrate care by providing love and support to learners. This includes offering financial assistance for university applications and purchasing uniforms from their personal resources. Murphy et al. (2018) highlight the importance of addressing organisational prejudice to align practices with the needs of affected individuals, thereby uncovering the root causes of social inequality and fostering innovative solutions. The practice of "adopting" learners facing hardships exemplifies principals’ deep awareness of the challenges in deprived contexts and their understanding of the adverse effects these challenges have on learning outcomes.

This caring approach to leadership is reflected in Principal Two’s perspective and supported by research emphasising its significance. Studies by Louis et al. (2016), Smylie et al. (2016) and Van der Vyver et al. (2014) underscore the centrality of caring leadership to effective school management. Combining strong instructional practices with social support through care is essential for improving student outcomes and promoting well-being, especially in disadvantaged settings (Louis et al., 2016; Smylie et al., 2016). Furthermore, Louis et al. (2016) argue that in high-poverty schools, focusing solely on instructional practices may be inadequate or even detrimental. Schools in deprived contexts face more significant challenges than those in affluent areas, necessitating additional effort and resources (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

4.3 Factors constraining the leadership of principals in deprived secondary school contexts

This theme responds to Research Question Two which asked, “*What factors constrain the leadership of secondary school principals in a deprived school context?*”. Three themes emerged as factors constraining the leadership of principals in deprived secondary schools. The

themes are lack of resources, red-tape in processes and challenges with undocumented learners. The themes are discussed below.

4.3.1 Lack of resources

The principals shared that their schools had a lack of resources which adversely influenced teaching and learning. Resource constraints included physical, human and financial resources. Regarding physical resources, the principals shared the following:

Principal One voiced that the school lacked floor space, and the classrooms were dilapidated. He said:

The classrooms are overcrowded. There are not enough classrooms. When it rains, the classrooms get wet.

Principal Two shared that the school did not have sufficient furniture. He stated the following:

The furniture that the learners are supposed to use when they are inside the school is not in a good state in a sense that you find three learners sitting on a desk that is not supposed to be for two learners.

Principal Two also mentioned that they have a problem with their restrooms which are not in a good condition and the mobile toilets do not get cleaned regularly, which causes a problem of hygiene.

The learners' restrooms are not in a good condition. We still use the old pit toilets. When we asked for the upgraded restrooms, they gave us those mobile ones. But you also find that they don't even get cleaned properly. They only clean them once a month and that is unhygienic for the learners.

In deprived school contexts, resource scarcity significantly hampers teaching, learning and leadership. Schools in underprivileged areas often lack essential materials, infrastructure and technology (Patel et al., 2020). There is overcrowding in some schools due to high teacher-learner ratios (Chikoko et al., 2015). Studies also highlight dilapidated facilities and scarce resources in such schools, especially in provinces like the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Limpopo, where basic sanitation remains inadequate, with many schools still using pit toilets (Bhengu & Myende, 2016; DBE, 2018; Faulkner, 2015). In 2019, about 3000 schools had pit toilets—a safety hazard linked to fatalities (SAHRC, 2021), including a widely publicised 2018 drowning incident (Somdyala, 2019). Poor sanitation also leads to hygiene issues, disproportionately affecting girls who may avoid school during menstruation (Faulkner, 2015).

In addition to inadequate infrastructure, Principal Two also commented on the lack of financial resources. He also mentioned the tensions with stringent government measures that prescribed how the funds could be used.

We use that little amount of money that we get from the government to patch the holes because the government does not allow us to use the monies that are for other resources for buildings.

Schools in deprived contexts are generally classified as no-fee schools and fall within quintiles one to three, receiving a higher government subsidy per learner (Mestry & Africa, 2020; van Dyk & White, 2019), which they largely rely on. However, multiple studies (Baker et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2019) indicate that this financial support remains insufficient, leaving these schools struggling to meet basic needs. Overall, the principals' accounts indicate their awareness that schools mirror the communities they serve. In deprived areas, numerous factors converge to create challenging, often toxic, school environments (Lumby, 2015).

Principal Two also commented on issues around remuneration within the profession. He expressed frustration that neither he nor the teachers receive any compensation for their hard work. This lack of support is discouraging, especially since school personnel are held accountable if learners fail and are blamed for not fulfilling their duties.

If the government was fair, we were going to receive compensation for our hard work. Even if it was a once off compensation to just say thank you. But if the learners fail the principal and teachers get blamed for not doing their jobs.

Research indicates that school principals receive inadequate compensation in general, which negatively affects their mental health and, as a result, their focus on providing high-quality services (Nthebe et al., 2016). This is evident with Principal Two as he voiced his dissatisfaction with the DBE for not compensating them for working extra hard to achieve good results. Teachers frequently experience a lack of recognition and gratitude despite the important nature of their work, both in the professional and social spheres (OECD, 2019). Amongst the most urgent problems that teachers encounter globally is insufficient remuneration (OECD, 2019). Teachers frequently receive lower pay than other professions needing comparable levels of education and experience, despite the hard nature of their work (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016). Adding to this, Principal One added the issue of lack of human resources with understaffing issues:

We have a shortage of teachers. I end up taking one of the teachers out of the classroom and then ask them to do the clerical work since we now have SA-SAMS but at the end of the day when we submit, we have the same due dates as someone who has the advantage of having a designated Administrator when I don't have that advantage.

Globally, there is growing concern over teacher shortages (Garcia, 2022). Lumby (2015) asserts that schools in deprived areas often face challenges in retaining high performing teachers because of inadequate financial incentives and challenging working conditions. Montgomery et al. (2020) concur that teachers may choose to leave the profession due to stress, burnout or low salaries.

4.3.2 Red-tape in processes

The data further revealed red-tape in the fulfilment of requests as a constraining factor. The principals mentioned that requests for services were delayed. These time lapses had adverse effects on teaching and learning.

Principal Two expressed frustration with the Department of Basic Education (DBE), citing failure in the procurement of essential services in a timely manner. By the time some services arrive, it is often midway through the year, and some learners have already dropped out.

The DBE do not offer services in a short space of time. Like the uniform that I need for learners they will take time and only give it to me on the 3rd term when I need it now. It also causes a lot of drop out amongst learners because if the learners are no longer wearing clothes that are representable, they get ashamed of coming to school, other learners laugh at them and that damages their self-esteem, and they end up quitting school.

Principal Two further added that bureaucratic red-tape also affects the procurement of furniture, showing a lack of empathy from the DBE towards their challenges. He stated:

When we apply for furniture, it will take time to get delivered. The government says that you cannot tell the learners that they cannot study because you do not have the resources for them, they are all expected to learn and be in school, but where are they supposed to sit?

Similar sentiments were shared by Principal one. He shared the following:

I can tell you maybe there was still another principal when they first started to ask for help. I came here in 1994 when we applied for renovations, and the DBE has only approved it now in 2023.

The majority of developing countries frequently make the same error of underfunding educational facilities that are intended to support high-quality education (Mncube, 2023). The DBE's funding is frequently insufficient, which results in a lack of infrastructure, textbooks and furniture (Petherbridge et al., 2022). Government assistance for schools in deprived contexts has typically been neglected for decades, and many schools are still underdeveloped today (Dube, 2022). These challenges faced by schools in deprived contexts may have a negative impact on providing quality teaching and learning and thus hinder student outcomes.

Inadequate physical facilities, limited technology infrastructure, inadequate resources and poorly maintained facilities and equipment can create an unfavourable learning environment (Barrett et al., 2019). According to West (2020), inadequate infrastructure can limit teachers' and students' access to essential resources and increase teacher workload and stress as they may need to spend more time and effort to compensate for the lack of resources, thus hindering teaching and learning.

4.3.3 Challenges with undocumented learners

The challenge of undocumented learners was raised by Principal One as a constraining factor. This had negative implications for funding as these learners were not accounted in the enrolment and were not funded through the government subsidy. Principal One said:

We have those learners that do not have documents (birth certificates), even though there are not many. There are about 7 of those learners that do not have documents. But this means that we cannot count them in our enrolment because they do not have documents. This limits us because it means they are not even counted on the feeding scheme, but we still give them food.

Schools with high numbers of undocumented learners may receive reduced funding due to inaccurate records (Ee & Gandara, 2019). This has a negative impact on the learners that are documented, and the school leaders still have to provide the undocumented learners with education and food. These learners also encounter barriers to post-secondary education and employment (UNESCO, 2019). School leaders may encounter challenges with the academic processes when accommodating these learners. This means overcrowding and shortages of teaching and learning materials like stationery and textbooks.

4.4 Factors enabling the leadership of principals in deprived secondary school contexts

Despite the challenges which school principals face in leading teaching and learning in deprived school contexts, there are some factors that enable them to strive and meet their desired goals. In this study, parental and systemic support emerged as factors enabling the leadership of principals. These are elaborated on below.

4.4.1 Parental support

Both principals noted that they receive parental assistance when needed. Parents contribute by supporting their children's education and attending school meetings, including those of the School Governing Body (SGB).

Citing the active involvement of parents, the principals shared the following:

Last week there was a meeting for the bi-election where we were auditing the SGB, and it was a success. (Principal One)

Principal One further expressed that parents were enthusiastic about the school and participated in additional activities. He said:

The parents are very positive. As you can see the ones that are preparing next door. They are preparing for a meeting that is going to take place with the SGB. They want to make sure that everything is in order for the meeting.

Principal Two also commented on the commitment of parents. He shared that such support aided him in dealing with the challenges they face.

It is hard, but with the help we also get from parent. They are very supportive. If you ask them to come, they do come. They even buy calculators for us.

Principal One shared that a collaborative relationship with parents helped address issues with ill-disciplined learners, as close communication kept parents informed and involved. He voiced the following:

We know the parents of the learners that are in our school. So, if a learner misbehaves, we tell them that we are going to visit their homes to speak with their parents. The learners know that we are not bluffing because we have a good relationship with their parents.

The principals highlighted that parents are engaged in their children's education and are always willing to assist. It is widely recognised that parents play a crucial role as partners in their children's education, and that their involvement positively impacts academic achievement (Ndwandwe, 2023). According to Manilal and Jairam (2023), the benefits of parental involvement in learners' education include an increase in learners' academic performance and achievement, learners' aspirations, motivation and self-discipline and behaviour. The active participation of parents suggests that principals are in constant communication with the parents. Regular communication between the school and families allows the principal to better understand the challenges students face at home, providing more tailored support (Graham-Clay., 2024). Principals who can establish strong relationships with parents often find it easier to navigate the constraints of deprived school environments (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). Moreover, it enables the principal to harness the collective efforts of the community to improve school outcomes (Epstein & Sanders, 2016).

Hallinger (2011) emphasised that parental involvement can have a number of benefits, including improved students' outcomes; increased teacher morale; stronger school community

relationships; and more effective school leadership. This may enable more effective decision-making.

4.4.2 Systemic support

In addition to parental support, the principal reported that they received systemic support from the Department of Basic Education (DBE). Systematic support refers to the co-ordinated efforts by educational authorities, government bodies and community organisations to provide essential resources, professional development and policy frameworks that empower school leaders (Walker et al., 2024). Support from the DBE was extended through district officials and initiatives such as the feeding schemes. Regarding the former, Principal One stated:

Our Chief Inspector Mr X is very supportive towards the school. He always gives assistance when we request for it, he also relies on us to perform. He oversees six schools in our circuit. We are the ones with the most enrolment in the circuit, so he always supports us. I can even call him here in front of you and ask him for assistance and he will assist. I don't know if it is maybe because I have worked with him before in another school before I came here but he is very supportive.

He further shared that they receive support through the feeding scheme. He said:

We are lucky that the government provides us with the feeding scheme, this way we are able to support the learners who come to school on empty stomachs. This way they are able to focus in class.

Quintile one to three schools benefit from the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), lessening the financial burden of obtaining access to education (Chikoko, 2018; Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019). This is because in such areas, economic opportunities are scarce, with the vast population dependent on social grants and menial labour for income (Chikoko, 2018; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). As such, food shortages in general and nutritional poverty in particular are prevalent amongst South Africa's deprived communities (Chikoko, 2018).

Drawing on these support systems indicates that the principals are aware of the academic structures that may assist them. Academic structures in the Hallinger (2011) Leadership for Learning model may include formal and informal structures which all contribute towards learner improvement and academic achievements.

4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the data and discussed the findings. The chapter discussed seven themes, with three responding to research question one, two responding to research question two and two responding to research question three. The following chapter provides the summary, conclusion and recommendations of the whole study.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented and discussed the findings of this study, organised around seven themes that addressed the three research questions outlined in Chapter One. This final chapter concludes the study by summarising the previous chapters, providing conclusions, and offering recommendations based on the findings. It begins with a summary that highlights the key discussions from the preceding chapters. This is followed by the conclusions drawn from the findings, emphasising the lessons learned about the leadership of principals. Finally, the chapter offers recommendations and concludes the study.

5.2 Summary of the study

This section provides a summary of the study, highlighting the key issues discussed in the previous chapters. Chapter One provided an overview of the study. The chapter commenced by providing the introduction and background. This was followed by the articulation of the problem statement. Thereafter, I presented the three key research questions that guided the inquiry. The rationale, providing the justifications for engaging in this study, was then presented on three levels, the personal, professional and theoretical. The chapter then provided the clarification for the key concepts, that is multiple deprivation and leadership. Lastly, the chapter presented a synopsis of the study through a section titled “overview of the dissertation”.

Chapter Two presented a review of extant literature. The review drew on local and global scholarship to discuss various issues. Five themes were discussed. In the same chapter, the researcher discussed Leadership for Learning, the model used as the lens for the study.

Chapter Three presented the research design and methodology used in the study. The chapter commenced with the introduction, followed by a discussion of the interpretive paradigm. The qualitative research design and case study methodology were then discussed. This was followed by a discussion of purposive sampling which is the sampling approach used in this study. Semi-structured interviews, as the data generation method were then discussed. This was followed by a discussion of thematic analysis, drawing on Braun and Clarke’s six step analysis approach. Measures ensuring the trustworthiness of the findings and ethical issues were also discussed.

Chapter Four dealt with the presentation, discussion, analysis and interpretation of the findings of the study, with verbatim quotes from the participants as evidence that what is written is based on the statements that were made by real people. The conclusions were reached based on the findings discussed in Chapter Four, followed by the recommendations.

5.3 Lessons drawn from principals leading secondary schools in deprived contexts

This section presents the conclusions of the study, elucidating the lessons learnt and drawn from the findings. The conclusions drawn are presented for each research question and drawn from the findings presented in Chapter Four.

5.3.1 How do secondary school principals in a deprived school context lead teaching and learning?

The study found that principals leading secondary schools in deprived contexts used multiple leadership strategies as they engaged in their leadership. The principals used a collaborative approach working with the school-community. They worked with internal stakeholders such as the SMT and SGB, leveraging the collective capital of all these structures to ensure that they could lead effectively. Regarding external stakeholders, they worked with the wider school-community participating in structures with multiple stakeholders. The principal termed this collaborative approach the ‘three-legged approach’.

This practice aligns with the principles of distributed leadership, which emphasises both formal and informal leadership roles across various levels within an organisation (Jones et al., 2014; Spillane et al., 2006). In this approach, leadership responsibilities shift depending on the task or context, allowing different individuals to take the lead as needed (Gronn, 2002). Distributed leadership fosters a sense of shared purpose, collaboration and ownership amongst team members (Harris, 2013). Central to this approach is the focus on building strong relationships, which are essential for cultivating the social capital required to effectively lead 21st-century schools (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013). Such capital is vital, especially in deprived school contexts where resources are scarce. In addition to working with the school-community, the principals focused on the instructional core to ensure effective teaching and learning.

In leading the instructional core, principals emphasised the early completion of the curriculum in order to allow teachers and learners ample time for revision. They also initiated the use of extra classes after school, weekends and school holidays to ensure that learners are ready for the exams, thus improving student achievement. Curriculum coverage monitoring ensures that

teachers are covering the material and providing students with ample opportunities to study, ultimately aiming to improved student achievement (Bertram et al., 2021).

The principals also ensured that work done in the school was accurate. They used monitoring as a tool to ensure the quality of the work, whereby they monitored DHs to ensure effective curriculum delivery. This approach was valuable as it became institutionalised to ensure consistent, measurable standards across the school (Huerta & Zuckerman, 2019). They also ensured that they allocate the best teachers to Grade 12s as the performance of the school is usually measured by the pass rate of the Grade 12 learners. This was a practice they used to set high standard for their schools. It is believed that the quality of teachers has the biggest influence on learners' academic progress (Olawale, 2023).

The study revealed that principals go an extra mile in ensuring effective teaching and learning by exceeding their prescribed duties. Over and above their leadership responsibilities, they also performed teaching and administrative duties and lead through a leadership of care. They held extra classes and dedicated more time to teaching and learning. This is linked to the theory of transformational leadership which emphasises the ability of leaders to inspire and motivate followers to achieve more than they originally thought possible, focusing on change, innovation and improvement (Steinmann et al, 2018). They actively communicate this vision motivating others to strive for excellence (Steinman et al., 2018).

5.3.2. What factors constrain the leadership of secondary school principals in a deprived school context?

The study found that principals from the chosen secondary schools showed that even though they lead teaching and learning, they face challenges that may act as a stumbling block to their leadership effectiveness. These challenged included a lack of physical and human resources which included a lack of physical structures, and the one principal is faced with staff shortages. Schools in deprived contexts often lack basic teaching materials, infrastructure, and access to technological tools, all of which are essential for modern education (Patel et al., 2020). The theme of red-tape in processes emerged, where principals had a problem with the delay in requests for services with the DBE. This proved a constraint as it had a negative effect on their leadership roles. The principals also had challenges with undocumented learners who did not have birth certificates and ID documents. This was a challenge as they were obliged to afford them the same services as those learners who are documented. These learners benefitted from teaching and learning, learning materials and the feeding scheme. In under-resourced schools,

where teachers and learners face significant challenges, principals are expected to take on more directive roles, guiding and motivating staff through adversity (Cairns, 2016).

The findings suggest that deprived school contexts are also prejudiced contexts. These prejudiced contexts are marked by “consistent, systematic social and economic disparities in experiences and results based on individuals' social group affiliations” (Murphey et al., 2018, p. 66). This emphasises the role of context in shaping leadership, as discussed by Hallinger (2018) and Leithwood et al. (2020), and points to deprived contexts as examples of such settings. Murphey et al. (2018) contend that acknowledging prejudice in particular environments enable leaders to tailor their practices to the needs of those impacted, bringing attention to neglected sources of social inequality and seeking creative solutions to tackle these disparities. This is reflected in the leadership strategies of principals, which demonstrate their efforts to address and alleviate the challenges present in their schools.

Furthermore, the principals' awareness suggests that they are context-responsive leaders. Bredeson et al. (2011) describe context-responsive leadership as the practical application of wisdom, where leaders use knowledge, skills, and virtues to adapt their leadership in response to dynamic contextual variables. This was evident as the principals' practices were shaped by the contexts in which they lead.

5.3.3. What factors enable the leadership of secondary school principals in a deprived school context?

The study indicates that the principals found parental support as an enabler that assisted them to thrive in their leadership roles. Parents are also an important component in the three-legged approach, which was mentioned in Theme One. Some of the parents of learners were available and contributed to the running of the school. These included parents attending school meetings and those of the SGB. The principals had a collaborative relationship with the parents, and they showed that they were invested in their children's education. Regular communication between the school and families allows the principal to better understand the challenges students face at home, providing more tailored support (Graham-Clay, 2024). Moreover, it enables the principal to harness the collective efforts of the community to improve school outcomes (Epstein & Sanders, 2016). In addition to parental support, principals received systemic support from DBE. This included relationships with the district officials and support through the feeding scheme that allowed learners to have food and be able to focus in class. Effective school

leadership in deprived contexts also depends on supportive governance structures (Mhlanga, 2019).

5.4 Recommendations

Recognising support networks both within and beyond the school indicates that principals understand the extra resources and help needed to acquire necessary assets. This demonstrates an asset-based approach, which sees schools and communities as interconnected, utilizing local skills, knowledge, and resources to strengthen the school's ability to provide quality education (Myende, 2019; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). This perspective emphasizes the strengths of a community rather than its shortcomings, fostering positive transformation (Ennis & West, 2020). The discussion above focused on research findings and conclusions. Even though both principals showed strengths in leading teaching and learning in their respective schools, there is still room for improvement. The recommendations provided below are informed by the conclusions stated above.

5.4.1 Recommendations for practice

From the findings of the study, it was noted that there is no policy set by the DBE to support principals from deprived contexts. Principals in deprived contexts find themselves thrown in the deep-end with no guidance and structured practice, yet they are expected to perform like all other principals that have support from affluent schools. The recommendation is that the policy that guides principals in schools be amended to cater for principals in deprived contexts. Another recommendation is that the DBE can give more support to the principals in deprived contexts so that they also feel valuable.

5.4.2 Recommendations for future research

This study was conducted in the ILembe district, with only two principals as participants. I recommend that for future research, more studies be conducted with a larger participants scale to explore how principals lead teaching and learning in deprived contexts. These studies should also use mixed methods approaches in addition to qualitative approach. Such depth may assist in providing a more comprehensive perspective on the combined effects of deprivation and schooling. I noted through this research that the deprived context is a complex matter and would recommend that more studies be done under this context.

5.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I reflected on the chapters of the study, giving a summary of what each chapter presented. This was followed by the summary of the study, drawing from the lessons of principals leading secondary schools in deprived contexts. The summary focused on a brief discussion of what each research question entailed. The chapter concluded with recommendations for practice and future research.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



10 August 2022

Nothando Brilliantine Zungu (215080787)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear NB Zungu,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00004512/2022

Project title: Principals promoting effective teaching and learning in deprived rural secondary schools in Ilembe District: Lessons from two principals

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 21 July 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted FULL APPROVAL.

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

This approval is valid until 10 August 2023.

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

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

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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

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

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT



UNIVERSITY OF TM
KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

Letter requesting permission from the principal (gate keeper) to conduct research in schools

P O Box 204
Kranskop
3268

The Principal
P O Box 93
Kranskop
3268

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

My name is Nothando Brilliantine Zungu, a master's student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. As part of my degree fulfilment, I am required to conduct research. I therefore kindly seek permission to conduct this research at your school. The title of my study is: Principals promoting effective teaching and learning in deprived rural secondary schools in ILembe District: Lessons from two principals.

This study aims:

- To understand factors associated with the deprived context
- To understand how such factors impact on teaching and learning
- To document the strategies principals employ to overcome factors associated with promoting effective teaching and learning in deprived context.

Participants will be interviewed for approximately 40-60 minutes at the times convenient to her which will not disturb the schedules of the day. The interview will be voice-recorded. Documents review will also be done.

PLEASE TAKE NOTE THAT:

- There will be no financial benefits that participant may accrue as a result of her participation in this research project.

- Her identity will not be divulged under any circumstance/s, during and after the reporting process.
- All the responses, and reviewed documents will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Pseudonyms will be used to represent the school and name of the participant.
- Participation will always remain voluntary which means that participant may withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime if they so wish without incurring any penalties.
- Participant purposively selected to participate in this study and they will be contacted well in advance for interviews.
- The interviews shall be voice-recorded to assist me in concentrating on the actual interviews.
-

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

Supervisor:

Dr S.D. Bayeni

Tel. 031-267026 (office)

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

UKZN Research Office

HSSREC-Ethics

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Nothando Brilliantine Zungu



Email: thandobrilliantine@gmail.co.za

Declaration

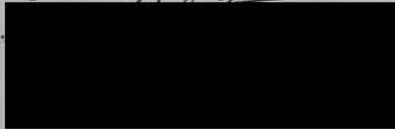
I,.....
the principal) of (Full names of
.....(School name) hereby

confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study:

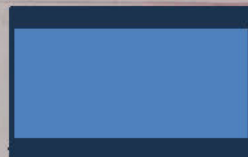
Principals promoting effective teaching and learning in deprived rural secondary schools in ILembe District: Lessons from two principals. I have received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and I consent voluntarily for the school to be part of the study. I understand that the school is at liberty to withdraw from research at any time should the school so desire.

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



Signature of Principal



Date
09/06/2022



Declaration

I..... (Full names of the principal) of  (School name) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study: **Principals promoting effective teaching and learning in deprived rural secondary schools in ILembe District: Lessons from two principals.** I have received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and I consent voluntarily for the school to be part of the study. I understand that the school is at liberty to withdraw from research at any time should the school so desire.

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

Signature of Principal

.....

Date

..19.09.2022'


.....
.....

APPENDIX C: EDITING LETTER
EDITING LETTER


Clare Estate

Durban

4091

13 December 2024

To: Whom it may concern

Editing of Dissertation: Nothando Zungu

Leading Teaching and Learning: Lessons from Two Secondary School Principals Leading in a Deprived Context

This letter serves as confirmation that the aforementioned dissertation has been language edited. The requisite grammatical conventions have been met/recommended. Suggestions have been made to the candidate where necessary.

Any queries may be directed to the author of this letter.

Regards



MP MATHEWS

Lecturer and Language Editor

Mercimathews4@gmail.com



APPENDIX D: TURNITIN REPORT

The screenshot displays the Turnitin Feedback Studio interface in a Google Chrome browser. The page title is 'feedback studio' and the document name is 'Nothando Zungu | For Turnitin.docx'. The main content area is currently blank. On the right side, a 'Match Overview' panel is visible, showing a total match percentage of 6%. Below this, a list of six matches is provided, each with a source name and its corresponding percentage.

Match Number	Source	Match Percentage
1	researchspace.ukzn.ac... Internet Source	4%
2	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	1%
3	repository.up.ac.za Internet Source	1%
4	Submitted to University... Student Paper	<1%
5	Submitted to University... Student Paper	<1%
6	Phumlani Erasmus My... Publication	<1%

At the bottom of the interface, the status bar indicates 'Page: 1 of 58' and 'Word Count: 20770'. There are also options for 'Text-Only Report' and 'High Resolution' (set to 'On'). The Windows taskbar at the very bottom shows the system clock as 12:02 on 2024/12/06, with a weather forecast of 25°C Mostly cloudy.