The impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and teachers' identities in high schools

By

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Supervised by

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DECLARATION

This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Education in the Postgraduate Programme of the College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Sandisiwe Benerdette Mbalentsha Mazeka, student number: 211515977, declare that:

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my own original research.
2. I have not submitted this thesis for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other person's graphs, data, pictures or other information. Any information sourced from other people has been acknowledged.
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Student signature: 

Date: 10 June 2024

Name of Supervisor: Prof Carol Bertram

Signature:_

Date: 10 June 2024

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late father, Thembinkosi Petros Mazeka, and my mother Christophora Mazeka.

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ABSTRACT

The South African education system aims to provide quality education to all learners. There are various methods used to ensure that teachers comply with department-set education standards in education, one of which is external monitoring. The purpose of external monitoring is to provide support and professional development to underperforming schools, enabling them to reduce learner underperformance. In the process, teachers become the centre of external monitoring. This study explores how external monitoring impacts teachers' work and identities. The study focuses on six grade 12 teachers' perspectives of external monitoring.

This qualitative study was conducted in three high schools. These schools were purposively selected because they were underperforming schools. Data was generated from six participants using semi-structured interviews, collages, and a focus group. A conceptual framework represents the associations between accountability, teacher autonomy and teacher identities. The generated data was analysed using deductive data analysis. The data generated demonstrated that external monitoring is a two-sided phenomenon. External monitoring is a tool used by the Department of Basic Education that aims to provide support and development to underperforming schools and subjects. However, not all teachers see it as a tool that is there to support. Rather, teachers feel exposed and encounter limited teacher autonomy. Themes that emerged from the data were: teachers' reasons for underperformance, insufficient time for curriculum coverage, teachers' perception of external monitoring and teachers' emotional responses to external monitoring. The findings show that most teachers find external monitoring offers limited support for teachers. Rather, external monitoring of teachers increases teacher accountability but decreases teachers' autonomy. This, in turn, impacts teachers' identities.

ABBREVIATIONS

ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DH	Departmental Head
DoE	Department of Basic Education
EELC	Equal Educational Law Centre
FET	Further Education and Training
GET	General Education and Training
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
MDT	Multi-Disciplinary Team
NEPF	National Evaluation Policy Framework
NCS	National Senior Certificate
QMS	Quality Management System
SNES	Special Needs Education Services
SIP	Subject Improvement Plan
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Dissertation

1.1. Introduction

External monitoring of teachers has become crucial in attempts to improve teacher performance and the quality of education in South Africa. External monitoring aims to provide objective and unbiased feedback to teachers in the teaching and learning environment (Louis & Robinson, 2012). This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and their identities. According to Faubert (2009), external monitoring in education includes the practice of having external officials or evaluators who observe and assess the performance of teachers. Lange and Luescher (2003) define monitoring as a form of evaluation that helps to establish whether intended targets are being met and to identify changes. They further mention that there has been an increase in monitoring of public institutions because of the concern about performance standard indicators and the demand for accountability. This study uses the ideas posed by literature to understand teachers' perceptions of external monitoring and the impacts it has on teachers' work and identities.

This chapter discusses the background and problem statement of the study, elaborates the rationale behind the study and highlights the objective of the study. Research questions are then presented, followed by the location of the study and the research design. The chapter ends by highlighting the key concepts of the research.

1.2. Background and problem statement

There is great concern about schools that fail to reach the National Curriculum Statements (NCS) set standards of learner performance, particularly in grade 12. According to the report by the Equal Educational Law Centre (EELC) (2022), the supervisory framework focuses on underperforming schools as it intends to secure quality education for all learners in South Africa. In principle, the use of the framework enables the Departmental Head (DH) to identify underperforming schools and ensure that schools gain support and assistance in addressing issues that lead to underperformance. When schools fail to meet the stipulated standards, schools are often impacted and there is anticipation for change in the dynamics of the schools, for example, the increased

focus on learner performance, regular guidance and expectations of remedial interventions and accountability mechanisms.

Schools are deemed to be underperforming when they achieve results that are below the stipulated standards, there is a breakdown in the school management, and learners' safety cannot be assured. The process of identifying the schools is done in three stages. First, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) identifies the schools that meet the three prior mentioned categories. Second, they implement support and management to identify appropriate remedial strategies. Finally, provincial and national department officials introduce monitoring and accountability measures (EELC, 2022).

Numerous educational policies have been put in place that aim to improve teaching and learning, as well as curriculum development and assessment strategies to improve educational outcomes. One example is the National Policy of Whole-School Evaluation. According to the Department of Education (DoE), this policy aims to improve the overall quality of education in South African schools (DoE, 2001). Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks are designed as indicators that measure whether programmes are successful. The National Education Policy Act brings policies, legislation, and monitoring responsibilities to the education system. The implementation of educational policies is not always beneficial to the DBE, schools, teachers, or learners (Jansen, 2004; Spaull, 2015). The National Whole-School Evaluation Policy "rhetorically" aims to measure and support schools and teachers (Jansen, 2004). Spaull (2015) states that oversight leads to accountability. However, there is a disconnect between accountability and teachers' needs for capacity-building.

The external monitoring is done by district officials, often organized in Multi-Disciplinary-Teams (MDT) which may comprise subject advisors for Further Education and Training (FET), General Education and Training (GET), Special Needs Education Services (SNES), circuit managers and representatives from other sub-directorates. However, any of these officials may individually visit the school for external monitoring. District officials focus on the principal of the school, teachers who are teaching underperforming subjects and school management teams that are monitoring the underperformed subjects. When monitoring principals, district officials pay attention to curriculum management, assessment, supervision and teamwork, finance, infrastructure, safety, and overall school functionality.

The curriculum management monitoring instrument is used to monitor teachers. This entails tracking of curriculum coverage; teachers having Subject Improvement Plans (SIPs) and implementation of these plans; termly achievement analysis, and the compiling of teachers' work files. Teachers' files should have the necessary information and documentation provided by the Department of Education—Programme of Assessment (POA), Abridged Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (ACAPS), Annual Teaching Plan (ATP), homework timetable, handover tools and others. There is an emphasis on monitoring teachers' work. District officials analyse whether 1) tasks are being done weekly according to the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document, 2) learners' workbooks are being marked, 3) controlled and uncontrolled tasks are available, 4) learner workbooks are up-to-date, with topics, dates and corrections.

External monitoring often impacts teachers, where teachers are required to account for the predetermined educational standards and guidelines. When teachers fail to meet this standard, they face consequences and are expected to increase compliance with the set policies and regulations. On the other hand, those who meet the standards gain a sense of accreditation. Teachers' autonomy is impacted, and teacher judgement is often restricted when teachers fail to meet the standards (Ehren et al., 2020). Ehren et al. (2020) further mention that pressure is put on teachers through external monitoring and this pressure may yield negative or positive results. The DBE highlights teachers being the main reasons for learner underperformance in schools and often ignores any other reasons such as socio-economic status, home backgrounds, learner motivation, resourcing, and the contextual surroundings of the school.

This study sought to gain an in-depth understanding and description of teachers' lived experiences when experiencing external monitoring in T65 high schools. These are schools that have performed under 65% in grade 12 results. It highlights the perspectives of teachers rather than the DBE's insight on monitoring. This was done by drawing from selected teachers' experiences of being externally monitored and the impact it has on their teachers' work and identities.

1.3. Rationale for the study

I started teaching in 2019 and I began teaching grade 8 to 12 mathematics. The school where I was teaching was underperforming and was classified as a T65 school. In 2020, I changed schools, and this, too, was an underperforming school. Since the beginning of my teaching profession, I have been externally monitored by subject advisors and the MDT. The spread of the COVID-19

pandemic brought the implementation of social distancing, and external monitoring was postponed in schools. My experience of external monitoring has been eye-opener and has had a significant impact on my teaching practice and how I view myself as a teacher. Visits from district officials left me feeling doubtful of my purpose as a teacher and of my pedagogical content knowledge.

The experiences I had involved incidences where district officials would come to schools unannounced, and ask for teachers' files, moderation files, subject improvement plans and learners' activities. This was usually done by subject advisors. On the other hand, MDT visits were announced well in advance, and they requested teachers' files, subject improvement plans and learners' exercise books. Emphasis was put on the administrative aspect of teaching—more marking of learners' work, updating of files, prescribed lesson plans, informal weekly assessment, not diverging from the prescribed work/activities and extra classes. This meant I would spend more time at school, allocate more time to administration and I could not deviate from any advice and teaching resources given. There was an increased sense of pressure to ensure that all was in line and ready for the next external monitor. For me, the constant monitoring implied that if I adhered to all the supervision and advice then learner performance in the school would improve. Over the years, I began to question my purpose and professional judgement as a teacher, and this soon influenced my teaching identities.

There is some existing literature on external monitoring in South Africa. For example, Cibane (2020) conducted a South African study that focused on principals' experiences with underperformance and external monitoring. Further research focused on the influences external monitoring has on teachers (Rutherford, 2012; Skerritt, 2020; Spaull, 2015). The research of this dissertation will add to the knowledge by bringing insight into the impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and identities. This research aims to create a synthesis between external monitoring of teachers, teachers' work, and teachers' identities.

1.4. Objectives of the study

The objective of the study is to gain in-depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences when experiencing external monitoring in high schools and how the external monitoring impacts teachers' work and identities. It further aims to draw from the experiences that teachers encountered when being externally monitored to understand how external monitoring impacts their teaching practices and their identities.

1.5. Research Questions

1. How do teachers experience external monitoring?
2. How does external monitoring impact teachers' work?
3. How does external monitoring influence teachers' identities?

1.6. Location of the study

The schools selected are within the Langelihle (pseudonym) Circuit in UMgungundlovu District. The schools are found 24km and 36km from the Pietermaritzburg area. The circuit was selected as it is the circuit in which I teach, and this was convenient for me as a researcher. This circuit consists of nine high schools and five of these high schools have been identified as underperforming schools. This study selected three of the five high schools. The Langelihle Circuit mainly consists of developing rural schools. Most of the schools are categorised as quintile three and quintile two, where schools do not have extensive school resources and facilities. The three schools in this study are quintile three high schools. The schools are provided with DBE feeding schemes to cater for learners who are coming from child-headed homes and the lower-end of the economy. Socioeconomic factors in the surrounding areas include low-income homes, where most families are living off pension funds or social grants and are single-parent or child-headed homes.

1.7. Research Design

The study falls within the interpretive paradigm. An interpretivist approach seeks to understand social behaviours, and how people make meaning of their experiences (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Creswell, 2013). Similarly, Maree (2015) suggests that the interpretivist paradigm focuses on the participant's subjective experiences, as it seeks to understand the phenomena at hand. Within the paradigm, there are many realities that each participant may express.

This research was formed by a single case study that involved three high schools. Coombs (2022) asserts that a single case study enables the researcher to focus on one issue or concern, which in this case was the phenomenon of external monitoring. The use of a single case study with multiple schools allowed for the investigation of the selected schools, which formed a single case because they have all been externally monitored and share similar expertise. The use of a case study allowed an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and different selections of data generation (Heale & Twycross, 2018; Swanborn, 2010). Shoaib and Mujtaba (2016) assert that a case study

highlights thick descriptions. This allows for interpretations of participants' experiences as they are seen as well-informed about the phenomenon. The use of a case study for this research is appropriate as it seeks to understand the teachers' experiences of external monitoring. By using a case study, the context of the schools and their surroundings and social factors about the situation are considered.

A qualitative research approach was used in the study. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), the qualitative approach includes several approaches which focus on a phenomenon that occurs in its natural setting in the real world. One of the benefits of qualitative research is that the data that emerges from a qualitative study is descriptive and is reported using the participants' words. Maree (2015) states that qualitative research studies participants and their context through interaction and observation in the participants' natural context. This allows the researcher to focus on the meanings and interpretation of the data generated. The qualitative approach makes use of investigative research as it helps in understanding the views and perceptions of the participants.

The selected participants were those who had experienced external monitoring in their teaching practice. This study utilised the experiences of six participants who were teaching in the Langelihle Circuit. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the data generated through the participants applied to the study. Palinkas et al. (2015) state that purposive sampling enables the researcher to identify participants who will provide rich data relevant to the phenomenon. Pseudonyms are used to ensure anonymity for participants and schools in the study.

1.8. Key concepts

1.8.1. External monitoring

Monitoring is essential in any organisation as it assists in ensuring that organisational goals are achieved. Monitoring entails systematic observations, supervision and tracking of the process of a project with the aim to meet standards and achieve favourable outcomes (Kusek & Rist, 2004; Sajad, 2023). External monitoring links to monitoring as it is the practice that includes the supervision of teachers, where teachers' performance is measured and assessed by external officials such as school administrators and district officials (Timperley, 2015). External monitoring aims to ensure compliance with external supervisors to confirm that standards are being attained and to increase the employment of best practices (Sajad, 2023).

1.8.2. Teachers' work

Teaching goes beyond the ability to pass on knowledge to the next individual. Teachers are responsible for assigning tasks and grading assessments. Further, they are responsible for moulding their learners. Teachers' work focuses on all the elements that teachers face in and out of the teaching and learning environment (Ingersoll, 2003; Morrow, 2001). Teachers are expected to create a conducive teaching and learning environment that will cater to the diversity in the classroom. In the context of this study, teachers' work is affected by teachers' autonomy and the accountability that comes with external monitoring. Accountability in education is defined as a multifaceted and vigorous system that consists of methods of revealing and judging the work of a teacher through the construction and use of data from large scale studies, group tables and monitoring systems of teaching and learning (Ball, 2010; Maroy, 2008; Ozga, 2009 cited by Lennert da Silva and Mølstad (2020). Through school visits and school monitoring the opportunity for accountability is presented in the form of teacher appraisals, written reports and direct classroom visits that allow for teacher observations.

1.8.3. Teacher identities

Research suggests that teacher identities is a complex concept to define (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Mockler, 2011), because teacher identities is an ever-evolving process that teachers undergo throughout their teaching profession (Beijaard et al., 2000). Timoštšuk and Ugaste (2010) suggest that teacher identities are an evolving element of teaching where teachers derive meaning through their experiences and narratives over time. They further state that teachers' professional identities involve the individual's self-knowledge in teaching. This knowledge relates to the relations created and learning experiences one faces. This means that teacher identities can be built through the teachers' learning process even when they are teaching. An understanding of teachers' identities is crucial in professional development and awareness of attitudes that arise from any educational changes and policy adjustments (Derakhshan et al., 2020; Mora et al., 2014).

1.9. Overview of the Dissertation

The five chapters in this study are structured as follows:

Chapter One outlines the purpose and focus of this study, accompanied by the problem statement and background of the impact of external monitoring on teachers' work. The rationale provides insight into the significance of the study; the research questions are stated and the research concepts outlined.

Chapter two outlines the related literature in external monitoring which includes teacher autonomy, accountability, and teacher identities. The study employs a conceptual framework that draws these three concepts together.

Chapter three presents the research methodology. In this chapter there is justification for the research design and the research collection method. The procedure for selecting participants is explained. The research paradigm is justified, the research methods are discussed, and trustworthiness, limitations and ethical issues are outlined.

Chapter four focuses on the data presentation and discussions of the responses of the six participants to the research questions. Four themes emerged from the data generation process. This allowed for the recommendations that are provided in chapter five.

1.10. Conclusion

This chapter outlines an overview of the purpose, and the rationale, and briefly discusses the research design and key concepts. The next chapter focuses on relevant literature that was consulted for this study and discusses the conceptual framework utilised.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

This chapter of the study describes some significant literature discussing the impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and identities, as well as a detailed conceptual framework used to understand the research. According to Ferreras-Fernández et al. (2016), a literature review is a compilation of scholarly sources related to a specific topic or research. The chapter aims to understand the different concepts that inform this study, such as monitoring, teacher identities, teacher autonomy and accountability. It also reviews studies on teachers' experiences of external monitoring. The conceptual framework aims to establish relationships among these concepts as they relate to the study. I will describe my conceptual framework which uses three concepts: teacher autonomy, accountability, and identities.

2.2. Monitoring

The primary purpose of an education system is to provide learners with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to engage effectively in society. Bush (2013) argues that the purpose of schooling is to facilitate teaching and learning. Teaching and learning involve many elements—such as classroom activities, teaching, and assessment—and these should be monitored to obtain feedback on their specific impact on learning. A framework for monitoring learning outcomes can form the basis of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan to assess how an education system is performing over time (Kusek, 2010). One of the main objectives of monitoring and evaluating in education is to "ensure fair and high-quality education for all learners and at all levels within the education system" (UNESCO, 2015, p. 116). A monitoring framework is intended to monitor quality at different levels (country, region, school) and different groups (school authorities, teachers, learners). Monitoring frameworks rely on various tools and components to collect and organise the data necessary to monitor system performance (UNESCO, 2015). These include school-level tools for learner and teacher data, the National Education Management Information System (EMIS), human resources or teacher management information systems for

teacher recruitment and placement, inspection and evaluation systems, and financial management. The framework may also include system-level learner assessment.

Monitoring in the education system refers to the process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting relevant data that will be used in the assessment of learners' progress, the effectiveness of academic strategies and intervention methods that will assist the department of education (Avella et al., 2016; Shinn, 2007). Shinn (2007) suggests that monitoring embodies continuous observation of learners' academic and non-academic achievements as well as teachers' performance and work in the teaching and learning environment. When an organisation is aware of the importance of monitoring, they can effectively manage, evaluate, and improve within the organisation (Hevesi, 2005). This can be true for monitoring within an education system. According to UNICEF (2016, p. 3) monitoring is regular oversight of all implementation activities aimed at determining the extent to which inputs, work schedule, routines, required consistent action and attainable outputs are presented to make "correct deficiency detection." Through monitoring, organisations can track work that is being done, provide management of information and identify any areas of concern. In essence, monitoring is a useful tool implemented to assist managers in tracking work, providing information, identifying concerns, and allowing for adequate decision making within the organisation.

Monitoring is present at different levels within the education system and conducted for different functions throughout. According to Schildkamp et al. (2013)' the purpose of monitoring is that it provides teachers, officials, and policymakers with valuable data that can be used to improve teaching and learning and make adequate decisions. Monitoring allows the organisation to supervise learner achievement, identify nonconformities and implement improvements when necessary (Hevesi, 2005). Monitoring in education is a tool to quantify improvement and ensure accountability (O'Day, 2002). Furthermore, O'Day (2002) states that monitoring has the fundamentals to ensure the accessibility to real-time data and feedback that can lead to improved decision-making. According to Sloan (2006), accountability may assist teachers to provide more targeted, high-quality, and impartial instruction. Over the years, monitoring has enabled the identification of academic gaps in the education system (UNICEF, 2016). This can assist all relevant stakeholders to focus on the improvement of education quality.

Willms (2003) distinguishes between educational quality monitoring in terms of inputs, processes, and outputs:

a) Compliance monitoring—designed to ensure institutions adhere to standards and norms—centres on educational inputs such as teachers, textbooks, classrooms, and equipment.

b) Diagnostic monitoring—focused on the educational process and whether teaching and learning objectives are being met—highlights information on the quality of education offered by the schools.

c) Performance monitoring—focused on monitoring learners' academic performance through testing—provides feedback on the achievements of the investments made by the department of education.

This study examines how teachers perceive and receive the external monitoring at school level, focusing on compliance and performance monitoring—where teachers are monitored by school external stakeholders (subject advisors and Multi-Disciplinary Teams from the education district)—to ensure quality education, specifically for grade 12 learners.

2.3. External monitoring

External monitoring is carried out by educational specialists. They function as a consistent mechanism to engage teachers' performance competencies and objectivity, through continuous assessment and analysis of class management, providing valuable insight into teachers' strengths and areas that still require improvement (Alexander, 2000; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Hénard & Roseveare, 2012). There is also internal monitoring. This may examine similar aspects to external monitoring, but it is done by inside school officials—school management teams (SMT). Usually in internal monitoring the department head (DH) monitors the work of teachers under the department or phase he or she is leading. However, the principal or the deputy principal may also monitor teachers.

The Department of Education believes that external monitoring is vital to assuring the quality of education in South Africa and that it plays a significant role for teachers and schools that are monitored. External monitoring is significant in attempting to measure teachers' work performance and confirming accountability within the education system (Mandinach et al., 2006).

Teachers are entrusted with shaping and moulding the young minds of learners placed in their care as they have a crucial impact on learners' intellectual and emotional development (Lumpkin, 2008). This leads to high level of scrutiny and authoritative assessment on their capability and effectiveness in delivering quality education to all learners. This is where external monitoring comes in (Jansen, 2004). According to Mandinach et al. (2006), external monitoring in education enables teachers, administrators, and policy makers to make informed decisions, improve teaching and learning and ensure adequate and quantifiable education. External monitoring can assist in identifying teachers who require support or educational development. This, in turn, contributes to the enhancement of overall quality education within the school and in the overall education system. Through external monitoring the department of education is able to promote quality teaching through accountability, valuable feedback and encouraging collaborative practices within the education system.

However, there is also literature that questions external monitoring (Jansen, 2004; Öztuzcu et al., 2021; Spaull, 2015). Jansen (2004) conducted a South African study focusing on school underperformance and external oversight. Through external monitoring teachers are held accountable for learner performance. The study focused on the external supervision that comes with grade 12 (matriculation) underperformance of the schools. Jansen (2004) showed concern for teachers and schools who were exposed as the results were publicised. Teachers and schools became highly accountable to the Minister of Education and underperforming schools received district monitoring. The monitoring could be done by any district official. At times, that led to conflict between external monitors and teachers. However, monitoring did not consider the views that teachers may have on external monitoring. Schools and teachers may take the initiative to voice their concerns on "unfair treatment and unjustified action" (DoE, 2001, p. 14). Nevertheless, the Minister had the final ruling over all procedures. The study further highlighted the pressure that comes with the exposure and monitoring. Teachers strive to improve learner performance, but the increase in infringed accountability leads to minimised professional teacher autonomy. The external monitoring did not always present a true reflection of the teachers' practices because teachers feared and were disrupted by the visits. They often represented themselves in a manner that would "impress the government officials" (Jansen, 2004, p. 61).

2.4. Monitoring in the South African Education system

The South African government has implemented policies that are used in school monitoring. The Policy Framework for Government Wide Monitoring and Evaluation (DoE, 2007) states that monitoring is a system used to collect, analyse, and circulate data inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes, and external influences that assist in school management decision making. Through the implementation of education policies, the South African government sets national curriculum standards and guidelines that district officials, schools, and teachers adhere to. This includes the specification of subject content at different levels, establishment of assessments, and examination policies. Government policies ensure the implementation of monitoring of the schools' and teachers' performance (Leithwood et al., 2002). Policies further outline measures of accountability that district officials, schools and teachers have for their performance. External monitoring officials as well as School Management Teams (SMT) develop their monitoring tools based on the guidelines provided in policies. This study focuses on the circumstances created by these policies: teachers are exposed to external monitoring and face 1) the consequences for the underperformance of their schools and 2) the implication of not achieving the set standards.

Goldman et al. (2015) suggest that the implementation of the National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) in South Africa placed a significant emphasis on evaluation and monitoring within the department of education. The National Evaluation Policy Framework aims to improve: the credibility and quality of education evaluation in South Africa; accountability; decision-making; and creating equal opportunity for learners. It is designed to support and develop rather than imposing judgement or providing disciplinary measures (Goldman et al., 2015). The purpose of the policy is to aid in the improvement of school performance through collaboration, mentoring and guidance. The policy entails reporting of conclusions and providing feedback to schools and numerous stakeholders such as national and provincial education departments, parents, and society. The findings presented to the stakeholders should be based on the performance of the school. The National policy stipulates that the qualified supervisors use national guidelines, criteria, and evaluation tools to provide consistency in the school evaluations. The National Policy on Whole-school Evaluation (similar to the National Evaluation Policy) also focuses on the improvement of the schools through school supervision and support (DoE, 2001). It is intended to attain the goal of school enhancement through collaboration with supervisors, schools, and support

services at one level, and national and provincial governments at another. The primary objectives of the policy are also essential to the supporting documents, the strategies, and principles. The principles are to:

(a) Moderate externally, on a sampling basis, the results of self-evaluation carried out by the schools.

(b) Evaluate the effectiveness of a school in terms of the national goals, using national criteria.

(c) Increase the level of accountability within the education system.

(d) Strengthen the support given to schools by district professional support services.

(e) Provide feedback to all stakeholders as a means of achieving continuous school improvement.
(f) Identify aspects of excellence within the system which will serve as models of good practice.
(g) Identify the aspects of effective schools and improve the general understanding of what factors create effective schools (DoE, 2001).

2.5. Monitoring methods in education

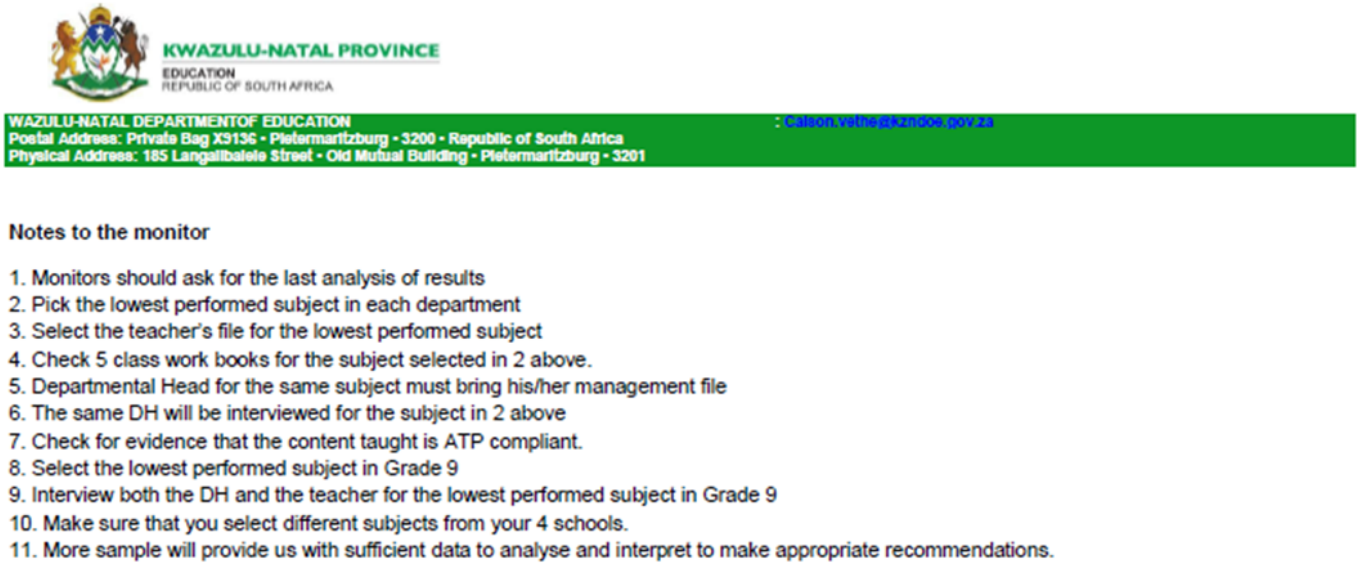
Monitoring involves techniques that will use numerous tools and methods to gather, analyse and interpret data to evaluate the development and efficiency of a specific system or project (Garbarino & Holland, 2009). Performance indicators are one of the most common tools used in monitoring. These allow external monitors to gain specific and quantifiable data that is used in tracking the achievement of anticipated goals and aims. This is the basis of this study, where schools are selected for external monitoring based on the grade 12 pass percentage. A study conducted in Kenya suggests that monitoring enables educational stakeholders to provide comprehensive and reliable data (Karimi et al., 2020). This further allows for quantifiable and qualitative analysis strategies that enhance the understanding and interpretation of the collected data. Before monitoring can take place there is need for common standards and performance indicators and establishing of relevant schools that fall into the stipulated categories selected for monitoring. Identifying needs and challenges requires defining criteria and appropriate means to monitor and evaluate whether the goals set have been achieved (Davies & Davies, 2013). Monitors are then responsible for regular evaluation of schools and processing information with the help of the education district office.

District responsibilities are developed for planning, support, supervision, and accountability. The plan includes district level planning and school assistance to develop a school improvement plan that outlines the processes needed to improve district monitoring in schools. The policies underpinning monitoring are intended to provide support through external officials as they build and maintain good relationships with schools, especially teachers and school leaders. This may assist in strengthening school management (Crawford & Bryce, 2003). Additionally, supervision and accountability are two-fold—districts officials are held accountable by the department chief director, and they hold school principals accountable. Principals, in turn, hold the Departmental Head and teachers accountable.

In 2013 the Minister of Education requested that districts come together and develop and enhance existing school monitoring tools. Amongst the tools that were developed and enhanced is the Circuit/District Managers Monitoring Tool for School-Level Operations with Focus on Curriculum Coverage (DBE, 2013). It aimed to boost internal systems for monitoring curriculum coverage towards the end of each term. The tool focuses on qualitative and quantitative data on the curriculum in relation to school readiness, admissions, leadership, management and planning, school monitoring, and partnerships and communication. The tool that is used by external monitors who monitor underperforming schools was based on the guidelines provided by the developed and enhanced tool.

A monitoring tool is used where monitoring takes place at different levels. External monitors make up Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) which includes different stakeholders such as circuit managers, Special Needs Education Services (SNES) officials and subject advisors.

The KwaZulu-Natal subject monitoring tool has certain criteria that a MDT should follow:



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Notes to the monitor

1. Monitors should ask for the last analysis of results
2. Pick the lowest performed subject in each department
3. Select the teacher's file for the lowest performed subject
4. Check 5 class work books for the subject selected in 2 above.
5. Departmental Head for the same subject must bring his/her management file
6. The same DH will be interviewed for the subject in 2 above
7. Check for evidence that the content taught is ATP compliant.
8. Select the lowest performed subject in Grade 9
9. Interview both the DH and the teacher for the lowest performed subject in Grade 9
10. Make sure that you select different subjects from your 4 schools.
11. More sample will provide us with sufficient data to analyse and interpret to make appropriate recommendations.

Figure 1. 2023 KwaZulu-Natal Provincial DBE subject monitoring tool. (p. 1)

According to the document in Figure 1, monitors are expected to report on lesson preparation, curriculum coverage, availability of subject improvement plan, homework and individual timetable, class work, homework, controlled class tests and formal School Based Assessments (SBA) tasks. Teachers are expected to teach topics and concepts in a prescribed time and should align with the CAPS framework. This is monitored using an ATP. The ATP is a document produced by the DBE that provides teachers with implementation guidelines and minimum core content and skills to teach. It consists of weekly plans for each term and outlines core concepts, skills and outcomes that should be taught in the academic year. Government officials may request to see the ATP to make a fair assessment of the teaching and learning pace completed within the school.

In this study, the external monitors are the department of education district officials. Their main purpose is to support curriculum provision at school level, to monitor and support schools in complying with school policies and to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Ehren et al., 2020).

2.6. The impact of external monitoring on teachers

External monitoring of teachers has become an increasingly important aspect within the South African education system particularly the monitoring of underperforming schools. This has been done as a measure to improve the performance of teachers in recent years. A South African study conducted by Spaull (2015) focuses on the teacher accountability that comes with external monitoring. Spaull (2015) distinguishes between accountability with and without capacitation. The study agrees that there is a need for external monitoring and teacher accountability. However, it suggests that teacher capacitation—specifically in content knowledge and pedagogical skills—should be addressed before teachers are held accountable. The emphasis on accountability before teacher capacitation becomes problematic (Spaull, 2015). The study highlights how educational monitoring policies focus on the learner performance improvement and exclude the teachers' perspectives of monitoring.

Teachers face many challenges and gain numerous advantages when undergoing external monitoring. The constant supervision of educators teaching grade 12 is there to assure that the standards of quality education are being met and that teachers are informed about issues such as curriculum coverage and teacher development. This study will provide insight on how teachers experience these advantages and disadvantages of external monitoring done by external stakeholders. External monitors, such as subject advisors, circuit managers and teachers from other schools, can provide an objective assessment of teacher performance compared to internal school monitoring. According to Leithwood et al. (2002), external monitors ensure that reviews are well-founded, truthful, and not influenced by bias or other subjective factors.

On the other hand, there are also challenges related to external monitoring. Alexander (2000) illustrates that external monitors may not be aware of the context and happenings of the school; there is limited understanding of the specific context or challenges that the teachers or schools may be facing. This can make it difficult to accurately evaluate the effectiveness of educators' teaching activities or the impact of external factors that may contribute to the performance of the school, and the identification of the school as T65. Additionally, accountability reforms may demoralise and demean teachers' professionalism and dignity (Jansen, 2004; Öztuzcu Küçükbere & Balkar, 2021; Spaull, 2015).

De Grauwe (2008) conducted a global study that illuminated the unfair impact of external monitoring on teachers and schools. There is minimal impact on teachers who have not been monitored or those who have not recently been monitored. However, those facing external monitoring are left feeling disrespected and their dignity demeaned (De Grauwe, 2008; Jansen, 2004). The study suggests that external monitoring should be more frequent for it to become effective—allowing for in-depth understanding of the school and teachers. Once the supervisory visit is over teachers forget about it, because the reports are not issued to the teachers; rather they are shelved without any distribution (De Grauwe, 2008). There is a need for more frequent follow-up visits after external monitoring. The study emphasised that external supervision cannot be effective if it employs a one-size-fits-all approach. There is a need for suitable models that are specific to the needs and aims of the schools, teachers, and goals of the school. External monitoring is only one part of learner improvement and cannot ensure that there will be improvement (De Grauwe, 2008). Resource availability, teacher development and contextual school background should also be considered.

2.7. Accountability in monitoring

Klijn and Koppejan (2014) define accountability as the degree to which participants are held answerable on their performance by those to whom they are liable. Further, Hooge et al. (2012) refer to horizontal and vertical accountability. Vertical accountability is based on the accountability teachers have to their principals and school management team. According to Ehren et al. (2020), lack of accountability in the South African education system is one of the reasons why there is minimal improvement in the quality of education that is being offered. Similarly, Spaull (2015), suggests there are instances where monitoring and accountability fail to improve performance in teaching and learning. The first scenario occurs when there is increased accountability but no support. The second scenario occurs when there is increased support without increased accountability (Spaull, 2015). There is a need to create a balance between accountability and teacher support before there can be improvement in learner performance.

The importance of teacher accountability in education cannot be underestimated. Teachers' accountability plays an important role in individual learner success and in the overall performance of the education system. This is the fundamental focus of this study, as teachers in South Africa are being monitored because of the under-performance of the learners in their schools. When

teachers are accountable for their learners' performance results, this makes them aware of their responsibilities and motivated to continuously improve teaching strategies and ensure the best possible results for the learners. On the other hand, teachers can feel demotivated by increased accountability as they must account to different levels of monitors that include school-based and district-based monitors and subject advisors. Each level may require their own ways of accountability. Sometimes demotivation may result if the expected goals are not achieved.

There are numerous challenges that teachers face when they are being externally monitored. Ehren et al. (2020) mention that subject advisors and circuit managers have different reporting lines, and this causes different expectations for each external monitor. Teachers are being given different expectations which causes confusion and creates dysfunctional reporting requirements. There is an Annual Tracking Plan prescribed by the province. These provide annual pace setters that teachers follow. Metcalfe (2018) mentions that CAPS is overwhelming for most teachers because it does not cater for teachers with struggling learners or those that may be multi-grading. During external monitoring the ATP is checked, and monitors need to indicate the completion of curriculum and assessments done by the teacher. This could lead to teachers taking shortcuts or completing the curriculum inaccurately. In addition, teachers are expected to update the ATP as well as numerous other documents. Van der Berg et al. (2011) notes that schools are showing concerns about the increased paperwork that comes with the monitoring and accountability, causing teachers to feel undermined and untrusted by the district level authorities. CAPS comprises prescribed instructional activities and assessments that teachers need to implement, and this is monitored by school SMT and also through MDT visits, where the data is collected and used to generate national surveys.

According to Keddie and Mills (2019), accountability and monitoring can lead to earned professional autonomy that will minimise de-professionalising and mistrust of teachers and school principals. Further, Skerritt (2020) notes that monitoring keeps a close eye on teacher behaviour and it can help in establishing teacher effectiveness. He further mentions that accountability in the South African education system is between teachers, unions, governing bodies, and parents. This accountability is informed through four identifications. First, it requires DBE targets and plans that are monitored at school and district level as well CAPS which provides instructional activities and assessments that teachers are required to implement, and which are monitored by school heads and

district officials (Skerritt, 2020). Second, there is an Integrated Quality Management Systems (IQMS) that is based on developmental improvement, performance management and whole school evaluation (Skerritt, 2020). Third, there is local accountability and democracy where school governing body members oversee fee-paying school policies, language policies and the appointment of staff in the school. Lastly, there is professional accountability where teachers should adhere to the professional standards that are stipulated through the South African Council of Educators (SACE). Skerritt (2020) outlines how the changes in policies impact the education system—changes in the curriculum cause frustrations and can delay the implementation of teaching and learning as teachers are unwilling to implement the changes and are still held accountable.

2.8. External monitoring and teacher autonomy

Teacher autonomy is the capacity of teachers to make decisions that impact the content and conditions of their work within the framework of regulations and resources provided by the state (Mausethagen & Mølstad, 2015). Cribb and Gewirtz (cited by Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020) view teacher autonomy from a government standpoint, examining how the government standardises and controls education. This control and standardisation can occur at different levels throughout the education system, such as district level and school level. In contrast, teacher autonomy emphasises teachers' ability to make professional decisions on their own or collaboratively with numerous external limitations (Mausethagen & Mølstad, 2015). Wermke and Höstfält (2014) similarly refer to teacher autonomy as the relations between teachers and government where government controls and governs the education system. In turn this minimises or maximises teachers' capacity to make professional decisions and take initiative to work. This study provides insight into how teachers' autonomy is impacted by the regulations imposed by government through external monitoring.

Teacher autonomy considers the relationship between teachers' choice of action and the government's role in providing resources and regulations that extend or constrain the scope of action (Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020). Webb (2002) explains teacher autonomy as *teacher power*. He asserts that teacher power is ultimately related to teachers' professional judgment and exercise of professional autonomy. It can be viewed as the basis for professionalization in education. He further emphasises the need for teacher development initiatives that provide teachers

with learning opportunities that develop professional discretion, rather than excluding or limiting their power to teach. The key element of a positive teacher's professional identities strongly relates to their perceived self-efficiency, job satisfaction and positive work climate. Teacher autonomy is multi-dimensional as it allows for researchers to decide on who makes the decisions regarding teachers' work and who controls the outcomes of the decisions made. Researchers can examine whether teachers or other stakeholders within the school take the lead in decision making.

Research has been conducted on teacher autonomy by a range of authors in different countries. Mausethagen and Mølstad (2015) note that teachers in Norway find that the regulations and control from government is helpful and acts as a guide in their teaching and learning. Lennert da Silva and Mølstad (2020) conducted a Brazilian and Norwegian study which finds that control and regulations are necessary as they support teaching and learning. It protects learners by minimizing teachers' choice in teaching and ensures standardisaed quality education through accountability. However, Lennert da Silva and Mølstad (2020) suggest that an increase in accountability will minimise teacher autonomy. This can lead to tensions between professional obligations, teachers' philosophies, and the need to meet standards. These limitations can lead to minimised creativity, professional truthfulness and fun in teaching and learning. A Turkish study conducted by Tokgoz and Bumen (2021) suggests that even though teachers perceive that they have limited autonomy, they still aim to adapt to the imposed curriculum changes.

Teachers' professional autonomy is seen as contributor to school efficiency and effectiveness (Öztürk, 2011). "The autonomy of teachers making a professional judgement in the interest of quality education is a fundamental building block of a vibrant and truly liberated education system. Anything less would be masked or disguised 'autocracy'" (Samuel, 2008, p.14). Autonomy gives teachers more freedom to think and act in the best interests of their learners (Öztürk, 2011). Teachers are aware of learners' diverse needs, interests, and talents and thus should be able to make decisions according to different learner characteristics. Therefore, a uniform curriculum may not be suitable for all learners. According to Öztürk (2011), there are different interpretations of teacher autonomy. He argues that "these different definitions exhibit common aspects that emphasise the need for autonomy to recognize the authority and freedom of teachers in their professional activities" (Öztürk, 2011, p.115). In this Turkish study the findings suggest that changes in the curriculum minimise teacher autonomy and this impacts on learners and the

teaching and learning environment. Teacher autonomy does not imply absolute freedom or anarchy (Öztürk, 2011) as some instructions and equilibriums are required to maintain quality education.

Teacher autonomy in classroom teaching is a topic of great importance in teaching and learning. Togkoz and Bumen (2021) assert that teacher autonomy is the ability of teachers to have adequate decision-making skills regarding their teaching practice, curriculum, and assessment techniques. The importance of teacher autonomy lies in the ability to encourage creativity, propose innovation and personalize teaching. When teachers are free to carry out their professional activities using their own professional judgment, they can design lessons that meet individual learners' diverse needs and interests (Jansen, 2004). This leads to a more engaging and effective learning experience for learners because teachers can alter their teaching strategies in accordance with learners' strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, teacher autonomy promotes a sense of ownership and responsibility among teachers, as they can tailor their teaching practice to their own educational ideologies and beliefs. This level of autonomy doesn't just improve teachers' work satisfaction but also allows them to develop as reflective individuals. Finally, teacher autonomy in classroom teaching contributes to improving the overall quality of teaching (Salokangas et al., 2020).

Teacher autonomy is an important aspect of education because it allows them the freedom to choose their teaching strategies. However, it is equally important to have some form of external monitoring to ensure accountability and ensure standards of educational quality (Sahlberg, 2010). Foskett and Lumby (2003) emphasise that there is a need to finding a balance between teacher autonomy and external monitoring. This ensures that teachers have the elasticity to modify their teaching strategies while meeting expectations and requirements prescribed by educational officials.

A rigid monitoring system can hinder teacher creativity and the ability to meet the diverse needs of learners (Ehren et al., 2020). Correspondingly, minimal external monitoring can lead to errors in teaching practices and potentially affect the quality of education being provided (Alexander, 2000). Finding a suitable approach to external monitoring includes establishing clear guidelines and expectations for teachers, providing them with continuous professional development opportunities that will enhance their professional skills, and implementing a feedback and evaluation process that focuses on constructive collaboration rather than performance ratings. In addition, Sahlberg (2010) argues that external monitors need to find an approach that

acknowledges the key point of teacher autonomy while also providing the necessary support and accountability that can promote a positive and learning environment while benefitting both teachers and learners.

Trust plays an important role in maintaining an equilibrium between teacher autonomy and external monitoring. Darling-Hammond (2004) suggests that to ensure effective teaching and learning, teachers must have the freedom to make decisions and implement teaching strategies that best meet the learners' needs. However, to maintain a sense of accountability and ensure quality educational standards, external control mechanisms are required. Trust acts as a link between autonomy and teacher external monitoring. Trust ensures that there is high level of respect and collaboration between all stakeholders that are involved. When there is trust between teachers and external monitors, such a subject advisors and MDT teachers feel empowered to explore the dimensions of their teacher autonomy while being open to outside critique and feedback. Equally, trust minimises the need for over-regulation and micromanagement, allowing teachers to feel supported and encouraged in their own professional development (Ehren et al., 2020). Moreover, the presence of trust will lead to a harmonious interaction in the relationships between teacher autonomy and external monitoring.

A decrease in teacher autonomy works hand-in-hand with the increase in monitoring and accountability as these two concepts influence each other (Verger et al., 2019). This is evident in European research done by Skerritt (2020) where he referred to monitoring as *surveillance*. Teachers expressed both negative and positive implications of the increase in accountability from monitoring. Klein (2017) suggests that school autonomy has a significant impact on school improvements as teachers can make proper decisions as they are aware of the needs and outcomes of the school. School autonomy is the level of independence and ability for decision making schools hold in the management of the daily happening in the school. This includes school budgets, administration, and subject specialization. Schools with high school autonomy have the authority to implement their own curriculum, flexibility in hiring new staff members and may, at times, be able to implement their own assessment practices. The study conducted by Klein (2017) was based on the European and United States of America Governments, and detailed how schools in disadvantaged areas often underperform and, as a result, face scrutiny. The findings suggest that

the level of autonomy found in these schools was less than that found in advantaged schools and the disadvantaged schools faced higher requirements for accountability.

2.9. Teacher identities and external monitoring

Teacher identities is a multifaceted concept that involves teachers' understanding of themselves as professionals, as well as how they are perceived by others in their role as teachers. It is a complex and dynamic structure shaped by numerous factors, such as personal beliefs, values, experiences, and social contexts (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Teacher identities is not only a matter of self-perception but also has important implications for teaching practices and learner achievement. A strong sense of teacher identities can motivate teachers to teach more effectively and meaningfully, encouraging positive relationships with learners, and initiating a supportive teaching and learning environment. In contrast, weak or conflicting teacher identities can lead to apathy, burnout, and lack of motivation to improve teaching strategies (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011).

Professional teacher identities refer to how teachers perform in the teaching and learning environment, how they are, and how they understand their work in the professional workplace (Beijaard & Meijer, 2017). According to Sachs (2005), teacher identities is a vital aspect of the teaching profession, as it influences teachers' perceptions of themselves, their values, and their effectiveness in the education system. Teacher identities considers how to act, how to be and how to understand oneself as an individual in the workplace and society. Wendt, cited by Yilmaz (2011), defines teacher identities as a set of meanings that act as attributes to oneself while taking the perspective of others. Moreover, teacher identities are a continuing process of understanding and re-interpretation of an individual's experiences. Hoadley (2002) states that teacher identities are constructed by the engagements of personal aspirations and expectations that are shaped by the demands of education government.

This study uses Stenberg's (2010) definition of teacher identities, which is the teacher's sense of self and understanding of what it means to be a teacher. Noonan (2018) suggests that a person's identities is based on their past experiences and beliefs. This proposes that there is a shift in a person's identities as they grow into their profession. A teacher can move from being viewed as a novice teacher to being portrayed as an expert. According to Noonan (2018), teacher professional identities change and have a variety of influences. Kelly (2006) suggests that as teachers gain experience, they implement alternative views in tasks engagement, and this alters their teacher

identities. External monitoring creates opportunities for feedback and reflection. Constructive feedback can be essential in teachers' professional development, enabling them to reflect on the findings of monitoring and gain positive perspective on their teacher identities. On the contrary, the lack of meaningful feedback can be detrimental to teachers, causing them to question their purpose as a teacher, and further negatively impacting on their teaching practice. The experiences that teachers go through help to establish their professional identities. Equally, teachers' identities can influence the understanding of their experiences in their teaching practices (Noonan, 2018).

External monitoring plays an important role in teacher identities formation. When teachers encounter positive monitoring, this comes as a form of validation. Through external monitoring, a teacher's competency and effectiveness is either confirmed or weakened. This can boost a teacher's confidence and strengthen their professional identities or raise questions about the identities. As Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) argue, external monitoring can influence the development of teachers' identities because it allows for reflection on teachers' work and encourages professional development. Furthermore, external monitoring can help support teachers' beliefs and values, enabling them to align with the expectations of the educational system. Overall, external monitoring is an essential aspect of teacher identity formation, as it allows teachers to reflect on their practice, adapt to social expectations, and establish a professional identity. On the flip side, external monitoring comes with the stress of constant scrutiny (Mockler, 2011). This scrutiny is there to ensure that teachers are aligned with DBE educational goals. External monitoring is there is ensure that teachers are meeting the goals and standards, even when they do not align with teachers' beliefs about their teaching practice. When there is a mismatch between teachers' realities and DBE goals and standards, there is a sense of frustration and high level of conflict in teachers' identities. When teachers feel that their identities are being questioned, this impacts on the emotions of teachers, causing them to feel insecure and pressured to meet the expected DBE standards.

2.10. Conceptual Framework

The focus of this study is to explore how external monitoring impacts teachers' work and identities. According to Cohen et al. (2018), a conceptual framework stipulates the main concepts being employed in a particular study, how they are used to explore the phenomenon in question, and the relationships of the concepts used in the study. Wilson et al. (2010) state that a conceptual

framework includes one or more theories, combining the concepts and empirical findings obtained through the literature. The conceptual framework that best suits this study incorporates accountability, professional teacher autonomy and professional teacher identities as key concepts.

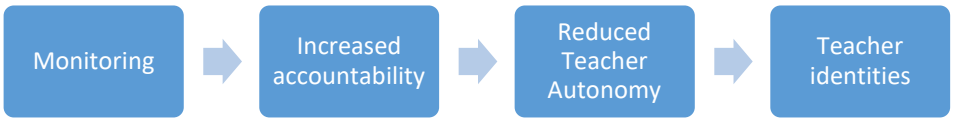

Figure 2. Conceptual framework: proposed relationships between the concepts

This model highlights the link between monitoring, accountability, teacher autonomy and teacher identities. It suggests that external monitoring brings an increase in accountability. Increased accountability lowers teachers' autonomy which then influences their professional identities.

The suggested conceptual framework understands that professional identity is impacted by the individual encounters that teachers face each day in their workplace. These experiences include external monitoring that comes with a level of teacher accountability. Teachers experience accountability at different levels and have different assumptions regarding the implications of being accountable. Teachers are held accountable for learner underperformance in their individual subjects. The accountability prominent in the conceptual framework is performance-based accountability. Darling-Hammond (2010) identifies performance-based accountability as one that leads to teaching to the test and prioritises test scores over rounded learner development within the teaching and learning environment. Accountability utilised in the study focused on how teachers are answerable for the learning outcomes achieved by grade 12 learners.

Accountability impacts on teachers' autonomy which, in turn, impacts on teachers' identities. The data generated in the study gives insight into the relationships between these concepts.

2.11. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the literature on external monitoring, which was relevant to the study. It explored different concepts of monitoring, accountability, teacher autonomy and teacher identities. This section highlighted different scholars' perspectives on monitoring and its influence on teachers in the teaching and learning environment. The study employed a conceptual framework, discussed above, which proposes the possible relationships between these concepts. The following chapter discusses the research design and methodology applicable in the conduction of the research.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The study aimed to explore the impact of external monitoring on teachers' identities and teachers' work. This study sought to gain insight into teachers' experiences of external monitoring. The previous chapter described monitoring, teacher identities and teacher autonomy and drew links to show these concepts intertwine. This chapter documents the research design and methodology of the study. Cohen et al. (2018) state that the research design is the outline of research strategies and practices selected by the researcher when conducting the study. The research methodology is the detailed procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyse the data about a phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2018). The chapter discusses the study's research paradigm, approach, questions, sampling, design, data generation methods, ethical issues, and limitations.

3.2. Research Paradigm

A research paradigm enables the researcher to understand and describe the philosophies of the realities within the study and the attaining of knowledge about the study (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). There are four assumptions which underpin a research paradigm. These are the ontology, the epistemology, the methodology and methods. Ontology refers to the underpinning realities of the paradigm; the researcher's beliefs about the nature of the social world. Epistemology refers to how knowledge of the phenomenon may be created and how the knowledge of the research paradigm is shared (Creswell, 2013). Methods refer to what data generation tools apply to the specific research paradigm.

The interpretive paradigm is a research paradigm that highlights the understanding of subjectivity in research. In this paradigm, researchers aim to explain social phenomena and understand the meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences (Brannen, 2017). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the interpretive paradigm rejects the idea of a single objective reality and suggests that individuals create their reality through their subjective experiences. Maree (2015) states that within the interpretivist paradigm, there are different realities about a single phenomenon that are not the same depending on the time and place. Researchers using this paradigm recognize the

importance of capturing participants' viewpoints, opinions, and emotions to gain a deep understanding of the social phenomena being studied. By accepting subjectivity, the interpretive paradigm provides a richer and subtler understanding of complex social phenomena (Brannen, 2017). Therefore, the interpretive paradigm is often used in qualitative research methods because it allows researchers to explore the lived experiences and subjective realities of participants to produce in-depth findings that are rich in context (Creswell, 2013).

An interpretivist approach seeks to understand social behaviours, and how people make meaning of their experiences (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Creswell, 2013). Similarly, Maree (2015) suggests that the interpretivist paradigm focuses on the participant's subjective experiences, as it seeks to understand how the participants experience the phenomena at hand. The interpretivist paradigm applied to this study as I wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of how the selected teachers experienced the phenomena of external monitoring and how this impacted their individual teachers' work. This aim is met by the interpretivist paradigm as different experiences from the participants of the study support the ontological assumption that individuals construct multiple realities about an event.

An interpretive epistemology views knowledge as being subjective (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Maree, 2015), and socially constructed by the researcher. The use of an interpretivist paradigm enables participants to share subjective experiences on the impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and identities through sharing meanings and interactions that may relate to each other. The methodology in the interpretivist paradigm uses mostly qualitative approaches such as case studies or ethnographic studies (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This study used semi-structured interviews, focus groups and collages as data generation methods, which are part of the qualitative research approach.

3.3. Research Approach

Selecting the correct research approach is crucial in the preparation of a research study as well as during the ongoing process of conducting the research. Cohen et al., (2018) acknowledge that the research approach includes the strategies and process for the research study, including the broad assumptions to detail procedures of data generation, analysis, and interpretation. This research used a qualitative approach as the foundation of the study.

The qualitative approach makes use of investigative research as it helps in understanding the views and perceptions of the participants. The study explores the impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and identities. A qualitative approach uses inquiry into social phenomenon in its natural setting, as it explores lived experiences, behaviours, and the creation of relationships (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Within the qualitative approach, the researcher aims to acquire insight and reasoning for the study, allowing for an in-depth analysis of the collected data.

The qualitative approach is aligned with the interpretive paradigm, as it is a research technique that highlights exploring the context and meaning of the study. This approach is characterized by an emphasis on understanding and explaining social phenomena through the perceptions and experiences of the participants. The qualitative approach involves the "multiple realities and meanings within social contexts" (Creswell, 2013, p. 41), recognizing that there are countless different subjective interpretations and understandings of reality. This corresponds with the interpretivist paradigm that acknowledges individual subjectivity within the same context. Furthermore, the qualitative approach encourages researchers to submerge themselves in the research context, often using methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis to collect rich, in-depth data (Creswell, 2013; Lee & Krauss, 2015). By exploring the context and significance of participants' actions and experiences, qualitative approaches allow researchers to attain a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena and to discover patterns and basic themes.

3.4. Case Study

A popular method in qualitative research is the use of a case study which involves the in-depth inquiry into a single case or a small number of cases. Case studies provide a rich and comprehensive understanding of a specific issue, allowing researchers to explore the context, experiences, and perspectives of participants in depth. Yin (2013) mentions that case studies can help researchers answer "how" and "why" questions, facilitating a deeper understanding of the complications and shade of meanings in human behaviour. Furthermore, Ruffa (2020) suggests that case studies provide valuable opportunities for theory construction and testing since they provide the contextual data essential to explore and articulate a hypothesis. Consequently, the case study technique is significant in qualitative research as it allows researchers to gain a

comprehensive understanding of social phenomena, generate rich data, and contribute to the development of theoretical knowledge.

This research uses a case study as a research design where the focus is teachers' experiences of external monitoring. The use of a case study allows for an in-depth understanding of how external monitoring impacts teachers' work and identities. A case study allows for descriptive data generation where participants are well-informed and can interpret their own experiences about the phenomenon. By using a case study, the context of the schools, their surroundings, and relevant social factors were considered. A case study explores a phenomenon within its natural setting and allows for the acknowledgement of the complexities and context (Maree, 2015). According to Krusenvik (2016), a case study can be used when a researcher seeks to comprehend the connection between a context and a phenomenon. In this research, I explore the impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and identities in "underperforming" schools in a challenging socio-economic context.

3.5. Sampling

According to Cohen et al. (2018), sampling means selecting a subgroup of participants, objects, or occurrences of the study from a larger population. This subgroup is called the sample. The sampling techniques used must be wisely selected to answer the research question and align with the research design. Sampling is especially important in qualitative research, where purposive sampling is often used. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants based on specific criteria related to the research question, such as their expertise or experience in a particular field (Guest et al., 2012).

By purposively selecting participants who have certain characteristics or qualities, researchers can ensure that the data collected will be relevant and informative, contributing to a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Cohen et al., 2018). Qualitative research makes use of purposive sampling. Etikan et al. (2016) suggest that purposive sampling is interested in participants who share common traits or specific attributes. By using purposive sampling, the researcher makes specific choices about the participants based on the purpose of the study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Tongco, 2007).

Three high schools were selected from a population of twelve high schools that had experienced external monitoring within the Circuit Management Cluster. The selection criteria were that the schools had to be high schools that were identified by the district as underperforming based on the government standards of grade 12 achievement. The selected schools had to be within the Langelihle Circuit Management Cluster and have had experience with the MDT team within the past five years.

Purposive sampling was used to select two teachers from each school who were teaching grade 12 in their school and had been externally monitored by district officials. Cohen et al. (2018) write that purposive sampling can be used to purposively select participants based on their judgement and knowledge, which may serve as a critical asset in the researcher's study. This meant that the chosen teachers had the necessary in-depth knowledge regarding the experiences of the impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and identities.

Principals were requested to identify suitable teachers who were involved in forms of external monitoring. Once the principals selected the suitable participants, teachers were addressed, the research was explained and those who were interested came forward. Further discussions on the study were done with these participants, and some teachers withdrew at this point. In cases where there were more than two teachers who were keen on participating, there was a group consensus of who would best present the school and be an active participant in providing in-depth insights adequate to the study. The teacher's teaching experiences ranged from four to thirteen years. Teachers taught different subjects although most teachers who experienced external monitoring were mathematics and life science teachers.

3.6. Data Generation Methods

The purpose of data generation is to gather rich data that will be analysed to answer the research questions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Kabir, 2016). A researcher needs to use data generation methods that are in line with the research paradigm, approach and data sampling. This study used interviews, focus group and collages as data-generating methods. These are in line with the qualitative research approach (Merriam, 2009).

3.6.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

Qualitative interviews aim to view the world through the eyes of the participants (Maree, 2015). Interviews refer to a one-on-one conversation between researcher and participant, allowing for in-depth exploration of the research topic. These interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured, depending on the nature of the research question and the level of flexibility needed (Yin, 2009). By using interviews, the researcher gains detailed descriptive data that outlines the participant's construction of knowledge and perceptions of social reality. Through interviews, rich, contextualized data can be collected, allowing researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the case under investigation (Creswell, 2013). Leedy and Ormrod (2010) suggest that semi-structured interviews are a suitable tool when attempting to answer pre-arranged questions and allow for follow-up questions that may arise in the interview process. The interviewers seek to acquire as much knowledge about a limited phenomenon using the interviewees' responses to questions (Baker & Edwards, 2012). This was done through elaborate probing, clarification probes and detail-oriented probing. Probing allowed for the identification of participants' reactions and access to clarity and coverage of all questions. The questions asked were open-ended questions that led the interviewees to further elaborate on any emotional aspects of external monitoring.

Semi-structured interviews in qualitative research are paramount and enable researchers to gain in-depth insights into participants' experiences, beliefs, and perceptions. According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), semi-structured interviews offer a balance between structured and unstructured interviews, providing a flexible framework while maintaining certain consistency. This flexibility enables researchers to explore a range of subjects while ensuring the generation of data that is comparable across respondents (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). The semi-structured approach allows for a more natural flow of conversation and facilitates the exploration of unforeseen topics and perspectives (Whiting, 2008). This differs from a structured interview that has prearranged questions. By using open-ended questions that allow for follow-up probes, researchers gain an in-depth perspective of participants' experiences and feelings, therefore gaining rich data (Whiting, 2008). Semi-structured interviews play a vital role in qualitative research, allowing researchers to capture the complexity and variety of human experience while upholding a level of integrity, reliability, and comparability (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Through interviews, rich, contextualized data can be collected, allowing researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the case under investigation (Creswell, 2013). Additionally,

researchers can use other data generation techniques in qualitative research, such as observation, document analysis, and focus groups, to further improve the depth and breadth of data collected for the case study (Merriam, 2009). In qualitative research, ensuring the trustworthiness of a case study requires establishing the validity and reliability of the data collected. Validity refers to the degree to which a study accurately represents the phenomenon being studied, while reliability refers to the consistency and stability of the results. To improve validity, researchers use a variety of strategies, such as member checking and peer debriefing. Member checking involves sharing the researcher's interpretations and conclusions with participants to ensure their accuracy (Creswell, 2013), while peer exchange involves consulting experienced colleagues to evaluate the researcher's interpretations and conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, the use of multiple data sources, such as interviews, observations, and documentary evidence, can increase the reliability and confirmability of findings (Creswell, 2013). On the other hand, reliability can be enhanced by using rigorous data generation techniques, such as taped interviews, and taking thorough notes of the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). By using these strategies, researchers can improve the validity and reliability of their case studies, thereby ensuring the trustworthiness of their qualitative research findings.

Two pilot interviews with participants that are outsiders to the study were done before the interviews were conducted, to test whether the chosen questions would yield the relevant data for the research. The interviews were conducted at different times and participants had one-on-one sessions at the schools where they were being interviewed. The interview times varied, ranging from 30 to 45 minutes.

When conducting semi-structured interviews there is a need for a high level of credibility and trustworthiness. This was achieved by creating transparency with the participants. Research methods and data analysis processes were described to all participants before the interviews. The questions asked sought valid explanations of the phenomenon and avoided bias of any pre-existing ideas about external monitoring. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed.

3.6.2. Collages

One creative technique in qualitative research is to use collages. According to Gerstenblatt (2013), a collage is used as a rich, subjective data generation technique, that enables participants to visually express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences through the selection and preparation of other

resources such as images, words, and objects. Collages in research offer numerous benefits. First, collages allow participants to express themselves without words, providing a different technique of communication than conventional interviews (Gerstenblatt, 2013). This technique is helpful when working with participants who have difficulty expressing themselves verbally or those with struggle to articulate difficult topics clearly. Second, collages expose unconscious or subconscious thoughts and feelings that may not be easily reachable through narratives (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). The imaginative and instinctive nature of collage can unlock an individual's imagination and intuition, permitting them to explore deeper layers of experience. Finally, collages provide researchers with a real artefact that can be analysed and interpreted together with the interview transcript, providing additional insight into the participant's perspective (Vaughan, 2005). Using collage in qualitative research offers unique benefits that enhance participant engagement and provide researchers with an in-depth perspective on the participants' experiences.

Participants were asked to compile an individual collage where they reflected on the emotional experiences associated with external monitoring. All participants were asked to select words and images of their choice. Participants were requested to compile collages where they expressed the emotional aspects of how internal monitoring had impacted their work and teacher identities. The collages were done on separate occasions. The first set of collages was done by four participants: Azande, Bani, Jabu and Mandla (pseudonyms). These participants gathered at Zamokuhle High School and were given time to compile their collages. Participants were provided with all the material used to compile their collages. Once the collages were completed, the participants took turns in presenting their collages. During this session, discussions on the individual collages arose, where ideas were shared and different perspectives were outlined. The two participants—Londiwe and Bongumusa—who were not part of the discussion session, provided their collages on separate occasions. I went to their schools for an individual presentation of each of their colleges. The presentations were recorded and transcribed alongside the interviews.

3.6.3. Focus Groups

A focus group is a small group of selected participants who share common characteristics or experiences. This method of data generation encourages the exchange of ideas and views among participants (Krueger, 2014). A skilled facilitator is crucial to the success of a focus group as they lead the discussion and mediate between the participants. The facilitator is required to outline the

objectives of the focus group, arrange necessary logistics (such as recording devices when needed) establish the topic of the discussion and select suitable participants for the group (Cohen et al., 2018).

Focus groups are crucial in the qualitative approach as they guide the researcher in understanding the participants' attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about a phenomenon. In a focus group, a collective of individuals discusses a topic (Nyumba et al., 2018). Focus groups provide insight into the views and responses of participants who are encouraged to share their views in discussions. Through focus groups, the researcher can observe the multiple expressions, opinions, and interactions among the participants. The researcher often facilitates the group (Krueger, 2014). This enables the researcher to uncover rich data that uncovers understanding of the subjective complexity of the phenomenon. Focus groups allow for thematic data analysis, where patterns and themes emerge. However, due to the size of the group, the findings from the study are not generalizable beyond the boundaries of the study at hand.

This study used a focus group to present the collages of the participants. The focus group comprised four participants: Azande, Bani, Jabu and Mandla (pseudonyms). Participants were requested to compile collages where they expressed the emotional aspects of how internal monitoring had impacted their work and teacher identities. Each teacher was allocated time to present their collages. Discussion arose between the presentations and once all the presentations were done. Participants shared their experiences, encounters, and opinions on external monitoring. The discussions of the focus group were recorded and transcribed. Participants were given the transcriptions to verify that the transcription was correct.

3.7. Data Analysis

Data analysis is a crucial aspect of the study, as it provides a systematic and rigorous process of examining and interpreting data in an attempt to gain an understanding of a phenomenon (Guest et al., 2012). The process of data analysis involves the generation of raw data, transcription, and transformation of the data into meaningful and coherent findings (Cohen et al, 2018). Data analysis and interpretation uses coding and categorising of the collected data. Themes were identified and patterns emerged from these themes contributing to the findings of the study. Creswell (2013)

suggests that there are six steps involved in attaining thematic data analysis. These are: familiarisation of the data, creating codes, formulation of codes, finding emerging themes from the codes, reviewing the themes, outlining the themes and generation of a final report. This process was followed throughout the data analysis and interpretation process.

Qualitative data analysis may entail both deductive and inductive reasoning. This study used both thematic analysis and deductive reasoning based on the concepts of accountability, monitory and teacher identities. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) suggest that deductive reasoning starts from a general frame and moves to a specific frame. This is known as a top-down approach. Deductive reasoning includes analysis based on a set of concepts used by the researcher. In contrast, inductive reasoning is not based on pre-constructed structures or frameworks. Within the inductive analysis, the researcher starts by organising and analysing raw data and formulates patterns and recurrences to achieve an uncertain hypothesis (Azungah, 2018).

3.8. Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are vital in qualitative research as they touch on the researchers' subjectivity and personal involvement towards the study, as well as the participants' personal experiences and perceptions. This leads to the issue of the researcher being able to ensure the security and privacy of the participants. Morrow (2001) emphasise that researchers must put the participants' perspectives first by ensuring that their data is kept confidential throughout the research process. The researcher's positionality must be stated to the participants. I explained my positionality in the research to all participants. I have had two years of experience of being externally monitored and I have my own perceived ideas, opinions, and perspectives of external monitoring, which means that I am an insider. As a researcher, I tried to ensure that the ideas shared by the participants were not influenced by my preconceived assumptions about external monitoring. Participants were given equal opportunities, asked the same questions and the data analysis presented the true remarks of each participant.

Three ethical principles were followed through the process of the research—respect of participants, beneficence, and non-maleficence. Non-maleficence means to not harm (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Throughout the research process participants were assured that there would be no psychological or emotional harm, and they would not be exposed to any situations that might

shame or embarrass them (Fahie, 2014). Counselling sessions were organized by the researcher for participants, if requested. No participants requested counselling during the research.

Anonymity is the need to obtain the consent of every person who will participate in the research study and it allows for researchers to maintain respect throughout the research study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2019). Throughout the interviews, confidentiality was maintained. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) define confidentiality as the researchers' responsibility to protect the participants' personal information and ensure that it is kept private. Anonymity means that participants' identities are protected, and their names and any other identifying elements are not revealed in publications and reports. Anonymity ensures that the identities of all participants and their schools remains confidential throughout the research process (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Within this dissertation the names of the participants were not used; rather pseudonyms were used when necessary; features that identify the schools were changed to ensure anonymity. Informed consent forms were issued to all participants stating the title of the research, the purpose, the procedure, the research question, and the length of data generation. There were no research risks involved in the study, thus no risks were communicated to the participants and the benefits of the research to the researcher were communicated to all participants. The rights of participants were clearly stated within the consent letters. Permission from both Department of Education gatekeepers and school principals was requested before conducting the research. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study.

Throughout the process, the researcher can create honesty, trust and transparency between the researcher and the participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2019). Trust was built between me and the participants, upholding professional standards, and clarifying my role and interest in the research procedure. Confidentiality requires that the researcher retain all the information or data gathered throughout the research within the proximity of the researcher and the supervisor. Participants were made aware that the data collected is viewed by me, the transcriber and/or supervisor (Hoeyer et al., 2005; Morrow, 2001; Orb et al., 2001). Once interviews and collage presentations were transcribed, the participants were given the transcripts to confirm if the transcripts are correct (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

This research is a small-scale study. I am fully aware that the six teachers experiencing external monitoring who participated in this study do not represent all teachers in rural T65 schools. As a

teacher who is currently teaching in a T65 school, I am aware of my biases (as I have experienced external monitoring) and how this may have affected how data was collected and analysed. This becomes one of the significant limitations of the study. The schools selected include the school where I am currently teaching. This touches on the ethical issues that may arise in the research process as an insider researcher. The participants from the school may not have given true responses in the interviews, and the selection of participants may have been favourable or unfavourable, based on the relationships I have with my colleagues. However, multiple schools were used to strengthen the overall findings of the study. A comparison of data collected from all schools was done to ensure that data analyses are more trustworthy. By applying all the ethical considerations, this research allowed the participants to feel comfortable in sharing their experiences and perspectives freely.

3.9. Limitations to the study

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018, p. 156) state that a limitation in a study addresses all "potential weaknesses" that the researcher cannot control. Limitations arise from the research design, researchers' knowledge as well as the data generation methods. The study used purposive sampling, which means that the generalisability of the findings is not easily transferable beyond this study. Furthermore, the researcher's subjectivity is a crucial limitation in qualitative research. As external monitoring is an experience that prompted this study, I had to ensure that my positionality in the research was made clear and data collection and representation did not reflect any bias towards participants or the data presented. As a researcher it is easy to influence participants and subjectively interpret the data collected. To strengthen the trustworthiness, participants were given the opportunity to validate the transcribed data.

3.10. Trustworthiness

When using a qualitative research approach, the researcher should aim to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study (Cohen et al., 2018; Maree, 2015). Anney (2014) states that trustworthiness is the credibility and reliability of the findings and conclusions of a study. Similarly, Anney (2014) states that to achieve trustworthiness is important to ensure that the results are reliable and can contribute to a wider knowledge field.

For trustworthiness to be achieved, the researcher needs to consider credibility, conformability, transferability and dependability when conducting the research study. Credibility is strengthened by ensuring that the research is well-grounded and supported by all relevant evidence (Anney, 2014). Credibility is defined as the competence of the researcher to gather results that are substantial and credible (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (2000) argue that maintenance of credibility is one of the important aspects when aiming to attain trustworthiness. Confirmability focuses on the dependability of the findings and conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was strengthened by providing detailed descriptions of the research process, making the research transparent and replicable.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that transferability is the degree to which findings of qualitative research could be used in a different context and generate similar results. To strengthen transferability, the research identified and elaborated on the phenomenon at hand by stating the problem statement, providing the purpose of the study and the context of the study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Participants were made aware of the data analysis process and member checking allowed the participants to look at the transcribed interviews. Quality voice recordings of all interviews were used, and transcription of data was generated from the interviews. Data generation methods, sampling and analyses of data will enable future researchers to establish the transferability of results into other contexts. The study used triangulation, where three methods of data generation were used. Raw data was submitted to each participant to verify the transcriptions of the interviews, collage presentation and focus group discussions. By identifying the research methodology, future researchers can determine if the findings and discussions of the intended study apply to their study. An external researcher (supervisor) who is not part of the study had access to the research procedure, allowing for data verification. This minimised bias or subjectivity in the analysis of data in the study.

3.11. Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed insight into the research methodology and design employed by this study. An argument for the use of an interpretivist paradigm was presented, along with the adoption of a qualitative approach and case study as part of the research design. A rationale was provided for using semi-structured interviews, collages and focus groups as suitable data generation methods. Furthermore, ethical considerations and trustworthiness measures were

discussed. Chapter four discusses the data analysis and data presentation that was collected during the research process.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DATA PRESENTATION

4.1. Introduction

This research aimed to explore how external monitoring impacts teachers' work and their identities. The schools that participated in the study have been part of external monitoring programs for different numbers of years. Consequently, the data gathered indicates that a variety of experiences and perspectives on external monitoring were experienced by different teachers. Their responses revealed that external monitors included subject advisors, circuit managers and multi-disciplinary teams. Multi-disciplinary teams comprised district officials that included subject advisors from both Further Educational Training and General Educational Training phases, circuit managers, Chief Education Specialists, Special Needs Education Services officials and officials from Examination and Assessment Services.

The themes that emerged from the data presented are:

i. Teachers' reasons for learner underperformance

ii. Insufficient time for curriculum coverage

iii. Teachers' perception of external monitoring

iv. Emotional responses to external monitoring

4.1.1. Context of the school and the biographical background of the participants

The three schools selected for this study are located in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal. All three schools are part of the Langelihle Circuit Management Cluster (CMC). The schools are categorised as quintile three, which means that they are not fee-paying schools. These schools receive a minimum amount of government funding which is allocated according to the school learner enrolment. Each school is part of the government nutrition programme where learners receive provisioned meals per day. There are limited resources—insufficient writing materials, textbooks, and learning aids. The schools' infrastructures are adequate, and all schools can supply learners with running water, ablution facilities and classrooms.

At Sizabantu High School (pseudonym), in 2022 the school enrolment increased to 241 learners where most of the learners are in grades 10 and 11. The school has a principal, no deputy heads, two departmental heads and six post-level teachers. This school has a lengthy history of learner underperformance. Nonetheless, this is not consistent—learner performance improves one year and may yield different results the following year.

At Vusithemba Secondary School (pseudonym) in 2022 the school enrolment dropped as a result of the Post Provision Norms. The school had a teacher surplus of six teachers, who were later appointed to new schools. Currently, the school has a learner enrolment of 673 learners, a principal, a deputy head, three departmental heads and fourteen teachers. The performance in this school has had a gradual decline over the years and has been monitored intermittently for the past seven years. The school is located far from a public library that has reliable education resources such as textbooks and computers. Learners in the school rely on resources that they can get at the school.

Zamokuhle High School has limited resources and is known as an overcrowded school. The current enrolment is 979 learners. The teaching staff of the school consists of a principal, two deputy principals, three departmental heads and nineteen teachers. The school does not have adequate classrooms to accommodate all the learners. The DBE has given the school mobile classes for them to utilise as additional classrooms. Zamokuhle High School's performance reflects a yoyo effect and has had some successful years of performance and some bad years.

Bongumusa is a teacher at Sizabantu High School. He has a Bachelor of Educator Degree majoring in mathematics and geography. Currently, Bongumusa is teaching grade 8 to 12 mathematics and social sciences in grades 8 and 9. He has been teaching grade 12 mathematics for the past four years. Mathematics in the school has been underperforming for the past four years and as a result, he has experienced external monitoring since he started his teaching career.

Londiwe has a Bachelor of Education degree. She teaches life sciences grades 10 to 12 and natural sciences grades 8 and 9 at Sizabantu High School. She has been teaching for nine years and has taught grade 12 life sciences on and off. Out of the nine years of experience, she has been teaching grade 12 for a total of five years. She has experienced Multi-Disciplinary Team monitoring for four years and continuous external monitoring from subject advisors.

Bani completed a Bachelor of Science degree and later obtained her Post Graduate Certificate in Education. She has been teaching for seven years has been teaching grade 12 life science for five years and has previously taught life science for two years. Bani is teaching at Vusithemba Secondary School where her subject has underperformed for two consecutive years.

Also teaching at Vusithemba High School, Jabu has a Bachelor of Education degree. She is a qualified mathematics teacher with four years of teaching experience, two years of mathematics underperformance and two years of external monitoring.

Azande is a grade 8 and 9 social science and 10 to 12 geography teacher, with a Bachelor of Education Degree. She is currently teaching at Zamokuhle High School and has been teaching at this school for twelve years. Azande has been teaching grade 12 for the last eight years. Her learners have been underperforming for the past two years and have recently experienced the process of external monitoring.

Mandla is a Bachelor of Education Degree graduate with thirteen years of teaching experience. Mandla first did an Applied Mechanics Diploma and later did his Bachelor of Education. Mandla has been teaching grade 12 mathematics for the past nine years and his learners have underperformed intermittently for six years. Mandla is teaching at Zamokuhle High School where he has taught many subjects such as physical science, life science and natural sciences.

Teacher (Pseudo-nyms)	**School (Pseudo-nyms)**	**Education Qualifi-cations**	**Subjects currently teaching in grade 12**	**Teaching Experience**	**No. Of Years Teaching the Subject in Grade 12**	**No. of years labelled as an under performing subject**
Bongumusa	Sizabantu High School	Bachelor of Education	Mathematics	5 years	4	4
Londiwe	Sizabantu High School	Bachelor of Education	Life sciences	9 years	5	4
Azande	Zamokuhle High School	Bachelor of Education	Geography	12 years	8	2
Mandla	Zamokuhle High School	Bachelor of Education	Mathematics	13 years	9	6
Bani	Vusithemba Secondary School	Bachelor of Science, PGCE	Life sciences	7 years	7	5

Jabu	Vusithemba Secondary school	Bachelor of Education	Mathematics	4 years	2	2

Table 1. Teachers' biographical background

4.2. Teachers' explanations for learner underperformance

All teachers agreed that they are being externally monitored due to their schools' underperformance in the grade 12 National Senior Certificate Examination results. This led to the schools being placed under the T65 category, which means that the school has obtained less than 65% in the overall school performance. Such schools are considered as underperforming schools by the Department of Education. The data indicated that teachers did not accept that they were being blamed for learner underperformance. Instead, most teachers blame other factors such as the constant changes in the Department of Education Performance Standards, the COVID-19 gaps, and the learners in the education system. Participants believe that external monitors do not consider these factors as the main causes of underperformance. Of the six teachers who participated in the study, two spoke of the changes in the department standards, five referred to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting educational gaps, and four remarked on the impact learners have on school performance.

4.2.1. COVID-19 academic gaps

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown caused numerous changes throughout the everyday lives of South Africans. The Department of Education decided to close schools on the 18th of March 2020 due to the increase in COVID-19 infection cases. The schools re-opened in June 2020 for Grade 7 and Grade 12 learners. After August 2020, there were ongoing short-term school closures and openings due to COVID-19 infections of either learners or teachers until 2021. Statistics South Africa (2020) reported that seventeen million learners were affected by the school closures. According to Gustafsson (2020), schools lost 60% of contact time in 2020 and 50% in 2021. The DBE introduced new education policies and regulations that aimed to assist in the changes since the pandemic. These included new academic timetables, remote learning, and rotational on-school learning (Gustafsson, 2020). This has left numerous gaps in learners' knowledge. Shepherd and Mohohlwane (2021) estimate a 32–37% loss in reading capabilities and a 50–63% mathematics loss due to the school closure. Once schools re-opened, the DBE introducing the trimming of the

curriculum, Revised ATPs were implemented in all grades excluding grade 12 (Hoadley, 2002). The data generated in this study revealed that teachers' reasons for learner underperformance was the lack of minimised grade 12 curricula in grade 12. The grade 12 curriculum was reorganized and only the assessments were reduced.

Due to the reduced number of days of schooling, there was an introduction of a revised curriculum which trimmed down content in the school subjects. This meant that the Department of Education decided to remove certain topics from the ATP for different subjects in different grades. The topics in the Revised ATP have been trimmed in all grades except grade 12 in most subjects. In grades 8 to grade 11 mathematics, financial mathematics and probability were excluded in the Revised ATP. In life science, practical sections were removed in photosynthesis and animal nutrition. In grade 12 life science the content of "Human Impact on the Environment" was excluded and has not yet been reinstated. In subjects such as the above-mentioned, controlled tests were written instead of examinations. All the mentioned changes were referred to as *trimmed curriculum* or *Revised ATP*. This has led to some learning content being lost along the way. Learners have missed essential components of the curriculum and now teachers are doing their best to close the gaps created.

Mandla is one of the teachers who noted that COVID-19 created knowledge gaps in mathematics. He said:

> *In the maths curriculum, learners were not taught financial maths after 2020 due to the revised curriculum because of Covid but now in 2022 in grade 12 the final exam has this section and we as teachers have to fit in content from grade 10 up to grade 12, in one year.*

The teachers in the study noted that the external monitors do not consider that the learners who wrote the grade 12 National Senior Certificate examination in 2022 were doing grade 10 in 2020 and those who were doing grade 11 in 2020 wrote grade 12 in 2021. Both these grades were affected by the school closures, the trimmed curriculum and had lost fundamental concepts of the previous grades. External monitors expected teachers to cover any gaps and ensure that these learners were ready to write the National Senior Certificate examinations.

For example, Bani noted:

> *They also fail to recall the issue of COVID-19—the learners we are teaching now are COVID-19 learners. There are certain areas that we have not fully taught. Learners do not know these topics, but they will be part of the grade 12 final examination.*

Teachers and learners who were affected by the COVID-19 virus had to go through an isolation process that included limited contact time. This meant that there was an increase in absenteeism among teachers, learners, and non-teaching staff. In the early stages of the pandemic, if the schools were infected, the school was forced to close to allow fumigation and cleaning of the school. There was further loss of learning content after the initial closure of schools. Three teachers referred to this issue and argued that absenteeism caused a further loss in curriculum coverage in 2020 and 2021. Consequently, learner performance dropped even further.

Jabu shared that absenteeism impacted learner underperformance:

> *The learners, and sometimes the teachers themselves, tested positive, so they didn't come to school, which has resulted in COVID factors leading to underperformance by learners.*

Bongumusa referred to those who had been exposed and infected with COVID-19 as "the COVID-19 contacts":

> *Whereby there were so many contacts and there were so many topics that were not covered in grade 11, and also in grade 10, so that became a challenge when it came to grade 12.*

4.2.2. Department of Education changed the set performance standards in grade 12

Many of the teachers in the study noted that the Department changed the expected academic performance standards that are regarded as satisfactory. It is increasing each year. In 2021, the expected overall school performance was 75%, therefore schools that obtained less than 75% were regarded as underperforming. In 2022 teachers worked hard, striving to get 75% or more. When the 2022 results were presented, the performance standard for the Umgungundlovu district changed to 84% and all schools that obtained less were deemed as underperforming. For the year

2023, the Umgungundlovu District has raised their standards to 84%. It said that because the district obtained an 84% overall pass, any school that obtained below that was regarded as underperforming.

Mandla noted that there was an annual increase in the expected performance standards that the DBE considered as well-performing:

> *There is always a change in the performance rate. Just last year (2021) it was 70% and then last year (2022) it was 84%. Even when we improve the results, we are still called underperforming schools.*

Jabu shared similar views:

> *… and then this year the school got 75% but the district said if you got 75% and the district obtained 84% then you are underperforming.*

The performance standards are there to improve the overall provincial performance. However, the data reveals that teachers who are continuously failing to reach ever-increasing standards are less motivated as their efforts never seem to be good enough.

4.2.3. Poor "material" to work with

Four of the teachers suggested that a major reason for their school's under-performance is the learners in the school. A common term used by the teachers when referencing the learners that they are teaching is "materials".

Azande was one of the teachers who referred to the learners in a particular year. He stated that:

> *It is the materials that we have……. if I'm referring to materials I'm referring to learners that we have in that particular year.*

Teachers explained that good quality learner material led to a higher overall school performance. The teachers noted that the "material" of learners differs each year and this results in the intermittent external monitoring in the schools. When learners are of a good quality "material"—hardworking and "knowledgeable" learners—then the pass percentage is high and vice versa. There are many factors that teachers use in determining if the learners are "good material" who

will yield good results at the end of the year. These include their performance in the previous grades, school attendance and commitment to school work.

Five out of six teachers shifted the blame for learner underachievement on to the learners.

Londiwe pointed out that the quality of learners affected the results of learner performance. The factor that she highlighted was contact time with the learners:

> *Another factor that contributed to under-achievement by learners is the material that we have. These two years are not good for producing good results. Sometimes most of them, don't come to school; most of them are bunking classes. So that material that we having determines the achievement of that grade or of that group.*

Azande notes that positive relationships between teachers and learners can lead to improved learner performance:

> *When you guys are working together; the relationship is well established. There's the respect among you two. The learners are bound to perform very well, but the only issue that you can observe is if you are moving towards improving learner performance.*

According to the participants, the external monitors do not consider the learners of the school. Teachers are expected to meet the set performance standards regardless of the learning barriers and difficulties that the learners may be experiencing. External monitors often recommend that teachers should not blame learners' capabilities. Instead, teachers need to find alternative teaching strategies that will suit the academic diversity in the class. They insinuate that the underperformance is not the result of learner quality but rather it is the teachers' inability to teach the learners well.

Through the use an interview, Azande suggested that the external monitors should not just focus on the limitations of the teacher but also go into classrooms and assess the learners that are being taught. When she discussed her collage (Figure 2), she noted that the MDT should also come to speak to the learners.

> *The repetition of the word "learner" in this collage is to emphasise the importance of the learner in the underperformance of the subject. The multi-discipline team must take the time to go into the class and speak to our learners.*

Bani made a similar observation:

> *Some negatives come with being monitored because you can't be trying to develop and then only focus on the teacher and not engage with the learners themselves.*

There is an emphasis on teachers "being at fault" rather than learners' failures. Two participants mentioned that the external monitors need to take time to address the learners during these visits.

Bani stated that:

> *I can do all of that, but they [the MDT] need to also have maybe ten minutes just to go over to learners and give them some sort of motivation.*

Londiwe also suggested that:

> *Maybe if they take time and come into the classroom, just teach a new topic for one lesson then they may understand the materials we are dealing with … and stop asking questions about why learners are failing.*

Teachers in this study did not put any blame on themselves. Even though some teachers had less than five years of teaching, they viewed themselves as adequate teachers who were not contributors to learner underperformance. The MDT feedback suggested that teachers were to blame, whether it was due to lack of content knowledge, teachers being unprepared, or lack of teacher pedagogical knowledge. The data revealed that teachers sensed that external monitors were "*fault finders"* rather than support structures and it was only because of this that teachers doubted themselves.

Londiwe refers to external monitors as fault finders:

> *So, the majority of the time, some of the monitors would be fault finders to us, they are only there to find our mistakes.*

Bani draws similar conclusions about the MDT shifting the blame onto teachers and this then makes her doubt her content knowledge:

When we are blamed for the bad results that the learners are getting it makes me feel unconfident about my own understanding of the subject.

Teachers expressed their reasons for learner underperformance, and it is evident through the data that teachers in this study reflected more on the negative experiences rather than the positive.

4.3. Insufficient time for curriculum coverage

Time is vital in the teaching and learning environment. A prescribed ATP has been put in place and teachers need to closely adhere to this document to ensure that the syllabus is covered. The period to be spent on teaching a certain topic is reflected in the ATP as it is used as a guide that determines the order and pacing that teachers must follow in teaching and assessment throughout the year. Time becomes crucial in curriculum coverage where teachers need to ensure that learners are ready for the final examinations.

The data from the teachers indicated that the time stipulated by the ATP does not reflect the actual contact time that teachers spend with learners. In reality, the specified time is insufficient because at times teachers need to repeat the topic before learners can understand. Repetition means there will be less time spent on other topics.

Bani referred to time on different occasions during the interview:

Then I think for the teachers maybe the issue is that we try to cover as much as possible so that the syllabus is covered … when the common tests come everything is covered … we move against time. In doing that along the way, some of the information might be lost in translation.

Then the curriculum will give you more time, but the timetable will give you less time... I think the way they structure the curriculum means that we try and work against time and try to maybe give more than what is in the curriculum.

Bongumusa also noted that there is not sufficient time to cover the ATP:

You find that towards the end of the term, there is not sufficient time to do a thorough revision, and that was the major reason why the results were affected.

Even though there is a set annual teaching plan we cannot always cover the annual teaching plan.

The subject policy guidelines give notional time which specifies hours to be spent teaching each subject per week. For example, mathematics, mathematical literacy and languages are allocated five hours per week, life orientation is given two hours, and the rest of the subjects are given four hours. Because of the pressures that come with external monitoring where underperforming subjects are scrutinized, there is an adjustment in the notional time. These subjects become the main priorities in the time allocation when compiling the school timetable. In some schools, the time allocated to the well-performing subject is used for the underperforming subject. For example, at Sizabantu High School, underperforming subjects used morning lessons, and some lessons officially allocated for life orientation, and languages were allocated to the underperforming subjects. This was based on advice from the Multi-Disciplinary Teams.

The teachers asserted that the issue of time was not acknowledged by the external monitors. External monitors used the ATP provided by the teacher to track their curriculum coverage and assess whether the learners would be well equipped to write the National Senior Certificate examination. The data revealed that teachers who deployed monitors reported that when they were not on par with the ATP they were seen as inadequate. This is then the reason provided for why learners are not meeting the required performance standards in that school.

Londiwe also picked up on the issue of time in her collage (Figure 4). In her reflection on her collage, she noted that the external monitors come and make judgements in just 20 minutes:

I chose the "'twenty minutes" for two reasons. One, the time that they give us is too small. Twenty minutes is never enough to do all this work, but the monitor doesn't care. So, we teach just to tick the box. Two, they are there to judge us based on the twenty minutes that they spend at the school when they make the judgements on us.

Time was crucial for the teachers in this study as it had impacted on the way that they were being monitored. The time allocation did not match teacher-learner contact time, and this had significantly impacted on the "learner underperformance" that led to the teachers being monitored.

4.4. Teachers' perceptions of external monitoring

Teachers' experiences with external monitoring had a significant impact on the way that they teach. For example, teachers shifted from a learner-centred approach to teaching that would suit the advice of the monitors. Rather than teaching for learner understanding, more written work and assessments were given to learners as required by the monitoring tool.

Even the most inconsequential experiences impacted all the teachers of the study, and these experiences varied according to the individuals' encounters with the external monitor. Five teachers had both positive and negative remarks to share; only one focused on the positive experiences of monitoring.

The data showed that teachers who focused on the negative shared a common stereotype of external monitors. As indicated by the teachers who participated in this study, external monitoring requires a high level of patience from teachers and a willingness to learn and develop.

Azande highlighted only the positive understanding of external monitoring. He viewed monitoring as a tool that aims to support teachers and assist learner performance:

> *There is a stereotype that it is like a power game from the superiors to the inferiors. But I would like to deviate from that perspective and see it as one method of trying to support and providing support because if you are going to monitor someone, people tend to think that you are coming to look for problems … That is not the case. The case here is not about the learners that must be educated; it is about the learner that must be in the end educated and pass.*

Teachers suggest that external monitors are there to minimise teachers' confidence because their learners are underperforming. They further see monitors as individuals who use their power to be superior to underperforming teachers—judgement is placed on teachers who fail to meet the department standards in the subject performance. External monitors are there to scrutinise rather than to support underperforming subject teachers. This stereotype is evident throughout all the interviews.

However, even though some experiences may not have always been positive, teachers were able to find good in the professional development encountered through monitoring. The external monitoring enabled teachers to be "ever-ready educators" as stated by Azande. This means that teachers are constantly updating their moderation and teacher files; ensuring that the lesson plans

are dated and presented in the files; classroom learners' activities are up-to-date; written work is constantly monitored by the teacher and the Departmental Heads; formal and informal assessments are done on time, marked and marks are recorded; teachers' Subject Improvement Plans are compiled each term and remedial activities are done. External monitoring allows teachers to gain a reflective perspective on their teaching. Subject Improvement Plans indicate areas of concern that teachers have—the external monitors analyse the Subject Improvement Plan and find reflective solutions together with the teacher. Teachers constantly anticipate that any external monitor can arrive at the school unannounced and this positively impacts their work.

Bongumusa noted that teachers should always be ready for an encounter with a monitor at any given moment:

> *To think that a subject advisor could come on any day makes work always and "ever ready" work. Everything must be in order in case a subject advisor comes around.*

4.4.1. Additional support

The DBE uses external monitoring to support teachers, find solutions to learner underperformance and, in the long run, increase the quality of education in South Africa. The data generated in this study revealed that external monitoring provides teachers with additional professional development. Teachers become exposed to additional monitoring and not just internal monitoring from the SMT. The participants of this study said that they gained expertise from different officials who were monitoring them at that time. When being externally monitored, teachers receive feedback that enables them to gain insight into their areas of improvement and their strengths. The monitor completes a monitoring tool to assess teachers' classroom practice. However, no copy of the tool is issued to the teacher. The monitoring assesses teachers' files, classroom activities, curriculum coverage and both formal and informal assessments. The monitoring official discusses their assessments with the teacher and highlights their observations. They mention any concerns that they may have and offer support and encouragement.

The teachers who were part of this study experienced both sides of external monitoring—they felt supported and developed, however, they felt demeaned when their credibility as a professional teacher was questioned.

Mandla mentioned that many emotions come with being monitored:

> *To be honest, you have mixed emotions, As I mentioned some good comes with it, but then it also makes you question yourself as a teacher.*

The subject advisors were the most recognized external monitors that had impacted positively on the individual teachers. Subject advisors were able to give guidance on alternative teaching strategies and how best to assess learners according to the subject cognitive levels. Teachers spoke freely with subject advisors as they felt they were able to understand the challenges that may come with the subject and how best to tackle the challenges teachers are facing in the classroom. Frequent advice that teachers received was that they should collaborate with other teachers. Through collaboration, teachers are paired with lead teachers, who assist during extra classes. Collaboration allows teachers to share ideas on how best to tackle content, suitable teaching strategies and sharing of teaching aids. In turn, this impacts on the assessment of the teachers. Through collaboration, teachers share formal and informal tasks.

Bongumusa agreed that the subject advisor was supportive. He also noted in his collage that they had an impact on his professional development:

> *So, the [subject] advisor visit seemed to be more fruitful for me. The advantages are there, easy to see. They are there to give me support.*

When presenting his collage, Bongumusa showed the importance of the subject advisor in his attempt to improve the learner performance in his subject. He noted that:

> *The use of best advice is to show how my advisor helped me with trying to turn the failing learners, where I was getting low percentages. I was able to make a comeback in 2018, because there was an increase in the subject percentage in my school.*

There were mixed responses about the multi-disciplinary team. Some teachers felt that these teams were the most fruitful as they were exposed to different education specialists and gained an alternative perspective on their teaching. However, not all teachers were happy about the additional support as they felt the ones giving the advice were “out of place”. This was evident in the multi-

disciplinary teams which are comprised of different district officials. This meant that teachers ended up being monitored by officials who may not specialize in the subject they were monitoring. For example, a life science teacher could be monitored by a Special Needs Education Services official who may have been a primary school teacher. This created doubt about the monitoring purpose. Jabu questioned the advice that she received from circuit managers:

> *There are circuit managers who have taught the foundation phase for the rest of their teaching experience, and they come to advise a teacher in grade 12. What does a foundation phase educator, advisor, and mathematics teacher in grade 12 do? So, in that way, I don't think the purpose is met by this.*

4.4.2. Additional classes and workshops

The most frequent experience that came with external monitoring was teaching far above the national prescribed time of six hours a day. Participants said that they conducted extra classes that included morning and afternoon classes. They were even expected to teach during Saturdays and school holidays. These extra classes range from 2-hour sessions a day up to a full day of learner contact time. The teachers felt that most their time is spent at work rather than at home with their families.

There is minimal consideration of teachers' responsibilities. Rather, there is great emphasis on the improvement of learner performance. When presenting the collages, a discussion arose about the Just-In-Time workshops, which are held on weekends. Teachers expressed that these deprive them of their time at home because teachers of "underperforming subjects" are compelled to attend this once a term. During external monitoring by the Multi-Disciplinary Team, advisors ask teachers if they are attending these workshops. Teachers who fail to attend these workshops are held accountable and the lack of attendance is seen as a reason for why the subject is underperforming.

When presenting his collage Azande used the days of the week to emphasise the constant teaching:

> *It is showing four weeks and all seven days of the week, just the same as we are expected to be teaching. Four weeks a month, and seven days a week. Just because the learners are not doing well.*

External monitoring meant that teachers needed to go the extra mile in the effort to try and improve learner performance. The participants explained that there is also additional work that comes with being monitored. Teachers who are externally monitored end up doing more than the teachers who are not externally monitored. The generated data revealed that external supervision comes with a large amount of paperwork and more expectations from teachers. This included more written assessments, more classroom activities, more marking, more lesson planning, and term-based subject improvement plans. There was more emphasis placed on written work rather than actual teaching.

Bongumusa noted that the multi-disciplinary team focused on learners' written work and not what teachers are teaching. He said that:

> *When the MDT came, they wanted to see all the activities that the learners wrote and didn't pay attention to the examples that I had given in class.*

Azande shared similar remarks when he said:

> *They also check teachers' files and the most important thing that they usually stress is to check the number of assessments that are given to learners.*

Bongumusa noted that the MDT comes with more administrative work than subject advisors:

> *The MDT visit is different. We call them ithimba (an isiZulu word meaning "the team"). I do not know if it is good or bad but there is a bad stereotype around ithimba (the team). They want more things than the subject advisors. There is a tool that they use. They want chalkboard summaries, lesson plans, timetables, ATP and so many other things.*

4.4.3. Loss of teacher autonomy

The monitoring tool used by external monitors is in line with all the requirements that assist in maintaining standardised quality expectations by the department. The same tool is used in different schools by different monitors. This tool closely follows the guidelines found in the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement. Through the implementation of external monitoring, teachers are expected to follow different advice which comes from different external monitors on top of those

that are within the school monitoring. Each of these should be accomplished at different levels of success or failure.

Jabu noted the confusion that comes with the multiple advice provided by external monitoring:

> *Sometimes they (MDT) give advice that is different from the ones that were given by subject advisors … So that makes our work confusing … but we end up taking what has been said by subject advisers and even forget about our teaching styles.*

Similarly, Azande shared about the contradiction between what advisors say and what the school departmental head expects:

> *Some subjects advise us … or some subject specialists usually prefer that there are weekly tests that are written in the subject or their topic test. But my HOD says I must focus on teaching and suggests that I do topic tests and topic revision.*

Teachers have to prioritise these and place their expectations aside. Their sense of judgement is critiqued because of the underperformance in their subject. The advice that comes with external monitoring is based on a one-size-fits-all approach, where monitors assume that the advice they give at one school applies to all schools. There is minimal consideration given to the context of the individual school and the diversity of learners' abilities.

A prominent reflection from the teachers was that minimised autonomy often left teachers doubtful of their professional judgement in their classroom. Teachers questioned their classroom decision-making skills and pedagogical knowledge. They further suggested that monitors had less trust in their capabilities as they did not produce the expected learner performance results. The aim of monitoring was to find fault in teachers practice and left some teachers disapproving of teacher collaboration. This caused some teachers to despise the increased accountability that comes with external monitoring. Not all teachers accepted monitors' advice about collaboration as they felt it led to others imposing on their teaching practice and teacher autonomy in their classroom. The data showed that having lead teachers meant that teachers were incapable of teaching and needed assistance from other teachers. Teachers felt that having a lead teacher exposed them to their peers because underperforming teachers had to sit in the class and watch their peers teach their learners. Even when teachers accepted the additional assistance, they alone were still held accountable for

their learners. Teachers suggested that the monitors do not consider any added help but the blame remains solely on the individual subject teacher.

Mandla pointed out that the idea of subject lead teachers undermined his teaching capabilities where he stated that:

> *At the end of the day, they advise us to invite lead teachers, and learners will still fail, but they come here and ask me what went wrong.*

Subject lead teachers are teachers that have a pattern of attaining good results in grade 12 NCS examinations. A lead teacher is often appointed to an underperforming school where he or she aims to assist in improving learner performance of the school. Lead teachers are selected by subject advisors; the lead teacher teaches the underperforming learners. It is often advised that the teacher of the underperforming subject sits in the class while the lead teacher is teaching, rather than collaborative teaching by the lead and resident teachers. The teacher being assisted is known as the resident teacher.

Bani demonstrated similar attitudes towards collaborative teaching and accountability. She said:

> *When iThimba comes, they ask who the teachers in the neighbouring schools are and how they can assist me—not how they can assist the learners. When we work with other teachers they will say, "Why are your learners still failing?" I am still to blame.*

Teachers saw external monitoring as a form of inspection and supervision by the department, where teachers must comply with the advice of the external monitors regardless of their professional judgement in their own everyday teaching and learning environment. When teachers fail to improve learner performance, teachers experience less autonomy. For example, Jabu had been monitored for several years, and in the previous three years, advisors had introduced the "Step Ahead" lesson plans. Although she explained that these do not fully cater to the needs of her learners, she is expected to use these, when being monitored. These lesson plans are issued to all schools using the one-size-fits-all approach.

Jabu felt that she was no longer able to use her professional judgment in her classroom.

I end up losing control of my class. Because all these people will advise and want to see their advice being implemented. The classroom is no longer my own. I am told what to teach by the annual teaching plan and when to teach by the annual teaching plan and now I am being told how to teach.

4.5. Emotional responses to external monitoring

Teachers in the study reflected on the external monitoring as it impacted on their teaching practice. The supervision impacted all teachers' emotions, where some teachers came out feeling motivated to work harder and reach the department set standards. On the other hand, there were those that felt that the monitoring was an emotional strain that left them demotivated and doubtful of their teaching capabilities.

Azande reflected on the affirmation that came with receiving positive feedback from the monitor, she said:

One thing that made me feel good is that when they checked my file, they almost got everything that they wanted. So that made me feel good to such an extent that I saw that even if I'm not 100% organised as a teacher at least I'm heading towards the correct direction.

4.5.1. Teachers' underperformance is open to scrutiny

There is a high level of accountability that comes with external monitoring. Four teachers stated that they are answerable for dilemmas that they are not responsible for and were being exposed for these in the technical report. The NSC examination results are presented by the DBE in technical reports. These reports are issued to all DBE high schools. Teachers then have access to the reports where individual schools and their achievements per subject can be viewed by any individual that has the reports. Teachers are further exposed during orientation workshops, where subject advisors verbally present performance of each school in the presence of educators from different schools. To teachers who performed poorly that sounds like "naming and shaming." Teachers are scrutinised and analysed by their colleagues. Teachers are being measured and are exposed due to the underperformance in their school. Individual school performance is recorded in the annual School Subject Report and the annual School Performance Report. Both of these are accessible to

any individuals once released by the department. Teachers expressed that they are judged not only by the department, especially the external monitors, but also by those who are viewing these policies. Through external monitoring, judgement from the monitoring officials as well as the Department of Education is placed on teachers who have failed to reach the departments' set targets and are required to provide reasons for why learner achievement is low. Teachers take on the responsibility for learners' actions rather than their actions.

Through monitoring, teachers feel a sense of judgement and this judgement is not always accepted peacefully by all teachers. External monitors do not have a depth of understanding of the challenges that teachers are face in the teaching and learning environment. This can lead to conflict between the teacher and the monitor. Teachers expressed that there is a high level of scrutiny and fault-finding rather than support. All the teachers' collages referred to the importance of "the percentage," as each collage had a percentage represented. During the presentation of her collage (Figure 4), Londiwe stated she highlighted the repetition of the percentage and distinguished between what the department expects and what teachers obtained:

> *The department wants us to get a high achievement of 75% but on the other hand, we are getting 12% and 33%, which is bad. All our failures are just put up for everyone to see.*

Bani also noted that her experience was that the monitors come to find fault, rather than to support:

> *Sometimes they don't come to develop, or they are not well informed as to how to encourage future development. So, the majority of the time, some of the monitors would be fault finders to us … to only find out your mistakes.*

4.5.2. Emotional pressure of external monitoring

There is a repetition of the word "pressure" throughout the data generated. This pressure was brought to light in both a beneficial ways and as a form of burden to teaching. Teachers mentioned that the pressure that comes with external monitoring, on top of the pressure to improve learner performance, and work pressures are also there. In some cases, the emotions conflicted as participants were able to draw both positive and negative elements of external monitoring. This was evident with Bani when first, she says:

So, I think monitoring is good in the sense that it does improve on confidence because as a teacher you have an idea as to what is required of you.

Maybe one of the downsides I can think of is the increased pressure that comes with this monitoring.

The pressure that comes from external monitoring interlinks with all stakeholders that are involved in the process. These include district officials, school principals, teachers, and even the learners. district officials who are monitoring are required to do their job by the Minister of Education; during monitor sessions the school departmental head becomes part of the monitoring as they must internally monitor teachers. The pressure is then put on the school departmental head. He or she then puts pressure on the teacher to improve learner performance. The school departmental head also experiences a sense of pressure and accountability for the underperformance of the subject they are supervising in the school. Departmental heads may not be part of the monitoring. However, the monitor may request to see this departmental head if the findings of external monitoring are poor. For example, if internal school monitoring is not performed adequately then the departmental head is held answerable for the underperformance in the subject he or she is supervising. Moreover, departmental heads put pressure on teachers, as they (departmental heads) too do not want to account for learner underperformance in a subject they are not teaching. Additionally, the pressure teachers gain from the departmental heads and external monitors impacts their teaching practice. Subsequently, teachers who are put under pressure tend to put pressure on their learners. Teachers want improvement in the subject performance and are willing to do a lot to achieve this. It is the learners who are writing the activities, the weekly tests, and formal and informal tasks. Teachers shift their learner-centred teaching practice and start using strategies that allow them to "tick the box" and meet all the expectations they are facing. This has a significant impact on the learners because learners are expected to do all the activities, corrections, and formal and informal assessments in the stipulated time, regardless of their understanding of the content.

Bongumusa noted that the pressure that comes with external monitoring impacts the departmental head as well as his learners:

> *There was a big amount of pressure on all our shoulders. I think back then I was still PL1 and my HOD would put too much pressure on me and I would also put a lot of pressure on the learners.*

Jabu expressed the same thoughts, she said:

> *They make us work under pressure. If one is making us work under pressure, it's not the work that is needed. You just work just to cover what is needed. So, working under pressure, the SMT pressurizes their educators, and the educators pressurize the learners. So, everyone goes under pressure.*

This pressure was viewed differently by all the teachers in this study. Two teachers were able to highlight the positive impacts of the pressure and three focused on the negative. The pressure mostly came from the Multi-Disciplinary Team monitoring. Teachers anticipated the arrival of the MDT and attempted to be as well prepared as they could before the arrival of the team. Teachers worked on updating their files, catching up on any outstanding learner activities, marking, preparing lesson plans and many other things. Since teachers could not predict the outcomes of the MDT visit, they felt pressure in terms of wanting validation of their teaching practice from the monitors. This form of validation is received from the feedback that teachers get in the monitoring tool discussion they have with the monitor. If teachers receive positive feedback, they receive a sense of endorsement because they are recognized as being capable of teaching.

Furthermore, pressure encourages the teacher to improve on the learner's underperformance in their subject. Having been monitored on several occasions is seen as a form of motivation where teachers want to break out of the monitoring cycle, and this can only be done if performance has met the department's standards.

Mandla mentions that the MDT puts pressure on teachers and works towards being prepared for external supervision.

> *There is a lot of pressure that comes with the MDT visit. I for one am never looking forward to any MDT visit even if I am feeling prepared but it seems as though they are there to find mistakes in all that we do as teachers.*

Bongumusa uses monitoring pressure to work towards improving learner performance:

> *The pressure that comes with it helps the teacher to want to improve in my subject and for learners to pass.*

The constant emphasis on performance, especially in grade 12, creates immense pressure among teachers. Teachers want to attain a performance percentage that is above that required by the department. This can come from internal pressure, school pressure or departmental pressure. Teachers aim to achieve high test scores and meet the performance targets which leads to exhaustion and feeling overwhelmed in and out of the teaching and learning environment.

When explaining her collage (Figure 4), Londiwe explained that:

> *The burnout we feel through the monitoring … I feel exhausted because we are always under pressure to do this and that. Sometimes I do not want to teach the subject at grade 12.*

4.5.3. Teacher demotivation and doubt

Teachers who participated in the study understand that there is a need for external monitoring to attain equal standards in the quality of education and contribute as additional support to teachers. Monitoring ensures that teachers are held answerable for their daily teaching and cannot just diverge from the policy implementation set by the DBE.

Bani understood the significance of external monitoring to ensure teachers are doing their jobs:

> *We are all people who need to be monitored. So, if your work is not monitored for others—I'm not saying for all but for others—if is not monitored, people will slack and will tend not to do their work.*

Nonetheless, the data revealed that teachers often feel demotivated and doubt their teaching practice during and after the monitoring process. Five teachers in the study spoke of either the demotivation or doubt they went through. Two spoke of the demotivation they get even from district specialists who are not qualified in the subject. Teachers questioned if the external monitor has the background knowledge required when giving advice. Perhaps it was for these reasons that monitors highlighted teachers' mistakes. Furthermore, teachers doubted their teaching practice, which led to them questioning their purpose as teachers and their capabilities and pedagogical knowledge.

Mandla noted that monitoring raises doubt in his teaching practice:

> *They already are doubting you, so it puts more doubt within yourself.*

Bongumusa had a similar insight, where he was demotivated and raised questions about those that were causing the demotivation:

> *The circuit managers have taught the foundation phase for the rest of their teaching experience, and they come to advise a teacher in grade 12. How does a foundation phase educator advise a grade 12 mathematics teacher? Maybe the circuit manager just sometimes comes to demotivate, not to advise about the subject.*

Londiwe also questioned the credibility of the MDT's advice:

> *I can say that the MDT team monitoring sometimes demotivates us as teachers. They come to the school, but they are not specialists in that subject. Most of them are leaders in the specialization of school leadership and management. They don't know anything about the subject, but they give advice which sometimes is not correct.*

The issue of demotivation was strong in the interviews, as Bani also mentioned how monitoring made her doubt her purpose as a teacher:

> *I won't lie, the process of monitoring demotivates you. They demotivate you as an individual because there are times when you even question yourself, such as "So, do I know my content? Do I know how to teach?" When the actual process of monitoring is okaying you, you feel a different range of emotions. One cannot explain—you have to be there and be monitored.*

Jabu began to question her teaching capabilities and questioned if she chose the correct teaching phase:

> *Sometimes you even feel that even though I'm qualified to teach at FET, I may be better off going and teaching during the senior phase. Maybe go to a primary school. It has affected me a lot, those teams.*

It appears that external monitors do not consider the emotional impact the process has on teachers. Many elements contribute to teachers' emotions and reactions to the feedback that they get from monitors. This was highly evident in the collage presentation and the discussion that arose through the presentations. Most of the remarks leaned towards the negative feedback that teachers receive. External monitoring often leaves teachers feeling doubtful about their pedagogical capabilities. Teachers question whether they can pass the content that they know to their learners. To some extent, the external monitors even raise questions about whether the teachers have grasped the subject content. They often feel doubtful about the profession and the grades that they are teaching. This sense of doubt demotivates teachers. They do not wish to continue teaching in grade 12 because this is the focus of external monitoring. Even though other grades are monitored, major emphasis is placed on grade 12 performance.

4.6. Collage presentations

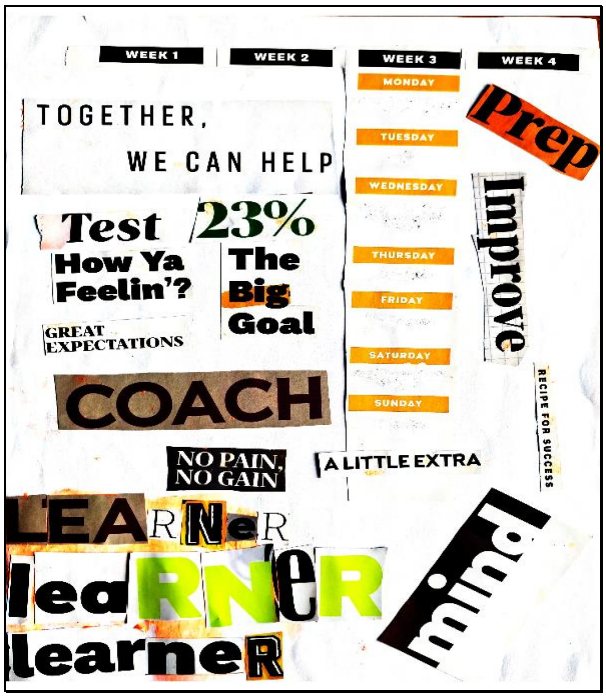

Figure 3. Azande's collage

Similar to his interview, Azande continued to draw on the positive side of external monitoring. The only drawback he found with monitoring was the need for the MDT team to visit the classrooms and speak with learners. This was explained through the repetition of the word "learner," as learners are at the centre of teaching and learning. He highlighted how there is a need for additional classes for teachers to cover the curriculum and give learners extra time to grasp the content and extra time to assist struggling learners. The use of the words "coach," "together we can help," "improve," "the big goal," and "no pain no gain" reflected on the positive aspects of external monitoring as it is implemented to assist in the collegial improvement of learner underperformance.

Azande highlighted the positive added support of external monitoring; he emphasised the collaboration he had encountered as a result of being monitored and the professional development he gained through the process. He said:

> *External monitoring shows us how the department cares for our learners and the education we are giving learners. We are not always in a good space when*

> *the monitors come but what would happen if each year these learners fail and no one asks why or wants to help improve the results? For me monitoring has been a rollercoaster, but I am grateful for the monitors. Hence I used the words, "together we can help." The department is trying to meet the teachers halfway in attempting to improve these results. Sometimes the approach is not okay, but the improvement is a team effort.*

During the presentation of his collage, Azande stated that his learner improvement had increased in 2022. He said:

> *I used "no pain no gain" because I started of resenting the MDT, after all their visits, but it didn't seem fruitful. Now look—my learners are performing better. Maybe if I had been part of this discussion last year, I would have a lot of negative things to say about monitoring. But my mathematics advisor assisted me in understanding that we all need to account for our actions and through that we can become motivated to do better.*

When asked if the learner improvement was a result of external monitoring, Azande explained that:

> *For me, my subject advisor had a significant role in the grade 12 improvement. The additional support came with learning resources that I previously didn't have access to. Even the advice that the advisor gave was fruitful, because he had an understanding of the subject.*

Figure 4. Londiwe's collage

Londiwe's collage illustrated a clear distinction between the positive and negative side of external monitoring, by creating a division and using the word "divide" in the centre of the page. She suggested that the DBE want learner improvement of 75% but teachers often fall below the DBE benchmark. Londiwe noted that she aims high in attempting to change the performance in her subject, where she could then take control of her teaching and be able to make professional judgments on her teaching practice. The use of the word "warm and comforting" was from the experiences of the support she received from her subject advisor. The advisor had constantly provided support and frequent visits since she first began teaching. The use of different percentages (12.2% and 33.9%) illustrated how the DBE emphasises percentages, especially in grade 12. She spoke of the pressure, panic, and burnout of feeling overworked due to learner underperformance.

During the discussion of her collage, Londiwe emphasised the importance of aiming high for both herself and her learners, and putting her professional judgement before the monitors added support. She stated that:

> *The words "aiming high" and the 75% link together because it is not nice being in the MDT process. I want to move out of this process and the best way to do that is if my learners achieve the high marks. Together we will set high goals even if they may be out of reach with the learners I have this year. Maybe, by*

chance, the learners will surprise me and pass. I am the one who needs to take control of my teaching in my class. Yes, the monitors can attempt to support me, but end of the day I am the one who is in front of the learners, teaching.

Figure 5. Bongumusa's collage

Bongumusa's collage (Figure 5) showed both sides of external monitoring. The runner and "come back" illustrated how he once was able to improve learner performance in 2018 and how monitoring motivated him to once again aim higher and be removed from the records of subject underperforming. Bongumusa revealed a side that appreciated the monitoring, by using the words "embracing," he referred to the opportunity to gain development that not all teachers are exposed to. External supervision is an everyday reality that teachers often face and leads to teachers feeling depressed and anxious about their classroom practice. The COVID-19 pandemic is present in most of the collages because the data revealed that COVID-19 had impacted learner performance in 2020 and 2021. Bongumusa had encounters with the MDT. However, he felt that subject advisors were there to give the best advice to the teachers who were underperforming, but also to show support to teachers throughout the teaching profession.

4.7. Conclusion

The data presented in this chapter highlighted how teachers feel blamed for learner underachievement in numerous factors of teaching and learning; how teachers experience monitoring, and the emotional responses teachers have to external monitoring. External monitoring

has both positive and negative impacts on teachers and this has a significant influence on teachers' practice, where teacher autonomy is decreased as external monitoring increases. Through monitoring, teachers have to face scrutiny where they either receive validation or disapproval of their work. The next chapter discusses the findings that were part of the study and the recommendations that came to light from the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

This study aimed to explore teachers' experiences of external monitoring and how it impacted their work and identities in underperforming schools. This chapter summarises the findings of the study about the three research questions posed in Chapter One. The study used semi-structured interviews, collages and focus groups to generate data from six high school teachers. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do teachers experience external monitoring?
2. How does external monitoring impact teachers' work?
3. How does external monitoring influence teachers' identities?

5.2. Discussion of the findings

Research question one: How do teachers experience external monitoring?

The findings of this study have shown that teachers were accepting of external supervision but did not agree with the conditions in which external monitoring was being done. They argued that they, as teachers, are not the only contributing factor to the schools' underperformance, but there are other factors leading to it. De Grauwe (2008) suggests that even though teachers' performance is being monitored externally, however this does not ensure that learners' academic performance will improve. Teachers mentioned that there are multiple contributing factors; these included the effects of COVID-19 when learning time was lost due to school closures and a high rate of absenteeism by both learners and teachers. This led to the loss of learning content and, thus minimal curriculum coverage. Grade 12 examination papers covered all grade 12 work including topics that were not taught or learnt in lower grades. Another causal factor mentioned was that DBE kept on changing the academic performance standards in different years. As a result, teachers kept on striving for a benchmark that was going to be changed when the results were presented. Participants also argued that learner performance depends on the quality of the group of learners

they are teaching in a particular year, which in turn affects the overall school performance. They called the group of learners in a particular class and year "the material."

Most of the teachers reflected on both negative and positive experiences that come with being externally monitored. One of the positive aspects was the additional professional development teachers gained through monitoring. Literature argues that external monitoring assists teachers in making informed decisions and improves the quality of teaching and learning in the education system (Mandinach et. al., 2003). Similarly, O'Day (2002) states that through monitoring teachers receive feedback that helps them to better understand their own teaching practice and this can lead to improved teacher performance. This was particularly evident when subject advisors were monitoring. The expertise that came with subject advisors was appreciated and well utilised by the teachers, because they gave relevant advice, suitable to the subject. Professional development was also received through the Just in Time J-I-T workshops and collaboration in the PLCs. Teachers used ideas shared in these platforms to attempt to improve their learner performance. External monitoring further allowed teachers to reflect on their own teaching practice. It allowed teachers to gain a perspective from someone who was not within their school context, even though the external perspectives were not always accepted by all teachers. Similar to Alexander (2000), who asserts that external monitoring does not consider the context and happenings of the school, the teachers in this study felt that external monitors possess a limited understanding of the school.

However, there was a stronger emphasis on the negative experiences of this type of monitoring. Teachers mentioned that they shift from a learner-centred teaching approach to one that will "tick all the boxes" for what is needed by external monitors. External monitors placed pressure on the school DHs, and that pressure ends up settling on teachers as the DHs try to transfer it to them. Teachers were further pressured into meeting the department-set standards for learners' performance, and those who failed to meet these standards were scrutinised and felt exposed by the DBE. Teachers' emotions were impacted through the process of external monitoring, as they felt that their teaching capabilities were being questioned by monitors because of the learners' performance rather than their own performance.

Another aspect mentioned by teachers was being "exposed." External monitoring comes with teacher scrutiny. Mockler (2011) suggests that the scrutiny in external monitoring is there to ensure

that teachers comply with the departmental set objectives. This scrutiny can be experienced by teachers as pressure.

Another negative aspect was that teachers in this study did not always agree with the advice given by the monitors, and they sometimes received contradictory advice. For example, a district official who once taught in primary school is now monitoring a grade 12 mathematics teacher. The participants sometimes questioned the credibility of the advice given by the external monitors and the teachers did not always agree with the monitor's feedback, since she lacked experience in teaching grade 12 and the necessary subject content. Leithwood et al. (2002) assert that external monitors should provide feedback to teachers that is credible, truthful, and non-biased, but teachers expressed a different point of view on the integrity of external monitors' assessments. Throughout the year, teachers encounter different monitors. This causes confusion and frustration for teachers as they receive contradictory advice and they do not always know which advice to prioritise. Ehren et al. (2020) state that there is little collaboration between subject advisors and district officials, and this was also the case in my study. Each has a different role in monitoring and supporting the schools.

A further negative aspect was that the monitors seemed to blame the teachers and only focused on the performance of the teachers. Teachers proposed that the monitors should not only focus on teachers' performance, but they should also focus on the learners. Monitors ought to take time to visit the classrooms during lessons, to observe whether learners are passive or active during teaching and learning. External monitoring does not consider the "material"—the quality of learners that are being taught. Instead of criticising teachers for learners' underperformance, initiatives to motivate learners need to be implemented within the external monitoring process. This is in line with the idea of monitors having a limited knowledge of the context of the school (Alexander, 2000; De Grauwe, 2008).

Limited time was a prominent reason given by teachers for learner underperformance. Teachers said that the time reflected in the ATP for each topic was insufficient as it did not fully cater to struggling learners. The finding demonstrated that the monitors do not consider any time factors. Instead, there is an increase in accountability for teachers who are not on par with the ATP tracking standards. Additional classes assist as catch-up strategies for curriculum coverage. However,

teachers highlighted that their personal responsibilities are not taken into consideration as these classes are conducted on Saturdays and during holidays.

Research question two: How does external monitoring impact teachers' practice?

One impact of the monitoring process is that teachers can gain valuable feedback on their teaching practice and teaching strategies (Mandinach et al., 2006; Willms, 2003). The findings affirm that one of the advantages teachers experienced was reflection on their strengths and areas of improvement in their teaching practice. In the process of discussing findings between the teacher and external monitor, monitors gave insight based on the completion of the monitoring tools, highlighting areas of concern and teachers' strengths. However, most of the feedback focused on additional paperwork such as the ATP, marking learner exercises and great emphasis on learners' written work which included both formal and informal assessments.

A further impact on teachers' practice was that teachers were expected to satisfy the needs of the department through attending training workshops, extra classes, and constant supervision, with the aim of overall school improvement. The extra classes and workshops were advantageous as they formed part of teacher development and teachers were able to use the added time to cover the curriculum and assist struggling learners. However, it was not clear how effective these classes and workshops were in improving learner performance in underperforming schools. Jansen (2004) argued that during and post-monitoring, teachers did not show a true representation of their teaching practice because of the fear of the consequences that may arise from external monitoring. Teachers in the study showed concerns and fear prior to the external monitor visits and tried to be as well-prepared as possible. Teachers became uncertain of the monitors' expectations and the feedback that they may receive. The uncertainty may be a result of the increasing DBE set standards, as teachers stated that these changes have a significant impact on the school's underperforming status. Spaull (2015) mentions that educational monitoring policies may neglect teachers' capacity and focus on increasing responsibility for teachers. This was supported by my study as teachers felt that they had greater responsibility in terms of the time demanded to attend workshops and offer extra classes.

Data presented in chapter four shows that teachers were content with the external monitoring done by subject advisors. Subject advisors are seen as subject specialists who provide relevant guidance, support, and alternative improvement strategies. The advice given by the subject advisors were

used by teachers in the effort to improve learner performance. They encouraged collaboration between teachers. Through collaborative efforts, teachers gained knowledge from each other, exchanged ideas and built professional learning committees. This corresponded with Hevesi (2005) who states that the correct implementation of monitoring can assist in the improvement of teachers' practice. However, forced collaboration was not always accepted, particularly when it involved lead teachers. This was because teachers felt that their own professionalism was undermined by having a lead teacher take their classes.

Some MDT officials did provide opportunities for the discussion of the findings from the monitoring tools about teachers' curriculum coverage and administration. These discussions were viewed by teachers as developmental sessions that were provided by experts in a particular subject. Teachers used the feedback as a form of reflection on their teaching, to find ways in which they could improve their pedagogical content and gain insight into their shortfalls. The feedback altered teachers' practice by changing their teaching strategies, holding additional classes, and attending compulsory workshops.

Workshops were viewed as developmental support. However, these workshops encroached on teachers' personal responsibilities on weekends. Additionally, the advice from monitors often came with added paperwork. It required more marking, more examples given to learners, more administration of formal and informal tasks and learner corrections. All this was to be done within the national prescribed teaching time. Teachers' practice changed because teachers became more adaptive to the external monitors expectations rather than addressing the diverse academic needs of the learners.

The findings suggest that teachers experience less autonomy as they must comply with the advice of external monitors, regardless of their professional judgment. The increase in what was expected from teachers led to limited teacher autonomy and a decrease in teachers' professional judgement. External monitoring aims to support underperforming teachers. However, it also impacts on teachers' autonomy. Limited teacher autonomy means that teachers will have less freedom to exercise their professional judgement in their own teaching and learning environments. For example, teachers were issued with DBE-set lesson plans that they must follow, but these do not always cater to the unique needs of the individual learners. Furthermore, limited teacher autonomy means that teachers are unable to align their teaching practice with their own teaching identities.

Less autonomy minimises teachers' worth—teachers doubt themselves and their teaching content knowledge. The data revealed that the feedback from external monitoring minimised teacher autonomy, where teachers attempted to adhere to the advice received from the monitors and often neglected their own professional judgement. Additionally, minimised teacher autonomy suggested that teachers became reluctant to access the added support, such as assistance from lead teachers.

Lead teachers were allocated to schools and the underperforming teacher became a learner in their own class. The data demonstrated that minimised teacher autonomy led teachers to have a more instructional approach to teaching. They started teaching to complete the curriculum and follow the advice of the monitors, rather than teaching for learner understanding. Teachers' teaching beliefs and approaches became test-driven as teachers aimed to meet the expectations of the monitors. Teachers became more focused on the advice of the monitors, and this minimised their own decision-making initiatives. Teachers no longer wanted to risk diverging from the advice as they would further be accountable for it.

There was an increase in teachers' paperwork, which meant that there was more that teachers were accountable for. Teachers sensed that there was less trust between themselves and the department because they were not meeting department-set standards. The department placed more accountability on teachers as they were required to account for learner results. On the other hand, Jansen (2004) suggests that teachers become more reluctant to take innovative steps that could assist in improving learner performance, such as engaging in collaborative teaching. Not all teachers approve of teacher collaboration as it comes with increased accountability regardless of who has been teaching.

Research question three: How does external monitoring influence teachers' identities?

The collages in the study gave participants a chance to draw on the emotions experienced through external monitoring. Participants were able to reflect on how external monitoring impacted on their professional teacher identity. The interviews further allowed participants to clarify how being monitored brought about a high level of accountability and low autonomy. This significantly changed teachers' professional identities depending on the individual experiences teachers had faced. The findings of this study revealed that teachers focus more on the negative influences of external monitoring on their teacher identities. This contradicts Fullan and Hargreaves (2012)

when they argue that external monitoring can positively impact the development of teachers' identities as it allows for reflection on teachers' work and encourages professional development.

External monitoring demoralises and demeans teachers' professional dignity (Jansen, 2004; Spaull, 2015; Öztuzcu, 2021). Teachers in this study saw external monitoring as a platform where the DBE exposes them regarding their learners' underperformance. This exposure was done through public records and significantly impacted how teachers saw themselves in their teaching profession. The findings suggested that this exposure led to teachers having increased pressure as they worked hard towards getting out of the underperforming category. The pressure was acknowledged by all components in the school—the principal, SMT and teachers being monitored—since they no longer wanted to be part of the external monitoring process. The pressure pushed teachers to change their teaching beliefs and values because they had to adapt to the challenges they were faced with. Their teaching objectives were to get through the syllabus and fulfil the external monitor's advice regardless of the learner's needs, capabilities, and diversities.

For some teachers, the pressure positively impacted them, because they became motivated to improve learner performance. The motivation that came with external monitoring pressure was linked with the approval that teachers felt when they received positive feedback. On the contrary, those who received negative feedback became doubtful of their teaching practice. Mockler (2011) suggests that external monitoring provides an opportunity for district officials to scrutinise teachers. Teachers received scrutiny as they indicated that external supervision was established to find fault in their teaching practice as they failed to meet DBE-set standards. Through the feedback of external monitors teachers became less confident in their professional judgement. The reactions to the feedback from the monitors varied. One teacher saw external monitoring as the DBE's way of supporting teachers and providing access to professional development. On the other hand, three teachers saw the feedback as the DBE's way to scrutinise them. These teachers began to doubt their teaching practice and professional judgement. The data demonstrated that teachers who failed to meet the set standards felt that monitoring was there to undermine their dignity and expose their failures. The data demonstrated that teacher identities were influenced by the feedback they received. The additional support was not always accepted by all teachers, as they felt that having lead teachers was a further platform for exposure from the lead teacher assisting in their school.

This further demotivated teachers because lead teachers were aware that they were underperforming in their subject. The data revealed that there was a mismatch between the DBE set standards and teachers' realities. There were constant changes in the set target pass percentage, where the DBE increased the NCS target each year. Even when learner performance did improve, the increase in the standard meant learners were still "underperforming" because they fell short of the target. This regularly left teachers feeling frustrated and demotivated in their desire to achieve the new standards. Rather, teachers were doubtful of their teaching practice, approaches, and purpose. Unexpectedly, none of the teachers seemed to doubt their content knowledge as they all felt that they were adequate teachers. Teachers did not blame themselves for the learner's underperformance.

The study used a conceptual framework which suggested that external monitoring increases accountability, and accountability affects teachers' autonomy. Lower autonomy, in turn, impacts on teachers' identities. The findings demonstrated that teachers who are monitored are answerable for the learners' underperformance in their subjects (that is, they became more accountable). Through monitoring, teachers receive feedback and advice that often shifts teachers' practice and minimises teacher autonomy. Teachers felt that they often had to focus only on the coverage of the curriculum and less on the actual learning needs of their learners. This shift influenced teachers' autonomy, as they felt that they had to follow the advice given by the monitoring team. The data generated did suggest that some teachers lost confidence in their own practice and did not like feeling exposed by the external monitoring process.

5.3. Recommendations

There are numerous DBE initiatives that aim to provide learners with quality education. External monitoring of underperforming schools is one of these initiatives, as it aims to assist and provide support to schools that are not attaining the department-set standards. However, teachers who are being monitored have expressed numerous challenges. This section of the study provides recommendations from the findings of the data generated.

I recommend that during MDT visits, each member should focus on the aspects of their sub-directorate function. For example, SNES should focus on learners who experience learning barriers; examinations should advise learners about examination techniques, and subject specialists focus on their specialisation. Subject advisors are informed of the new developments in

a certain subject. Therefore, they are best suited to monitor their subject. External monitoring processes should consider the school context and learners' academic capabilities, where monitors will utilize a supervision model suitable for the learners' academic performance. Furthermore, I recommend that teachers' perspectives of monitoring should be taken into consideration, and that the completed monitoring tool should be issued to teachers once they have been monitored. Monitoring is an instrument that is in place to support teachers. This should be emphasised to all monitors, and teachers should be truthful in their reflections once monitored. Teachers who are not confident in their subject content can use monitoring as a tool for professional development, since the tool can be used for reflection by teachers. There should be collaboration between all districts involved in monitoring so that the advice given to teachers is consistent. Teachers' classroom practice must be taken into consideration in the monitoring process, because not all teachers are struggling in the teaching and learning environment.

This study was done in one district and in one circuit, therefore the findings cannot be generalised. Furthermore, the participants in this study were teachers of the underperformed subjects. Further studies are recommended in more than one district, in different circuits, and include teachers of other subjects.

5.4. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how external monitoring impacted on teachers' practice and teachers' identities in rural high schools. The study utilised a qualitative approach to data collection. Data was generated using semi-structured interviews, collages, and a focus group. The findings of the study demonstrated that teachers have different experiences of external monitoring that have a significant impact on their teaching practice as they are accountable for the underperformance in their subject. Furthermore, teachers' responses to external monitoring influenced teachers' identities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: 2023 KwaZulu-Natal Provincial DBE subject monitoring tool.

KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

WAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENTOF EDUCATION : Caleon.vethe@kzndoe.gov.za
Postal Address: Private Bag X9136 • Pietermaritzburg • 3200 • Republic of South Africa
Physical Address: 185 Langalibalele Street • Old Mutual Building • Pietermaritzburg • 3201

Notes to the monitor

1. Monitors should ask for the last analysis of results
2. Pick the lowest performed subject in each department
3. Select the teacher's file for the lowest performed subject
4. Check 5 class work books for the subject selected in 2 above.
5. Departmental Head for the same subject must bring his/her management file
6. The same DH will be interviewed for the subject in 2 above
7. Check for evidence that the content taught is ATP compliant.
8. Select the lowest performed subject in Grade 9
9. Interview both the DH and the teacher for the lowest performed subject in Grade 9
10. Make sure that you select different subjects from your 4 schools.
11. More sample will provide us with sufficient data to analyse and interpret to make appropriate recommendations.

UMGUNGUNDLOVU DISTRICT

CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT MONITORING INSTRUMENT

School.....**CMC:**.....**Circuit** .....

Principal: ..... **Contact No:** ..... **Date:** .....

Grade 12 Pass Percentage: 2022 .....

Subject/s sampled for monitoring.....**Name of Monitor:** .....

1. Does the school have the following instruments?			
Aspects	**Yes**	**No**	**Remarks**
1.1. Concise lesson preparation			
1.2. Subject/s Improvement Plan/s			
1.3. Curriculum coverage			
1.4. Homework Time Table			
1.5. Handover Tool			
1.6. Is chalk board summary/ class notes available and monitored?			
1.7 Does the School understand a policy on concessions?			
1 .8 Does the school appy for concessions?			

2. Indicate how many pieces of work are given to learners per week on the following aspects in the subjects offered:
Subject: ..... Grade: .....Pass%..... Suggested No of Tasks per week: .....
Name of teacher:.....

WEEK NO:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
DATES:	*18-20 January (3days)*	*23 -27 January (5 days)*	*30 Jan- February (5 days)*	*6-10 February (5 days)*	*13-17 February (5 days)*	20-24 February (5 days)	27 Feb- 3 Mar (5 days)	TOTAL
Classwork								
Homework								
Controlled Class test								
Formal SBA tasks								

COMMENTS:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Comment on the administration and control of Learner Activities/Tasks/Tests.

	Classwork/ Homework		Controlled Class test	Formal tasks per term completed as per PoA	Comments
a) Are the administered classwork/homework controlled? Yes/No					
b) How many tasks are marked and not marked?	Marked	Not marked			
c) Are topics and dates indicated? Yes/No					
d) Are skills/content evident as per ATP? Yes/No					
e) Any feedback /corrections done? Yes/No					

RECOMMENDATIONS: _____

_____

_____

PRINCIPAL'S NAME:---------- **MONITOR'S NAME :** ---------- **DATE:** ----------

PRINCIPAL'S SIGNATURE: ..... **MONITOR'S SIGNATURE:** ..... **DATE:** .....

SCHOOL STAMP

Appendix B: Informed consent letter to participants.

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL
For research with human participants

INFORMED CONSENT RESOURCE

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Project title: ***The impact of external monitoring on teachers' work teachers' identities in high schools.***

Date: 29/06/2022

To whom it may concern

My name is Sandisiwe Mazeka. I am a mathematics teacher at Mpande High School and have been teaching since 2019. My contact details are [redacted] and email address [redacted] /211515977@stu.ukzn.ac.za.

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that seeks to understand the impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and teachers' identities in high schools. The aim and purpose of this research is to gain an in depth understanding and description of how external monitoring in T65 schools impacts teachers' practice and their identities. The study is expected to enroll 6 participants from high schools under T65 performance, specifically in the Langelihle (psyedonym) Circuit in Pietermaritzburg. In each school I seek to obtain 2 participants. There is a total of three schools targeted for the research. It will involve the following procedures; the participants will take part in semi-structured interviews that will take 45 minutes, and teachers will be asked to create a collage. The duration of your participation if you choose to enroll and remain in the study is expected to be less than a month.

Throughout the research study, if necessary, participants will have full access to a psychologist that will be provided by the researcher.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number_____).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at
Contact number: [redacted]
Email address: [redacted] or 211515977@stu.ukzn.ac.za

or

Supervisor contact details

Contact number: [redacted]

Email address: BertramC@ukzn.ac.za

Or

UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Participation in the research is voluntary and participants may withdraw participation at any point throughout the research process. There are no potential consequences to the participant for withdrawal from the study. If participants choose to withdraw, they will be requested to draft a letter stating their withdrawal. Participant's termination in the research study will be done if participants show resistance in full participation in the research study.

Within this dissertation the names of all participants will not be used, rather pseudonyms will be used; features that will identify the schools will be changed to ensure anonymity. Trust will be built between me and the participants, upholding professional standards, clarifying my role and interest in the research procedure. The participants will be given full assurance that the information will be kept confidential. Any printed copies of raw data/transcripts of interviews and collages will be securely locked away in my supervisor's office and after 5 years will be shredded. All digital audio files, as well as all other electronic data will be stored on the hard drive of the password-protected personal computer of the researcher, as well as on the hard drive of the password-protected laptop of the supervisor. Files will be shared via memory email only. This data will be deleted after 5 years from both computers, as well as any other device.

CONSENT

I …….. have been informed about the study entitled *The impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and teachers' identities in high schools,* by Sandisiwe Mazeka.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact the researcher at

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

Contact number: [redacted]
Email address: nde.ongakagmail.com or 211515977@stu.ukzn.ac.za

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO
Use of my collage for research purposes YES / NO

_____ _____
Signature of Participant **Date**

Appendix C: Request to conduct research

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL

For research with human participants

Request for permission to conduct research project

Date: 30/06/2022

Project title: ***The impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and teachers' identities in high schools.***

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Sandisiwe Mazeka, a student in the education department majoring in Teacher Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu- Natal (Pietermaritzburg Campus). I am conducting a study as part of the requirement for Masters in Education degree. The project aims to explore the impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and teachers' identities.

I kindly request permission to conduct this research study in your school. Participants in this research study will be required to complete a collage after participating in semi-structured interview that is expected to last between 45 minutes at a time suitable for each participant. Follow-up interviews may be conducted if necessary. Each interview will be voice-recorded. The data will not be made public in any way and will only be

used for research purposes. The school and teacher's identities will not be made public. The data will be kept anonymous; it will not be possible for it to be linked to the name of the school.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact me at:

Cell phone: [redacted]

Email address: [redacted] **or 211515977@stu.ukzn.ac.za**

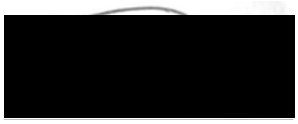
Or

The UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details below.

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus Govan
Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your cooperation.



_____

Sandisiwe Mazeka

DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I, _____(Name of the Principal) have been informed about the study entitled: The impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and teachers' identities in high schools.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time

If I have any questions or concerns about the study or the researchers, I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus Govan
Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Appendix D: Semi-structured interview schedule.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

My name is Sandisiwe Mazeka and I am currently doing my master's degree. The topic of my research is "***The impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and teachers' identities in high schools.*** I would like to use this opportunity to interview you, in order to gain an understanding of your experiences in your teaching practice.

With your permission, I will be to asking you some questions about your background, your education, some experiences you have had, difficulties encountered and expertise you have gained.

This information will help me as an interviewer to gain understanding about you and enable me to gather data for my research.

This interview will take about 45 minutes.

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching at this school?
2. What subjects do you teach?
3. Why did you choose to become a teacher of (maths or science)?
4. How long has your school been identified as a T65 school?
5. Why do you think your school was identified as a T65 school?
6. Why do you think the learner achievement in your school is low?
7. What has changed in the school since it was identified as a T65 school? (probe: extra classes, monitoring of extra visits by subject advisors)
8. What groups of monitors have visited your school? (Probe: subject advisors, circuit managers, Multi-disciplinary Teams)

9. How often do each group or official visit the school and what do they do at the school? (probe: is the external monitoring supportive, any positive or negative experiences)
10. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of external monitoring?
11. How does this impact on your work as a teacher? (Probe: extra classes, more stress, doubting own competence).
12. How has monitoring influenced your teaching and assessment practices and what you do in the classroom? (can you give an example of your teaching before monitoring and after monitoring).
13. How has monitoring made you feel about teaching and your purpose as a teacher? (probe: motivation, understanding the purpose of your work).
14. Is there anything else you'd like to say about your experience of monitoring?

Collage

Design a collage describing how external monitoring has impacted your teaching and your teacher identities. Choose pictures and words that reflect your emotions about external monitoring.

- This collage may be used a reflection on how external monitoring has impacted your teachers purpose, self-refection, teaching and learning environment, professional teacher identities, or any other aspects not covered in the interview questions.
- You may use photos, words, images or drawings.
- This collage may be emailed or will be collected one week after the interview has been conducted.
- Magazines will be provided as per request.

Appendix E: Permission to conduct research from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

21 September 2022

Sandisiwe Benerdette Mbalentsha Mazeka (211515977)
School Of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear SBM Mazeka,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00004571/2022
Project title: The impact of external monitoring on teachers' work and teachers' identity in high schools.
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 29 July 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

This approval is valid until 21 September 2023.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

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

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Appendix F: Permission to conduct research from KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 392 1051
Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Mrs B.T. Ntuli Ref.:2/4/8/7315

Miss Benerdette Mbalentsha Mazeka
[redacted]

Dear Miss Mazeka

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"THE IMPACT OF EXTERNAL MONITORING ON TEACHERS' WORK AND TEACHERS' IDENTITY IN HIGH SCHOOLS**: in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from **05 July 2022 to 31 March 2025.**
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

UMGUNGUNDLOVU DISTRICT

[redacted]

Mr G.N. Ngcobo
Head of Department: Education
Date: 05 July 2022

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

APPENDIX G: Turnitin Receipt