



**Investigating sustainable leadership practices by
departmental heads in schools around Bergville Circuit**

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degree of Master of Commerce in the Graduate School of Business
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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

School leadership is well positioned to influence a wide range of stakeholders and promote sustainability practices within and outside the school setting where they lead. This quantitative study investigates sustainable leadership practices that the departmental heads use in their schools with various stakeholders in public schools of Bergville Circuit. A stratified purposive sampling was used to select 59 departmental heads in public school of Bergville Circuit as participants. A self-completed questionnaire was designed with 45 items and dispatched to the selected departmental heads from rural public schools in the Bergville Circuit in KZN. Results indicate that although there are sustainable leadership practices currently used by Departmental Heads in the Bergville Circuit, these practices are not formally documented or communicated. The perception among Departmental Heads is that sustainable leadership practices that relate to continual development of staff and proper teamwork between the principal and other school leadership are of paramount importance for school functionality and sustainability. Key performance drivers (KPDs) that could enhance school leadership sustainability are the valuing of staff, continuous development of staff, stakeholder consultation, teamwork, environmental responsibility, and innovation. Drawing from these results, a framework of sustainable leadership practice is proposed to be used by departmental heads in schools. This study recommends that the sustainable leadership practices and KPDs be integrated into the leadership activities and workshops so that sustainability is regularly addressed and monitored. Socially, departmental heads should be more involved in managing relationships that schools, as social organizations have with their surrounding communities and the environment in such a way that mutual benefit is realised among the key stakeholders.

Keywords: Sustainable leadership practices, School leadership, sustainability, Sustainable School leadership

LIST OF ACRONYMS

Department of Basic Education -	DBE
Department of Education -	DoE
Department Heads –	DHs
Corporate Social Responsibility –	CSR
Integrated Quality Management System -	IQMS
KwaZulu-Natal –	KZN
South Africa –	SA
School Governing Body –	SGB
South African Schools Act (1996) -	SASA
School Management Teams -	SMTs

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CHAPTER ONE: ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

UNESCO ROSA (2021) declared South Africa as a water-stressed country with climate variability that is also very susceptible to the effects of climate change due to its socio-economic and environmental context. Leadership's role in entrenching or embedding environmental sustainability in all spheres of an organisation and society is key to ensuring a sustainable future for South Africa. Sustainability has more commonly been researched in the context of work-related organisations that involve adults. In recent years however, scholars have begun investigating sustainable leadership in schools (de Sousa, Richter & Raath, 2017; UNESCO ROSA, 2021). The school setting is fundamental in that this is where society begins to shape its young members into potential future leaders. Whilst existing research on education for sustainable development (ESD) and sustainability in schools is increasing, there tends to be greater emphasis on curriculum content rather than on developing teaching methods and competencies of educators to teach education for sustainable development. This is a complex matter and demands an interdisciplinary approach (Hendriawan, Ali & Rusman, 2019).

It is significant to note that there are limited connections and efforts to harness the relevance of indigenous knowledge systems with regards to environmental sustainability in both formal education and in collaboration with communities. It is also important to highlight that formal education for sustainable development in schools involves processes of engaging with communities, the youth and indigenous knowledge holders in order to expand education, learning opportunities and activities with regards to securing connections to the cultural, natural and social worlds of community members in South Africa (De Sousa et al, 2017). The actions of school leaders reflect their day-to-day practices, which cover a variety of school-related issues beyond curriculum content. This study focuses primarily on the actions of school leaders with respect to their pursuit of environmental sustainability through their leadership of operational, administrative, social, academic and student support activities within schools, which form a substantial section

of the world's social system. Leadership practices in schools have the function of shaping not only the physical school resources (e.g. equipment and classrooms), but also the social dimensions (e.g. the school social environment, which is a reflection of human behaviour within society at large), organisational structural aspects (e.g. hierarchy, authority and roles), and symbolic aspects such as beliefs, norms, values. All of these are key in influencing the feelings and behaviours of students and staff towards environmental sustainability (Popov, Wolhuter, Kalin, Hilton & Ogunleye, 2017; Niemezyk, 2016).

It is notable that there is limited research that positions environmental sustainability in the context of the practices of school leaders as a whole and various other stakeholders when it comes to sustainability, education and sustainable school system (Vila-Vázquez, Castro-Casal, Álvarez-Pérez & del Río-Araújo, 2018). Without sustainable school leadership, education cannot succeed as a critical tool for promoting sustainability and improving the capacity of the workforce. Learners and their communities must address the interconnected challenges of meeting the needs of the present generation without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Hallinger & Suriyankietkaew, 2018).

School leaders who are trained in education for sustainable development play a vital role in developing learning environments and learning experiences that create and enhance an understanding of the linkages with respect to environmentally sustainable development issues. Sustainability in all spheres of the school environment includes aspects of teaching, learning and management that empower learners (Gough, 2005). An investigation into education for sustainable development related practices of leaders in schools should be based on the fundamental understanding that education for sustainable development requires whole-institution approaches to dictate the principles and practices of environmental sustainability. However, school leaders tend to be highly skeptical of re-orienting such principles and practices holistically in their schools (de Sousa, Richter & Raath, 2017). In this regard, ESD leaders not only shape a sustainable future through their own actions, but they also involve other individuals in the process of pursuing environmentally sustainable practices (Boca & Saracli, 2019).

The real day-to-day life experiences and reflections of leaders with reference to sustainability are insightful in understanding the practices of sustainable leadership from the viewpoint of practitioners (Strydom, 2020). These leaders play a significant role as their practices either enhance or impede sustainability in the organisational context. In light of the above, the question of how school leadership and management teams exercise sustainable leadership is of significance to scholars of both leadership and environmental sustainability.

As such, this descriptive study sought to explore the specific practices utilised by Department Heads to lead environmental sustainability in Bergville Circuit schools within the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province of South Africa. With this overarching objective in mind, the introductory chapter presents the background of the study in terms of the geographical context and also clarifies the notion of the school as a social system and levels of leadership in education.

Since South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994, the country has experienced remarkable changes in various sectors including the education sector. These changes encompass, among others, the introduction and implementation of new policies in the education arena whereby leadership in the education system has shifted from a largely centralised leadership system to a more decentralised and delegated one. Another prominent change in global education over the last 30 years or so is the focus on sustainability, both social and environmental.

This chapter presents the overall context and background of this particular research study by providing an explanation of and motivation for the problem being addressed within the context of South African public schools. It further clarifies the specific objectives of the study, defines the research questions that guided the implementation of the study, and introduces the study's limitations. The chapter concludes with an outline of all the chapters of this dissertation and a short summary of chapter one.

1.2 Background to the study

Leadership within schools and the pursuit of sustainability in schools and their wider communities are integral in South Africa if we are to develop and produce learners and future leaders who are mindful of a sustainable future. Tingle, Corrales and Peters (2019) describe a school as a component of a multi-faceted system of human capital development and all facets of this system require consideration towards building a sustainable society. Environmentalists and scientists have schooling backgrounds and frequently reflect on their school education when aiming to assimilate certain principles and values that may contribute to the realisation of a sustainable future. This fact notwithstanding, it is noteworthy that environmental education in South Africa is conducted very erratically in schools as most educators, particularly in the more rural schools, have not been exposed to it through training programmes that should be widely and regularly provided by the Department of Education (DoE) (De Sousa et al, 2017).

When there is lack of both effective and supportive school leadership, education is considerably affected. While the educator 'defiance' battle remains active in South Africa, it is leadership and management failures that feature prominently throughout the system (Liu, 2020). For instance, resources are not allocated effectively and equally and text books and other utilities often fail to reach schools on time, if at all. While there are differences between and within provinces, many staff are highly committed and hardworking, yet evidence suggests that most district offices are operating ineffectively. Civil servants in the Department of Basic Education are faced with the immense task of meeting the demands in the multitude of South African schools and receive little support from more senior government departments and officials (Bush, Kiggudu & Moorosi, 2011). In some provinces, senior appointments are made politically and not on merit, which further hinders the success of the national level interventions. Subject advisors who have interacted with environmental education partners outside the school system in South Africa value greatly the resources and information they receive from these and in turn often transfer those resources and knowledge on to other South African educators (Nkambule and Amsterdam, 2018).

Social organisations such as schools exist through interactions among people, both within and outside of the organisation. In order to enhance the creation of a sustainable future it is critical that sustainable leaders in the school context nurture learners and staff who are not only aware of but who are also knowledgeable regarding possible actions and beliefs to sustain the environment. They, in turn, have the ability to influence the future and demonstrate the desire to act in ways that focus on meeting the needs of the current generation without compromising the needs of future generations, both in schools and in communities (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2013). In the school system, sustainable leadership is critical to model and encourage sustainability behaviours and practices among educators who as members of society themselves, not only guide the learning processes within schools but also in their communities (Bozkus, 2014).

A primary challenge in the current schooling system however is the lack of support for environmental education at higher levels of South African education. The workshop entitled “Sustainability Starts With Teachers”, held on 23 June 2020 in South Africa, clearly noted that despite some progress, education is greatly affected by a diversity of challenges within all levels of the formal education sector. . The development of a draft policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications in Higher Education and Training, and a 2019–2029 Environmental Education and Training Strategy and Action Plan, was derived from reviewing the progress made in ESD in South African education over a 15-year period since 2002, which included the integration of all levels of environmental and sustainable education. According to UNESCO ROSA, 2019, this policy and plan mark some of the progress made thus far, however the full impact has yet to be seen in South Africa’s education system.

Feedback from teacher respondents in this study highlighted that some academics are oblivious to the critical linkages between education and sustainable development and consequently do not integrate ESD in the teaching and learning process. Other concerns raised were that higher education lecturers lack capacity for offering either mainstream or full curricula ESD teacher training. Incapacity due to financial constraints results in a lean staff component who are forced to maintain their original training programmes in order to

manage workloads. Additionally, some respondents noted that, as it is a fairly new concept in SA at least, there is limited knowledge regarding ESD. In some higher education institutions there has been a recent restructuring of teacher training programme curricula, however a crowded curriculum means competition with other modules for teaching time (Schafer and Wilmot, 2012).

The mainstreaming of cultural and heritage issues into the South African higher education and training curriculum are integral in ensuring that cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge systems are valued in the national school curriculum and find expression in the classroom so that they enrich the everyday lives of the learners and their communities. ESD involves processes of engaging communities, youth and indigenous knowledge holders in expanding educational learning opportunities and activities, thereby making connections to the cultural and social worlds of community members.

In the school setting, there is a need for practices that surpass the traditional idea or behaviour of an educator. It is crucial to acknowledge educators as individuals who are in a complex relationship not only with their learners and colleagues in schools but also with their communities. It is within these complex relations that sustainable leadership in schools creates a conducive atmosphere for genuine learning to develop in ESD (Kopnina, 2020). This requires systems thinking, which in turn helps leaders at different levels within schools, other organisations and the greater society to recognise and act in a manner that is sustainable. Practices of leaders informed by systems thinking expands the world view of school leaders, students and school governance (Despres,2004).

As sustainability is complex, systems thinking is key to foster a more practical and inclusive approach to problem solving. It restores a sense of relationship to places, people, ecosystems and the world at large by acknowledging the fact that everything is interconnected. In viewing the complexity of sustainability, the new vision of education emphasizes the existence of a holistic and interdisciplinary approach, values-driven, participatory, critical thinking and problem solving (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018). This requires educational institutions to reorient education systems, policies and practices that

encourage people to act and make appropriate decisions in accordance with local conditions when dealing with issues that threaten their future (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018; Al-Husseini, 2019). The South African schooling system has suffered as a result of insufficient attention paid to teacher development and training programmes that have not proven effective in addressing the schooling challenges of the current generation. It is in this context that it is necessary to understand how the actions of leaders at school level either enable or impede sustainable behaviours by the relevant stakeholders in the school.

As has already been mentioned, one of the marked changes in the education system since South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994 was the shift from a largely centralised leadership to a more decentralised and delegated one (Pont, 2020). In education systems, the roles of the leaders are progressively characterised by collaboration and responsibility. This change guides school leadership into the fore of directing, aligning and ensuring commitment (DAC) of various stakeholders in pursuit of mutual goals at local school level. The stability and success of the schools are often aligned with the school leadership, especially principal leadership. Studies in Latin America (Castillo & Hallinger, 2018), Arab countries (Oplatka & Arar, 2017), China (Antoniou & Lu, 2018), and Kenya (Mwangi, 2011) have underlined the impact of school leadership as a determining factor of student outcomes and overall school success. Effective school leadership impacts positively on teaching and learning, school culture and the organisational structure as a whole (Bush & Glover, 2016). With constructive management, teachers are motivated and punctual and thus follow a structured and planned curriculum. Without successful school leadership, it is difficult to achieve the desired quality of output in the education system, likely negatively impacting the country both socially and economically.

This study focused on public schools in the Bergville Circuit under the uThukela District Municipality located in the northern part of KZN, South Africa. This region has three local municipalities under it, namely Okhahlamba (Bergville), Alfred Duma (Ladysmith), and iNkosi Langalibalele (Estcourt). Okhahlamba is the smallest of the three local municipalities in terms of economic activities and population yet it covers the largest

geographical area (3 971km²) in the district. Okhahlamba (which means “barrier of spears” in isiZulu) Municipality is geographically located in the Drakensberg mountains, which separate the northern parts of KZN from the Free State province and the Kingdom of Lesotho, where the uThukela river starts (uThukela District Municipality, 2020). According to Magi and Nzama (2008), the Okhahlamba-Drakensberg has been described as an important ecotourism resource.

Bergville is a small town that is known as the entryway to the Northern Drakensberg and attracts around 500 000 tourists annually. This area became known as Bergville Mountain Village in 1897 and is now used, among other economic activities, for about 2 500km² of dairy and cattle ranching (Mutambara & Mthembu, 2018). Bergville is halfway between South Africa’s economic cities of Johannesburg and Durban that are linked by the N3 Toll Road passing through the uThukela district. The main economic activities prominent in Bergville are manufacturing (29%), wholesale and retail trade (12%), finance, insurance, real estate, business services, tourism and agriculture. It has the highest percentage of the population in its district municipality with 68% of the population in Bergville living in poverty due to high unemployment rates (Mutambara & Mthembu, 2018). A significant percentage of households in the Okhahlamba municipality reside in traditional dwellings outside the small towns of Bergville and Winterton. In 2016, it was estimated that 11.8% of households had no access to electricity (uThukela District Municipality, 2020).

Schools in the Bergville area are located in the vicinity of the Drakensberg Mountains, which are rich in both heritage sites and natural environment that have the potential to play an important role in driving tourism and development activities (Prins, 2017). The primary focus of this study was on the rural public schools in this area, the majority of which do not levy school fees and are thus solely dependent on government funding. As such, most of these schools are characterised by poor infrastructure and lack of access to basic services including transport infrastructure, water supply and sanitation (uThukela District Municipality, 2020).

1.3 School as a Social System

In understanding the practices of sustainable leadership in schools, it is important to underscore the fact that a school is a social system as it does not exist in a vacuum. As part of the society, the South African basic education sector bemoans regular loss of teaching infrastructure through the break ins and torching of schools around the country every year (De Wet, 2016). There has been a decrease in the provision of services to communities and the study by Morudu (2017) revealed that there is a growing relationship between community protests due to demands for basic service delivery in communities and school disruptions. When there are protests by the community members demanding service delivery, the schooling processes increasingly get disrupted as children are blocked from going to schools. Notably, there has been an increase in the number of violent protests that ultimately result in the vandalism of school property (De Wet, 2016).

To understand what leaders in a school actually do in relation to sustainability, it is insightful to recognize that teachers work as a collective (Bottery, 2017). Teachers need support in order to have specific teaching competencies, and also for networking when it comes to education for sustainable development (ESD). It is crucial that the practices of school leadership also promote and support the building and maintaining of cross departmental collaborations and internal relationships across the traditional boundaries within the school (Malatji, 2018). As sustainability is complex, it requires systematic thinking and approach in teaching and solving sustainability problems (Kopnina, 2020).

There is an inseparable integration and influence of political power and authority within schools and among the external stakeholders become elements of the school structure (Chrispeels and Martin, 2002). As a result, relational practices of leaders are essential for relationships and socializations within schools and communities as they have an impact on many vital processes and practices of sustainability within and outside the school boundaries (UNESCO ROSA,2021).

1.4 Types, Levels and Quality of School Leadership

Clarity on the type and level of leadership in a study is vital, particularly in the educational context, which is structured and hierarchical. The seminal work of Katz and Kahn (1978) brings to the fore the notion of strategic, operational and tactical levels or categories of leadership in organisations. Strategic leadership theories are marked by a concern for the evolution of the organisation as a whole, including its changing aims and capabilities in the long-term. Strategic leaders are those in dominant coalition or top executives who have overall responsibility for the activities and outcomes of an organisation (Finkelstein, Hambrick & Cannella, 2009:4).

Tactical leadership addresses current matters, focusing on short-term decisions and risk management for instant outcomes. At the tactical level, leaders must balance the needs of team members with those of the mission or situation. This often involves negotiating and enticing followers to cooperate in order to achieve the intended objectives by creating an environment where leaders are willing to make sacrifices or contribute to the team because of a felt loyalty to the leader and other team members. Tactical leadership is thus highly transactional. Lastly, operational leadership refers to building the structures and systems that enable the strategic leader's vision and objectives to become realities whilst providing the framework for inspired action by the organisation's tactical leaders. These operational leaders create systems to support the values of the organisation and its leadership and encourage a culture as well as behaviour patterns that are congruent with these. They lead teams in analysing and understanding the strategic and tactical realities of the organisation and craft the supporting infrastructure that enables everyone to move tactically toward the achievement of the organisation's strategy through the operational framework of processes, systems, structures, and incentives. To do this, they require an intimate understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the transactional and transformational approaches to leadership.

Mindful of the above three levels of leadership, it is important to highlight that sustainable leadership should limit the negative impact of organisational activities on people, planet and profit (Boca & Saracli, 2019). Sustainable leaders develop self-awareness and reflect

on their relationships with environmental, societal and economic issues and on how their organisational strategy contributes a net positive effect on the world and what changes they can make to create an environment in which employees, stakeholders and clients can collaborate in shaping a sustainable future (Boca & Saracli, 2019).

This study focuses on departmental schools as members of the school leadership and management team; the upper echelon who make strategic decisions at the school level. It is important to note that functional school leadership does not always hold officially designated positions and is often spread across a number of individuals in schools. According to the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Departmental Heads (DHs) form part of the School Management Team (SMT) and are primarily responsible to teach, supervise and manage the work of post level one (PL1) educators. The Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) (2016) stipulate that a teacher, senior teacher or master teacher form post level one (PL1) on the school-based hierarchy. A PL1 teacher's responsibilities are limited to teaching and managing classrooms administrative duties and assisting in extra and co-curricular activities.

A senior teacher and master teacher have, in addition to PL1 teachers' duties, the responsibilities of mentoring and stakeholder interaction. Departmental Heads are on PL2 and have responsibilities of teaching as well as participating in school appraisal processes and advising the principal regarding the division of work among staff in their department (Seabi, 2019). With regards to communication duties, Departmental Heads have to co-operate with colleagues to develop and maintain high quality teaching standards. They interact with parents to champion the progress and conduct of learners as well as engage with the public on behalf of the principal. The deputy principals are on PL3 and hold duties in addition to those of Departmental Heads to manage staff and supervise and advise the Representative Council of Learners (RCL). School principals are on PL4 with responsibilities varying according to the needs of each given school. Moreover, principals are commonly entrusted to be the custodians of the South African Schools Act (1996) (SASA) and serve to provide professional leadership within and around their school.

Departmental Heads are perceived to be curriculum leaders and experts in their subject fields (Tapala, 2020; Thorpe & Bennet-Powell, 2014). Another expectation of Departmental Heads is that they should recognise the need for training of subordinates and must be in full control of curriculum expectations and implementation (Ogina, 2017). In essence, the core role of Departmental Heads is to enhance curriculum performance and success standards of learners and educators. Tapala (2020) defines curriculum leadership as the guiding and management of all activities that take place in a school for the purpose of teaching and learning. These include all learners' and educators' experiences, which are planned and documented with the intention of developing general knowledge and skills. ESD emphasizes that the school curriculum should instil enduring values and aid learners in being responsible and caring citizens capable of contributing to a sustainable society (Hoy et al, 2018). It should enhance their awareness of and respect for the environments in which they live as well as secure their commitment to sustainable development at a personal, local, national and global level (Kopnina, 2020).

In the South African school context, the Departmental Heads' role is central and relevant to the key activities of promoting sustainability in the school environment and how learners contribute to a sustainable future outside the school (Christie, Sullivan, Duku & Gallie, 2010). Yilmaz and Bakis (2015) are explicit that leaders and employees have a sizeable challenge of being able to implement their sustainability strategies devoid of the support of responsible and sustainability-oriented employees. The Sustainability Leadership Institute (2011) defines sustainable leaders as individuals who are compelled to make a difference by widening their awareness of themselves in relation to the world around them, embracing innovation and creativity in thinking and interaction, which lead to a sustainable solution. Sustainable leaders motivate subordinates towards supporting sustainability actions that contribute to a better present and future world. (Shaaban, 2020). Bush and Glover (2016) argue that distributed leadership is becoming a widely preferred model as the leadership burden is eased from overworked principals through collaboration and delegation. Departmental Heads thus have the responsibility of being sensitive to environmental and societal dynamics and using the same influence to promote and ensure sustainability. Work context is crucial to understanding sustainable leadership practices

as it not only consists of culture but also politics within and around schools. School leadership interact with their environments and are under the same influence of external forces as other open and social systems. School leadership facilitates sustainability through commitment and protection of profound learning and formulating a culture in schools that embraces the values of sustainability in an effort to ensure that improvements stand the test of time. This is of particular importance when delegating leadership and responsibility to others while considering the influence their school leadership also has on communities. Schools therefore have a responsibility to interact with external environments in order to align school activities with the dynamics of the external environment.

A significant change in the education sector and in the world has been the increasing emphasis on sustainability, characterised by social (people), economic (profit) and environmental (planet) focuses (Hoy et al, 2018). According to Hendriawan et al (2018), the history of sustainable education in South African schools includes the implementation of the International Eco-Schools programme, Edu-Plant, and more recently, the International Water Explorer Programme. The authors contend that there is a small established network of South African schools that have been practising ESD for up to 16 years, however this is not the reflection of the circumstances of the majority of schools in South Africa. Hendriawan et al (2018) assert that there is both a lack of content in the high school curriculum, as well as implementation of ESD. There is an expanding need to prepare young people through curriculum reform that needs to deal with 21st century globalisation in terms of cultural and ethnic diversity through the development of critical thinking capacity (Gough, 2005). There is a new challenge for “all leaders” to successfully guide their organisations through volatile environments and deal with the topic of sustainability (Shaaban, 2020). Shifts in the school curriculum are often the result of new societal challenges or changes that are considered crucial by decision-makers. Education is often used by policy makers as an instrument to induce behavioural changes in a socially desirable direction. Kopnina (2020) contends that ESD needs to support schools to motivate their learners to demonstrate sustainability in their personal lifestyles as well by developing empowered and autonomous thinking individuals who make sustainable life

decisions. Sustainable development is a continuously evolving concept and the relationship that exists between people and the environment is a complex and closely interdependent one (Gough, 2005). It is a learned human behaviour to adapt to the dynamic environment, which in turn responds to the changes caused by human activities and the effects thereof (Leal Filho, 2021).

There is no body of knowledge that suggests that there are actions that automatically lead to people to behave sustainably. This implies that sustainable development only occurs if there is a constant teacher and a learner, both superficially and subconsciously, each time people make decisions. A study by De Sousa, Richter and Raath (2017) explored the performance of newly implemented environmental management systems in 39 primary schools in northern South Africa. After implementing these systems in both the curriculum and the school's management, results revealed that the participating schools improved in management and conservation of water, waste, energy and greening. In another study, De Sousa et al. (2017) concentrated on a primary school in South Africa that implemented environmental management systems to identify indicators that reflected whether sustainable development is encouraged in education. Results from that study reflected that in township schools there are three bases of environmental sustainability, namely, participating in active care of plants, a low tolerance of littering non-organic waste, and the maintenance of cleanliness and hygiene. The study further revealed that the strengthening of initiatives to conserve resources and the upkeep of hygiene was not limited to the classroom, indicating that learners embraced principles and practices of sustainable development when exposed to it through, for instance, the use of indigenous and vegetable gardens.

In light of the above discussion, the challenge of developing learners who have the understanding, behaviour and competencies to contribute to a sustainable school environment and a sustainable future in general can only be possible with implementation of effective sustainable practices at school leadership level.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

It is common knowledge that many schools in South Africa are faced with the challenge of ineffective leadership, which negatively impacts on student performance (Makhasane & Chikoko, 2016; Bush & Glover, 2014). It is not, however, surprising that we are largely ignorant about the practices of school leaders with reference to how they enable and champion sustainability within the school environment. Existing literature divulges the voices of learners in South Africa on indicators of environmental management systems in respect to the degree of overall awareness of environmental sustainability in schools. As an example, a study by De Sousa *et al.* (2011) found that students considered water, waste, energy and greening-related activities in the school as important indicators proceeding the implementation of an environmental management system. Literature also indicates scholarly research focused on building knowledge capacity of educators and learners to advance the quality and relevance of education by harnessing Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), formal education, as well as the whole-system and institution as an approach for ESD (UNESCO ROSA, 2021).

Despite the importance of school leaders in the day-to-day activities in schools, it is notable that the practices of school leadership to enhance and support students in terms of embedding sustainability in the school are rarely prevalent. This is concerning primarily because of the increasing demands for integrating sustainability into schools and school practices in all aspects of school/institutional life. This includes governance, teaching content and methodology, campus and facility management as well as cooperation with partners and the broader communities. As sustainability demands a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or even holistic approach to sustainable development, it is imperative that school leaders not only cultivate a curriculum of connections, but also encourage systems thinking, cross-departmental coordination within the school as well as networking with external stakeholders (UNESCO ROSA, 2021). Leaders who practice and promote sustainability are integral in South African schools, which are formal and structured environments where the future of learners and youth are developed. Education organisations must continue to address environmental sustainability issues by modelling

ecologically sound practices and supporting the integration of sustainability into the school management practices and curriculum. With considerable scrutiny of learning and teaching activities by internal and external stakeholders, it will be ensured that the quality of learning and teaching addresses fundamental issues of sustainable leadership (Hallinger & Suriyankietkaew, 2018).

Bush and Glover (2016) propose that there has been an increase in emphasis on school leadership in recent years due to recognition of the interdependence between school leadership qualities and student academic performance. The DH is a leadership role that is the most immediate level to learners and teachers and thus directly related to learner performance (Seobi & Wood, 2016). Departmental Heads play an integral role in formulating and implementing subject policy, phase or departmental policy as well as school policy (Tapala, Fuller & Mentz, 2021). Departmental Heads influence and communicate the school's vision and mission statement to relevant stakeholders, including educators in their respective departments, ensuring they are briefed on the mission and work expected of them. Departmental Heads' roles as learning leaders should include supervising in order to develop new approaches to the school's curriculum. These approaches should teach learners necessary skills and standards that will enrich them with confidence, improve their performance and also equip them with the competence to contribute meaningfully to a sustainable future (Mpisane, 2015).

Departmental Heads are obliged to warrant academic advancement of their schools, which will ultimately translate into their sustained improvement. As proposed by Tapala *et al.* (2021), the perception of Departmental Heads raising the standard of their schools should not be limited to achieving higher examination results but should transcend to developing and supporting educators to enhance learner knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to live and enjoy a sustainable future. As such, Departmental Heads should be facilitators and sources of knowledge, skills and inspiration to educators in their departments. As the first level of leadership to intervene with urgency when there appears to be possible poor learner performance, Departmental Heads are at the heart of academic activities. Ogina (2017) asserts that when it comes to sustainability in the curriculum, Departmental Heads

ought to be vigilant, flexible and ready to implement unique intervention strategies to effectively deal with poor performance and failure to integrate sustainability in the curriculum. The quality of education depends chiefly on how it is implemented and managed by school leadership.

With this in mind, the lived experiences of Departmental Heads as part of SMTs and their reflections on what they actually do to enable or impede sustainability in their schools are imperative to uncover the practices of ESD leadership. This study seeks to add to this body of knowledge by including the voices of school leaders with regards to their ESD leadership practices in the rural schools of the BC under the uThukela District in KZN, South Africa. This study is of value as it rests on the premise that it is unwise to focus solely on the views of learners and PL1 educators when assessing the implementation of ESD in schools. The views of those who lead these educational and social initiatives must also be considered, hence this study's specific investigation into Departmental Heads in these schools.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

This quantitative study on the sustainable leadership practices in schools has three research objectives:

1. To identify the sustainable leadership practices used by the Departmental Heads in rural schools around the Bergville Circuit.
2. To explore the key performance drivers of sustainable leadership practices used in rural schools of the Bergville Circuit.

3. To propose a framework of sustainable leadership practices for Departmental Heads to implement in order to ensure sustainable leadership in Bergville Circuit schools.

1.7 Research Questions

Given the above- mentioned research objectives, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What sustainable leadership practices are used by the heads of departments in rural schools around Bergville Circuit?
2. Which performance drivers of sustainable leadership practices can be identified by departmental heads in rural schools at the Bergville Circuit?
3. What are the key practices of sustainable leadership which should be part of sustainable leadership framework for departmental heads to ensure sustainable schools around Bergville Circuit?

1.8 Significance of the Study

The conducting of this study is intended to provide essential knowledge for Departmental Heads as leaders or practitioners of school leadership as well as for all educators, stakeholders and scholars of leadership of environmental sustainability practices in an educational setting. Firstly, as the study focuses specifically on Departmental Heads' interactions within and between schools and the broader community and stakeholders, the findings are expected to significantly enhance their ESD leadership practices. Secondly, the study is useful for educators who operate under the leadership of Departmental Heads as the knowledge acquired and shared is hoped to positively influence teaching and learning in terms of becoming more integrated with environmentally sustainable practices in schools and in their communities as well. Lastly, the study is considered crucial to scholars and academics of sustainable leadership practices in an educational setting as it provides a point of leverage for implementing further studies in the field.

1.9 Research Methodology

As the intended study sought to observe the practices of sustainable leadership used by Departmental Heads in the rural Bergville Circuit public schools, a quantitative research methodology within the positivist paradigm was adopted. This paradigm uses scientific evidence derived from experiments and statistics to produce law-like generalisations. It is based on careful reflection of objective reality that exists in the world. Participants identified in the study were Departmental Heads in permanent posts at various primary and secondary schools in the Bergville Circuit irrespective of their age and number of years in the position.

As the first line of leadership, Departmental Heads are better placed to provide hands-on experience of dealing with educators, learners and other community and environmental stakeholders. Participants were sent structured questionnaires via email or WhatsApp and their responses were retrieved in the same manner. Quantitative analysis was used to identify patterns within the data regarding awareness and usage of sustainable leadership practices implemented by Departmental Heads in rural public school in the Bergville Circuit, SA.

1.10 Delimitations of the Study

This quantitative study is delimited in three aspects. Firstly, the study focused only on the Departmental Heads to acquire an understanding of the sustainable leadership practices they utilise to ensure environmental sustainability in their schools and surrounding communities. Secondly, the study is delimited in terms of its geographical location, as the researcher did not possess the resources or time required for a broader sample size. It can be argued however that the selected sample of schools provides a reasonable representation of similar issues within other rural public schools around SA. Thirdly, the study did not encompass any other school leaders or teachers who were only 'acting' as Departmental Heads. This is an important delimitation that was required to gain the perspectives of those with actual 'hands-on' experience of what it means to be a DH in

these schools and with regards to the challenges they face in implementing ESD leadership practices in rural schools in the selected location.

1.11 Chapter Outline

This study consists of six (6) chapters that are arranged as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive introduction to the entire study and begins by providing the background to the study in terms of positioning the school environment as a social system with various levels of leadership. The problem statement was then explained followed by the statement of the research objectives and questions. The significance of the study was highlighted, the research methodology summarised, and then the delimitation of the study was provided. Finally, the chapters of the dissertation were outlined.

Chapter Two: Literature review

Here the chapter revolves around the relevant previous studies that have been conducted in relation to this study. It reviews relevant literature on the sustainable leadership practices that school departmental heads use as members of school leadership and school management teams. It further discusses pertinent studies related to school leadership, sustainable leadership and the pyramid of sustainable leadership practices.

Chapter Three: Research methodology

This chapter provides an account of the research design, methods and procedures that were used in conducting this particular study. The chapter further expounds on methods of collecting, sampling and analysing data, as well as the ethical issues and limitations of the study that were considered.

Chapter Four: Research findings

This chapter presents the findings from the study to reveal the sustainable practices of departmental heads in rural schools in Bergville Circuit in Kwazulu Natal province, South Africa.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The study's key findings are discussed here in relation to summaries of the responses to each of the research questions, while aligning and contrasting them in terms of the relevant existing literature discussed in chapter two.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This chapter reflects on the initial objectives of the study and how the study was executed in order to achieve the research objectives. Conclusion of the study is drawn, recommendations made, and possible areas for future study are presented.

1.11 Chapter Summary

Chapter one has introduced the study on school leadership, specifically introducing sustainable leadership practices and has also provided a background for the study, explained the research problem and stated the research objectives of this study. Furthermore, the chapter has specified the relevant research questions, research methodology and delimitations of the study. In the next chapter, the existing literature based on previous studies around the topic is comprehensively reviewed.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on a review of relevant literature and concepts related to the study of sustainable leadership practices by school leadership in rural schools. The chapter is divided into four subsections: It firstly discusses the history of the concept of school leadership within the school environment and the various ways leadership has been conceptualized within the school setting as well as the role of school leadership. It also discusses the challenges faced by school leadership based on findings from previous research, secondly consider the concept of sustainability and its relationship with leadership, before un-packing the phenomenon of sustainable leadership and thirdly, the various aspects of the sustainable leadership pyramid before deliberating on previous studies on sustainable leadership and summary of this chapter.

2.2 History and Origin of School Leadership

Prior to the discussion on the history and origins of school leadership, it is important to begin by briefly describing the theory behind the concept of school leadership. The majority of literature on the history and origins of school leadership originates from North American and European sources with clear focus on economic views of leadership (Harris, 2005). Zhang, Lin and Foo (2012) point out that research on leadership had been largely conducted since the 1960s. Educational leadership started as educational management with the shift to educational leadership becoming more prominent towards the late 1990s. This was due to the fact that managerialism was to a large extent criticized and was not appropriate for educational organisations (Ball, 2011).

Since the 1990s the South African education system has been undergoing a number of phases geared to move from a rigid centrally managed education system to a more

decentralised one that facilitated greater school autonomy in pursuit of school improvement (Pont, 2020). The decentralisation of the school system has led to school leaders adopting a more managerial role that encompassed the delivery of school objectives directly. Liu and Watson (2020) contend that the transitioning of educational leadership from a focus on individual principal traits and capacity to collective endeavours of school leadership and management has called for greater research interest

Although school leadership is unique, it is understood within the broad understanding of leadership in general. History depicts that school leadership theory entered into existence in the late 20th century for several reasons. One of these being that higher levels of school learner achievements were demanded with schools being expected to improve and reform. These expectations were also driven by the demand for accountability in schools and as a result, upkeep of the status quo became less acceptable. The marked attention on managing teaching and learning as the core activities of educational institutions has resulted in the establishment of instructional leadership as the form of school leadership (Bush & Glover, 2014). This form of leadership, originating from North America evolved over time and has led to other school leadership models including transformational and distributed leadership.

Over the years, school leadership or educational leadership gained popularity and was adopted as a replacement for educational administration in recent years (Colgan, 2017). The concept of leadership was preferred because it conveys dynamism and pro-activity. A more modern view point on leadership, apart from the principal or school head, is also that of members of a formal leadership team or those who contribute toward the common goals of the school (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008). Yukl (2002) argues that most definitions of leadership depict it as a social influence process whereby deliberate influence is applied by one individual or group over other individuals or groups with the objective of inspiring their activities and relationships. The term intentional is of essence, as leadership is based on articulated goals or outcomes to which the process of influence is expected to lead

Evidence from multi-country data revealed that both formal and informal leaders lead with principals in schools. As their roles vary across different leadership functions, the study of distributed leadership comprising a range of school leadership responsibilities, which are related to instruction and student management, is fundamental (Printy & Liu, 2021; Liu & Watson, 2020). School leadership in the South African context is divided into pre-1994 South African education system which is characterised as hierarchical and authoritarian and post 1994 education that is characterised by a decentralised system of education management (De Villiers & Pretorius, 2011; Williams, 2011; Mpisane, 2015; Bush, 2018; du Plessis & Eberlein, 2018).

2.3 Defining the Concept of School Leadership

School leadership is also known as educational leadership (Castillo & Hallinger, 2018), educational management (Haidar, 2018) or educational administration (Oplatka & Arar, 2017) fall under to the same area of study (Kramer, 2020). Various definitions of school leadership have been developed and used by different researchers over the years comprising various perspectives and opinions regarding what must be included when describing the concept (Bush, 2007). Beaudoin (2003) argued that leadership involves a set of human activities that support and assist, particularly in relation to change, however Yulk (2002) argued that educational leadership is a concept that has different meanings to different people

The interest in leadership and management in schools has been prominently developing over the years due to the perceived importance placed on developing and maintaining successful schools and education systems. (Bush, 2018). Leadership has been widely researched with different researchers defining leadership from various viewpoints. There appears to be common elements in the definitions with these elements including influencing people's behaviour with clearly defined goals (Usman, 2016; Thoha, 2016; Winingsih & Sulistiono, 2020).

With the above in mind, leadership can be described as an act of influencing followers in a particular direction and behaviour in order to achieve a desired goal (Bush & Glover, 2004). Danielson (2002) posits that school leadership needs the aptitude to create, communicate and enact a vision for school development that will attract the support of related stakeholders around mutual objectives. This explanation indicates that school leadership must include teachers, support staff and all other internal stakeholders.

At school level, leadership has been extensively researched with focus predominately on different leadership models including distributed leadership, teacher leadership and instructional leadership (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016). The study on school leadership has been paired down to include layers of leadership such as middle management comprising departmental heads. Harris, Jones, Ismail and Nguyen (2019) highlight that departmental heads play a significant role in formulating and monitoring the worth of learners' academic experience.

Before the inception of the democratic era in 1994, a view of leadership in South Africa was primarily focusing on formal leadership positions. This view, is expressed by Bush (2011) as a formal model of management. Here heads exert authority that signifies a particular formal position in an organization. They are accountable to supporting bodies for the activities within their institutions. Grant (2006) outlines a number of formal management and governance structures that have been legislated by the democratic government post 1994, including the one of School Governing Body (SGB), the School management team (SMT) and the Representative Council of Learners (RCL). This study therefore adopts the definition of school leadership as an act by a leader who inspires and influences the behaviour of followers to a particular direction in order to achieve a desired goal.

2.3.1 The Difference between School Leadership and School Management

In the early nineteenth century, the term leading was described as the actions of influencing and exercising dominion. Proceeding this in the twentieth century, leadership was defined as the ability to lead and then was commonly used interchangeably with manager (Toor, Ofori & Arian, 2007). On the other hand, manager meant careful use, especially in the household. Bavington (2005) observes that the term management encompasses three principal meanings: management-as-control (with roots in the Latin word “manus”), management-as-caretaking (with roots in the French word “ménager”), and management-as-coping (a modern understanding of management). The current definition of management in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) encompasses organization, supervision, or direction; the application of skill or care in the manipulation, use, treatment, or control of a thing or person, or in the conduct of something.

To understand the difference between school leadership and school management, it is essential to firstly understand that the concepts of leadership and management have different meanings and functions, although they do overlap. John Maxwell defined leadership, highlighting influence as the main component (Maxwell, 1998). Leadership is the capacity for collective action to stimulate movement (Kotter, 1990), whilst management focuses on formal directing and controlling of their assistants, resources, structures, and systems (Kotter, 2001). An often-quoted phrase for distinguishing these two terms is that managers do things right, while leaders do the right things (Bennis & Nanus, 1997). While leadership involves steering organisations by shaping other people’s attitudes, motivations and behaviours, management is more closely connected to the maintenance of current operations (Bush & Glover, 2003).

Effective leadership is defined by Bennis and Nanus (2007) as those who serve the people that follow them.. In the same view Peter Drucker defined a leader as someone who has followers (Drucker, 1999). Some theorists believe that leadership is a derivative of the social influence processes (House and Aditya, 1997). Although there are a variety of leadership definitions, the majority of definitions focus on two components, namely: the

process of influencing a group of individuals to obtain a common goal as well as to formulate a vision.

Despite a wide range of literature by scholars attempt to provide a difference between the leadership and management concepts there is still confusion and belief that they are one in the same. (Kotter 1990; Zaleznik 1977; Bennis & Nanus, 2007). Management can be defined as exercising direction of a group or organization through executive, administrative, and supervisory positions (Katz, 1955). There is substantial theory that supports the fact that leadership and management exhibit great differences. (Zaleznik, 1977; Kotter, 2001; Perloff, 2004).

Other studies argue that leadership and management are mainly used interchangeably and it is often difficult and rare to present clear differences between these two concepts (Grant, 2010; Bush, 2007; Azad, Anderson, Brooks, Garza, O'Neil, Stutz & Sobokta, 2017; Dlamini, 2017). This argument contends that both leadership and management comprise being in charge of certain tasks and being in control of the processes particularly the ultimate outcome. Dlamini (2017) and Grant (2010) affirm that these duties complement each other. Christie et al. (2010) however, distinguishes between leadership, management and principalship in so far as the following: leadership is about exercising influence and setting directions regardless of institutional location, management is concerned with the structures and processes by which an organisation meets its goals and principalship is about positional power.

Leadership skills are generally glorified as being visionary and doing the right thing, while managerial skills are not as highly acclaimed and are categorized as task-oriented and having to do the right thing. Azad et al. (2017), argue that no scientific evidence exists to support the described differences between leadership and management. They maintain that one of the classic leadership definitions often recited of leadership is that of the quality that separates great leaders from good one. The manager executes managerial duties and in the same way leads while the leader has to manage these duties. Azad et al. (2017) contends that leadership and management overlap and are transposable while in contrast

Bush, Bell and Middlewood (2010) argue that leadership and management are distinguishable.

Azad et al. (2017) postulate in leadership and management continuum that leadership does not depend on positional authority, while management is related to positional authority and that successful administrators possess classical qualities of both leaders and managers. Furthermore, leadership facilitates inspiration, motivation, support and guidance in the right direction whilst maximizing people's potential (Emmanouil, Osia & Paraskevi-loanna, 2014). School leadership focuses on organisational development with regards to creating a clear direction that stakeholders agree on and embrace for the good of the school (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006).

In summary, these discussions reflect that school leadership is about a person who uses their skills of influencing, ability, persuasiveness, and vision to guide others into in action or opinion by leading in a school organisation.. On the other hand, school management encompasses a person who organizes, directs, plans and regulates or deploys resources; a person who manages a particular department of an organization or in this instance, a school.

2.3.2 The Roles and Functions of School Leadership

There has been a significant shift in the role of school leaders from leading the teaching and learning programmes within the school environment to a more complex and refined approach as facilitators of the collective work of professionals at and around their schools (Liu, 2021; Pont, 2020). At the focal point of this new role of school leaders is the emergence and establishment of integrated and collaborative cultures. Hargreaves and Connor (2018) have named this collaborative professionalism, while Kools and Stoll (2016) exhibit schools as a learning organisation.

Interest in educational leadership has led to and coincided with growing research in identifying school leadership functions or responsibilities. The main leadership model

highlighted has been instructional leadership responsibilities (Blase & Blase, 1999; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985), which identified the school leader's essential leadership functions to lead and manage instructionally effective schools. These functions included setting school vision, creating a positive school climate and managing instruction (Liu & Martins, 2020). Researchers (Barnes et al; 2010; Camburn et al; 2010; Sebastian et al; 2018) contend that the roles of instructional leadership do not capture school leaders' duties in their entirety. It is also concerning the lack of significant studies in school leadership that has proven any direct causal links between school leadership and enhanced student performance (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Bell et al (2003) argue that the systematic review of literature confirms that effective leadership is an integral factor in a school's success and that the effects of school leadership on student learning outcomes are mostly indirect.

Through reviewing available comprehensive frameworks which define major leadership responsibilities, the aforementioned researchers developed an extensive framework for school leadership functions. These were proposed by Liu and Watson (2020) and can be categorized under a three-function model of: (1) school management; (2) instructional management; and (3) evaluation and professional development. School leadership roles include: (a) building operations; (b) finances; (c) community or parent relations; (d) school district functions; (e) student affairs; (f) personnel issues; (g) planning and setting goals; (h) instructional leadership; and (i) professional growth (Barnes et al, 2010; Camburn et al, 2010; Sebastian et al, 2018). This framework comprises an inclusive range of school leaders' functional responsibilities including school instructional leadership roles that focus on school leaders' daily obligations. Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2019) claim that there is an emerging field named system leadership which originated in England. Here school leaders are encouraged to possess a range of discretionary thoughts in how they design the curriculum. According to Pont, Moorman and Nusche (2008), school leaders possess the flexibility to add and place additional emphasis on content as the curriculum framework does not specify the entire content.

2.3.3 Previous Studies on School Leadership in General

Previous research on school leadership has been principally exploring three theoretical models, namely: instructional, transformational and distributed leadership (Goode, 2017).

2.3.3.1 Instructional Leadership in Schools

Instructional leadership was initially regarded as hierarchical with the principal being the main instructional leader (Liu, 2020) with Meador (2018) Principals could be instructional leaders by aligning school structures with the school's mission and in that way, influencing student outcomes or school performance. Leithwood, et al (2019) point to the lack of clear explanations of instructional leadership in literature and suggests the definition as: Instructional leadership assumes that the critical focus for attention by leaders is the behaviour of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students. This suggest that teaching and learning in schools should be developed as a form of developing and enriching the school.

Leithwood and Louis (1999: 502) warn that instructional leadership is now showing signs of a dissolving paradigm as it only considers one aspect of organizational development and change, which is the classroom. It disregards other potential areas of change within the school, whereas Bush (2018) concludes that instructional leadership is perceived to be primarily concerned with teaching rather than learning. The other criticism is that instructional leadership focused too largely on the principal as the centre of expertise, power and authority (Hallinger 2003, 330) while disregarding and underplaying the input and influence of other leaders such as deputy principals, departmental heads, leadership teams and classroom teachers. Concepts such as shared leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership and transformational leadership have emerged with school restructuring (Liu, 2021) Participator and distributed leadership has been more extensively researched.

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leader in a school. Principals could be instructional leaders by aligning school structures with the school's mission and in that way, they could influence student outcomes or school performance. Leithwood, et al (2019) point to the lack of clear explanations of instructional leadership in literature and suggests the definition as: Instructional leadership, assumes that the critical focus for attention by leaders is the behaviour of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students. This suggest that teaching and learning in schools should be developed as a form of developing and enriching the school.

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2.3.3.2 Transformational leadership in schools

Transformational leadership is a leadership approach that is centred around people rather than structures and is fundamentally concerned with cultural rather than structural change. In the recent decades more emphasis has been put on the link between leadership and organizational culture. Leithwood and Riehl (2004) asserts that transformational leadership focuses on building a unified common interest between leaders and followers. This form of leadership assumes that the central focus of leadership is supposed to be the commitments and capacities of organisational members. Higher levels of personal

commitment to organisational goals and greater capacities for accomplishing those goals are presumed to result in extra effort and more efficient productivity.

Sergiovanni (2001) describes transformative leadership as leaders and followers united in a mutual quest of higher levels of objectives whereby they both thrive to excel. When transformative leadership is practiced successfully, purposes that might have started out as separate merge as leaders and followers engage in shaping the school in a new direction. Bass (1997) defines transformational leadership as encompassing charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration.

Transformational leadership entails a change in leader follower relations in pursuit of mutual benefit whereby school leaders attempt to exert power with, or through other people, rather than exercising control over them (Harris, 2005). In essence the research on this type of leadership suggests that at face value, transformational leadership is strongly associated with positive perceptions of the school principal's effectiveness, organization level effects and student effects, as leader's behaviour encourage teacher collaboration in order to improve teacher motivation and self-efficacy (Leithwood, et al; 2019). Burns (1978) affirms that transformational leadership is concerned with exploring conformist relationships and organizational understandings in such a way that there is an involvement between individuals in which leaders and followers push one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.

Leithwood and Riehl (2004) suggest that transformational leadership is leadership that is distributed across the organization and this action of distribution is one that creates the capacity for change. Chirichello (1999) posits that transformational leadership may be criticized as being a vehicle used to exert control over educators, through demanding obedience and it is more likely to be accepted by leader than by followers. Although the transformational leadership model emphasises the significance of values, Bush and Glover (2016) argue that these values are often those of government or of the school principal, who may be acting on behalf of government and may likely be subdued owing to externally imposed values.

2.3.3.3 Distributed leadership in schools

Distributed leadership, which has been receiving significant popularity and attention in several countries (Spillane, 2005), is often also referred as shared leadership, team leadership, or democratic leadership. Distributed leadership is more about leadership practices rather than leaders or their roles, functions, routines, and structures (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Distributed leadership focuses on engaging expertise wherever they exists within the organization. It disregards the notion of seeking this only through a formal position or role (Harris, 2005), and involves a normative switch from heroics to distribution. Gronn (2010) supports the view that distributed leadership means any reduction in the scope of the principal's role.

Distributed leadership in Liu and Watson (2020) is analyzed as having three features, namely (1) it is a dynamic interaction among stakeholders; (2) it is an interaction, or series of interactions, across boundaries; and (3) people with diverse expertise are often involved in leading. These features of distributed leadership in schools open an opportunity of pooling expertise in order to capture all leadership activities that occur in organizations. Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2019) sum up these three features as practice centered as they focus on the operation of leadership activity and aim to maximize practical outcomes. The support for distributed leadership is established on the assumption that it will bring about beneficial effects that would not occur with an individual leadership. The study by Leithwood et al (2008) shows that multiple leadership is significantly more effective than solo approaches.

Distributed leadership is criticized by Watson and Scribner (2007) as mere old wine in new bottles. There has been a significant shift driven by the evidence that schools could achieve desired school capability and student performance when the principal leads collectively with other leaders (Ingersoll et al, 2018; Li & Liu, 2020; Marks & Printy, 2003). Distributed leadership is considered by some researchers as leadership that promotes participation of leaders and followers. Some critics on this school leadership style point

out the lack of evidence of the effectiveness of distributed leadership and that one weakness lies in promoting instructional improvement and increasing student achievement. (Harris, 2005). Stimulated by the contingency theory and activity theory, scholars are enthusiastic about how school principals could work hand in hand with designated and informal leaders possessing expertise to fulfil vital leadership roles in different circumstances (Liu et al, 2018; Liu, 2020).

2.3.4 Previous Studies of School Leadership in South Africa

School leadership in a South African context needs to be firstly approached with an acknowledgement of uniqueness and diversity of the terrain, history and social dynamics. The South African education system has been through formidable transitions in terms of leadership, governance and provision of education (Christie, Sullivan, Duku & Gallie, 2010). The fundamental transition has been from a racially based pre-1994 education department to an inclusive system after 1994 (Kramer, 2020). Demographic representation on school leadership has been studied with reference to representation specifically of women in the South African education system (Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2018; Ndebele, 2018) and these studies argue that cultures and contexts have revealed that in school administration, men are more likely to be found in positions with the greatest power, pay, and prestige in comparison to women.

The study conducted by Ahiaku (2019) focused on appointment procedures and processes of principals and Departmental heads and exposed flaws leading to the appointments and placing of very incompetent and inexperienced school leadership in schools. The flawed appointments of unsuitable school leaders are commonly detected, especially in former historically disadvantaged schools (Mampane, 2015). The majority of these selection and appointment processes for school leadership posts were crippled with cadre deployment by teacher unions where appointing authorities are forced to appoint anybody regardless of qualification and experience to the high office of principal (DBE, 2016).

2.3.5 Challenges Faced by School Leaders in South Africa

There are various challenges faced by teachers and leaders in schools which emanate from either internal or external factors. All these factors attribute to shortcomings of the educational system and leadership to sustainably attain its objectives and have resulted in social and economic impact.

Geographical Demarcations and Natural Resources

South African education is a complex system that serves a society characterized by diverse cultural and historical background as well as geographical and socio economic factors (du Plessis and Eberlein, 2018). With regards to the geographical distribution of schools, a large number of schools are located in rural and non-urban areas. A study by Preston and Barnes (2017), Stewart and Matthews (2015) postulate that varied experiences and the needs of leaders in small rural schools can be often disregarded. Hardwick-Franco (2019) contends that the reality of a large population of the country relies on rural schools having to necessitate differentiated approach in terms of allocation of resources and specialized focus. Hardwick-Franco (2019) asserts that in Africa a large number of highly qualified and experienced teachers move away from rural setting and that rural schools are less resourced than those in urban areas thus making it challenging for school leaders to maintain staff motivation in the midst of isolation and lack of support.

Income Inequality

Mouton *et al* (2013) contend that education in historically disadvantaged schools has been subject to problems that are exacerbated by lack of parental involvement in school affairs. Steyn *et al* (2011) propose that in many instances the community fails to be held accountable for school concerns in their communities with learners and school leaders facing socio- economic issues stemming strongly from a historical nature... It was estimated in 1995 that roughly 28% of households and 48% of the population, translating into 12 million children, Living in poor households negatively affects quality of teaching

and learning and manifests itself into poor learner performance with significant disparity between provinces, districts and schools (Spree & Vally, 2010).

Another reality that school leaders face in a South African context is the inequality of income and resources among the school population. Government, through the Department of Basic Education (DBE), allocates funds to schools according to a quintile ranking system. This was originally compiled by the National Norms and Standards of School Funding in 2000 and advanced by the Education Law Amendment Act in 2006 (DBE, 2019). Quintile 1 schools are mostly historically disadvantaged schools with quintile 5 being the least disadvantaged and more affluent schools (Zuze & Juan, 2018). Quintiles 1-3 are categorized as no-fee paying schools and cater for and are located in the impoverished communities. They rely solely on government funding to operate their core functions (van Dyk & White, 2019). The autonomy of upper quintile schools to charge frequently unregulated fees has perpetuated inequalities both in the education sector and in general society (Gilmour & Soudien, 2009), as quintile 1-3 schools received a mere minimum government funding of R1 175 per student in 2016, yet certain quintile 5 schools charge more than R40 000 per student on average (McLaren, 2017). The segmentation of schools according to quintile rankings remains divisive to date (Davids, 2018; van Dyk & White, 2019). Having admitted that the quintile ranking system in public schools has its flaws, Kramer (2020) nevertheless argues that it accounts for and mitigates socio-economic issues to a certain extent.

Uneven Provision of Basic Service Delivery

South Africa is still recovering from the socio-political dispensation that was notoriously based on discrimination against of females. Despite the Apartheid system official demise in 1994 and the birth of the democratic era, affectionately known as the Rainbow Nation, there appears still to be no end to discriminatory inequality in South African schools (Kramer, 2020). This massive inequality becomes prominent especially during times of crises highlighting the significance of school leadership, as leaders in schools encounter unique challenges and circumstances. One of the historical dynamics of the South African

leadership environment is gender inequality which, through extensive research shown in other countries, is not unique to South Africa alone., (Davids, 2018; Madsen, Ngunjiri & Cherry, 2015). Females in leadership positions and roles have been underrepresented (Ndebele, 2018; Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2018) and subsequently are still often expected to stay at home instead of taking up roles previously dominated by males.

Although women are progressively forming part of the majority of the workforce in public education in both developed and developing countries (Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2018), the education system and other societal factors still make conditions challenging for women to obtain the opportunity to resume senior leadership positions. Little progress has been made to address this issue as the study by Greiling and Stein (2015) conclude that research still indicates an underrepresentation of women in management positions at all levels of the education system, including primary schools, high school, universities and other educational institutions. There has been some marked progress with regards to the position of women leaders in education in South Africa as more women school leaders believe that attitudes towards them as principals are relatively more favourably than previously. (Davids, 2018).

Political and Social Unrests

One of the persisting challenges that school leadership in South African schools encounter is the societal issue of violence in schools and in communities (Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2015). Communities have resorted to violent demonstrations predominately caused by poor service delivery, strikes and political intolerance (Mouton, Louw & Strydom, 2013). This is particularly evident in the last two decades where protests, involving students and communities, have escalated to violence and vandalism at educational organisations.. (Buka, Matiwane-Mcengwa & Molepo, 2017). This violence experienced by school leadership not entirely unique to South Africa. Schoeman (2010) considers the plight of children globally who are raised under appalling circumstances stemming from broken family systems, joblessness, levels of substance abuse and prevalent violence.

Bottery (2017) contends that some of the threats and challenges that school leadership face are as a result of school leaders being unprepared and under equipped to carry the workload and demands that come with leading a social organisation. Ahiaku (2019) reveals that internal competition between applicants to be awarded a leadership position can lead to physical confrontation and even killings.

2.3.6 Role of Departmental Heads (DHs) in School Leadership

Authority is divided into two spheres in the public education system of SA, namely the national and provincial departments. The national department is responsible for setting norms and standards for the system as a whole, while provincial departments have responsibility for implementation. School leadership thus falls under provincial authorities. (Christie et al, 2010). School principals take responsibility for student performance through policy implementation and monitoring, while giving attention to issues such as equity, democracy and diversity in their institutions, (du Plessis & Eberlein, 2018). The workload of the school principals is becoming increasingly unmanageable with many principals not having adequate time for understanding their leadership duties, hence Mampane (2017) asserts that this workload, together with a transition to decentralized education management system, has been overwhelming to the school principals in most cases. The DHs have been given significant powers and responsibilities such as leading and overseeing curriculum activities in schools.

Du Plessis and Eberlein (2018) argues that DHs regularly interact with teachers as they are more interactive with the classroom environment than the principals. DHs play a pivotal role in the professional development of teachers. As per their departments and in SA, the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) Government Gazette (2016) outlines the duties and responsibilities of DHs. These duties include advising the principal regarding the division of work among the staff in that department, jointly develop the policy for that department as well as engaging on the educational welfare of learners and inexperienced staff members in the department..

Quong and Walker (2010) points out that a strategic school leader manages and organizes the learning environment efficiently and effectively to ensure that it meets the needs of the curriculum and occupational health and safety requirements. This is achieved by, among other things, ensuring that the staff and other resources are deployed and allocated appropriately through maximizing the use of their skills and knowledge and managing their workload to achieve student learning outcomes. Mpisane (2015) further explains the role of DHs in school leadership as facilitating the vision and mission statement of the school to teachers and other stakeholders in their respective departments. This is achieved through a set of behavioral actions and mental strategies which a DH can adopt in order to discover and achieve motivation for teachers and other relevant stakeholders.

The DHs are in a strategic position in schools. Mampane (2017) specifies that they are responsible for developing the capacity for policy enforcement during their leadership of teachers and also providing support to teachers' areas of need. As members of school leadership, DHs are required to have a clear and thorough understanding of teaching, learning and assessment. They are also key in creating the conditions that are conducive to improved curriculum management (Mestry, 2017). Principals and teachers in general are required to be involved in life-long learning, especially when considering the changing dynamics in the education system (Steyn, 2015). Schools in developing countries and emerging economies face enormous challenges each year as the majority of schools in these areas are located in rural communities with their objective being to seek solutions rather than excuses in order to have the school perform against the odds in the education and social system (Heystek, 2015).

A large number of South African schools are serving poor communities that are under resourced (Lumby, 2015). The current study is key as it investigates sustainable leadership practices by DHs in rural schools around Bergville Circuit. Schools with leadership who exhibit sustainable leadership practices are likely not only to meet the needs of current and future stakeholders, but also enjoy fruitful relationship and support from their community

2.4 The Meaning of Sustainability

Dalati, Rraudeliūnienė and Davidavičienė (2017) posit the serious discussions and activism about sustainability having started in Brundtland Commission of the United Nations. Sustainable development comprises three main components of sustainability which are economic, social and environmental (Muralidharan & Pathak, 2018). The concept of sustainability originated in the late 1970s in agriculture and then later into the construction sectors. However, the concept of sustainability has become the keynote in global dialogues with main purpose of discussion centred around the human future that is under threat due to negligent human activities (Orr, 2002).

This sustainability description by Brundtland Commission highlights the needs of the world's demanding nations and the limitations on the ability of the environment to satisfy the present future generations demands. The aim is to adopt policies and initiatives that seek poverty alleviation, environmental improvement, and social equitability and to be strongly aligned with sustainable economic growth (Muralidharan & Pathak, 2018). The concept of continuity and sustainability in organisations primarily is the responsibility of management, and DHs need to ensure that there is sustainability in school operations across all stakeholders.

2.4.1 Linkage Between Sustainability and Leadership

In the turbulent environment of the 21st century, there has been great emphasis on the interdependence between organisations and the societies and environment they operate in. The growing attention and awareness in sustainability and sustainable development has gained momentum in recent years predominately as a result of new global economies (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018). There is an overlap between sustainability and leadership termed sustainability leadership (Bairamian, 2017). Sustainability implementation is the responsibility of sustainable leaders who possess integrity and defend the principles of sustainable development. Ulrich and Smallwood (2013) describe sustainability leadership

as caring for the organization's resources by achieving through adapting and changing leadership patterns consistent with organization requirements.

2.4.2 Defining the Concept of Sustainable Leadership

Sustainable leadership has been widely researched and discussed as a subject on various disciplines, especially in the 20th and the 21st century with sustainability receiving global emphasis. Sustainable leadership is often defined as leadership that aims to meet the needs of present-day society, without compromising the ability of future generations to prosper (Hallinger & Suriyankietkaew, 2018). Shaaban (2020) describes a sustainability leader's point of view as one striving to create a sustainable organisation that is socially and environmentally focused. With the dynamics in societal needs changing, society keeps on evolving. With this change, sustainable leadership must adapt and adopt problem solving skills to deal with arising complex challenges (Fullan, 2004). Heifetz and Linsky (2002) argue that adaptive work demands continuous learning and experimentations with a skill for holding difficult conversations. Gayle and Bergsteiner (2011) emphasized that sustainable leadership necessitates the need for a long-term perspective in making decisions as well as fostering systemic innovation aimed at increasing client value; developing a skilled, loyal, and highly engaged workforce; and offering quality products, services, and solutions.

2.4.3 The Seven Characteristics of Sustainable Leadership

Sustainable leadership, as described by Hargreaves (2007), as a shared responsibility. It does not unduly diminish human or financial resources, and cares for and avoids exerting negative damage on the surrounding educational and community environment. Sustainable leadership has futuristic commitments with the forces that affect it. It builds an educational environment of organizational diversity that promotes cross-fertilization of

worthy ideas and successful practices in communities of shared learning and development. Sustainable leadership, according to Hargreaves (2007) has seven characteristics, namely:(1) sustainable leadership lasts as it pay serious attention to leadership succession, (2) sustainable leadership spreads as it ensures that vision is developed and shared with other school actor, (3) sustainable leadership is socially just and it aims to benefit all students and surrounding schools, (4) sustainable leadership is resourceful and it provide certain intrinsic rewards while at the same time offering external incentives that attract the best and brightest in the leadership pool, (5) sustainable leadership promotes diversity, (6) sustainable leadership is an activist, and (7) systems must support sustainable leadership.

Hargreaves and Fink (2004) outline the seven principles of sustainable leadership. The first one is that Sustainable Leadership Matters meaning that sustainable leadership provides an all-inclusive and expressive education that engages learners intellectually, socially and emotionally and equips learners for life beyond that of school years.. Education should focus on what is itself sustaining as an enrichment of life, the fundamental moral compass of lifelong learning for all in commitments to nurturing relationships with others. Secondly is that Sustainable Leadership Lasts ensuring that there is stable leadership, having a succession plan in place for leadership and other critical positions and functions in an organisation. Thirdly, Sustainable Leadership Spreads in a sense that leadership is shared and distributed as a means of talent management and multiple levels in the whole school capacity development, by promoting collective leadership.

The fourth characteristic is that Sustainable Leadership is Socially Just and safeguards that leadership decisions and actions are considerate of the impact it has on the large number of learners, as well as on greater community. As the actions and outcomes of schools affect each other in webs of mutual influence (Baker and Foote, 2006), school leaders should show concern for schools and fellow students in surrounding schools. The fifth one is that Sustainable Leadership is Resourceful and strives to identify, attract,

employ, and retain the best talent. Furthermore, sustainable leadership promotes knowledge sharing and networking among staff members and external professionals.

The sixth one is that Sustainable Leadership Promotes Diversity, and thus creates an environment that recognizes and celebrates multiple best practices. Hargreaves and Fink (2004) contend that standardization tends to stifle sustainability and does not impose standardized templates on everyone. The seventh characteristic is that Sustainable Leadership is Activist engaging individuals and the community in patterns of mutual influence and creating change through innovative ways of extended leadership. For the purpose of the study, these characteristics of sustainable leadership fit well with school leadership roles of departmental heads as part of school management teams. They afford them an opportunity of being more involved in implementation of policies and creating conducive environment for school stakeholders to ensure effective relationship and interactions within the school environment and in the society.

2.4.4 Previous Studies on Sustainable Leadership

There has been extensive research over the years on sustainable leadership. Miller, Gaynor, Powell and Simpson (2019) researched the topic of Leadership as sustainability in terms of context and primary school principals. The study focused on challenges and opportunities faced by school leaders in demonstrating sustainable leadership. The volatility of the educational and community environments propels school leaders to lead in ways that are more resilient, more flexible, and more adaptable by engaging leadership in a manner that is aligned and acknowledges change, and by developing and implementing policies that drive sustainability.

The study Seeking Sustainability Leadership by Bendell and Little (2015) revealed the conventional social and academic assumptions regarding what leadership entails are critiqued. The socially constructed notions and practices of leadership as systematic logical thought by senior role holders that perpetuate power relations is addressed. On the basis of a critical deconstruction of leadership discourses conducted by Bendell and Little

(2015), the study assesses what is useful for organizational change. It also addresses the awareness of the imperatives of wider sustainability, social justice and personal dignity, by the way of identifying key orientations that are sought to be promoted among participants in leadership development.

The first is developing the sustainability leadership through enhancing people's understanding of how to develop leaderful groups. This can be achieved by allowing leadership to naturally emerge from within the group and thus assist the group to better serve a social purpose. The second orientation encouraging deeper self-construal is where no outcome is hoped for, enabling this type of self-exploration to obtain insights from critical sociology, psychology, philosophy and spiritual traditions, as well as deep conversations, group work and experiences in a responsible manner. With reference to leadership traits for sustainability, Metcalf and Benn (2013) contend that sustainability leaders are required to possess extraordinary abilities. These leaders should have an ability to read and predict through complexity, think through complex problems and engage stakeholders in dynamic adaptive organisational change. Although this analysis seems to suggest that leadership for sustainability needs brilliant individuals, Bendell and Little (2015) argue that these sustainability leadership traits are not supposed to be at the expense of collective, collaborative and democratic efforts.

2.4.5 Sustainable Leadership in Schools

The success and sustainability of schools is dependent on the type of leadership in each individual school. Gayle and Bergsteiner (2011) assert that organizations that use sustainable leadership align their current activities to common long term interests of the organization together with their stakeholders. The South African Schools' Act of 1996 (SASA) endorses transition from a centralized control and decision-making to a more decentralized education management. This has caused an increase in demand for school leadership that transforms the school environment and creates an atmosphere that promotes sustainability in schools as an organization, what Senge (1990) terms as a learning organization.

Regarding school leadership, principals have a great influence on the direction of the school and can act to restructure the organization (Day et al, 2015). DHs in schools are pivotal in school leadership as this type of leadership ensures that correct policies are implemented in a manner that will be effective and efficient.. Reasons may vary as to the why school leadership is successful. (Hartijasti & Afzal, 2016). There has been a growing body of research on school leadership but lack thereof regarding sustainable leadership in school which serves the needs of multiple stakeholders, current and future needs. This study seeks to investigate sustainable leadership of schools by focusing on practices of DHs. The study draws from a sustainable leadership pyramid by Gayle and Bergsteiner (2011), which is useful as it categorizes practices into three groups, namely: the foundation practices, higher-level practices, and key performance drivers. This pyramid identified 19 leadership practices, five of which have demonstrated that organisations led through sustainable leadership can flourish.

2.5 Sustainable Leadership Pyramid

Gayle and Bergsteiner (2011) outline the sustainable leadership practices in the form of three spheres on a pyramid. These groups which the theory terms as the honeybee practices add considerable value to an organization. They are foundation practices, higher-level practices and key performance drivers which ultimately create the fourth level or the crown of the performance outcomes. The researchers argue that it contributes to sustainable leadership of an organization.

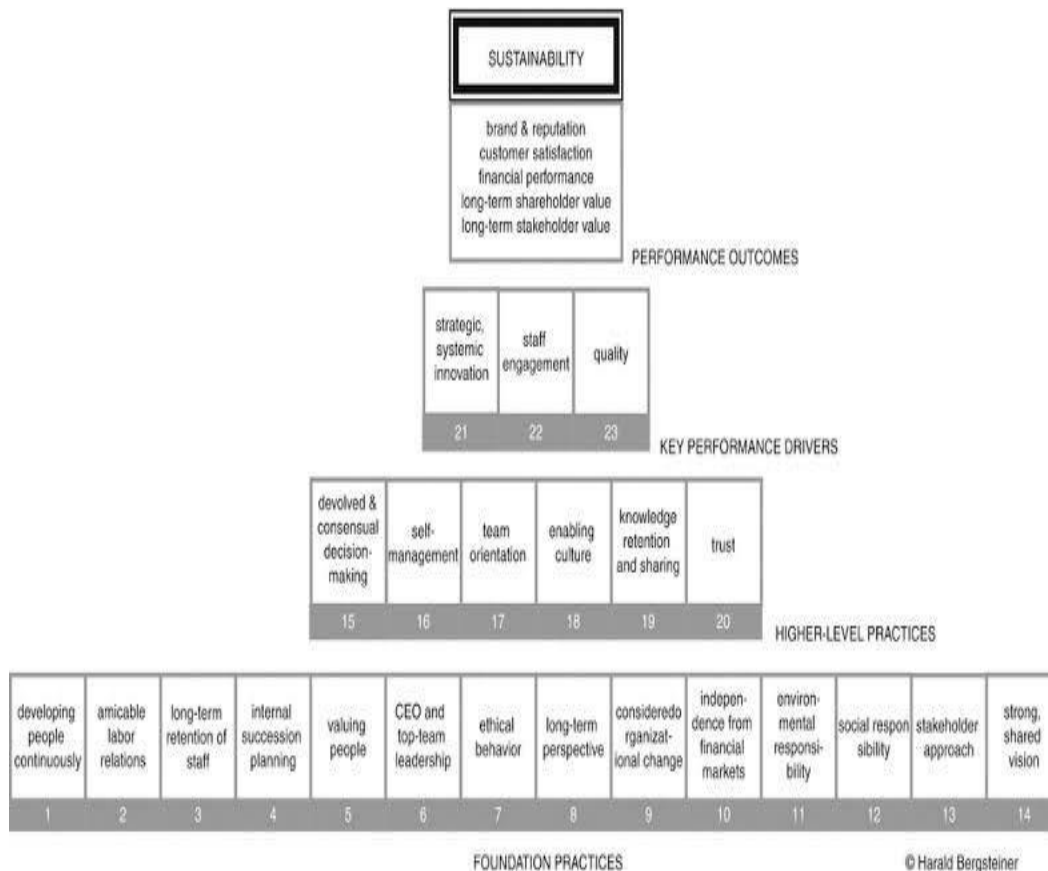


Figure 2.1: Sustainable leadership pyramid

2.5.1 Foundation Practices

Forming the base of the pyramid, foundation practices include programs for training and developing staff, striving for amicable labour relations, staff retention with the goal of avoiding layoffs, succession planning, valuing employees’ experience and their contribution to customer loyalty. They also depict the following: innovation and the decision as to whether the executive leader’s role is to be that of hero or top team member, ensuring of ethical behaviour, promoting long-term thinking, managing organizational change sensitively, striving for independence from the financial markets, promoting environmental and social responsibility as well as the balancing of multiple stakeholder interests, and ensuring that a shared vision drives the business (Gayle & Bergsteiner, 2011).

2.5.1.1 Developing staff, Labour relations, Long- term staff retention

Developing staff

The process of developing staff is executed by school management team members or DHs through developing of staff at their respective departments. This in turn enhances sustained productivity of staff at respective departments and thus when school leadership engages in continual professional learning and development it positively affects their teaching practices (Thoonen, Slegers, Oort, Peetsma & Geijsel, 2011). This is mainly implemented by DHs. Du Plessis and Eberlein (2018) assert that DHs manage and develop staff in such a manner that the vision and mission of an organisation are attained. This is because they are the immediate superiors of the teachers and are also the immediate subordinates to the top leadership comprising principal and deputy principals.

Labour Relations

Relations between school leadership and labour representatives benefit the school if the interactions are maintained professionally. Msila (2014) contends that there is evidence that suggests that leadership and the efficient management of school operations have been deteriorating in schools that predominately serve predominantly poor communities. This may be the result of vicious influences of powerful labour unions particularly the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) in the education sector. They are a significant member of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Labour unions have a tendency to create instability in education if their interests are not met. Mouton et al. (2013) assert that SADTU, which boasts the overall majority of more than 240 000 teachers as members, has a key role to play towards achieving transformation. However, the union has had a detrimental effect on education in the country at times. The inherent threat occurs when the labour union contradicts its educational leadership role with its political one (Lee, 2011). In fact this has led to other schools being ungovernable (Chikoko et al, 2015).

Huong (2020) describes school leadership's role on development of staff, specifically that the school leaders should increase their visibility and their interactions with all staff members regarding standards and achievements and ultimately promote a culture of learning at all school levels. DHs are specialists in their respective departments and play a leadership role by directing and monitoring instructions which include providing relevant support and guidance to teachers their immediate staff members (Mpisane, 2015).

Long- term Staff Retention

Organisational commitment is described in Liu and Watson (2020) as the employee's attachment to the organisation where employees are passionate to the extent that they show willingness, eagerness and a continued commitment to stay in that particular organisation. In schools, effective staff retention stabilizes school workplace to avoid layoffs and ensure continuity. The DHs regularly motivate and inspire teachers by creating strong social and professional interactions (Bipath & Nkabinde, 2018; Ogina, 2017). School leadership creates an environment for relatively new or novice teachers that ensure a low teacher turnover in the education sector. Ntsoane (2017) attributes the reasons for teachers leaving their profession early to lack of induction, insufficient resources, difficult roles, generation gap, stress and inadequate support.

Schools face the challenge of retaining qualified and competitive staff for sustainability of the school as teachers and other education professionals shift to other careers or to the private sector. This is attributed by Green, Aderdorff and Mathebula (2014)'s findings that approximately 4% of relatively new teachers leave their teaching profession in SA. Bottery (2017) describes unsustainability in leadership as a situation in which individuals fail to apply for the role, leading to a shortfall in recruitment where people in the position retire early or resign, and also when individuals do not remain long in the principalship or school leadership position.

The post-modern leadership model suggests that leaders should respect, and give attention to, the diverse and individual perspectives of stakeholders (Bush, 2007). The

labour relations between the school and representative of workers have been growing in importance since South Africa's democratic dispensation. Gurr (2014) posits that the development of success in schools is largely dependent on the leadership of the school management team, including the values and beliefs that underpin their leadership behaviour and leadership style within school environment and around the society. School leaders communicate in order to stay in tune with policy changes, anticipating new pressures and trends that seem likely to have an impact on their schools.

2.5.1.2 Succession Planning, Valuing Employees, Customer loyalty

Succession Planning

For school leaders to impart a sustainable legacy in schools and in society, they need to ensure that leadership principles are developed and shared with others. Hargeaves and Fink (2004) believes leadership succession is more than grooming school principals' successors in that it also involves distributing leadership throughout the school's professional community. These school leaders delegate and distribute leadership roles to staff, while in the process building leadership capacity and ensuring educational leaders share their workload with others (Mombourquette, Sproule & Brandon, 2019).

The study conducted by Zellner, Jenkins, Gideon, Doughty and McNamara (2002), suggests the succession principle whereby teacher leaders or school management teams and deputy principals should be given opportunities to wrestle with real school challenges in a safe environment under the coaching of the principal. School principals have an obligation to mentor and guide others in their respective schools. Zellner et al. (2002) posit that school leaders conduct mentoring and succession planning both by purposeful direct teaching as well as informed guidance and that the school management team members should play an active role in curriculum and instruction as well as in more prevalent management issues.

Valuing Employees

School leadership is based on the fundamentals of instructional leadership. Mombourquette *et al.* (2019) reveal that school leaders can directly support the advancement of teachers' professional capacities which informs sustained changes in the pedagogical practices of teachers. These changes exert positive influence on student learning. The study by Zellner *et al.* (2002) contends that when subordinate teachers have had opportunities to lead, when they have worked collaboratively and when they experience the leadership as larger than one person, the position of school leadership will be more attractive to prospective leaders.

Customer Loyalty

Pupils form the major client base that the school leadership serves. Hargreaves and Fink (2004) propose that the needs of the students should be prioritized and be clearly communicated with a sense of expectation to enhance students' feelings of inclusiveness. Leithwood and Riehl (2004) acknowledge that school leaders guide their schools through challenges posed by an increasingly complex environment which schools operate in, but argue that school leaders must respond to diversity that is found in student characteristics.

The needs and characteristics of the learners are affected by different factors that include cultural background, income inequality, physical and mental disabilities and the variation in learning capacities. For this reason, school leaders must engage and manage collaborations with other social agencies that serve the children (Leithwood & Riehl, 2004). The South African learner population is diverse in terms of these factors and the sustainable leaders' responsibility is to retain and maximize the satisfaction of these key stakeholders as student loyalty can be used as a powerful competitive edge of the school and society.

2.5.1.3 Leader's Role as Top Team Member, Ethical behaviour, Promoting long-term thinking, Managing organizational change sensitively

Leader's Role as Top Team Member

The decentralization of leadership focus from the principal of the school has led to school wide distributed leadership mindset, shifting from where the principal provides all answers, and teachers strive for what will benefit the school (Fiarman, 2017). Liu and Watson (2018) maintain that distributed leadership, as a modern decentralized school leadership model, acknowledges collective ability, skill, and dispositions to maximize outcomes. DHs, as instructional leaders, play a more functional role than school principals and are expected to form and champion effective teams in many schools with regular meetings. (Bush and Glover, 2014). Msila (2008) asserts that when people work together in a team, sharing a vision, they will tend to care for one another due to the positive aspects of the collective and communal way of thinking.

Sustainable leaders value teamwork and participation of all team members as leaders in their own right. Ngcobo and Tikly (2010) contend that a teacher is a leader in all respects and is not expected to participate in leadership only when given a formal leadership role. The team members assist fellow members in cross-training one another and facilitate the development of shared mental models among team members, which improves team effectiveness (Loughry, Ohland & Moore, 2007). In the study on Ubuntu and School Leadership, Msila (2008) points out that the concept of communalism enhances team participation as well sharing of skills and ideas. The study concludes that school leadership that introduced and encouraged team building and coaching culminates in solidarity of teachers and non- teaching members in the organisation

Ethical Behaviour

Moral leadership and authentic leadership are described by Bush and Glover (2016) as values-based leadership whereby leaders conduct themselves with integrity, while they spearhead objectives that are founded on explicit ethical values. Ethics and ethical

behaviour at all leadership levels is vital. Bowen, Bessette and Cham (2006) decree that ethics lies at the heart of modern society, challenging the whole educational workforce to re-evaluate themselves, their motives, and their character. Society expects that school leaders make ethical decisions for the common good and that their actions will be driven by a commitment to moral and academic excellence (Bowen et al, 2006).

Promoting Long-Term Thinking

The responsibility of educational leaders should be to facilitate and create a supportive environment for sustained learning and growth to thrive (Mombourquette *et al*, 2019). Studies on professional community are closely associated with organisational learning and shared leadership. Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) propose that when the mind-set of teachers is centred around the quality of student learning and collective efforts, teachers ultimately embrace educational approaches that improve learning opportunities. Sustainable leadership cultivates resources including human resources. It carefully nourishes and allocates resources in knowledge and skill development of all its teachers instead of concentrating efforts and resources on selected few or already established team members.

Managing Organizational Change Sensitively

Effective leadership has been extensively researched. One factor that has been used to evaluate the success of leadership is the extent to which the organisation manages to change to the sustainable benefit of the organisation. (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010). In the study on School leadership models, Bush and Glover (2016) suggest that teachers and leaders have a higher probability of embracing and championing change when they own it. The role of school leadership includes ensuring the best possible resource achievement, allocation and evaluation and the security of the site and property in order to ensure that teaching and learning are of high quality.

2.5.1.4 Environmental and Social Responsibility, Balancing Multiple Stakeholder Interests, Shared Vision

Environmental and Social Responsibility

Despite school leader's busy schedules, Dlamini (2017) asserts that school leaders are expected to take an initiative and interact with the school community that is being served by the school. School leadership proactively positions the school within their environment by being responsive to legitimate concerns from parents and other stakeholders. The distributed school leadership uses an approach that helps hold the school community together (Liu & Watson, 2020). This ensures the community involves itself in efforts that are used for the betterment of the school output. Hargreaves and Fink (2004) affirm that sustainable leaders at school level facilitate both the learning environment and learning matters that are sustainable and, engages stakeholders intellectually, socially and emotionally.

Balancing Multiple Stakeholder Interests

Sustainable leaders use frequent and ongoing multi-directional communications and collaborative decision-making with stakeholders throughout the school community to inform and achieve the school's mission and vision (Mombourquette *et al*, 2019). School leaders are expected to establish strong ties between families and the school. In a study conducted by Leithwood (2012), it was concluded that school leadership plays a pivotal role in assisting families to connect with other stakeholders, and establish inter-stakeholder collaboration in order to fully cater for the needs of all students. Leithwood (2012) found that sustainable leadership engaged parents by designing a welcoming and inclusive environment, developing multiple ways to involve parents and supporting teachers' commitment on community participation.

Shared Vision

Vision is viewed as an integral constituent of effective leadership and implementation of an organisation's plans. Bush and Glover (2016) propose that school leaders are

motivated to effectively do their work when their leadership is in pursuit of their individual vision. An increasing interest in educational leadership research for distributed leadership, shared leadership or collective leadership affirms the argument that a group of school leaders could achieve more than a single school principal if leading collaboratively (Liu, 2021). Thoonen et al. (2011) posit that adverse effects arise if there is lack of collaboration between school leaders and teachers during the process of vision building. This is further alluded to by Liu and Watson (2020) as the fundamental elements in which professional learning community works in collaboration with administrators and teachers by engaging them in shared decision-making to develop a shared vision for school success.

One of the most fundamental functions of a leader is to create a shared vision in an organisation. Winingsih and Sulistiono (2020) propose that vision can be created by leaders or by staff; however its objectives should be widely understood and embedded in everyone's mind. People base their actions and aspirations on the vision that they understand. With this in mind, Leithwood and Riehl (2004) recommend that school leadership create a shared meaning to support the shared vision of the school. To ensure cohesion, Msila (2008) argues that vision sharing in the school environment is utilized as a means of creating a balance between the individual and the vision and objectives of the school.

2.5.2 Higher-Level Practices

At the second level of the pyramid there are six practices, namely: consensual decision-making, creating self-managing employees, harnessing the power of teams, developing a trusting atmosphere, forming an organizational culture that enables sustainable leadership knowledge sharing and retention of valuable knowledge. This pyramid has been developed with the idea that when relevant foundation practices are in place they facilitate and support the emergence of the higher-level practices. It is unwise, for instance, to merely conclude that staff members will by default become self-managing without employees having undergone an appropriate training that will equip them to self-manage and know and share the vision of an organisation despite being with the organisation for

a long time. Likewise, trust cannot be built easily and hastily as it is determined by various factors of foundation practices. For this reason, in the pyramid self-management and trust form higher-level practices that arise from interactions in multiple lower level foundation practices.

2.5.2.1 Consensual Decision-Making, Self-Management, Team Orientation

Consensual Decision Making

There is broad support in school leadership for expanding teachers' participation in leadership and decision-making duties. Research suggests that increased teacher influence in schools has the potential for significant positive effect on school improvement (Mayrowetz, Murphy, Louis & Smylie, 2007; Mayrowetz & Smylie, 2004; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004). The intentional sharing of decision-making and purposeful building of capacities of the school staff who may have previously existed as passive followers can involve decisions that may subsequently influence the success of learners (Leithwood & Azah, 2016; Mombourquette *et al*, 2019). Distributed leadership emphasizes school improvement through engaging capable leaders and other leaders without formal position in daily decision-making and management with a view of improving school human and social capital (Liu, 2021). In addition, Thoonen *et al* (2011) allude to school leadership involving the whole staff and immediate stakeholders in consensual decision making as the participative decision making increases stakeholders' ownership of organizational goals and can reinforce the extent to which stakeholders have adopted school goals and values as their personal goals.

Self-Management

To demonstrate commitment to professional learning, Mombourquette *et al* (2019) claim that school leadership shows self-leadership by taking responsibility for self-development, reframing and open up of both theirs and others' minds to new possibilities as well as questioning their assumptions. Sustainable leaders are proactive in their own growth and development and are devoted to pursuing new ideas. Sustainable leadership trains leaders in how to take care of both their leaders and themselves (Hargreaves & Fink,

2004) to ensure continuity and avoid burnout of leaders and teachers. The study by Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) on Professional Community, Trust, Efficacy, and shared responsibility suggests that sharing decision-making responsibilities among a broader group of stakeholders creates legitimacy for collective decisions regarding priorities. It also reinforces norms of the professional community, binding teachers together in strategic decisions that teachers face when they design and adjust their teaching and learning practice.

2.5.2.2 Enabling Culture, Knowledge Retention and Sharing, Trust

Enabling Culture

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) posit that school leadership help develop school culture that embodies shared norms, values, beliefs and attitude and encourages mutual caring and trust among stakeholders. One of the challenges which educational researchers face is attempting to identify properties of schools that make a substantial difference to academic success within the control of school leaders (Hoy, 2002). Research by Mombourquette *et al* (2019) highlights the importance of school leaders facilitating the school's understanding of cultural backgrounds of learners, building trusting relationships with parents and using existing community resources to form collaborations and capacity to support the needs of all learners. School culture, according to Bush and Glover (2016) is characterized by sociability (friendship and morale) and solidarity (collective will and mutual interest) and is linked to school leadership.

School culture is cultivated by school management teams. It would be a true asset to schools if suitable school leadership could be appointed which would lead in such a way that a teaching and learning culture could be achieved and thrive. (Bush & Glover, 2016). While socio-economic factors undeniably have a significant link to student success in schools (Hoy, 2002), other factors within the control of schools appear to be more important. These include school's organisational culture of academic emphasis and school trust between students and parents. Hoy (2002) contends that these factors can be

affected by the enabling culture instilled by school leaders providing a clear focus for efforts to improve academic success particularly high-poverty schools.

Knowledge Retention and Sharing

Knowledge management encompasses capturing, generating, refining, distribution and application of 'know-how' (Collison a& Parcell, 2004). Frost (2011) adds that knowledge-building starts within the school and disseminates throughout its community. Mombourquette *et al* (2019) conceptualize school capacity building as more than developing teachers' pedagogical capacity and student learning. School capacity-building should, however, recognise the importance of organizational learning and knowledge sharing. Cooperative involvements and the sharing of knowledge and ideas are fundamental features of professional learning communities, Thoonen *et al* (2011) acknowledge that free sharing of knowledge and ideas may provide emotional and psychological support for teachers' work. The sharing of teacher knowledge has both short and long- term positive impact on the school environment. Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) postulate that when teachers share ideas, discuss them, or demonstrate them regularly, they may have decreased dependence on their leadership as a direct source of expert knowledge. This lessened dependence helps reduce some of the workload and pressure on leadership.

Trust

Trust is a fundamental determining factor in the success and sustainability of leadership. Adams and Forsyth (2007) posit that trust among individuals in a social system develops over time and its foundation lies in positive social interactions and relationships that lead to favourable outcomes. This creates and improves the level of trust held by an individual or group towards another party. Coleman (1990), conceptualizes trust as one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party stemming from the belief that the latter associate is competent, open, concerned, and reliable. School leadership that is respected and trusted by the members of the school communities is a contributing factor to the success of school (Mombourquette *et al*, 2019). One pivotal area in sustainable leadership

is personal integrity. In the study by Ngcobo and Tikly (2010), it was perceived that the money raised through school policies was expected to be utilized wisely in such a way that fees should be kept low with the said monies financing notable tasks and projects. Trust at school level reduces staff's feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability. Thoonen *et al* (2011) maintain that high relational trust can cause teachers to feel and believe that improving the quality of education and learning is both an individual and collective effort. This positively affects teachers' engagement in professional learning activities by being willing and able to invest their energies in contributing to the school's goals.

2.5.3 Key performance drivers

The third level of the pyramid which encompasses key performance drivers, namely: elements of innovation, staff engagement, and quality essentially provide the organisational performance needed by end-users of the service or product.

2.5.3.1 Innovation

School leadership operates under various conditions. The environment and the needs of students are dynamic with sustainable leadership bringing about innovative ways to position the school to be productive (Hargreave & Fink, 2004). In the study undertaken by Naicker, Grant and Pillay (2016) it was discovered that teachers use effective and creative strategies to create strong classroom discipline.

2.5.3.2 Staff Engagement

Leaders work both through and with people. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) ascertain that leaders are expected to work with others to create a shared sense of purpose and direction. School leadership is responsible for collaboratively establishing goals they are aspiring to attain and how they will collectively and individually achieve the outcomes for which they are striving using the necessary management tools such as monitoring and providing feedback to the staff and students (Huong, 2020). Effective leaders are sociable

and converse with staff. Teachers have a professional responsibility to be engaged in effective, sustained and relevant professional development throughout their careers and should receive continuing professional development (Frost, 2011).

2.5.3.3 Quality

School leadership is playing a prominent role in creating and maintaining teaching and learning of superior quality in schools (Huong, 2020). The functionality and success of schools lies in leadership that provides opportunities for professional development of staff and improved student achievement. For a sustainable quality teaching output, school leaders recognise and celebrate high-quality teaching and improved learner performance through various incentives and rewards (Leithwood, 2012; Mombourquette *et al*, 2019). Bush and Glover (2016) hold the view that an effectively managed and improved performance of teachers will result in quality performance of schools. In SA the prominent instrument is the Integrated Quality Management system (IQMS).

2.5.4 Performance outcomes

The top of the pyramid comprises five performance outcomes that indicate sustainable leadership.

Integrity of Brand and Reputation

Reputation is widely recognised in leadership as a determining factor in an organisation's success (Vercic & Coric, 2018). Although subjective, reputation reduces stakeholder uncertainty about leadership and future performance. When positive the brand reputation is considered to be one of the most valuable intangible assets that an organization or leadership can possess as it can lead stakeholders to provide leadership the benefit of the doubt should negative rumours surface (Vercic & Coric, 2018). The challenge to build and maintain a reputation for sustainability has resulted in organisations striving to credibly signal socially and environmentally responsible behaviour and to benefit from a

commendable reputation (Bairamian, 2017). This has led to decision-makers and leaders investing more time and effort in sustainability issues.

Enhanced customer satisfaction

Research on educational leadership in the last decades has revealed that the influence of principal leadership on student performance is indirect (Liu, 2021). There are essential mediators that school leaders could manoeuvre more directly to ultimately improve student performance, which enhances the confidence of students and parents towards school. (Leithwood et al, 2017; Murphy, 2017). Kramer (2020) argues that although school leadership, specifically principals place considerable focus on the financial side of the school due to schools adopting a business-like approach in leadership, effective school leaders prioritise the functional aspects of schooling, specifically the wellbeing of their learners as their primary clients over finances.

Solid operational finances

Financial management of the school is influenced by several stakeholders and their conducts towards the school finances, including broader local community and beyond. Section 37 of SISA 84 (RSA, 1996) prescribes that the overall responsibility for controlling school money and property lies with school governing bodies that are fully accountable for the allocation of finances to show school priorities, control of school expenditure, and preparation and auditing of annual reports. SMTs have the responsibility to ensure efficient financial control in collaboration with the school governing body (SGB) in ensuring solid financial control (Rangongo, Mohlakwana & Beckmann, 2016). Section 16A (2) (i; k) of SISA 84 (RSA, 1996) places an obligation on public school principals to become good custodians of school funds and to fulfil the following obligations: to take all reasonable steps to prevent any financial maladministration or mismanagement by any staff member or by the governing body of the school (S16A (2) (i)), and to report any maladministration or mismanagement of financial matters to the SGB of the school and to the DHs (S16A (2) (k)). Rangongo (2016) defines financial mismanagement in the school context as maladministration and corrupt behaviour, accompanied by wrongdoing on the part of an

authority whereby funds are used inappropriately and dishonestly. Sustainable leaders should exercise a sense of morality and professional ethics and integrity when dealing with public funds and Rangongo, Mohlakwana and Beckmann (2016) argue that mismanagement of funds should not be tolerated.

Long-Term Shareholder Value and Multiple Stakeholder Value

The principle of Stakeholder Governance is described in Guadano and Sarria-Pedroza (2018) as an organisational practice that seeks to encourage or coerce management to have the welfare of stakeholders in high regard. Stakeholder value has recently been replacing the previous emphasis of shareholder prioritizing approach as stakeholder governance has been prominently preferred in recent years. This change is largely attributed to CSR, which Guadano and Sarria-Pedroza (2018) describe as going beyond the pursuit of pleasing the shareholders or owners of an organisation to striving to establish a composed relationship with all the organisation's stakeholders. Sustainability has become a matter of global concern and many NGOs have advocated for sustainable development both at local and international level and Bairamian (2017) affirms that leaders want their activities to draw stakeholder attention in engaging in social and environmental responsibility.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed key concepts which are related to this study. Discussion of theory relevant to the phenomenon under investigation and theoretical framework, which was school sustainable leadership based on the sustainable leadership pyramid, were deliberated on. The following chapter outlines the research design, approaches and methodology used and basic details on why they were used to conduct the study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodological process employed in this study in order to achieve overall research aim of assessing the sustainable leadership practices by school leaders and its impact on long term school performance, social and environment. Firstly, design research is discussed. This is followed by an explanation of the proposed methodological framework selected, and the cross-validation strategy utilized in this study. Lastly, the data procedures, ethical issues and trustworthiness of the findings are discussed, followed by the summary and conclusion.

3.2 Research Paradigm

A paradigm is described in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) as a world view in terms of what is perceived as accepted or precise scientific knowledge. Mertens (2007) contends that a paradigm studies an interpretation of knowledge and exists when theoretical framework is able to be distinguished from a theory. In the definition of paradigm by Taylor and Medina (2013), the emphasis is on beliefs with reference to the nature of knowledge, methodology and criteria for validity as integral components that must be apparent. Maree (2010) attests that a paradigm focuses on beliefs of the vital facets of realities that concern the world.

As observed by Kuhn (1962), a paradigm comprises three critical elements, namely: ontology, epistemology and methodology. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) refer to ontology as assumptions regarding the nature of reality. This has the ability to shape the way in which one views and studies his or her research objects. This signifies that ontology determines how the world of research is concerned and what is chosen to be researched in one's study. Babbie (2013) posits that reality can also be perceived as being socially constructed by actors acting together in a context such that the researcher cannot be separated entirely from what is known. This study adopted the ontology of social reality as

it focused on the different behaviours and practices taken towards sustainability leadership. It started with schools and subsequently extended to communities and the immediate environment.

Burrell and Morgan (1979) suggest that epistemology deals with assumptions not only with reference to what is regarded as acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge but also to how knowledge is transferred to others. It relates to the question: what is the relationship between the researcher and knower? In this instance, this study adopted an epistemology which allowed the researcher to interact with the research respondents to create reality. The methodology was the systematic and theoretical study of methods applied in research. Saunders et al. (2016) sectionalize the research process into six layers, namely: research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, research choice, time horizon, and research procedures as shown in the figure below.

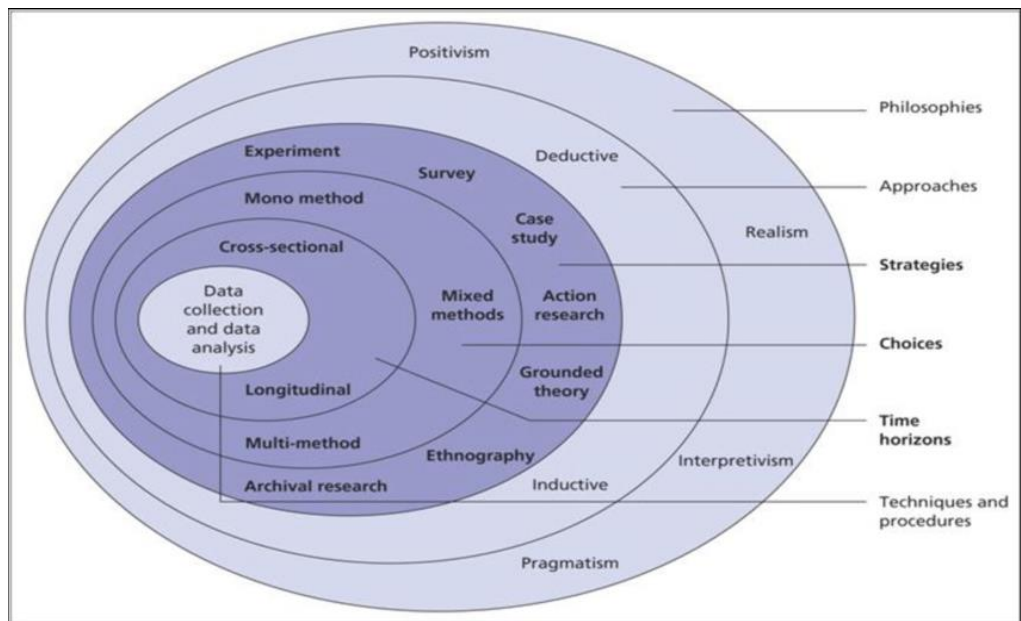


Figure 3.1: Research Process Onion (Saunders et al., 2016:124)

3.3 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is described by Cresswell and Cresswell (2018:5) as a general philosophical orientation regarding the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to the study. The world view and assumptions of the researcher are what determine the chosen research philosophy. In business and management, Saunders et al., (2016) outline the following major philosophies:

- (a) **Positivism** – uses scientific methods and measures facts such as experiments and statistics to produce law-like generalizations.
- (b) **Critical Realism** – focuses on what we see and experience in terms of underlying structures of reality that shape observable events and eventually suggest recommendations to address social problems.
- (c) **Interpretivism** – pursues narratives, stories, perceptions and interpretations. It assumes that people are distinctive from the phenomena as they create significance for events.
- (d) **Postmodernism** – emphasizes the chaotic primacy of flux, movement, fluidity and change by using the role of language and power that give voice to alternative marginalized views.
- (e) **Pragmatism** – focuses on the problem and aims to contribute practical solutions that could be useful for future practice. The approach is dynamic and acknowledges the diverse ways of interpreting the world showing there are several realities.

For this study, a positivist philosophy was followed as the researcher sought to observe and measure facts and regularities that had the potential to lead to the production of credible and meaningful data. These referred to practices used by Departmental Heads to ensure sustainable leadership.

3.4 Research Design

Research design is defined as a framework for the collection and analysis of data. This serves to answer the research question on meeting the research objectives by providing reasoned justification for the choice of the data sources, collection methods and analysis techniques (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:726). A research study is comparable to an architectural project whereby an architect draws a blueprint that will guide the construction. Hence a research plan is essential for the initial phases of the research study to direct collection, measurement and analysis of the data.

Akhtar (2016:68) declares that the research design be considered as the structure of research and the glue that holds the different elements in a research project together. In short, a research design is a plan of the proposed research work. In this study, the research design helped the researcher to formulate shape to his ideas and provide insight into areas that needed attention. Research design highlights the purpose of the study. Saunders *et al.* (2016) provide characteristics of specific designs as follows:

- (a) **Exploratory** – addresses subjects where there is very little existing research on the subject matter. As such, the research design is flexible and unstructured.
- (b) **Descriptive** – addresses subjects where accurate and valid representation of factors about the research question is required. As such, the research design is more structured than on exploratory study.
- (c) **Explanatory** – aims to identify links between factors about the research problem and is highly structured in nature.

The current study was descriptive as there were existing factors that needed to be addressed and the research focused on practices of school leaders toward finding a sustainable solution to current and future socioeconomic as well as environmental issues in Bergville in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

3.5 Research Approach

At the second layer of the research onion, the research design needs to be matched with the research methods. It is of paramount importance to consider the difference between deductive versus inductive processes within development of a theory. They are then subjected to a rigorous test via a series of proportions (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:146). The deductive approach is predominantly associated with quantitative research whereby laws present basis for explanation, allow anticipation of phenomena and allow it possible to predict the occurrence. The deductive process is undertaken by developing a hypothesis which essentially means reasoning from the broad to the specific.

The inductive approach, in contrast, is centred around the exploration of new phenomenon or reasoning from the specific to the broader context. It is generally concerned with context and is associated with qualitative research. The researcher begins with a completely open mind- devoid of preconceived ideas. He then collects and analyses data that culminate in the creation of a series of propositions or hypothesis (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). In this study, the theoretical framework or prior assumptions from sustainable leadership practices of Gayle and Bergsteiner (2011) pyramid were tested. A significant point to note is that deductive approach was adopted as the aim of the study was to ascertain whether sustainable leadership practices are used by departmental heads in Bergville schools.

3.6 Research Methodology Choice

The third layer of the research onion is focuses on the methodological choice comprising the use of qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods to answer the research questions. According to Saunders *et al.* (2016:165), the difference between qualitative and quantitative research is that the quantitative method uses numeric data or numbers whist qualitative research uses non- numeric data like words, images, video clips and other similar material. In this way, a quantitative method is often any data collection technique like questionnaire or data analysis procedure such as graphs and statistics. In contrast, the qualitative method is associated with any data collection technique such as interview

or data analysis procedure like categorizing data that generates or uses non numerical data (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) in addition to the above definition assert that objects are not reduced to a single variable and studied artificially. In terms of ontology, quantitative research investigates objective reality whereas qualitative reality advances an understanding of subjective reality. In terms of epistemology, quantitative research introduces controls to ensure validity of data as it is in an experimental design.

Questions in a research process of a quantitative nature are expressed clearly as the data is collected in a standard manner with the researcher being seen as independent from the respondents. This contrasts from the epistemology in qualitative research as there is close interaction between the research respondents and the researcher to discover and explore reality flexibility in the data collection process. This study used the quantitative research methodology as the researcher sought to determine which sustainable leadership practices are actively used by the departmental heads in the study area and the extent to which this is done.

3.7 Research strategies

The fourth layer of the research onion is concerned with the research strategies. Research strategy can be defined as the map of how the researcher will effectively answer her or his research questions (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:177). Strategies utilized by researchers comprise of experiments, surveys, archival research, case study, ethnography, action research, grounded theory and narrative enquiry. Sukamolson (2007) declares that quantitative researchers select from the following approaches: 1) survey research, 2) correlational research, 3) experimental research and 4) causal-comparative research. The research strategy complements the research design and what the researcher seeks to achieve, specifically to test and determine what the case is in the real world. The survey research in this study utilized scientific sampling and questionnaire design to measure estimates of the school leadership population that adopts sustainable leadership practices.

3.7.1 Questionnaires

Self-completed questionnaires, generally referred to as surveys, and are usually completed by participants in the study. The questionnaire is used to collect data from large, diverse and widely scattered groups of people. It acts as a tool to secure answers to questions by utilizing a form which is filled by the respondents. Questionnaires enable the researcher to elicit detailed information from respondents who may not be accessible. (Sukamolson, 2007). Saunders *et al.*, (2016:440) classify the types of questionnaires into two categories, namely: the self-completed questionnaire and interviewer questionnaires. Self-completed questionnaires can be distributed to the participants via the internet (internet-questionnaires). Participants can also access the survey in the web using a hyperlink (web questionnaires). Another option is that these self-completed questionnaires can be mailed to participants who will mail them back after completion (mail or postal questionnaire). They can also be delivered by hand to each participant to be collected later (delivery and collection questionnaires).

The interviewer-completed questionnaires are completed or recorded by the interviewer based on the respondents' answers. A further research method is that of being contact based whereby interviewer physically meets the participant and asks questions (face-to-face questionnaires) in a structured interview (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). This study used the self-completed questionnaires, distributed and collected using the social media mobile Whatsapp app. The justification for this was that the study was conducted during COVID 19 pandemic whereby protocol called for minimal contact of people to minimize virus transmission and infections.

3.7.1.1 Self-Completed Questionnaire

The questionnaire (**Appendix 4**), comprised 45 items that needed to be filled by respondents. The first 10 items that participants needed to respond to were covered demographic and school information of the respondents. The last 35 items explored departmental head's perceptions of sustainable school leadership as derived from Gayle and Bergsteiner (2011)'s pyramid of sustainable leadership practices. The questionnaire

was appropriate as it included Gayle and Bergsteiner (2011)'s sustainable leadership practices, namely Foundation practices, higher level practices and key performance drivers. There were few modifications on phrasing of certain statements and questions which were done as May (2011) points that the phrasing of questions should be simple for respondents to understand and respond easily.

Respondents were asked to what degree they agreed, or disagreed, with 40 statements on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 6 = strongly disagree. Ten additional questions, relating to background information and demographics, such as gender, age and years of experience as a departmental head, were included to extract descriptive data. The questionnaire was first piloted with two current departmental heads where the researcher is a teacher at a combined school.

The feedback was generally positive, with participants returning the filled questionnaire within an average time of 23 minutes to complete the questionnaire. A critique included that the questionnaire should have more open ended questions (qualitative in nature) where respondents could express their perspectives freely about the topic, hence few open ended questions were added to the questionnaire to achieve the aim of probing respondents' reasons for their answers in certain cases. No major concerns were noted. The questionnaire was then sent via email or Whatsapp to departmental heads of schools that formed part of the sample and who had initially agreed to take part in the survey.

3.8 Time Horizon

The fifth layer of the research onion concerns the time horizon in a research study. Time horizons can be either longitudinal or cross-sectional. Saunders *et al.* (2016) define the cross-sectional study as a snapshot and the longitudinal study as the diary perspective. Longitudinal studies are repeated over a longer period of time, whereas cross-sectional studies are done over a limited specific timeframe. This study adopted the cross-sectional time horizon due to the fact that there was limited time that was available to complete the research.

3.9 Target Population

Saunders et al. (2016) describe target population as a complete set of cases or group members that are the focus of the research inquiry, and from which a sample will be drawn. For this study, the target population comprised all departmental heads that are members of school management teams at public schools in the Bergville Circuit. The researcher accessed the Circuit Manager's report for the database of both primary and secondary schools in the Bergville circuit as well as the number of departmental heads in the circuit.

A sampling frame was obtained from the circuit office comprising a total of 109 public schools in Bergville, consisting of 76 primary schools and 31 secondary schools and 2 combined schools. Each school had at least one departmental head and a maximum of four departmental heads. The total number of departmental heads based on the Human Resource statistics from Circuit manager's report was 232 of which at least 135 were based in high schools and 97 being based in secondary schools. The sample size was 59 constituting roughly 25% of the total population. The ideal sample size of 50% could not be studied after the ethical clearance and gatekeeper's letter had expired. Nevertheless, with the population of departmental heads not vastly diverse in the Bergville schools, the 25% of the sample was a reliable representation of the population and the outcomes achieved reflect the practices of the entire population. The sample incorporated both primary and secondary schools and included long-serving departmental heads and those that are fairly new to the leadership role.

3.10 Sampling

The selection of a sample for the study is integral as it will have direct effect when generalizing the research findings (Datta,2018). The sample is the subset of the population that is being studied in the research question. When sampling the researcher can either use probability sampling and/or non-probability sampling. In probability sampling, the chance of a participant being selected from the target population is known and all participants have an equal chance of being selected. (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

Datta (2018) describes the advantages of probability sampling as being the lessening of systematic errors and sampling impartiality with inferences drawn from the sample being generalizable to the population. The drawback is that the technique can be time-consuming and expensive. The probability samples that Saunders et al. (2016) describe as the techniques available for this kind of sampling are simple random, systematic random, stratified random, cluster and multi-stage sampling.

Non-probability sampling provides a range of alternate techniques to choose a sample where probability of each particular participant that is being selected is unknown. Saunders *et al.* (2016) describe the techniques available to the researcher as quota, purposive, volunteer and haphazard. In this study, stratified random sampling technique was adopted. Here Saunders *et al.* (2016) explain that the target population needs to be divided into two or more appropriate and significant strata based on attributes given. The attributes pertinent to this study included gender, size of the school, nature of the school, community engagement and others. The total number of participants in this study was 82, of which half the total participants were men, participants were from four clusters namely Emangwaneni, Amazizi, Winterton and Bethany clusters or ward demarcations.

3.11 Data Collection

The researcher conducted the study using self-administered questionnaires with individual participants from the local schools in the Bergville Circuit. The content of the questionnaire was designed using the pyramid of sustainable leadership practices by Gayle and Bergsteiner (2011). The questionnaires were designed with an intention of deriving the intended objectives of the study.

The questionnaire was designed and the content edited to comply with the predetermined requirements. The questions were then arranged according to relevant categories to facilitate the flow of thoughts whilst the participants are filling the questionnaire. The

questions were kept simple but concise, flowing from less demanding to begin with and ending with more challenging and thought provoking ones.

3.12 Data Analysis

For data analysis, the raw data was obtained from the respondents using questionnaires and arranged in order to obtain useful information from it. Data from the questionnaire was initially coded on collection and captured onto MS Excel spreadsheets. The quantitative data was then imported into SPSS version 27 software, made available at UKZN. The analysis of the data gave an important insight into various issues relating to the realization of the study's objectives.

The classical descriptive analysis, specifically with an evaluation of frequencies, mean, standard deviation and percentages were extracted using the SPSS v.27 in order to determine if and how Departmental Heads use different sustainable leadership practices. The statistics that were used included the mean scores for responses on each item, as well as the frequency distributions for each response. The descriptive statistics are used to "describe" the population from the sample data (Saunders et al., 2016). Chapter 4 deals with findings of this research.

3.13 Informed Consent

The participants in this study, who were departmental heads of the public schools around Bergville, were informed of their rights, including the intentions of the research and what the researcher's intended study objectives. The introductory letter (appendix 3) clarifies the purpose of the study. It was given to participants who asked to sign the consent form, indicating that they understood clearly what the study was about and that their consent was based on being fully informed about the study. Respondents were made to understand their right to withdraw their participation in the study when and if they felt there was a need to do so.

3.14 No harm to Participants

The researcher safeguarded responded against any possible harm that could be caused during the study. Since the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, physical contact with participants was avoided through the use of technological communication, specifically WhatsApp and email. The researcher further decided not to include questions that could infringe on participants' rights and personal values.

3.15 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured and maintained in this study. Participants were exposed to the fact that the transcripts of the research proceedings and outcomes would only be accessed by the researcher and supervisors. Participants were further made aware that their names and their school names would remain anonymous in research report.

3.16 Ethical Clearance

As the researcher was committed to conducting ethical research, ethical clearance was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) before the survey started. A copy of the Ethical Clearance Certificate provided by UKZN is attached (**Appendix 1**).

3.17 Summary

In this chapter, the research paradigm was discussed. The research opinion was explained as it informed the research process. The research methodology chosen was detailed to reflect how this quantitative study was carried out to investigate the sustainable leadership practices used by departmental heads of public schools during the era when sustainability is one of the prominent issues that affect the world. The study used purposive sampling to select departmental heads as respondents in the study who participated in the self-completed questionnaires. The findings of this are outlined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the overall findings of this quantitative investigation. The three research questions of this study were examined using descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations. The mean providing the central tendency for each sustainable leadership practice studied, whilst the standard deviations offering an available definition to explain potential variations for each distribution. Firstly, it contrasts the mean and standard deviation (SD) scores of the individual questionnaire items.

4.2 Response Rate to the Survey Research

A response rate, which is generally expressed in percentage form, is the number of people who answered the questionnaire, divided by the number of individuals in the sample (Saunders *et al.*,2012:267). Initially a total of 59 participants, representing 25% of the total population of Departmental Heads in Bergville public schools received the self-administered questionnaires to participate in this survey. This makes a total of 31 schools which participated in the survey. Of the total respondents that participated, 44 questionnaires (representing 75% of the total participants) were fully completed and returned to the researcher. The following is the account of findings from the responses of the participants.

4.3 Reliability of the Survey

The validity of this quantitative survey was tested through the use of Cronbach's alpha as shown in Table 4.1. The number of items in the questionnaire were 41 (n=41) and the overall Cronbach's alpha was 0,93 (a= .93), which indicates that there is a strong reliability within the 41- item data collection tool that was used in this study.

Table 4.1: Table representing reliability of data collection tools.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.932	41

4.4 Questionnaire Findings

The responses from the questionnaire generated a formidable understanding of the study's primary research objective, to investigate the sustainable leadership practices used by departmental heads in the public schools of Bergville. The next section thoroughly addresses the research questions 1,2 and 3 of the study.

4.4.1 Research question 1

What sustainable leadership practices are used by the Departmental Heads in rural schools around Bergville Circuit?

In order to explore the sustainable leadership practices, the questionnaire comprised 27 items or statements under the foundation and higher level practices. The respondents needed to determine whether these practices are used by Departmental Heads in their

schools. Items with “strongly agree” reflected the most popular practice among the participants, with the items of “least strongly agree” being the least used sustainable leadership practice. In an attempt to explore the perceptions of the Departmental Heads with regards to sustainable leadership practices, the mean scores and standard deviations were compared with all 27 questionnaire items to that sought to address Research Question 1.

Table 4.2: Sustainable leadership practices ranked according to perceptions of departmental heads.

Five most Strongly Agreed questionnaire items	Frequency: Strongly Agree (SA)	%: Strongly Agree (SA)	Mean	SD
1. As a departmental head I am continuously involved in developing everyone in the department.	24	54.5	1.5455	0.6973
9. School principal works as top team member or team leader.	22	50.0	1.6136	0.78402
8. Staff members are regarded as contributing and adding value to the school.	21	47.7	1.5909	0.72555
3. Efforts are made to value long term retention of staff in school.	18	25.0	1.6364	0.61345
11. As a departmental head I promote ethical behaviour at leadership and general staff.	17	38.6	1.6591	0.60782
Overall			1,61	0,69
Five least Strongly Agreed questionnaire items				
4. There is succession plan and staff are promoted from within school whenever possible.	7	15.9	2.0455	0.74567
6. In case one employee is unable to work or teach, at least one employee has been trained to fill that next gap from within the school.	7	15.9	2.5227	1.17114
16. School promotes active environmental and waste management, like reuse, reduce and recycle.	8	18.2	2.2500	0.94315
24. Employees are independent and self-managing.	9	20.5	2.1136	0.89484
13. A change is embraced positively and is managed accordingly	9	20.5	1.8864	0.65471
Overall			2,16	0,88

Table 4.2, above represents items related to personnel development, teamwork with the principal, effort in appreciating the contribution of staff, long term retention of staff and ethical behavior had lowest overall mean scores (1,61), which reflect that they were closest to “strongly agree” as per the questionnaire.

The items that had the least strongly agree perception had the higher mean scores, with an overall mean of 2,16, were related to succession plan, staff ability to complement each other, environmental protection, employee independence as well as embracing change. The standard deviations emphasize the consistency in the perceptions of the Departmental Heads as the 5 most strongly agreed items had a significantly lower standard deviation (0.69) than the 5 least strongly agreed items (0.88).

4.4.2 Research question 2

Which key performance drivers of sustainable leadership practices can be identified by Departmental Heads in rural schools of the Bergville Circuit?

Table 4.3: Table depicting the descriptive statistics for Key Performance Drivers

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
28. Strong innovation culture promotes creativity at all levels	44	1.00	5.00	1.8636	.73424
29. Emotionally-committed staff are valued and resulting commitment in school activities	44	1.00	5.00	1.9773	.84876
30. DH fosters an enabling, widely-shared culture in school	44	1.00	5.00	2.0000	.71528
31. Staff commitment and determinations are recognized and valued	44	1.00	4.00	1.8182	.58161
32. There is culture of quality that is embedded in school activities	44	1.00	5.00	1.9091	.64043
Overall				1,91	0,704064

In order to determine whether the key performance drivers are adopted by the Departmental Heads, the questionnaire comprised 5 items of the total 35 items that the participants of the study needed to respond to. As can be seen from in the above table the descriptive statistics for the key performance drivers for sustainable leadership indicated the overall mean score of 1,91 and the overall standard deviation of 0,704. This reflected a positive perception and use of key performance drivers amongst the Departmental Heads as the majority of the respondents agree with the use of these key performance drivers.

Item 31 of the key performance drivers which addresses the valuing and recognition of staff commitment and determinations by the Departmental Heads showed the mean (1,82) closest to “strongly agree” which indicates that the Departmental Heads have a positive perception towards it and also the lowest standard deviation (0,58) showing consistency in respondents’ perceptions. The mean that was furthest from the strongly agree, this being the least popular item 30 which addresses that Departmental Heads foster an enabling, widely-shared culture in the school.

With reference to the above statistics, further testing of variables revealed the following significant differences in the results on key performance drivers:

- Younger Departmental Heads (n=26) representing 59 % of the total participants, strongly agreed with item 28 of culture of innovation and creativity.
- High school Departmental Heads (n=29), representing 66% of the respondents strongly agreed with item 28, with the majority of them being in Mathematics and Science departments.
- More female Departmental Heads strongly agreed with item 29, 30 and 31 which deals with recognition and acknowledgement of commitment, social values and culture among staff.

More primary school Departmental Heads strongly agreed with item 32, confirming emphases on quality at the lower phases in schools.

4.4.3 Research question 3

What are the key practices of sustainable leadership that should form part of a sustainable leadership framework for Departmental Heads to ensure sustainable schools in the Bergville Circuit?

In the last three open-ended questions of the questionnaire the respondents had liberty of sharing which sustainable leadership practices are prominent in their leadership

environment. The participants could also suggest which practices and performance drivers they recommend as integral to Departmental Heads of schools in the area. They also included aspects of the participants including gender, age and number of years in leadership. There were no significant differences in terms of aspects like race and location of the schools as all participants were black and location of schools was predominantly rural (n=41) over township (n=3) and urban(n=0).

Item 33 stated: In your opinion, which sustainable leadership practices are being used in your school environment? The most frequently mentioned practice was that the school principal works as top team member or team leader. The second most frequently used was that there is proper consultation of stakeholders when major decisions are to be taken by school leadership. Teamwork and communication seemed to be more popular among the Departmental Heads in schools.

Item 34 stated: In your opinion, which sustainable leadership practices would you recommend that should be used by Departmental Heads in public schools? In this item the respondents 'suggestions were mostly extracted from the sustainable leadership practices of the pyramid, as most frequently suggested practice was item 14 (Staff and stakeholders are encouraged to adapt and thrive in changing environment.) and 23 (There is all an effort for consensus at school leadership during decision making.), whilst the popular key performance drivers were 31 (Staff commitment and determinations are recognised and valued).

To further examine Research Question 3, all individual questionnaire items were compared in order to determine differences amongst groups. The following significant differences were found:

- Older Departmental Heads with more years in leadership positions most frequently mentioned practice of: School principal works as top team member or team leader.

- Older Departmental Heads in terms of age and number of years on leadership position most frequently agreed and suggested items 3, 4 5, and 6 which deal with the practice of succession planning, continuity and consistency.
- More Departmental Heads from bigger schools in terms of enrollment and number of teachers under their leadership strongly suggested the item: There is proper consultation of stakeholders when major decisions are to be taken by school leadership.
- Teamwork and communication seemed to be more popular among the Departmental Heads in schools.
- Female Departmental Heads (n=22) strongly agreed with item 15, 16, which deal with environmental protection and sustainability.
- Departmental Heads from primary schools strongly agreed with item 15, 16, which deal with environmental protection and sustainability.

4.5 Summary

This chapter began with an overview of the data analysis procedures, a description of the rate of participation by the target population of 59 Departmental Heads in leadership positions in public schools in Bergville. The responses to each question contained within the three main research questions of the study were examined using descriptive statistics, including frequency, mean, and standard deviation. The primary focus of the study was to determine if the sustainable leadership practices were being used by Departmental Heads as well as the perception around the key performance drivers in sustainable leadership. The data suggested that there were some elements of popularity and use of some practices that were surveyed in schools but with inadequate knowledge of how these practices translate to sustainable leadership and sustainability in general.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the study's key findings as systematic responses to each of the research questions discussed in chapter 4. It theorizes them in terms of the relevant existing literature. It must be noted that the results of this study provide insight into the perceptions around sustainable leadership practices by Departmental Heads, as sustainability becomes increasingly spotlighted among leaders, especially at the younger generation educational level.

5.2 Research question 1

What are sustainable leadership practices that are used by the Departmental Heads in rural schools around Bergville Circuit?

The respondents answered questions specific to two categories of sustainable leadership practices, namely: foundation and higher level practices on the pyramid. The survey results were collected through the use of self-administered questionnaires. An examination of research question 1 and a descriptive analysis was calculated to assess whether these sustainable leadership practices were being used by the Departmental Heads. The results revealed that departmental heads placed priority on continuously developing people, collaboration through teamwork with other leaders, appreciating and appraisals of staff as well as ethical leadership. The perception of the Departmental Heads lies in the belief in continual involvement of leadership to develop learners and that professional development and mentoring of staff maintain both teacher motivation and production levels. (Mestry, 2017). In the quantitative study conducted by Thoonen et al., (2011) on elementary schools in Netherlands, the study discovered that teachers' engagement in professional learning activities provide teachers with a sense of self-efficacy. It serves as a motivational factor to teachers and ultimately improves school organisational overall conditions.

These results reveal that school leadership should be innovative by proactively creating more professional developments and training programmes instead of relying on government and other institutions. The practice of continuous development aligns with the perception of long-term retention of staff as a principle of sustainability in order to develop and retain physical and human resources (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). The results, however, also revealed practices that are related to succession plans in schools and adopting internal recruiting policies by promoting staff from within the school as the least used practice among the respondents. The Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM, 2016) ascribes the role of developing training programmes to school principals thus suggesting that the responsibility of succession planning in schools are to be vested only at top management level (Strydom, 2020). This indication seems to contradict with the popular perspective among Departmental Heads that the principal is seen to be the top team member in the school environment.

The practice of the principal being a team leader in the school arena suggests that leadership responsibilities are shared by both top and middle management. Perceptions of Departmental Heads in the findings of this study reveal the opposite. The least agreed upon practices include the following: the presence of succession plans, active environmental management and protection, independence of staff, as well as embracing change. The suppressing of staff independence and self-management is a concern as it is the KPD that determines environmental sustainability initiatives that can be used in schools and communities. Initiatives to protect and manage the environment would be functional only if all stakeholders are inclusive in the awareness of environmental management systems in schools (De Sousa, Richter & Raath, 2017). These findings indicate inactivity of schools in environmental sustainability, confirmation of this lying in this being the least popular practice. This is related to the school leadership embracing and managing change. One prominent factor in the changing environment is the need to actively reverse the causes and effects of climate change and to save our planet. If leadership is reluctant to embrace this change, this may impact negatively on sustainability. Carr (2016) posits that schools have the largest role to play in the sustainability of the planet and humankind.

5.3 Research Question 2

Which performance drivers of sustainable leadership practices can be identified by Departmental Heads in rural schools at the Bergville Circuit?

The results of the survey on the KPDs that are prominent in the schools where Departmental Heads lead revealed a fairly consistent adoption of these drivers. Recognition of staff commitment and determination was the most popular driver consistently selected by Departmental Heads. Recognizing and valuing subordinates' efforts acts as a motivating factor to staff. This affirms that this may trickle down and positively impact on learners and school performance, as per the suggestion by Williams (2016). This driver makes it possible for stakeholders to embrace the culture of innovation and creativity as these findings reveal that staff members become emotionally attached to school operations and culture. This is further alluded to by overwhelming results from female Departmental Heads on those drivers that recognise the emotional wellbeing of staff and commitment. The study by Miller (2017) discovered that female school leaders tend to place greater value on communal qualities of leadership than their male counterparts.

Of concern is the finding that there is relatively less adoption and use of KPDs that place responsibility on Departmental Heads to foster an enable and shared culture in schools. This is further confirmed by less popularity on the culture of quality in schools. The issue of school culture seems to be of less interest to high schools compared to primary school findings. The study on school culture by Tus (2020) affirms this as it revealed that there is no significant link between the academic performance of the learners or the school. School culture is, however, still essential as it sets a measuring yard stick for standards and expectations of behaviour in the school environment, as argued by Rodriguez (2021).

5.4 Research Question 3

What are the key practices of sustainable leadership which should be part of sustainable leadership framework for Departmental Heads to ensure sustainable schools around Bergville Circuit?

The intention of this research question was to extract the independent opinions of the participants with the aim of compiling the framework to be used and recommended to schools. Overwhelming results indicated that Departmental Heads regard the need for teamwork at all levels of leadership, including school principals as an essential practice to drive sustainable leadership. This is supported by the suggestions from Departmental Heads for proper consultation of stakeholders when major decisions are to be taken by school leadership. This promotes communication as a focal point for effective teamwork (Bush & Glover, 2014). It is therefore appropriate for top management to ensure and reaffirm the need for teamwork at all levels of the school as this increases the magnitude of school leadership and builds strong relationships with all stakeholders (Naidoo, 2019).

The results reveal that environmental sustainability and innovative ways of running a school that are responsive to evolving needs for sustainability must be adaptive. It is true that environmental education in schools through leadership establishes a solid platform and foundation in knowledge, attitudes and abilities to find solutions not only for students but for the community at large (Boca & Saracli, 2019). As such, the practice of environmental management needs to be adequately integrated into leadership and education practices in schools. However Moore et al., (2017) discovered that there is still insufficient comprehensive definition of sustainability to society, which becomes a challenge as people need to be convinced about what is it that they need to sustain and for what. Drawing from the above results in this study, it is important to ensure sustainable schools through a variety of sustainable leadership practices according the Departmental heads. This diversity of practices is depicted on Figure 5.1 below, which collectively form a framework to be used by departmental heads in their respective schools.

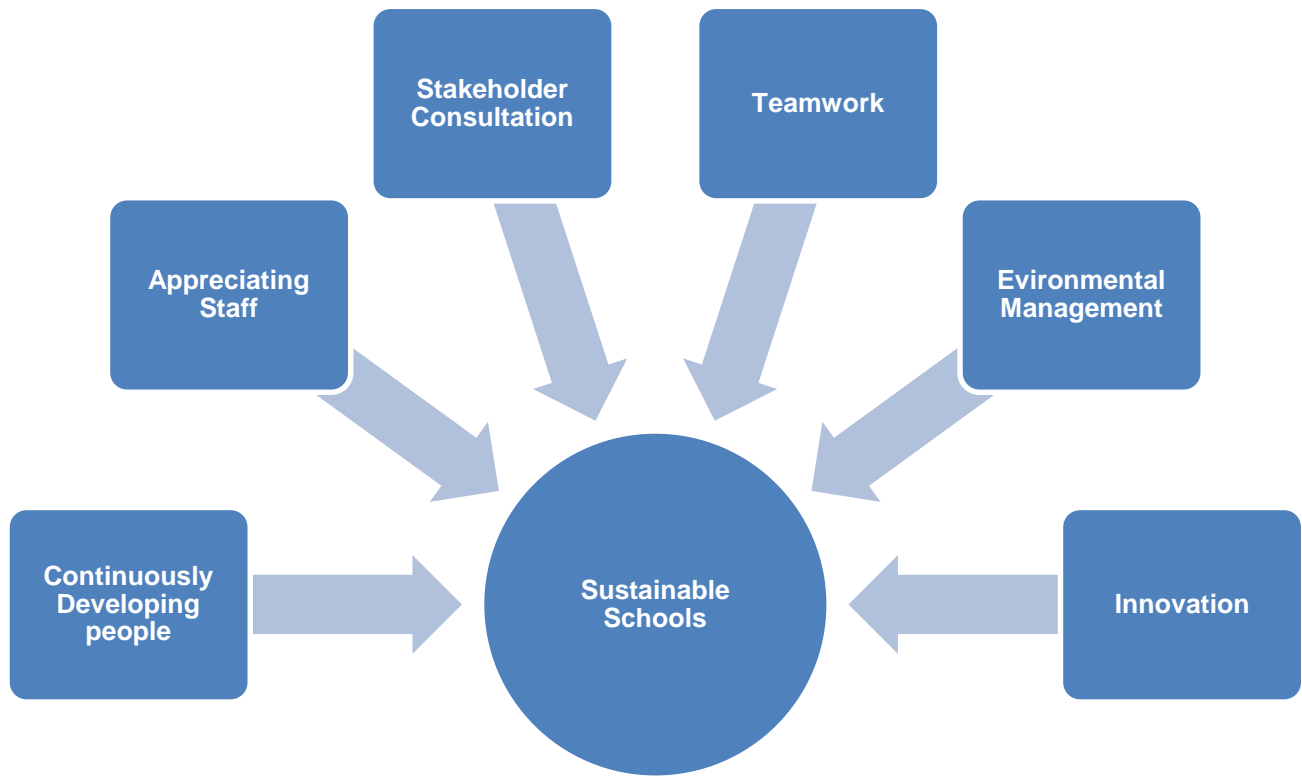


Figure 5.1: The framework of practices that ensure sustainable schools

Source:Own

5.5 Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of the quantitative study that utilized questionnaires. Discussions were segmented according to the research questions posed at the outset of the study in order to determine if the objectives had been met. Results provided a clear indication about a need for more adequate education and awareness about practices pertaining to sustainable leadership in schools as confirmed by several literatures before this study.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This last chapter of the study aims to align the objectives, the main findings and finally to conclude the study. The chapter also seeks to provide recommendations and areas for future research as well as the theoretical and practical contributions of this study to the field and practice. The chapter, therefore, presents limitations of the study, recommendations, areas for further research and finally conclusions.

6.2 Overview of the study and a summary of findings

This quantitative study was based on the following objectives of this study:

- 6.2.1 Objective 1: To identify the sustainable leadership practices used by the Departmental Heads in rural schools around the Bergville Circuit.
- 6.2.2 Objective 2: To explore the key performance drivers of sustainable leadership practices used in rural schools of the Bergville Circuit.
- 6.2.3 Objective 3: To propose a framework of sustainable leadership practices for Departmental Heads to implement in order to ensure sustainable leadership in Bergville Circuit schools.

In pursuit of realizing the objectives of the study, a 45-item questionnaire was designed and electronically dispatched to the sample of 59 Departmental Heads of the Bergville Circuit schools representing 25% of the total population of Departmental Heads in the circuit. Participants were selected by means of the stratified purposive sampling, the requirements were that the participants must be currently working and formally appointed as a DH at a public school in Bergville. The total respondents who completed the

questionnaire were 44, all participants being of African race group comprising 50% male and 50% female.

Prominent points that emanated from the findings indicated that although there are sustainable leadership practices currently used by Departmental Heads in the Bergville Circuit, these practices are not formally documented or communicated. The perception among Departmental Heads is that sustainable leadership practices that relate to continual development of staff and proper teamwork between the principal and other school leadership are of paramount importance for school functionality and sustainability. Key performance drivers (KPDs) that could enhance school leadership sustainability are the valuing of staff commitments and wellbeing coupled with culture of innovation among school leadership. It was proposed that the sustainable leadership practices and KPDs be integrated into the leadership activities and workshops be introduced so that sustainability is regularly addressed and monitored. These results illustrate that this study achieved the objectives that were set at the start of this study.

6.3 Conclusions from the study

The following conclusions are based on the findings from this study:

- Sustainable leadership practices are known at the school leadership level, albeit that these practices are not formally complied with by everyone to recognize them and assess if they are being consistently used.
- Departmental Heads acknowledge that there is the perception that their leadership is confined only to their departments that they lead. They seldom see their influence going beyond school activities, to the external stakeholders, community and natural environment.
- Two-way communication is vital in school leadership as it builds trust and enhances teamwork.

The weak communication culture does not end at leadership level, it negatively affects the creativity of other personnel in schools, which in turn limits sustainability initiatives and ideas that could benefit the community and the environment.

6.4 Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on the findings of this study:

- 6.4.1 The phenomenon of sustainability and sustainable leadership practices be integrated to the training programmes of the novice Departmental Heads with sustainable leadership practices being incorporated into the annual school management team meetings or annual workshops.
- 6.4.2 The culture of recognizing the emotional well-being of staff, including prioritizing their commitments and addressing challenges that school leaders and staff encounter in their schools or in the society. This is blatant in the findings of the study, which coincided with the time when the matter of mental health and emotional well-being is increasingly taking the spotlight in society (Kumar and Nayar; 2021).
- 6.4.3 Communication strategies and team building should be emphasized in leadership and stakeholders in order to achieve innovative new ways of attaining sustainability.
- 6.4.4 Schools should outline and communicate their sustainability goals in the same way they display their vision and mission statements. This will influence stakeholders associated with schools to adopt and promote the same sustainable leadership practices.

6.5 Limitations of the study

The data for the study was collected through the use of a 34-item self-administered questionnaire which was completed by 44 Departmental Heads of the schools in the

circuit. The researcher did face a few challenges during the course of this study which are discussed in the subsections below:

6.5.1 Conduction of Survey in One District Only

The responses from participants did show some level of consistency in opinions. The sample of 25% of the total departmental heads population was used instead of half of the total population. This may not be representative of all Departmental Heads in the country due to the fact that this survey was conducted in one district of one province, being KZN. Although the range of participants reflected the composition of high school, primary schools and combined schools and also a balanced representation in terms of gender, not all the quintile schools were represented.

6.5.2 Representation of One Race Group Only and Limitation of Areas

The black race was the only race who participated in the survey. There were also no urban schools that were surveyed in the study. In addition to these limitations only currently employed Departmental Heads participated in the study with other components of school leadership not being included. Acting Departmental Heads were also excluded from the survey.

6.5.3 Limitation of Data Collection Methods

Another limitation was the study's approach of using electronic modes of collecting data due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher could therefore not physically visit the respondents to observe and identify some sustainable leadership practices in schools that could be visible.

6.6 Recommendations for Future Studies

6.6.1 Focus on Different Practices and Components of School Leadership

Following the limitations that have been identified from the current study, future research could come up with different outcomes from integrating other components of the school leadership. It is important to note that while Departmental Heads may adopt a variety of practices as leaders, this study focused specifically on those practices which enabled or hindered sustainability in schools. The study deliberately excluded leadership practices which are not relevant in the aspects of sustainability in the selected schools. Secondly, the study had a geographical delimitation, it focused only on school leaders specifically Departmental Heads in Bergville Circuit primary and secondary public schools, and schools managed by provincial education departments which implement the policies formulated by the Department of Basic Education.

6.6.2 Focus on Other Geographical Areas and Levels of School Leadership Structure

It focused only on school leaders specifically Departmental Heads in Bergville Circuit primary and secondary public schools, and schools managed by provincial education departments which implement the policies formulated by the Department of Basic Education. Other studies may focus on additional geographic areas or levels of school leadership structure such strategic leaders of the entire school.

6.6.3 Use Larger and more Diverse Sample Sizes

There is an opportunity for future studies to use more diverse and larger samples that could even include other districts or provinces for a more complete picture on the question of sustainable leadership in the entire country.

6.6.4 Focus on other Leaders outside of the Education Sector

Another study method may be used, including other leaders outside the education sector in order to get a different perception on sustainability and specifically sustainable leadership practices. It is also worth noting that sustainable leadership should not be limited to education sector. The biggest culprits on unsustainable practices include corporate sector and others (Muller, Kiel & Voigt, 2018).

6.7 Summary

This concluding chapter has summarized the main findings of the study, outlined the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research have been provided. The researcher concludes that this study has met the objectives set at the beginning of the study which were outlined in Chapter One.

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APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



04 February 2021

Mr Daniel Lehlomla Matubatuba (218042574)
Grad School Of Bus & Leadership
Westville Campus

Dear Mr Matubatuba,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002215/2020

Project title: Investigating Sustainable leadership practices by Departmental heads in schools of Bergville Circuit.

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 01 December 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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.

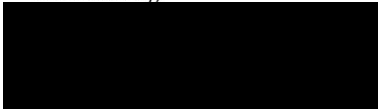
This approval is valid until 04 February 2022.

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

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

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

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX 2: GATEKEEPERS LETTER



education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: L.F Mbongwe

Ref: 036 448 9200

Date: 15/10/2020

**TO: ALL PRINCIPALS OF SCHOOLS
BERGVILLE CIRCUIT MANAGEMENT CENTRE**
**FRPM: THE CHIEF EDUCATION SPECIALIST
BERGVILLE CIRCUIT MANAGEMENT CENTRE**

**MATTER: RE-PERMISSION FOR MR D.L MATUBATUBA TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON LEADERSHIP
STUDIES (MASTER OF COMMERCE)**

This communique has reference.

Permission has been granted to the bear of this latter to conduct research in all Bergville schools of his choice.

Appointments and other logistical issues shall be agreed upon by both parties.

Thanking you in anticipation.


MR L.F MBONGWE
BERGVILLE CIRCUIT MANAGEMENT CENTRE.
CHIEF EDUCATION SPECIALIST



KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Through a Revolutionary Education for all...

APPENDIX 3: LETTER OF CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU NATAL
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP- WESTVILLE CAMPUS

Masters' Degree: Master of Commerce in Leadership Studies

Researcher: Mr DL Matubatuba (0726393111)

Supervisors: Dr M Kanyangale (031 260 7934), Dr BZ Chummun (031 2608943)

Research Office: HSSREC Research Office (031-2603587)

Dear Sir/Madam

I, Daniel Lehlomla Matubatuba at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, of the University of KwaZulu Natal- Westville Campus. I invite you to participate in the study entitled: ... Investigating Sustainable leadership Practices by Heads of Department in Schools around Bergville Circuit.

The aim of the research is to :

- Investigate challenges faced by heads of department in terms of sustainable leadership practices in the Bergville Circuit.
- Explore key performance drivers of sustainable leadership practices in schools at the Bergville Circuit.
- Propose the sustainable leadership practice framework that Heads of Departments can use to ensure sustainable leadership in schools around Bergville Circuit.

The results of the research will be used to improve the involvement of School Management Teams, particularly Heads of Departments in leadership practices that will ensure sustainability in schools and how a sustainable relationship can be maintained between schools and stakeholders in Bergville Circuit.

I request your permission to allow the Heads of Departments in schools in Bergville Circuit to participate in the research through telephonic and electronic communication method, the recordings of questionnaires will be used solely for research purposes.

Your participation is voluntary and data will be kept confidential and used for study purposes only. There will be no monetary gain in participating in the research. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequences.

Yours Truly

Investigator's signature_____

Date__18/12/2020_____

APPENDIX 4: DATA COLLECTION TOOL

QUESTIONNAIRE

Investigating sustainable leadership practices by Departmental heads in schools around Bergville Circuit

This questionnaire must be completed by a departmental head teaching at a school in Bergville Circuit.

Part A: Personal information

Please respond to the following questions by placing a cross (x) in the appropriate box.

1. Gender:

Female		Male	
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2. Race :

Black		Coloured		Indian/ Asian		White	
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3. Age:

16- 30		31-40		41-50		51-60		61 +		Cannot disclose	
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4. Number of years teaching:

0-7		8-15		16-23		24-31		32-39		40 and above	
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5. Number of years as a Departmental head:

0-4		5-9		10-14		15-19		20-25		25 and above	
-----	--	-----	--	-------	--	-------	--	-------	--	--------------	--

6. Department or phase overseeing or leading:

Foundatio n phase		Intermediat e phase		Senior phase		Language s		Maths and Sciences	
Commerc e		Humanities		Social Science s		Arts and Culture		Other	

Part B: School information

Please respond to the following questions by placing a cross (x) in the appropriate box.

7. Nature of school:

Primary school	<input type="checkbox"/>	Secondary/ high school	<input type="checkbox"/>	Combined school	<input type="checkbox"/>
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8. School geographical location:

Town	<input type="checkbox"/>	Township	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rural	<input type="checkbox"/>
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9. Total learner enrolment at school:

1-449	<input type="checkbox"/>	450-899	<input type="checkbox"/>	900 and above	<input type="checkbox"/>
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10. Number of teachers accountable for/ under supervision:

1-3	<input type="checkbox"/>	4-6	<input type="checkbox"/>	7 and above	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Part C: Sustainable leadership practices

Please respond to the following questions by placing a cross (x) in the appropriate box.

Foundation Practices						
	CODES	01	02	03	04	05
	Strongly Agree=SA; Agree=A ; Not Sure=N; Disagree =D; Strongly Disagree=SD.					
	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	As a departmental head I am continuously involved in developing everyone in the department.					
2	I strive to create constructive relationship between the school and labour representatives.					
3	Efforts are made to value long term retention of staff in school.					
4	There is succession plan and staff are promoted from within school whenever possible.					
5	Policy and decision making are future oriented and focus on long term effects.					
6	In case one employee is unable to work or teach, at least one employee has been trained to fill that next gap from within the school.					
7	Welfare of employees is the priority of departmental head and is constantly monitored.					
8	Staff members are regarded as contributing and adding value to the school.					
9	School principal works as top team member or team leader.					
10	School principal and top management promote diversity of ideas in School Management Teams and staff.					
11	As a departmental head I promote ethical behavior at leadership and general staff.					
12	Long-term effects are preferred over the short-term impact during decision- making.					
13	A change is embraced positively and is managed accordingly					
14	Staff and stakeholders are encouraged to adapt and thrive in changing environment.					
15	It is school leadership's responsibility to advocate for the protection of the environment.					
16	School promotes active environmental and waste management, like reuse, reduce and recycle.					
17	Departmental heads build mutual relations between the school and the community.					
18	School leadership adds value to the community, and the community sees the school as their own valuable property.					
19	All stakeholders matter to the school operations.					

Foundation Practices						
	CODES	01	02	03	04	05
	Strongly Agree=SA; Agree=A ; Not Sure=N; Disagree =D; Strongly Disagree=SD.					
	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
20	There is proper consultation of stakeholders when major decisions are to be taken by school leadership.					
21	The vision of the school is clear and shared by all staff.					
22	There is shared view of future as an essential strategic tool					
	Higher Level Practices					
23	There is all an effort for consensus at school leadership during decision making.					
24	Employees are independent and self-managing.					
25	Team work is encouraged.					
26	School or organizational culture enables knowledge sharing and knowledge retention.					
27	Trust is emphasized at all levels through relationships and goodwill.					
	Key Performance Drivers					
28	Strong innovation culture promotes creativity at all levels.					
29	Emotionally-committed staff are valued and resulting commitment in school activities.					
30	Departmental head fosters an enabling, widely-shared culture in school.					
31	Staff commitment and determinations are recognized and valued.					
32	There is culture of quality that is embedded in school activities.					

Part D: Comments by participant

33 In your opinion, which sustainable leadership practices are being used in your school environment?

34. In your opinion, which sustainable leadership practices would you recommend that they should be used by departmental heads in public schools?

35. Any general comment you can share after doing this exercise?

Part E: Vote of thanks

Let me use this opportunity to thank you for choosing to use your valuable time to participate in this study, I would also like to thank you for the work that you do in building the future of students in your school and providing leadership to teachers under your department. Your efforts have a positive and sustainable impact on the lives of the young people, on the community as well as on the nation. For any enquiries concerning this study you may contact me, Mr DL Matubatuba at the email address: 21842574@stu.ukzn.ac.za or on mobile phone: 0726393111.

THANK YOU!!

APPENDIX 5: TURNITIN REPORT

Dissertation DL

ORIGINALITY REPORT

9%	8%	4%	6%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to University of Portsmouth Student Paper	<1 %
2	en.m.wikipedia.org Internet Source	<1 %
3	core.ac.uk Internet Source	<1 %
4	Submitted to Marymount University Student Paper	<1 %
5	Submitted to The University of Buckingham Student Paper	<1 %
6	www.richtmann.org Internet Source	<1 %
7	www.ukessays.com Internet Source	<1 %
8	Submitted to University of Derby Student Paper	<1 %
9	Submitted to FPT Polytechnic Student Paper	<1 %