

Rural School Transport: Poor rural learners' experiences of their trips to and from school

By

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Supervisor's statement

This dissertation has been submitted with/without my approval.

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Date:

Declaration

I Bafana Joseph Mahlaba declare that

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Acknowledgement

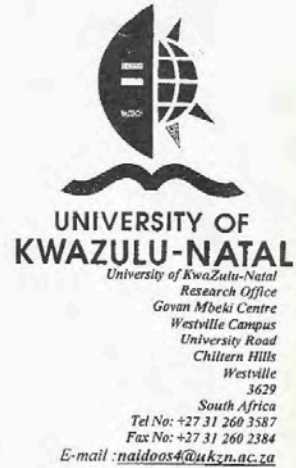
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All participants who openly and willingly participated. Without their participation, none of this would have been possible.

Ethical Clearance Certificate



15 July 2010

Mr B J Mahlaba
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Dear Mr Mahlaba

PROTOCOL: Rural School transport in KwaZulu-Natal
ETHICAL APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0795/2010 : Faculty of Education

In response to your application dated 09 July 2010, Student Number: **952042475** the Humanities & Social Sciences Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been given **FULL APPROVAL**.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

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

Yours faithfully

Professor Steve Collings (Chair)
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE

SC/sn

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Abstract

Poor rural learners who walk long distances to school and back home in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal

This study is about poor rural learners who walk long distances to school and back home. The study focuses on learners' experiences between home and school, and how some experiences become a barrier to education. Two methods of data generation were used, that is, focus group interview and a purposive observation.

The focus group was conducted with ten Grade 10 learners. These in-depth interviews focused on their experiences during their walk between home and school. The composition of learners that were selected was gender balanced. There were five boys and five girls from one rural secondary school in KwaZulu-Natal. During the focus group interview the learners told stories about their experiences on their walk to school, and they were capable of articulating their experiences. The purposive observation was of learners coming to school. During the observation week a high rate of absenteeism was noted.

The findings were that poor rural learners who walk long distances experience delays and miss the first lesson of school. However, this changes according to the seasons of the year. For example, in summer experiences were different from those in the winter. There were also life threatening risks such as snakes that learners come across as they walk to school. The conclusion is that some of the experiences, such as late-coming and absenteeism, lead to barriers that undermine access to quality education.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 introduction

The South African government and its Provincial Departments of Education have some transport learner policies made and implemented with an aim of redressing the imbalances of the past in terms of providing learner transport across the country. The condition that was set by most departments was that learners who walk more than three km from home to the nearest school would qualify for 100% free transport from home to their schools. The existing problem is that presently there are learners in the province of KwaZulu-Natal who walk more than three km from home to school who do not enjoy this benefit. Therefore, this study investigates the challenges and negative experiences that affect such learners' performance on their education when walking long distances from home to school. This is affecting these learners in accessing free basic Education.

1.2 Background

My study is about poor rural learners who walk long distances to school and back home. Walking is the only mode of transport available to them, because in some rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal there are very few roads between home and school, and no public transport. Hence learners depend solely on pathways. This study is worth doing because there is scant research about how transport in rural settings is a challenge to learners accessing schooling.

In rural areas most families are living in poverty and they suffer because of it (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). My view is that the government has done a great deal in alleviating these issues of poverty. For example, most rural schools have been categorised as non-fee-paying schools (Act no.84 of the South African Constitution). In addition, the government provides such schools with free meals through the National Feeding Scheme Programme (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2008). However there is little being done concerning the transportation needs of poor rural learners. Transport for learners is more easily available in urban areas where the road infrastructure is developed. This is different when compared with the deep rural setting

where the dominant mode of getting to school is by means of walking. In recognition of this fact, the government has attempted various initiatives such as constructing pedestrian bridges and sponsoring bicycle projects (Department of Transport, 1999). However, these improvements are small in relation to the enormity of the problem in the rural areas. Although the issued a draft Scholar Transport Policy in February 2009 (Department of Transport, 2009), it has not adopted the policy in the provinces.

Nevertheless, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996a) in its Bill of Rights chapter states that everyone has the right to Basic Education, including Adult Basic Education and Further Education. This means that, through reasonable measures, the government must make education available and accessible to rural learners. Therefore, the government has a mandate to provide all learners up to the age of 15 years, even in rural areas, with compulsory education (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). Thus, this study focuses on understanding the rural learners' experiences of getting to and from school and how this affects their day at school. As a manager and educator in my school I have seen that learners who walk long distances usually miss the first period and early morning classes that some teachers organise for their learners. The driving question was "How does walking to school affect their access to schooling?" My reading also shows that little research has been conducted on this specific topic and that serves as one of the rationale for undertaking this study. For purposes of this study, I wanted to understand this matter of walking long distances to school through listening to the learners' own experiences and from their own point of view. The approach of listening to learners talking about their experiences goes along with what Nelson Mandela once said:

So often we make the mistake of talking about children, forgetting that they are the ones who most acutely experience those needs and that they are quite capable of articulating those needs and experiences
(Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005, p.7).

1.3 Rationale for the study

Other researchers have shown interest in school transport in different ways. For instance, Karlsson (2007) has researched learners who travel daily across the city of Durban from townships to attend schools in suburbs. She found that such learners have a lively, direct experience of the streets. For them life is busy, full of interaction and stimulation, yet there are

also dangers nearby. However, her study is silent about rural learners' transportation and the challenges that they face in the rural setting. Another scholar that has conducted research in this area is Mbatha (2005) and her study focused on rural areas. She found that learners in rural areas walked through long grass to get to school and also that on their way to and from school, they encounter criminals and sometimes fall victim to abduction for marriage purposes (Mbatha, 2005). Potgieter, Pillay and Rama (2006) studied transport for rural learners and found that the dominant form of transport is walking. The National Household Travel Survey (Department of Transport, 2003) indicates that in general, learners in KwaZulu-Natal are severely affected by a lack of appropriate transport to school. On the whole, 79% of the province's roughly 3.5 million learners (Rogan, 2008) walked to school while just below 13% used taxis or buses (Department of Transport, 2003). Learners in KwaZulu-Natal experience the longest travel times to school of all the provinces in South Africa (**Source**). Of all the learners in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, 42% travel for more than thirty minutes to get to school and 25% travel for more than 45 minutes (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport, 2007). This highlights the importance of understanding how walking long distances affects learners and their access to education.

Compared to the studies mentioned above current research included the voices of the rural learners themselves about their experiences when walking such long distances between home and school. In addition, their accounts of how such experiences act as a barrier to their participation at school is explored.

1.4 Research questions

Two following research questions guide my study:

1. What are rural learners' experiences when they walk long distances to school and back home?
2. How does walking long distances to school yield barriers to education for rural learners?

1.5 Focus and purpose of the study

The study focuses on the learners in one rural area which is characterised by poverty. The main purpose of the study is to understand how walking long distances to school affects them on daily basis and also how it relates to them accessing education.

1.6 School and participants

This study is about learners from one secondary school serving a poor community in rural KwaZulu-Natal. The participants in this study are Grade 10 learners who walk daily for thirty minutes or more from home to school. A comprehensive discussion on this aspect is presented on Section 3.4 of Chapter 3.

1.7 The outline of the study

Chapter One

This chapter introduces the entire study and also presents a discussion about the background of the study. It also explains the nature of the problem and the location of the study. Key questions guiding the study are also highlighted as well as the focus of the study.

Chapter Two

This chapter reviews literature relating to issues of scholar transport and its effects on the learners' work at school. International literature is also consulted in order to try to find out how other countries deal with the issue of learner transport. The literature reveals that across the world learners are faced with challenges when walking to school, and there are concerns among parents and government pertaining to school trips. Secondly, I review what the South African government is doing about learner transport and the challenges it is faced with in this regard. The theoretical framework that was used to analyse the data is also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Three

This chapter focuses issues of design and methodology. It begins by discussing paradigmatic stand, methodology, and the methods I used in conducting research in a secondary school in rural KwaZulu-Natal. This chapter describes how a qualitative case study in the secondary school was conducted.

Chapter Four

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The findings are presented under various themes. The findings show amongst other things that learners in the study were exposed to dangers which

can be life threatening. There is also evidence that suggests that walking long distances to school results in poor school attendance and late coming.

Chapter Five

This chapter attempts to answer the two research questions that were posed in Chapter One. This is done by drawing from the findings presented in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on introducing the study and also dealt with the background to the study, the rationale as well as the research questions. In this chapter I discuss the review of scholarly work done locally and internationally on learner transport. South African policy documents on school transport are also discussed. The scholarly literature is divided into two sections. The first section reviews international literature on learner transport and the second section covers South African literature on the same issue. The purpose is to obtain an understanding about what scholars have written regarding the experiences of rural learners who travel daily between home and school, as well as understanding how this can be a barrier to their schooling. The review of policy documents aims to shed some light about how learner transport policy addresses their experiences and the barriers that learners face on their way to and from school. The chapter closes with the discussion of a conceptual framework underpinning the study.

2.2 Reviewing related literature

The International literature looks at empirical studies done mainly in the developed countries such as Britain, the United States of America, the Netherlands and Germany. Western literature review puts more emphasis on urban areas and little emphasis on walking as a dominant mode of transport in rural areas. More details on these aspects are provided in the section that follows below.

2.2.1 International literature

In the late 1990s the minister for schools in Britain was concerned that education, health and social issues were being negatively affected by the high traffic congestion on the roads, and so the minister decided to promote walking and cycling to school as a strategy to reduce the use of cars (Morris, 1997). It appears that such a strategy had the desired effect. However, several years

later, some scholars began to doubt the benefits of that strategy. For instance, scholars such as Pooley, Turbull and Adams (2005) argued that trips to and from school formed part of everyday routine for most British children and that many parents or guardians escorted their children to school. This tended to increase traffic on the roads. There were many reasons for this in the literature. Some of the reasons include the view that parents are concerned about the safety of their children and the time it takes them to get to school. When comparing traffic congestion between Britain and the United States of America, Dladla (2012) argues that there has been deterioration in walking and cycling to school in the United States of America since 1960. This has resulted in an increase in traffic.

More recently the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (2010) in the United Kingdom argues that transport problems mean that children have difficulties in getting to schools or colleges either because of the lack of public transport or the rising fuel costs which significantly disadvantage the poorest children living in the country side. It is evident therefore that even in a developed country such as Britain transport is one of the most substantial obstacles to learners in rural educational settings. This survey is relevant to rural learners in South Africa because transporting learners in the rural areas is experienced as a challenge.

In Britain the transport policy states that learners who qualify for free school transport are learners who walk two miles or more to the nearest schools (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2008). Other learners are required to make their own travel arrangements and pay the cost for that travel. This means that learners who live near to school use pedestrian marked routes known as walking routes along roads which are considered to be dangerous. In the United Kingdom the academics indicated that transport is one of the most substantial obstacles to providing a broad and balanced education for all pupils and students in rural educational setting. Literature (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2008. Pooley, C., Turbull, J, & Adams, M., 2005) reveals that a lack of safe routes to school prevents many pupils from the disadvantaged backgrounds from taking part in the after school and extra-curricular activities. Such activities are important as they contribute in for instance, raising the learners' self-esteem and also in increasing participation in education amongst learners. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (2008) argues that a majority of rural students, reaching their local school or colleges is not easy as they travel significant distances. Similarly, Storey and Brannen (2012) reveal that in

Britain young people in the countryside often experience particular difficulties with transport to get to education. It is clear that the problem of learner transport is not a South African problem only but it also affects the developed countries as well.

Many rural school children who use school buses end up with long rides, both going to school and coming back home (Gabriel 2010). This situation has been mentioned in Pakistan whereby many students from rural areas have been reported to be spending more time traveling to schools compared to their urban counterparts. The European Commission (2008) has pointed out that in countries such as Ireland, France, Greece, Poland, Italy, Spain and Hungary, children who live in predominantly rural areas may have more difficulties to access education because they have to commute every day due to the decline in the number of rural schools. This results in schools in rural areas becoming less accessible due to long distance that the learners have to cover and also due to high travel cost that their families have to incur. The impact caused is that educational attainment is significantly lower in rural areas compared to their urban counterparts.

Although the use of cars to get to school is relatively modest in the Netherlands, over one decade there was an increase in private car use from 15% to 20% (De Boer, 2005). On the other hand, Germany provides public transport for primary school learners to get to school, whereby there are a lot of buses that wait outside school gates to take learners to where they live (De Boer, 2005). Thus, some developed countries have enough resources to provide learner transport in cities. De Boer's (2005) study does not say anything about the transport system offered to learners living in rural areas of Germany. It has also been noted from the literature reviewed that many of the out-of-school children and youth are in that situation as a result of disability. Fleisch et al. (2012) argues that various economic and social barriers are keeping children out of school or making it difficult for them to keep pace with basic schooling system. These challenges include poverty, lack of scholar transport and long distances to school. These factors are also regarded as detrimental to the learner performance in poor rural areas. According to European Commission (2008), remoteness is an important element of difficulty in rural areas. Poor employment opportunities in rural areas reinforce conditions that promote under investment in education at the level of both the individual and the local institutions. This tendency is different from that of the South African government. In South Africa the state is spending more on individual and institutions situated in rural areas than those in urban areas in terms of its norms and standards allocations in schools (South African Constitution, 1996).

What has emerged is that, in the context of the developed world, urban school transport is integrated with public transport. However, the safety of learners is not guaranteed and in some countries the trend is towards private provision of transport to and from school. In rural areas of the developed countries transport to and from school is provided by the state or the parents privately drive their children to school and back home. Evidently, this reality is the opposite of the reality in South Africa where rural parents are generally known to suffer from unemployment and poverty.

2.2.2 National literature

In this section the literature that is reviewed about learner transport is in the context of South Africa. Prior to 1994 in South Africa, there were many different education departments catering for the needs of different racial groups. Each department had its own arrangements in addressing learner transport needs. What is also evident is that not all departments made provisions for learner transport. For instance, many if not all previously homeland departments of education made no provision for learner transport. Following the formation of a single national Department of Education after 1994, a more consistent learner transport policy was created for all provinces (Mngaza, Dlamini, & van Zyl, 2001). However, various provinces continued to face challenges relating to learner transport implementation. For example, in the Western Cape, there were difficulties in getting proper contracts and permits for the vehicles to transport learners to schools every day. This was related to the fact that the provincial Department of Education was not capacitated to issue road worthiness certificates for public transport, but relied on the department of transport for the road worthiness certificates for public transport (Provincial Administration of the Western Cape, 2003).

Reddy, Sifunda, James, Kambaran and Omardien (2008) argue that South Africa has the highest number of road accidents, as well as the highest fatality rates in the world. These scholars further state that most people who get injured or die in these accidents are children between the ages of five to fifteen years of age. This occurs mostly when these youngsters are walking. It leads to attention on the safety measures that relate to drivers that tend to ignore the presence of the

pedestrians. Statistics South Africa (2010) points out that in KwaZulu-Natal, 28% of all learners walk for more than 30 minutes to reach their nearest schools. KwaZulu-Natal has large numbers of learners who walk long distances from home to school and back. In a related study, Karlsson (2007) found that in the townships of Durban the learners who walked to school were exposed to various dangers such as gangsterism and dirty or un-cleared paths.

Dladla (2012) also notes similar dangers for urban learners. He points out that there is theft and harassment by strangers on the road and that girl learners were harassed by male strangers when they walked to school. The strangers forcefully proposed love to the girls and if they refused to speak to them, they threatened them by promising them that they will ambush them when they return from school in the afternoon. There is also the danger of crossing busy urban roads. His findings closely relate to the findings of Karlsson (2007) and Mbatha (2005). Potgieter, Pillay and Rama (2006) point out that the parents in the rural Eastern Cape are concerned about the safety of their children as they walk to and from school. In addition, they point out that schools are too far away from the households; the grass along the paths is very tall and such places exposed the children to the risk of rape, attacks, or snakes bites and other dangerous animals. Their study revealed that rivers and streams that children cross got flooded during rainy seasons thus making it difficult for them to reach school.

The findings of a study conducted by Mbatha (2005) indicate that children at Emmaus in KwaZulu-Natal travel for more than an hour to get to school. They climb mountains to get to school and this contributes to their tiredness during the lessons. Her study also reveals that parents see criminals as the biggest problem associated with walking to school. Caregivers report that teenage girls are in danger of being abducted for forced marriages on their way to school. Mbatha also indicates that lightning strikes during summer are a problem and children have nowhere safe to hide and the chances of being struck by lightning are very high. Mbatha (2005) further argues that walking long distances has contributed to the children failing at school.

The discussion of the research findings conducted in this country consistently indicates that many children in rural areas are faced with serious challenges of exercising their constitutional right of access to education (Rogan, 2006). One of the reasons is that educational institutions are

situated far away from their residential areas and there is also a general lack of public transport for commuting.

Moletsane (2012) raises a concern that South Africa after the demise of apartheid and its educational system is still plagued by huge challenges, with no change in sight, particularly for those who need support the most. The situation highlighted above is applicable to those who live, work and learn in rural areas, informal settlements and similar communities who continue to suffer marginalisation of many kinds.

Similar fundamental rights have been highlighted in ATL (2008) when quoting Nelson Mandela's speech which he presented in Trafalgar Square in 2005. In that speech, it was argued that poverty was not natural but that it is man-made and it can be eradicated by actions of human beings. Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity rather; it is an act of justice (Nelson Mandela Foundation. 2005). It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. A number of academics including Moletsane (2012) argue that in education the negative impacts of poverty in rural communities, including poor educational outcomes, in general and poor achievement in Grade 12 examinations in particular, are often spoken and written about by outsiders and interventions are developed with the preclusion of the affected communities. Most theories used to study rurality by focusing on the space rather than the rural communities. It is the communities or individual people that may be studied. Moletsane (2012) is concerned that the context of rurality is ignored and that rurality is dynamic; it has a value and strength, independent of urbanity and urban influences. Rurality is predominantly dominated by deficiencies which disregard conscious and special rural context and relevant strategies for addressing the educational needs of the rural communities.

Gardiner (2008) argues that the achievement of real quality in education in rural areas will only come about when there is a significant social and economic development in those areas. Until then the quality of education provided in the rural areas will limit the people's opportunities to lead long, healthy and creative lives; to acquire knowledge and enjoy freedom, dignity and self-respect. In addition, Nkambule (2011) reveals that despite several interventions, education in rural areas continues to face a set of challenges owing to, among other factors, the diverse geographical location of the schools, diverse learners' background and diverse learning styles. Gabriel (2012) confirms the challenges facing rural dwellers by revealing that conditions in rural areas still have many shortcomings. For instance, children are still expected to carry out certain

domestic tasks in the early morning and in the afternoon. In many instances, these duties clash with the routines and time tables of the school. Hunger leads to poor concentration for the learners and in rural areas teachers tend to live in average 36 of kilometres away from where they teach which makes it difficult for them to catch up with school time in the morning and in the afternoon. This also limits their knowledge about what goes on in the community.

Gabriel (2012) further points out that the learners in rural areas are more likely than their urban counterparts to leave school early. According to Emerging Voices learners in rural areas do not have their constitutional right to education realised, and their rights within education or through education are also limited (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). Such limitations are being experienced in rural education despite the fact that in 1994 the African National Congress published the Policy Frame Work for education and training. In this policy there is a special chapter called *The Special Case of Rural and Farm Schools*. That chapter the State makes the following commitments: that it will assume full responsibility for the provision of schooling in rural areas; that it will where necessary provide transport to schools and establish rights to cross private land to ensure effective access to schooling; that the physical and service infrastructure of many farm schools and that rural schools need to be upgraded to ensure minimum standard such as the provision of water; toilets, library books, electricity, office equipment, and sports facilities; that it will introduce schools where schools will operate as community learning centres; housing, access to transport, and perhaps other incentives need to be provided to attract and retain effective teachers in rural schools.

When one carefully analyses this framework one may find that very little has been done by the government to date in ensuring that great improvement is achieved in rural education in this country. The Council of Ministers (2012) reported that one of the challenges amongst others is that of rural education is the learners' home background. The Council regards home background as an important determinant of educational outcomes in rural education. The main argument being advanced is that prevailing conditions in rural areas put rural learners at a disadvantage. This is mainly because many rural communities lack the professional help and support, governance structures, books and learning materials that they need to provide the necessary parental support and care for their children. Further recommendations are that the government must be consistent in rural development strategies whereby access to economic activities is

expanded in order to reduce poverty. The importance of giving substance to South Africa's constitutional commitment to the right to education is balanced by the recognition of the importance of evaluating the needs of particular people in specific contexts. The Council of Ministers also pointed out the relevant features of rural locations and these include the distance to town; topography (the conditions of roads, bridges to schools); transport infrastructure (roads, buses, taxis); access to lifelong learning opportunities; social conditions in the community such as proportion of children living without adults.

When looking at these features one may find that they represent a severe challenge to the delivery of schooling in rural areas and may play a role in determining the quality of provision. Adding to this is the level of illiteracy particularly among rural women which remains critically low (Fleisch et al, 2012). In addition, gender based violence appears as the greatest threat to girls' education in South Africa as the levels of safety at high school and the reports of high incidences of sexual harassment across the system continue to highlight the risks faced by the girl learners. Besides the risks faced by girl learners is the issue of poverty which is a persistent phenomenon in rural communities. The whole argument presented in various sections of this report suggests that the most important aims for rural education are rural development should revolve around poverty alleviation. Children in rural areas suffer greatly from poverty and are likely to endure its consequences over a longer period of time.

Flugel (2009) argues that the South African government is promoting children's rights to education but transport to school is a barrier to education for poor South African households. Her argument has been confirmed by other South Africa researchers who maintain that the transport cost is the reason that 70% of South African learners walk long distances to school. Rogan (2006) contends that the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport is not fulfilling the rights of learners to safe and efficient trips to school. The same sentiment has been shared by Flugel's (2009) study. The basic argument is that where learners experience transport challenges their education suffers since they arrive at schools late or missing out classes sometimes too tired to concentrate in the lesson. The high cost of transport is measured as one of the exclusionary mechanisms that act as a barrier for poor learners from accessing the schools that they may choose. The Department of Transport conducted a National Household Travel Survey in the 2003. One of its findings was that the trips to education institutions are significant in in

the transport sector, comprising approximately one third of all National daily travel (Flugel, 2009). This scholar further argues that such finding points to the effect that education transport has on other transport-related business sectors such as the road construction, vehicle trading and fuel industries. The second finding that Flugel (2009) confirms is that households experiences transport as an economic burden, thus transport cost poses a barrier to education for poor households.

Flugel (2009) further argues that the omission of specific relief measures for household, transport provision in economic terms is unjustifiable. It is noted that in government policies, there is mention of transport for learners in urban areas but there is silence about the transportation of the rural learners. The study conducted by Fluget (2009) is similar to mine in that it focuses on poor rural learners who walk long distances from home to school and back home. Another similar study is the one conducted Dladla (2012). The lack of transport and the distance travelled by the learners to and from school is regarded as the barriers that prevent learners from attending schools.

Rogan (2006) argues that the National Household Travel Survey indicates that learners in KwaZulu-Natal are severely affected by a lack of appropriate transport to schools. On the whole, 79% of the provinces roughly 3, 5 million learners walk to school while just below 13% are able to use taxis or buses. Learners in the KwaZulu-Natal experience the longest travel times to school of all the provinces in South Africa (Department of Transport, 2007). Of all the learners in the province, 42% travel for more than 30 minutes to get to the school and 25% for more than 45 minutes to get to the school. It cannot be disputed that walking is the primary mode of transport to schools in South Africa (North West Department of Education, 2014). It is significant that learners in KwaZulu-Natal also have the longest walking times in the whole country with 23% spending more than 45 minutes walking to school. This statistics indicates that there is a greatest need for learner transport in KwaZulu-Natal. Rogan (2006) points out that Human Rights Watch maintains that it is a legal responsibility of the government to provide transport for learners where the lack of reliable transportation affects school attendance or performance. Rogan (2006) further argues that Human Rights Watch and Human Sciences Research Council note that the safety of learners is also a component of transport and a need to accessibility to education. The meaning of the above mentioned accounts confirms that walking

long distances to school places learners in greater danger of both sexual violence and traffic accidents. Exposure to violence and harassment is interpreted by the Human Rights literature to be a breach of the state's obligation to learners of providing safe and secure learner transport. Rogan (2006) points out that a school environment where sexual violence and harassment is tolerated compromises the rights of learners to enjoy education on equal terms and it is against South African Constitution and its international obligations.

2.3 South African school transport policy documents

This section presents the review of the South African learner transport policy documents. One of the scholars who have reviewed learner transport policy is Rogan (2006) who asserts that learner transport policy in South Africa is fragmented. Documents fail to speak to each other for the purpose of effective strategies to ensure safe and efficient trips to school for the learners (Rogan, 2006). Another scholar is Flugel (2009) who found that transport policy arrangements are both an enabling and also a limiting factor for learners in South Africa. However she did not consider how learner transport policies serve rural learners' needs.

North West Departmental Policy on learner transport (2014) indicates that rural communities are sparsely populated and many of the schools are located within the farming communities. This policy proposes that the learners staying three kilometres away from the nearest school qualify to be transported. This is good but the challenge is the effective implementation of the policy. The North West Policy on Learner Transport leads to some concerns for learners who reside less than three kilometres from the nearest school. Such learners do not qualify for assistance and must walk to school. The distance can exhaust the learners and may result in poor concentration during their lessons. It makes sense that the government is going to subsidise rural and farm school with 100% of learner transport, though it depends on whether such learners meet the requirement of three km from home to the nearest school without the utilisation of choice.

Failure to implement such learner transport policies by any provincial department can have negative effects on the children's ability to access education. This is due to the fact that transport has a significant impact on children's ability to access education. In White Paper 2 (Department of Education, 1996), the post-apartheid government identifies scholar transport provision as a necessary requirement for greater and more equitable access to education, particularly for

children of a compulsory school-going age. The North West Department of Education on its policy argue that since rural communities face serious challenges of abject poverty and the lack of basic infrastructure, the North West Department of Education is going to provide learner transport for rural and farm school. The challenges sighted by this Department are that in the North West, rural communities live in small settlement, remote from economic and social opportunities and essential services.

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (2013) issued a policy document on learner transport for public schools in the context of the *National Transport Policy and Regulations for Safety Measures on Public and Independent schools* (Department of Transport, 2009). This policy states that provincial Department of Education it will ensure that learners in disadvantaged communities and deep rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal will have access to school transport and be able to safely participate in school activities. As it is the case with the North West Department of Education, the KwaZulu-Natal department of Education also promises 100% subsidy for qualifying learners. However, such a policy does not say anything about rural learners who live in deep rural areas where there is shortage of access roads there is a lack of infrastructure leading to access roads.

What is noteworthy is that although the policy has recognised the need to bring a uniform safe approach to the transportation of learners and fulfilment of the constitutional mandate of the Department of Transport to provide a safe and efficient transport system, evidence of this is unclear. This policy also aims to ensure that even learners in disadvantage communities and deep in rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal have access to school. The policy itself has many gaps such as its silence on inaccessible roads, shortage of learner transport, long distances walked by learners in the rural areas and many other more challenges. For instance, it could have proposed cycling as an alternative mode of transport for learners who live in deep rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal but it did not. Subsidised dedicated learner transport is aimed at needy learners to whom attending school depend on the availability of safe and secured transport. Most of these learners are from poor families which mostly depend on social grants and who hardly affords a day's meal. In these families payment of transport will definitely pose a challenge which will be an additional burden which could not be met.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The concepts that underpin this study are democracy, human rights and social justice. In discussing them I start by defining what democracy is, and followed by the other two concepts. I also shed light on how these concepts are relevant for the study.

i. Democracy

Democracy is a broad concept which different scholars define differently. In this study I use participatory notion of democracy. Hanberger (2001) defines people's participation as the most important quality of democracy. According to this view, the power of the people is exercised when they participate in activities that relate to their lives. Accordingly, apathy and non-participation are seen as the major threat to democracy. Participation is presumed to develop responsibility. Therefore, when people fight for democracy, issues of human rights and social justice formed part of that process. In 1994, South Africa witnessed a shift from apartheid era to democratic era which entailed all South Africans beginning to enjoy equal rights and citizenship.

Democracy means that people must be involved in the decision-making processes. In view of this, the parents and the learners must be involved in educational decision-making processes that will improve their lives. This will allow them to become responsible citizens of the country (Hanberger, 2009). Therefore, the dawn of democracy in South Africa was celebrated on the assumption that all citizens would be exposed to all democratic institutions and in a democratic manner. If for instance, learners in rural communities are still not involved in decision-making processes on issues that affect their lives, one can argue that democracy does not exist for them. It may mean that the change from the apartheid era to a democratic dispensation has not come about. Similarly, issues of access to good quality education in rural communities seem to be a distant reality (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). Walking long distances to school is one indicator that, perhaps democracy has not come for these communities.

ii. **Human Rights**

Issues of human rights are about freedom, equality, free to any religion, sex, and freedom of expression (South African Constitution, 1996). Human rights are enshrined in the Bill of Rights in Chapter Two of the Constitution Act, No. 108 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). As such it is expected that all people of South Africa should enjoy these rights including learners. Learners in particular are expected to enjoy such right in respect to education which is the basic human right. For instance, it is the State's obligation to provide accessible education to all learners including those who live in rural areas. This may range from providing learner transport, free and compulsory education between Grades R to Grade 9. In terms of infrastructure, the Department of Education in conjunction with the Department of Transport must provide access roads to schools and bridges to rural areas. If these basic human rights needs are not provided then the Department of Education might be infringing on the rights of the learners. This will further deprive these learners of their basic right to education. The schools that are located in rural areas have learners that are not able to access them. It appears that some learners still do not have a free access to school because of the lack of the infrastructure in rural areas.

This study therefore, is going to shed light on how learners are affected by the lack of infrastructure; to be more specific, the roads to schools, including bridges. Hence, rural setting is faced with the problem of impassable rivers and streams during the rainy seasons. Flugel (2009) argues that the implication of the notion of human rights to transport arrangement to learners is that their human rights are protected in terms of the Constitution. Such an argument further states that Section 26 of the Constitution refers to the rights of the children and the importance of their interests in all matters affecting them. Therefore, the learners and children are protected as vulnerable citizens. It is therefore important that the Department of Education must comply with the Constitution by protecting the learners even those in rural areas to exercise this basic human right.

iii. **Social Justice**

This means that people must be treated equally before the law. Justice must be seen to be done by the different sectors of the governance including the education department. Therefore, if the learners in rural areas are not able to access education because of the lack of infrastructure, that

means that there is no social justice prevailing to these learners and to their parents. This concludes that social justice and human rights are violated.

2.4.2 Definition of key concepts

There are two key concepts that need to be defined so that as they are being used in the study, they are clearly understood. These concepts are experience and education, and are briefly discussed below.

Experiences

According to Collins English Dictionary (Hank, Long & Urbang, 1998), experiences are particular incidents and the related feelings that a person can have. Tullock (1993) points out that an experience can be described as the apprehension of an object, through emotion or the senses or mind. It is an active participation in events or activities leading to an accumulation of knowledge and skills. The experiences that I focus on in this study concern walking to school in rural areas and arriving at school after a long walk from home. Some experiences may be positive and others may be negative.

Education

Education is a process of learning aimed at equipping people with knowledge and skills, and has the responsibility of passing on knowledge from one generation to the next so that people will be able to analyse, diagnose and question life around them (Hills, 1982). A school is an institution designed for the teaching of learners under the supervision of teachers; it is where formal and compulsory education is offered in most countries (Giddens & Blackwell, 1997). In these systems, learners progress through a series of schools. These schools are primary, secondary and high schools. But some learners attend school at a very early age, and these types of schools are referred to as pre-primary schools. Flugel (2009) points out that school means a public school or an independent school which enrolls learners in one or more grades from Grade R to Grade 12. This is the same meaning as in the *South African Schools Act* (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). The purpose of the school is for teaching and learning. In this study education is not freely accessible to rural learners who walk long distances to school and hence, such walks yield barriers to education for rural learners.

2.5 Conclusion

The above defined concepts that is, experiences and education are linked to each other in the sense that experiences of walking long distances to school are experienced by these rural learners as they endeavour to acquire education. In a way their experience of education is intertwined with their experience of walking long distances to school. School is an institution which they have to attend in order to acquire formal education which is a basic need for them. In general, children living in rural areas in the developing world face severe accessibility constraints, due to geographical remoteness and poor or non-existent transport infrastructure and services (Vasoncellos, 1997). Learner Transport has a significant impact on children's ability to access education. While this chapter has reviewed literature relating to learner transport, the next chapter provides a detailed account of the design and methodology that was used in generating data that would address research questions.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the findings of the study and these were presented in the form of themes. This chapter presents a discussion of the research design and methodology that was used in generating data that would assist in answering research questions driving the study. The chapter begins with a discussion of a paradigmatic stance that underpins the study and then moves on to discuss the methodology that was used to generate data. Data analysis methods as well as ethical issues that were considered in the process of doing the study are also discussed.

3.2 Research paradigm

The study was undertaken within the interpretive research paradigm because the aimed to interpret and understand the experiences of learners that walk to and from school. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) point out that a researcher who works within the interpretive paradigm attempts to understand human experiences from the participants' perspectives. In this study the experiences of learners as they go to school and how such experiences become an obstruction to them accessing education was the main focus. Maree and Van Der Westhuisen (2007) argue that interpretivism focuses on how individuals and communities interpret their experiences. Similarly, in this study learners were expected to tell stories about their experiences when walking to and from school.

3.3 Research design

Maree and Van Der Westhuisen (2007) argue that a research design is a plan or strategy about the selection of the site and the participants, the data gathering techniques to be used as well as the data analysis to be utilised. In planning this research I decided to conduct a study of ten learners from one school in a rural setting. I believed that this number of participants could provide a balanced and comprehensive picture about this phenomenon. In addition, I ensured that there was gender balance by selecting five girls and five boys, who walked long distances daily

to school and back home. It was hoped that such a choice would again provide a balanced perspective and as we would draw lessons from both boys and girls who share similar experiences.

Maree and Van Der Westhuizen (2007) further describe conceptual studies, historical research, action research, case studies, ethnographic and grounded theory as the research strategies that are suitable for qualitative research. I chose a case study design for this study of learners' experiences for two main reasons. Firstly, it was deemed relevant because it would enable me to explore the cases of learners walking to school in rural areas. Secondly, it would offer me a multi-perspective analysis, such as the accounts from my participants and my observation of the participants (Maree & Van Der Westhuizen, 2007). The two perspectives enable me to understand learners' experiences of walking to and from school and how these factors collectively contributed as barriers that confound their schooling. Maree and Van Der Westhuizen (2007) describe case study research as an empirical inquiry that investigates factors that affect participants within their real-life context. In the context of this study, the main factor is the practice of the learners' walking long distances to and from school as well as the relationship between the phenomenon of walking and their access to education within the context of rurality.

Creswell (2005) indicates that there are five types of case studies, and these are historical studies, observational case studies, situational studies, clinical case studies and multi-case studies. In historical case studies for example, the development of an organisation take place over a period of time. Unlike historical case studies, observational case studies focus on actions which research participants engage in such as in a classroom where a group of people, be it the learners or one teacher or team of teachers can observe a particular type of behaviour taking place. Similarly, the above mentioned category of people could themselves be subjected to observation by a researcher or a team of researchers as they continue with their daily activities.

In situational case studies, a particular event is studied where the researcher becomes part of the situation. The clinical case study focuses in-depth on a particular individual such as a child having problems with reading. The multi-case study is a collection of case studies, such as in a series of experiments or a series of similar stories about a particular phenomenon under the gaze

of a researcher. To use Creswell's (2005) characterisation of case studies, I can say that in this study a combination of observational and multi-case studies were used because I focused on a group of learners, from a rural area who walked long distances from home to school and back. The participants were real learners at one real school and the data generation methods included focus group discussions and observations.

3.4 The context of the school

The school selected for this study is located in a rural district of KwaZulu-Natal with the closest town being approximately 60 km away. The local area had a political past of low intensity conflicts between two political parties. The school was built in 1995 and this was a result of political settlement and peace negotiations between the two warring parties. The school services rural communities which faces a number of social challenges including, unemployment, poverty and ill health. The school is quite small with a total enrolment of only 250 learners from Grade 8 to Grade 12, and has 7 educators including the School Management Team. Given the fact that the local community is generally poor, the school was declared as 'No-Fee' school. In addition, one free meal is provided to the learners daily as part of the National School Nutrition Programme which is intended to improve the nutrition of learners in schools. The area is in need of infrastructural development such as roads and bridges.

Despite high unemployment highlighted in the sections above, there are limited employment opportunities. For instance, some parents of the learners are employed predominantly on commercial plantations as farm workers from which they earn a low income. Some of them are paid weekly while others are paid monthly. Most of them are different levels of illiteracy. Some of them never attended any school while others dropped out of school at different grades. Invariably, pressures to earn some form of income and support the younger siblings seemed to be the main reasons for them to drop out of school before completing National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations. Most families are single female-headed households and they depend on social grants in the form of either pension or child support grants.

Most people in the area were born and attended school in the local community. School leavers rarely pursue further education in the form of tertiary education and this reality is generally

attributed to the prevailing socio-economic difficulties in the community. Because of the prevailing socio-economic difficulties, the usual scenario is that when learners complete their NSC examinations, they do not proceed to college or university education. Some of them find work on the local farms and the rest join the ranks of the unemployed. This particular study intended to shed some light about how walking long distances to and from school affects them and it contributes to kind of future they live in. I selected the Uxolo High School, a fictitious name, in terms of the following criteria:

- (a) It should be a rural school, which means it should be a school remote from cities and towns.
- (b) It should be a high school. My reason for selecting a high school is that teenagers are able to articulate their own experiences of walking to school.
- (c) The school must have learners who walk long distances to school.
- (d) The school must offer easy access to me, but not be the school of my employment, because I wanted to avoid learners identifying me as an educator rather than a researcher.

It should also be noted that I had some professional contact with the school a few years prior to this study. I therefore, thought that the school complied with all the requirements for selection to the study. Therefore, the school was deemed suitable for this research.

3.5 Selecting the learner participants

At the outset it should be declared that the population for this study consisted of Grade 10 learners. This grade was targeted for this study because other grades such as Grades 11 and Grade 12 were not available given that their focus was mainly dedicated to preparing for the National Senior Certificate examinations. I also thought that Grade 10 learner were sufficiently mature to be able to articulate their experiences confidently. Therefore, I would be able to generate rich data from them. The selection criteria for the ten participants in the study were the following:

- (a) Half of the group should be girls and half boys in order for me to hear about the experiences of either gender equally.

(b) Participants should walk more than thirty minutes one way to school because the study was about learners who walk long distances between home and school. This means that my selection was purposive (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

The process I employed to select the learners is that all Grade 10 learners were asked to convene to one classroom in order to inform them about the study and explain the proposed participation and the selection criteria. Those willing to participate were invited to indicate their willingness by show of hands. Five boys and five girls were selected voluntarily to take part by the show of hand in a class room comprising of 60 learners. I then met with the 10 selected learners to organise informed consent and guardian permissions (see Appendix A) and to schedule the focus group discussion and observations. At the end of the focus group interview participants filled in a one-page demographic profile form about them (see Appendix B). The information about the participants is presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Demographic Profile of the Ten Selected Grade 10 Learners

No.	Gender	Age of learner	Years living in the area	Lunch money each day	Number of employed people in household	Total average family monthly income	Place of employment for family members
1	Boy	16	16	R4	4	R1500	Plantations
2	Boy	15	15	R2	2	R1000	Plantations
3	Boy	20	20	R2	2	R1000	Plantations
4	Boy	18	18	Nil	0	R1000	none
5	Boy	21	21	Nil	0	R1000	none
6	Girl	20	20	R2	1	R500	Plantations
7	Girl	17	10	R5	4	R1500	Plantations
8	Girl	18	18	Nil	0	R1000	none
9	Girl	18	10	Nil	1	R500	Plantations
10	Girl	19	19	R2	1	R500	Plantations

From the demographic profile of the learners I gained the following information: Bearing in mind that the learners were all from the same grade the youngest learner in the focus group was 15 years of age, and the oldest was 21 years of age. The range of age across these participants is six years. The significance of this great spread is that some learners are already adults (and this is not gender specific) and thus they may carry great responsibilities to protect those who walk with them to and from school and possibly could be parents themselves.

Most of parents of the selected learners work in the local forest as farm labourers and their incomes were generally low. The family income ranged between R500 and R1500 per month depending on the number of the family members employed. Some parents were unemployed and they depended on state grants, such as the pension and child support grants. Thus all the learners participating in this study were from very poor families. There is a strong correlation between the availability of money to spend at tuck shop and the employment of family members.

3.6 Data generation methods

Two methods were used to generate data from the ten poor rural learners who walk long distances to and from school. The methods are the focus group discussion (FGD) and observations. The discussion of these methods is presented below.

3.6.1 Focus group discussion (FGD)

Focus group discussions are a form of interview which is the interaction within a group where a topic supplied by the researcher is discussed (Morgan, 1988). Focus group discussions yield a collective rather than an individual view, though the view of each participant is taken into consideration (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The participants interact with each other rather than with the interviewer. It is from the interaction of the group that the data emerges (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Focus group discussion is also regarded as the most effective way of interviewing many people at the same time and is therefore cost effective and saves time (Romm, Nel & Tlale, 2013).

During the FGD the participants were given freedom to use their mother tongue language, which is isiZulu. The interview took place in a classroom during break time and lasted for about 30 to 45 minutes. This time was negotiated with the participants as being a suitable time for them. Two

topics in isiZulu were presented to the participants for discussion (see Appendix C). The first topic was: What are your experiences of your walk coming to school? The second topic was: How has the lack of school transport become a barrier to your academic performance? The discussion was recorded and transcribed (see Appendix D).

3.6.2 Observation

Maree and Van Der Westhuizen (2007) explain that an observation is the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, without necessarily questioning or communicating with them. In this study I observed how the learners were running, walking or dawdling as they came to school and sometimes as they left for home. I also observed their physical condition or state of appearance as they arrived at school in the morning (see Appendix E). I also observed sweating, and what was being carried. My observation was restricted to the 10 participating learners, observing their arrival at school on five successive mornings Monday to Friday. The type of observation I used is known as the observer as participant (Maree & Van Der Westhuizen, 2007). In this type of observation the researcher is in the situation but focuses mainly on his or her role as observer in the situation. I arrived at my post outside the school entrance at 05:30 to observe the patterns of behaviour of the participants on their arrival at school.

The duration of each observation was four hours. I stood within the premises of a shop but in full sight of the learners across from the school gate. I did this because I was trying to ensure that I remained as unobtrusive as possible so that I did not interfere with the natural course of events in the learners' natural setting. However standing at this distance it was difficult to identify the selected participants if they entered the school gate in large groups of learners. At the end of each observation session I went to the security guard to check his records and find out if any of the participants had entered the school gate without me noticing them. On Thursday and Friday none of the participants attended school (see Table 3.2 below).

The entire weekend, prior to the Monday of the observation week, there were heavy rains. For three days of the observation week there were light showers of rain. As a result the river in the area was flooded and therefore access to the school was restricted. There was no bridge to cross this river. Under normal circumstances the learners and the community members cross this river by walking on a tree trunk or log lying across the water. During the observation week, this log

was submerged and as a result, learners were unable to cross the river. There is another route to get to the school but to use that route takes three additional hours of walking to get to the school. This predicament meant that none of the selected learners attended school on the last two days of the observation week.

Table 3.2 Summary of Observation of Learners

LEARNERS	Boys					Girls				
DAYS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Monday	Arrived at 7:38am untidily dressed and tired	Absent	Absent	Arrived late at 8:02am. Hastily walking and untidily dressed	Absent	Arrived late at 8:29am. Slowly walking tired	Absent	Absent	Absent	absent
Tuesday	Absent	Arrived late at 8:05am walking tiredly	Absent	Absent	Running tiredly & sweating disheveled. Arrived late at 8:20am	absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	absent
Wednesday	Absent	Absent	Absent	Arrived late at 7:55am. Looked exhausted	Absent	Arrived late at 8:03am. Sweating and tired	Arrived late at 8:10am	Arrived late at 8:20. Tired and sweaty	Absent	absent
Thursday	None of the participants came to school. Principal said this was due to heavy rains									
Friday	None of the participants came to school. Principal said this was due to heavy rains									
Summary	Only attended school for one day in this week	Only attended school for one day in this week	Did not attend school at all this week	Did not attend school at all this week	Only attended two days	Only attended two days	Only attended school for one day in this week	Only attended school for one day in this week	Did not attend school at all this week	Did not attend school at all this week
Total No. learners that attended school	1	1	0	2	2	2	1	1	0	0

What is presented in Table 3.2 indicates high rates of absenteeism and unacceptable levels of late coming in some rural schools more especially during the rainy days.

3.7 Data analysis method

Qualitative data analyses involves taking large amounts of data and reducing it to patterns, categories or themes and then interpreting those patterns, categories or themes (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). In this study I began the data analysis after organising and transcribing the focus group data. I selected and coded texts or fragments on similar topics or themes and put them together to form categories. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) explain that a code is simply a name or label that the researcher gives to a piece of text that contains an idea or piece of information. I have used coded themes (such as experiences, feelings, tiredness, fears and barriers) to analyse the data. I read the focus group transcript while looking for themes related to my research questions and marked these accordingly. I analysed my observation notes, checking to see how they triangulated with the focus group data. Finally I gathered the theme data in order to understand how they answered my two research questions. My analysis is presented in the next chapter.

3.8 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an important element of the research process in that it ensures the readers and reviewers that the findings of a research can be trusted (Bhengu & Mkhize, 2013). To ensure trustworthiness of the findings, I utilised a framework developed by Guba and Lincoln (1985) which has four criteria, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002) argue that credible research produces findings that are convincing and trusted. Geldenhuys (2011) argues that credibility is about evaluating and verifying the truthfulness of the findings. To do this in this study I generated the data from the voices of the learners and the learners provided information voluntarily. To enhance dependability of the findings, I used two methods (FGD and observation) in order to assess the extent to which these would lead me to the same conclusion about the learners' experiences. This is known as the triangulation of methods. Dependability means that the findings are similar to those of similar studies, which have been conducted previously. My findings are similar to

those of Dladla (2012), thus there is dependability in my study. This will be reflected on chapter five which is the last chapter of this study.

As part of confirmability of the findings, I had to ensure that my interpretation of what the learners had told me was checked with them in order to ensure that my understanding was similar to theirs. This technique is usually referred to as member-checking and forms part of confirmability criterion. In addition, when the focus group discussion was transcribed into text, I then presented it to the participants to verify the content of the data and then confirmed that it was accurate. The voice data was in isiZulu and was transcribed *verbatim* without being interpreted into English. However, once it was confirmed with the participants, the transcripts were also translated to English in order to enhance accessibility to wider audience that does not understand IsiZulu, and this includes my supervisor.

3.9 Ethical considerations and practices

I have followed ethical principles while conducting this study. The principle of ‘do no harm’ (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2007) was considered when conducting this study. Learners’ dignity, their real names and their family backgrounds were not used real in this study. This has been also confirmed by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002) when they state that the autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons are ways to do no harm. In this study, I followed what has been mentioned above by treating all participants with dignity and respect, and ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality of information they provided. This was done by obtaining permission: In this study the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions granted me permission to conduct this study at one of their public schools (see Appendix F). I also sought permission from parents, guardians or care-givers for their children to be part of my study, and from learners as well (see Appendix A and G). This was important because it allowed participants to decide for themselves whether they wanted to be part of the study. This further gave them an opportunity to get clarity and know what was expected from them.

The principle of beneficence demands that the researcher is obliged to tell the participants how they may benefit from the study (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). In this study I told participants that there was no immediate benefit for them because the study was for academic

purposes. The methods of how data would be generated were fully explained to the participants. The issue of voluntary participation and freedom to withdraw at any time without any harm was explained to the participants. Permission from the parents and the learners was granted to me. I also applied for permission from the school governing body to conduct the study at their school, and the permission was granted (see Appendix H).

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter issues of research design and the methodology that was utilised for generating data to answer research questions were presented. In this chapter I describe how I used focus group discussion and observation in gathering the necessary information. The next chapter presents the findings and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a detailed discussion of research design and methodology that was used in generating data. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the findings that were arrived at after the data had been analysed. The chapter presents the accounts from the participating rural learners of their experience of walking to school and back home. They also share their views about how their walking to school constitutes a barrier to them accessing education. In this chapter I present the key findings from data generated during the focus group discussions and observations. I first discuss data from the focus group discussions and this is followed by the data from the observation.

4.2 Focus group interview

The findings are grouped into three themes about routes and the effect on learners, experiences that are particular to certain seasons, and how walking long distance made the learners feel.

4.2.1 Routes to and from school

Routes are ways to get to a destination. They are the planned direction to reach the destination. This section presents a discussion about the routes the learners took to get to school and back. The learners mentioned that one route, the one they used most often, took 1½ hours to get to the school. Another route which could be regarded as alternative route, took them 3hours from home to school and it was used as a detour to avoid rising rivers during rainy days. Learners referred to the paths they followed to reach their school. The reason why it takes so long to reach school is because the learners live far away from the school. Below I present the extract from one learner telling stories about these routes. This is what Ndoda had to say:

Sihamba ematsheni nasemaweni. Okwesibili siwela nomfula uyagcwala. Siyakhumula futhi notshani bunamazolo. Sihamba nasemahlathini, kukhona nezimoba [= *We walk on paths full of rocks*

and cliffs. Secondly we cross swollen rivers and we to take off our clothes when crossing the rivers. The grass is dewy and we get wet. We walk through forests even through sugar cane fields (Ndoda).

In the extracts above, Ndoda presents a description about list of factors that seem to suggest the difficulties he goes through for him to get to school. As one reads, one gets a sense that the route is not short at all and that it negatively affects them as learners and it delays them and makes them feel tired.

4.2.2. Delays

The rural learner participants said that they experience a lot of delays on their way to school. One of the girls refers to this delay. This is what Thandeka had to say in this regard:

Ngiye ngihambe i-hour lonke no-half we-hour ukusuka ekhaya ngiza eskoleni. Masengifika emfuleni ngisuke ngisazothatha esinyeikhathi, ngoba ngisazokhumula. Ngikhumule ibhulukwe bese ngikhumula ne-shirt ngoba phela kunodaka ngilibambe, ngiliphakamisele phezulu ngingene emfuleni ngiwele. [= It takes me one and a half hours coming here. When I get to the river, I take some time taking off my clothes and cross the river holding them up out of the water]

Crossing rivers involves a loss of time which results in the learners coming late at school. They have to take off their clothes when crossing the swollen river during the rainy season, in order to have dry clothes when they reach school. Clearly, the notion of a young girl taking off clothes in a public space can engender various images of vulnerabilities that are peculiar to rural contexts. A similar sentiment of delays is presented by Sindi who said the following:

Une briji omunye awunalo. Nomfula uyagcwala. Siwela imifula ewu two, kodwa omunye. Kuyenzeka uthathe isonto lonke ugwele ungehli. Siyakhumula siphoseke emanzini izinto zimuke. [= We cross two rivers, but one river has the bridge while the other doesn't, yet it often gets flooded. Sometimes the river takes the whole week to

subside. We take off our clothes when we cross the river, sometimes fall inside the water and our things get taken by the water].

Sindi's account reveals that in the process of crossing the river, their belongings such as books and clothes, are sometimes swept away in the water. This delays them getting to school on time. Another learner called Thoko mentioned other things that cause delays which seem similar to those highlighted by Ndoda in the previous section. Sindi mentions snakes such as pithons and other that they come across; flooded rivers, dew on the foot paths as well as the fact that they have to undress when crossing the rivers. This is what she had to say:

..Futhi endleleni sihlangabezana nezinkinga. Okokuqala sabona inhlwathi, okwesibili siwela nomfula futhi uyagcwala, siyakhumula notshani bunamazolo. [= On the way we come across many problems. Firstly we see a python, secondly we cross rivers and the grass is dewy we get wet].

When these learners encounter dangerous wild animals such as pythons, they have to exercise caution and patience and wait for it to move out of the way before they can proceed. By the time the snake clears off, the learners' time is gone and they arrive late at school.

4.2.3 Tiredness

What has also emerged in the study is that, due to long distances that they walk to and from school, by the time learners arrive at home in the late afternoon, they are usually tired and unable to do anything including homework and other school related activities. This is what Sindi had to say in this regard:

Ngibuya esikoleni ngingenzi lutho ekhaya sixabane nomama ngikhathale ngingakwazi ukwenza lutho. Ethi umama angenze imisebenzi, noma kuthiwa nginikwe i-homework ngifike ngingayenzi ngoba ngikhathale. [= I come back home tired and unable to do anything and my mother quarrels with me. My mother wants me to do some chores and even if I have homework I am also unable to do it because I am tired].

The need to walk long distances affects learners' energies, strength and levels of concentration in class and this may result in fatigue setting in. When the learners get home they cannot even do their homework and chores because they are so tired.

4.3 Seasonal Experiences

The data suggest that different seasons of the year present different challenges and experiences for the learners in the study. For instance, when it is summer they face different challenges as opposed to winter. In this section, I start by discussing summer followed winter.

4.3.1 Summer experiences

Summer seasons in KwaZulu-Natal are characterised by heavy rains and usually, rains start falling in the afternoons while the learners are still at school. October and November are notorious for heavy rains and, coincidentally, that is the time for year end examinations in the country. When it starts raining, learners are compelled to take longer routes which invariably are safer but cause them to arrive late at school. Sifiso who is one of the participants in the FGD had this to say:

Eyi malisifce la eskoleni kuye kube inkinga ngoba kuyaphoqa ukuthi siyowela le Ehlanzeni, ebrijini lapho kuse amanye amahora amaningi. Ayi impela kuyawathatha ama-hour amathathu kusuka nje la eskoleni, ngibe ngisazo suka ngidonse indlela endala. [*=When it is raining while we are here at school, we are forced to use the longest way home which has a bridge to cross the river. It takes us three hours to get to the bridge, before we can take the route that leads us home*].

When these learners walk hours in addition to their normal times, the obvious consequence is late coming and exhaustion. The frustrations, low morale as well as other negative feelings are imaginable. Some learners get frustrated not knowing what to do when they face heavy rains on the way back home from school and it is risky going home in stormy weather. While learners are busy with their lessons they hear thunder and they lose concentration and their focus is diverted away from their studies. Siphso describes how his views and feelings about walking home and feels trapped by bad weather. This is what he had to say:

Ehlobo kuyinkinga kakhulu ngoba like lidume sila esikoleni singazi ukuthi sizokwenzenjani kodwa kuphoqe ukuthi sihambe siye emakhaya. [*=There is a big problem in summer because rain is taking place. Sometimes it happens while we are still here at school, and we do not know what we must do but we are compelled that we must go home*].

Other learners also mentioned being fearful and scared to go home under these conditions, because walking exposes them to lightning. Sharing similar sentiments, Thoko had this to say:

Ehlobo-ke kunzima kakhulu ngoba umphezulu, umbani usuke ugijima nangendlela, abadala bake bathi ungahambi endleleni uma likufica endleleni ngoba alibonakali izulu uma liqhamuka ngale, uye ulizwe usulibona ngalo ubona izulu nail seli la eduze. [*=In summer it's difficult because the lightning is running on the paths, the elders used to tell us that we must not walk along the path if the thunder catches us on the way, it catches you on the way because you cannot see it when it is approaching, you just hear and see on the other side suddenly it is just next to you*].

Thoko is referring to the advice given to children in rural communities that when it is raining and lightning is flashing, they must not walk on the foot path, but rather on the side of the path. African indigenous knowledge says that during electric storms, lightning runs along the wet puddles in the path. Paths become hollow because they are heavily used and they catch puddles of water which during lightening, become electrically charged and are life threatening. These are some of the dangerous conditions which such learners are exposed to when they walk to school in summer. Besides, the threat of lightening, there is inconvenience of dew which is usually collected by long grass that usually line the foot path. By the time learners arrive at school, they are already wet because of the long, dewy grass they have to contend with. On this issue, Nkosi had this to say:

Uphuma ekhaya uya esikoleni mewuthi uyafika endleleni kunotshani, kunamazolo. [*=When you leave home going to school, on the way you will walk through long wet grass*]

Learners have to push away the long wet grass to prevent their feet, skirts and trousers from getting soaked. Often they say they get to school with wet feet and skirts or trousers. The paths lead through white-owned farm land and this compounds the problem as the grass cannot be cut or destroyed through the use of fire breaks as it usually done in the communal land under the authority of traditional leaders headed by Inkosi (Chief). The learners say that farm owners do not want the long grass burned on their farms. This is what Nkosi had to say in that regard:

Uphuma ekhaya uya esikoleni mewuthi uyafika endleleni kunotshani,
kuna mazolo kanti nabelungu abakhona endaweni abavumi ukuthi
izindawo zabo zishiswe. [= *When you leave home to go to school on
the path you encounter wet grass, and the white people around the
area do not want grass to be burnt in their areas*].

The practice of burning grass takes place for many reasons in KwaZulu-Natal. One is to clear the land around the pathways so as to see more easily dangers such as snakes and criminals who may hide in long grass. A second reason is to avoid getting wet when walking the paths during the early hours of the day. The other reason is to protect homesteads against runaway fires as highlighted in the discussion above. Potgieter, Pillay and Rama (2006) report that long grass along rural paths pose a problem. These scholars argue that long grass affects learners going to school and pose a challenge for them especially in summer.

4.3.2 Winter experiences

The other finding from the data regarding seasonal experiences is that learners find it difficult to concentrate in the first periods during winter time. This is mainly due to the fact that when they arrive in the morning, they had been exposed to frost and they find it difficult even to hold a pen. On this issue, Siphso had the following to say:

Ayike cha; ebusika siyabhubha unqoqwane; sifika izandla zingasakwazi ngisho
ukubhala usazoke uhlale umbuke uthisha ubone ukuthi nazi ezinye izingane ziyabhala
kodwa ngisahleli. [= *It's even worse in winter. We are freezing. We arrived, our frosted
hands unable to write. And you have to wait [to thaw out your fingers] but other learners
and the teacher are busy working, but I am sitting doing nothing*].

In the above extract, Siphso shares his painful experiences of having to watch other classmates writing their class tasks while he and his mates that walk long distances cannot write for some minutes if not hours. Learners like Siphso struggle to use their hands to write during the first period, and this impacts negatively on their effective learning experiences as they can hardly concentrate under those conditions. Evidently, such experiences suggest that some learners are excluded from their democratic right of access to quality education as enshrined in the Constitution Act (No. 108 of 1996).

Some of the older learners are delayed in winter by younger siblings who cannot walk fast under freezing conditions. For example, Nhlakanipho describes how he experiences walking to school with his siblings:

Kunzima kakhulu uma kusebusika ngoba sivuka sihambe nezingane. Zihamba kancane futhi ziyakhala endleleni ngenxa kangqoqwane, kuyabanda manje kufanele ulidane nezingane. [*= It is very difficult in winter because we also walk our siblings to school. They walk very slowly and they also cry because of cold weather, and we have to wait for them*].

The above extract highlights the dynamics that are peculiar particularly to winter times and how these experiences affect older learners who have to care for younger siblings while also trying to cope with freezing winter conditions. There are previous studies that have been conducted in this field which includes Potgieter, C., Pillay, R., Rama, S. (2006) & Nelson Mandela Foundation, (2005). That particular study did not raise the issue of caring for younger siblings while also trying to survive difficult conditions such as these.

4.4 Bad emotions

The third theme focuses on the descriptions of the manner in which the learners who participated in this study felt about incredibly long distances that they walked to and from school. In the focus group discussions learners expressed negative feelings as they narrated stories about the consequences of walking long distances. Nkosi, for instance had the following to say:

Mina kungiphatha kabi kakhulu, ngoba kuye kube khona ukuthi sifike emakhaya, umzali kukhona into afisa ukuthi umenzele yona, kodwa

ngesimo sokuthi usufike ntambama kakhulu ungabe usakwazi kwenza lutho. [= *I am feeling very bad, especially when we arrive late at home, our parents want us to do work for them. But because it is late we cannot do anything*].

The above extract indicates that Nkosi did not feel happy after walking such long distances and that he could not do his chores. Learners also spoke about waking up as early as at 04:00 in the morning to prepare for the long walk to school. They also had to leave early if they are to get to school on time. This is what Siphso had to say in that regard:

Ngisuka ngo 05:00 ekuseni ekhaya ngaleso sikhathi kusuke kusemnyama; ingozi yona engangehlela kodwa ngisuke ngingazi ukuthi kuzokwenzakalani. [= *I leave home at 05:00 while it is still dark. Leaving home at such times exposes me to many unforeseen dangers*].

It is common knowledge in our community that many life threatening occurrences take place during the dark. Therefore, learners fear most criminals and dangerous animals which they come across when walking long distances on foot, and sometimes in darkness. Among these animals are snakes, such as pythons and others. One of the learners had this say:

Mina ngosuku lwami lokuqala ngiya esikoleni kona kwabanzima impela ngoba umuntu wayekhumba emfuleni uzothi usukhumulile emfuleni kanti hhayi uvinjwe inyoka sekumele uqale maphansi uwele umfula ngoba ufuna ukuzofunda. [= *On my first day coming to school it was difficult. I had to take off my clothes and cross the river. After crossing the river I found that there was a big snake blocking the path. Then I had to go back and take off my clothes again to cross the river because I wanted to come to school to learn (Nhlakanipho)*].

The extract above shows that the fear of many dangers on the way to school and the long distances meant that many learners were bound to arrive late at school. The learners also said that as punishment for late coming, the school detained them by holding them back after school. Such practices added more dangers when they go

home alone without the company of other learners. Confirmation of late coming and the effect of the summer rains on attendance and the fatigue resulting from walking long distances was found when I observed the learners over the period of one week. Details about these issues are provided in the next section where the data from observations is discussed.

4.5 Observation data

Observations were conducted over a period of five mornings in one week. The discussion regarding the manner in which observations were structured is presented in the methodology chapter; (see Appendix E for the record of my observations). My findings are about the arrival times, dress, physical energy levels, absenteeism and luggage.

4.5.1 The arrival times

Each morning the school bell rings at 07:45 and immediately after that the security guard closes the gate. Any person who arrives after that time is officially late. Learners who arrive after the bell has rung have their names written by the security guard in the late arrival register. This is done to control and discourage late coming. The registration of late arrivals is done from 07:45 to 08:30 and the register is then handed in to the principal's office. Anyone who arrives after 08:30 is required to report personally to the principal. All registered late comers each day remain behind after school to clean the entire school as part of their punishment.

During my observation week I found that most of the participating learners arrived late at school on most days. On the first day the earliest participating learner arrived at 07:38; the second arrived at 08:08 and the last learner arrived at 08:29. Others did not attend school that day. During the first three days of observations, all but one participant (on one morning only) arrived late.

4.5.2 Dress

I found that learners appeared untidy and exhausted. All participants were sweaty and their shirts were sticking against their bodies and their clothes dishevelled. Girls' skirts were creased since

they were squeezing them out because they were wet from their hips down to their shoes due to rain. Boys had their trousers folded up to their knees and were dirty from the muddy road. Nevertheless, all the participants were dressed properly in their school uniforms. Some of them had face towels to wipe their faces. It was evident to me that these participants had walked to school in the rain. Similar accounts from the learners are noted in the Rural Education Research project funded by the Nelson Mandela Foundation wherein one of the learners said:

When we get to school we are no longer tidy as we were when we left home, it is worse when it is raining (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005, p. 47).

It is a challenge for these learners to attend school after walking in the rain and then to attend classes with dress in that state. Their listening and attention to lessons will obviously be affected. Once their concentration span is negatively affected their level of understanding and performance in subjects will similarly be poor. Unfortunately, these conditions prevail among many learners in rural communities across South Africa and may influence the generally poor national performance in the international Mathematics and Science TIMSS (Trends in International mathematics and Science study) tests. In the 2010 assessment of Grade 9 level learners in Mathematics and Science, South Africa were among the three countries with the lowest performance (TIMSS, 2011).

4.5.3 Physical Energy Level

Walking long distances are tiring and they affect learners' concentration in class. It is a usually accepted fact that a tired person cannot use their listening skills effectively due to exhaustion. My observation reveals that most learners who participated in the study were tired when entering the school gate. Having to attend lessons without enough energy to listen, concentrate and to participate in lessons after walking long distances to school is a challenge. This finding suggests that these learners could only take in limited amount of tuition each day and this continues through the academic year. This may negatively affect the learners' end-of-year academic performance.

4.5.4 Absenteeism

There was high rate of absenteeism among the ten participating learners during the week of morning observation. On Monday, the first day of observation, seven of the ten participants were absent. On the Tuesday eight of the ten participants were absent and on the Wednesday only four participants attended school. All ten participating learners were absent for the Thursday and Friday. Although the study is of only ten participants, the finding of a high level of absenteeism among learners who walk long distances to school may be widespread among the many learners in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal, but it is not the intention of this study to generalise on this finding. Perhaps, another study of quantitative nature can determine the true picture about this issue.

4.5.5 Carrying of school books

I observed that the learner participants did not carry books and bags between home and school. It emerged during our discussion that in fact, they deliberately left their books at school or at home, especially when it is raining. They usually carried one exercise book or nothing at all. In the focus group discussions one learner said their books get wet and damaged and what is written in their exercise books fades and becomes illegible. In certain instances their books fall and are swept downstream while trying to cross the river. Their poor parents have to bear the cost of replacing those books. The learners said that they would rather leave their books at home in order to keep them safe. The obvious implication behind this is that learning cannot take place at school without books, and at home learners cannot do their homework well without their books, and no reading will take place in the absence of books. This practice may result in poor reading skills for such learners and ultimately it will affect their performance in the examinations. In addition, these learners do not have decent school bags in which to carry their books. They use plastic bags to carry their books. When learners do carry books, they select only those books that they will use for homework. I observed this because I saw some learners carrying only one book while others carried no books at all. This observation raises questions about the extent to which there is proper learning that happens among these learners.

4.6 Barriers to Schooling

The findings from the focus group discussion and observation have shown that there are several ways in which the experiences of walking long distances to school becomes a barrier to rural

learners' education. These barriers are exhaustion, natural events, lateness as well as financial burden, and these are discussed below.

4.6.1 Exhaustion

I found that exhaustion constitutes a barrier to these learners' learning. The long distances tire them and affect their concentration during lessons. The participating learners left their homes early in the morning, possibly without having any breakfast, to head for school. The school only provided learners with one free meal per day and this is only provided during the mid-morning or at midday. The lack of nutrition affects learners' concentration negatively and this may result in poor performance in their lessons and assessment activities. Walking a long distance to school is thus a barrier to learning. The Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) report suggests that children perceive the long distance to walk from home to school as one of the primary reasons for some learners dropping out of school. The researchers in that study found that dropping-out starts with late-coming followed by an increased absenteeism. Later in the day the long walk from school to home results in learners failing to do their homework due to tiredness. Another finding is that these learners leave some of their books at school because books are heavy for them to carry while travelling between home and school. Some other learners leave the books to save the books from being damaged by rain or eroded by the river water when they cross. All these factors compromise the education of these learners and thus undermine their democratic right to quality education.

4.6.2 Natural events

I found that rural learners who walk long distances to school experience harsh natural events that can have negative effects on their education. For the learners in this study a major natural event that becomes a barrier was the river, especially when it is flooded. The flooded river prevents learners from going to school for a couple of days; sometimes the whole week as they wait for the water to subside so that they can be able to step on stones to cross the river. Linked to this is the case that under normal conditions learners have to undress in order to wade across the river on their way to school. For teenage girls undressing in public in order to cross the river expose them to many risks some of which may have long term consequences. It can be argued that the absence of bridges may be a cause of poor attendance and even dropping out of school.

By walking through the wet fields or in the rain, along muddy paths and so on, I observed that the learners who walk long distances to school do not arrive looking clean like other learners. Instead, they were sweaty, wet and focused on trying to dry out their uniforms and shoes. This may have many undesired consequences such as feelings of inferior to other learners who are neatly dressed and may influence their participation in lessons.

4.6.3 Lateness

Arriving late at school, as a result of long distances learners walk to school, as well as, the dangers encountered along the way, can be regarded as a barrier to quality education. It is a barrier causes learners that are involved in this situation miss the first lesson of the day. In addition, they are exposed to harsh punishment they receive from the teachers as a result of arriving late for school. In short, these learners suffer in different ways including punishment they receive from the teachers and also the detrimental effects of late coming on their academic performance.

4.7 Financial burden

Parents in rural areas have a financial strain because of the wear and tear on the clothing of their children walking long distances each day. The extent of this problem is suggested by Sindi who shared her views and experiences on this matter. She indicated that her parents had to buy her school shoes more than three times in the year. This is how she put it:

Futhi okunye engakuphawula ukuthi izicathulo ngonyaka odlule ngathengelwa kathathu njengoba amatshe ngangingawajwayele ngiqhuzuka njalo, zidabuke njalo. [= *What I noticed is that last year alone my parents bought me school shoes three times because I was not used to walk on stony path and my shoes get torn now and again*].

The long distance that these learners walked damaged their shoes so quickly because the path they used was stoney. Some of the access roads that they used can be characterised as gravel roads and their parents had to buy them new school shoes now and again. A participant in the Mandela Foundation Study (2005, p.47) confirms this by saying that “*I walk a long distance from here to Nongeke. I have to buy shoes approximately three times a year*”. Thus, having to send their children a long distance to school puts a financial strain on the already-stretched purse of poor parents.

4.8 Conclusion

The data presented in this chapter clearly indicates that there are rural learners who walk long distances through difficult climatic conditions and get to school wet. The data has also indicated that getting to school throughout the year is a luxury to these learners as they cannot go to school during bad weather. They arrive at school exhausted and unable to concentrate well. In summer these learners risk their lives by walking through thunderstorms, heavy rains and lightning to get to school and they may often arrive late at school. In winter they struggle to fully participate in academic activities during the first period because their hands are freezing and they cannot use them to write during the first periods. The data has indicated that collectively; all these factors constitute negative experiences which form barriers that prevent them from learning and performing academically as expected by society. The next chapter concludes the study and presents conclusions that I have arrived at on the basis of the findings presented in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented findings according to various themes as explained in the chapter. In this chapter, conclusions based on the findings are presented and recommendations drawn from the conclusions are made. However, before the conclusions are made, a short summary of the study is made. After the conclusions have been made, the implications of the findings, as well as the limitations and some ideas for future research are advanced.

5.2 Summary of the study

This study has explored the experiences of the learners who walk long distances to and from school on daily basis and also to understand how walking such long distances affected their learning in the school. This study was conducted in one school in a rural education district in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The study comprised 10 learners from Grade 10. The first chapter has outlined the background to the study, including the discussion of the rationale, research questions and a brief discussion of the methodology. The second chapter has focussed on the review of related literature including the discussion of the conceptual framework. The third chapter provided a detailed discussion of the design and methodology that was employed to produce data that would assist in answering the research questions. The fourth chapter presented a full discussion of the data. The last chapter summarises the study, present the conclusions as well as the recommendations.

5.3 Research questions restated

Research questions that were posed in Chapter One are used to present the conclusions and also to highlight the extent to which the findings answer the research questions that the study sought answered.

5.3.1 What are the experiences of rural learners that walk long distances to school and back home?

This first research question fits my conceptual framework which included experiences. I found that rural learners who walk long distances to school experience delays on their way to school. The delays are due to a variety of factors including flooded rivers that learners cannot cross; chores as part of home responsibilities given to children by parents such as looking after cattle; dangerous animals and reptiles such as pythons which sometimes block the path learners use to get to school; learners having to spend time undressing before crossing the river and then dressing after they have crossed the river; on the rainy days taking detours using the longest route to get to school in order to get safely across rivers; accompanying their young siblings first to the primary school close by in winter because the freezing conditions mean the young ones cannot walk fast because of the cold.

These delays negatively affected the participants from coming to school on time thus causing them to miss their first lesson. Due to these delays learners become demoralised about schooling and learning. When these learners return late at home they had some difficulties in doing their homework and chores. One girl in the focus group discussions mentioned that her mother quarrels with her over late coming and the mother want her to do more chores. These experiences of learners become a barrier which prevents learners from doing their school work well and freely accessing education.

I found that girls become vulnerable to sexual harassment. Nakedness of these girls when they had to cross the river with their clothes held up high makes them vulnerable and compromises their privacy. All the girls in the focus group discussions were teenagers. Although none of the girls mentioned being sexually harassed during the focus group discussions, this is a lurking danger when they undress themselves in public spaces such as rivers. Although the girls never mentioned this in the focus group interview but they repeatedly mentioned their discomfort when they had to undress themselves.

I found that walking long distances to school means that these rural learners experience exhaustion and they cannot concentrate on their lessons. The average distance these learners walk, normally takes them more than one and a half hours one way. If they had to take a detour

for unavoidable reasons, such as swollen rivers, they had to walk a route that takes three hours making them even more tired.

I also found that rural learners' experiences change according to the season so that summer experiences differ from those of winter experiences. In summer learners faced heavy rains, lightning and thunder on the way. These conditions at times frightened the learners and they found themselves not knowing what to do. These learners risked their lives sometimes walking in such conditions. Learners also experienced difficulty walking on pathways where the grass is long and dewy. Due to these situations learners get wet shoes, skirts and trousers to school. The school made no provision for such learners and this forced them to attend lessons wet. These learners are already late for their lessons. The long grass along paths can also hide criminals who ambush learners. During summer, parents of such learners incurred financial burden, because heavy rains damage learners' books and exercise books, and parents have to replace these learning materials. One learner said that she had to replace her school shoes more than three times in one year, because her shoes wore out while walking on the rough terrain.

Some of these experiences are similar to those noted by Dladla (2012) in relation to poor urban learners' experiences such as the dangers of crossing busy roads and harassment by the strangers along the road. However, Dladla (2012) did not find that urban learners had similar seasonal experiences while walking to school as I have found in this study.

5.3.2 How does walking long distances to school yield barriers to education for rural learners?

I also found that the exhaustion from walking long distances to school is a barrier to these learners because they cannot concentration during lessons. These learners left their homes early in the morning possibly without a proper breakfast heading for school. The school only provided learners with one meal per day. Poor concentration results in poor learning. The Nelson Mandela Foundation researchers (2005) found that long distance from home to school was one of the reasons for some learners dropping out of school. It is likely that the late coming to school and high absenteeism, which I observed was due also due to the distance the learners walked to school and back home. This is a barrier to learning and eventually can lead to dropping out of

school altogether. If the undressing of teenage girls when they cross the rivers on their way to school leads to unwanted sexual experiences and rape, this may result in severe long term consequences that may become a barrier to their schooling. Such experiences can result in poor attendance causing these girls to miss a lot of schooling which in a long run may result in these learners failing at the end of the year.

I also found that rural learners who walked long distances are exposed to natural barriers such as flooding rivers which prevent learners from going to school. These learners missed a couple of days of school work, sometimes the whole week as they waited for the river water to subside. This caused learners to fall behind in their class work so that they may not do well in their tests. The late coming and the carrying of few books which I observed can also be an important barrier for these learners in that such learners may fall behind in their lessons and not do as well as their peers in tests. That scenario meant that in each academic year these learners do not receive full tuition in the learning areas. They also did not receive the support from teachers and departmental officials for time loss.

5.4 Implications of the findings

In South Africa the state provision of transport for school learners is not enough. There are no clear policy guidelines on this issue. The review of literature has not produced any adequate information regarding clear policy guidelines on learner transport. Evidently, this is an area that needs urgent attention, particularly if social justice and democratic access to quality education has to be guaranteed to the learners in rural communities. Unless clear policy provisions are made to address the issue of learner transport, learners in rural communities will continue to have proper education denied to them. If they come late they miss the first lessons and if they have to walk long distances without breakfast they will fail to concentrate on their lessons. Unless the state builds functioning roads and bridges the learners will continue coming late to school and sometimes even wet during bad weather conditions. They cannot concentrate on their lessons and they are in danger of falling sick. Unless the school governing bodies and school management review their school starting time and punishment protocols the problem will persist and learners in rural communities will continue to suffer in terms of lack of access to proper education as a result of these factors.

5.5 Limitations and research possibilities

This study was conducted in only one rural secondary school with only ten participants (five boys and five girls). It is not intended to make generalisations from this study. Despite this limitation, this study gives an in-depth understanding of rural learners' experiences and challenges. Another limitation is that I did not seek any explanation for the high absenteeism over the whole week noted in Table 3.2 of Chapter Three. Future research might explore reasons why rural learners who walk long distances to the nearest school are coming late and frequently being absent from school. Similarly, we do not know if these findings are widespread in rural areas. Therefore, a quantitative study comprising survey questionnaires might present a clearer picture about the extent of this problem across rural communities.

5.6 Conclusion

During the process of conducting this study I became concerned that the government generally and the Department of Education in particular, had not done enough to provide learner transport to and from school. Rural learners are faced with infrastructural challenges which are beyond their capacity or control. Finding a means of transport to take them safely to school and back home again is an impossible task for them without the support of government. It was also revealed in this study that rural learners who walk to school are arriving late at school. Late-coming deprives these learners of their first lessons. Another concern revealed by this study is that learners who walk long distances are often absent from school. Evidently, issues of democracy, social justice which framed this study are undermined as learners from this rural community do not enjoy similar rights as their urban and township counterparts.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sample of the Informed Consent Letter with reply form, for participating learners' parents/guardians/care-givers, granting permission for the child to participate in the study

11 Ridge Road

Hammarisdale

3700

01 March 2011

Dear Parent/Guardian/Care-giver

I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the Faculty of Education. My student number is 952042475. I am conducting my study about the experiences and barriers of poor rural learners who walk long distance to school and back home. Your child has been selected to participate in this study which involves interviews, focus group interviews and transect walk. Therefore I am requesting permission for your child to participate in the study. The aim of the study is not to make money so there will be no monetary gain on it. All research material will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and the material will be destroyed after 5 years.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw your child from participating in the study at any time. Similarly, if your child decides to withdraw and not participate in the study, I will accept his/her decision entirely.

The particulars of my supervisor are as follows:

Dr. J. Karlsson, Faculty of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Tel: 031-2601398/083 788 1433

E-mail: karlsson@ukzn.ac.za

Please complete the form attached to indicate that you understand what I have requested and indicate your reply to this request.

Please return this form to the school before the 8th of March 2011

Yours sincerely

Mr Bafana J. Mahlaba

Informed consent declaration

The study is about poor urban learners' long walks to school and the influence on their school activities,

Research: Mr Bafana J. Mahlaba

- I understand the request about the activities that my child will be invited to participate in doing.
- I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and he / she can withdraw at any time from the activity.
- I understand that my child's name and identity will not be used in any reports that are written.

I agree/ disagree to allow my child: _____ of _____ to

Participate in this study as indicated in Mr Bafana J. Mahlaba's letter.

Signed

Date

Appendix B: Learner Demographic Profile Form

One-page Demographic Profile of the Learner

My gender: _____

My age: _____

I have lived in the area for _____ years.

How much lunch money for each day _____

Number of employed people in household _____

Total average family monthly income _____

Place of employment _____

Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Instrument

Topic

Interview of learners about their experiences of walking long distance to school.

Preparations

I will need a venue i.e. classroom to conduct an interview. I will negotiate suitable time for an interview with the participants. The interview will be scheduled for an hour at most. A digital voice recorder will be used when recording interview data. Permission will be requested from the participants before I begin the recording. Notes will be taken for the purpose of reviewing the answers and ask additional questions at the end of the interview, and make a transcript out of these notes.

Opening remarks

Learners, this interview is about your experiences when walking to school and back home. I hope your participation is voluntarily, and if you feel like dropping off from an interview, feel free to do so. This interview will not take more than an hour. It should take approximately forty five minutes.

Questions

- Xoxani ngezimo enihlangabezana nazo endleleni eniyihambayo uma niya eskoleni zinsuku zonke.
- Xoxani ngezinto ezinivimbayo ukuba nifunde ngokukhululekile eziyinxenye yezingqinamba enihlangabezana nazo endleleni eya eskoleni.

Closing remarks

Now we have come to an end of our interview process. Thank you so much for your participation, and for having such a good conversation. I hope you will walk safely back home after school.

Appendix D: KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Permission to Conduct Research in selected schools



kzn education

Department:
Education
KWAZULU-NATAL

MR BJ MAHLABA
11 RIDGE ROAD
HAMMARSDALE
3700

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

Date: 05/10/2010

Reference: 0099/2010

PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW LEARNERS AND EDUCATORS

The above matter refers.

Permission is hereby granted to interview Departmental Officials, learners and educators in selected schools of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal subject to the following conditions:

1. You make all the arrangements concerning your interviews.
2. Educators' programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, educators and schools are not identifiable in any way from the results of the interviews.
5. Your interviews are limited only to targeted schools.
6. A brief summary of the interview content, findings and recommendations is provided to my office.
7. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers and principals of schools where the intended interviews are to be conducted.

The KZN Department of education fully supports your commitment to research: Rural school transport in KwaZulu natal.

It is hoped that you will find the above in order.

Best Wishes

R Cassius Lubisi, (PhD)
Superintendent-General

...dedicated to service and performance
beyond the call of duty.

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

POSTAL : Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa

PHYSICAL: Office G25, 188 Pietermaritz Street, Metropolitan Building, PIETERMARITZBURG 3201

TEL: Tel:+27 33 341 8610/8611 | Fax: +27 33 341 8612 | E-mail

Appendix E: Sample of the letter and the form signed by learners agreeing to participate in the study Demographic profile of the learner

11 Ridge Road

Hammarisdale

3700

01 March 2011

Dear learner

I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and doing a Masters Degree. My student number is 952042475. As part of my study I am trying to understand what learners' experiences are, and how some experiences become a barrier for learners in accessing education.

I am writing this letter to invite you to participate in my research. Participation in this study is voluntarily and your name will be kept confidential. The aim of the study is not to make money so there will be no monetary gain on it. All research material will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and the material will be destroyed after 5 years. If you decide to withdraw and not participate in the study, I will accept your decision entirely.

The particulars of my supervisor are as follows:

Dr. J. Karlsson-Faculty of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Tel: 031-2601398/083 788 1433

E-mail: karlsson@ukzn.ac.za

Please complete the form attached to indicate that you understand what I have requested and indicate your reply to this request.

Please return this form to the school before the 8th of March 2011

Yours sincerely

Mr. Bafana J. Mahlaba

Reply form for learners

A study of rural school transport in KwaZulu-Natal

To Researcher – Mr Bafana Mahlaba

- I understand the request of participation in your study.
- I understand there will be no material benefits
- I understand my real name, and all the discussions will be kept confidential.
- I understand I can stop participating when I want to.
- I agree/disagree (circle your decision)

Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix F: Sample of the letter and the form signed by the principal and chairperson of the governing body, granting permission to conduct the study at the school

11 Ridge Road

Hammarsdale

3700

03 July 2010

The Chairperson and the Principal

The school Governing body

Mphelandaba Secondary School

Sir/Madam

Request for Permission

I am a Masters student in the Faculty of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am conducting a study about rural school transport. I request your school to allow me to conduct this study. The name of the study is rural school transport in KwaZulu-Natal. I intend observing and conducting focus group interviews with some learners (five boys and five girls) from your school. The learners that will participate will be selected from grade ten.

The particulars of my supervisor are: Dr Karlsson, [Tel:031-2601398](tel:031-2601398) / 083 788 1433. School of Education and Development, Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Please complete the reply form below to indicate your decision about my request.

Yours Sincerely

Mr Bafana J. Mahlaba

[Tel:031-736](tel:031-7361621) 1621 / Cell 072 226 5434

Student number: 952042475

Granting of permission

A study about poor urban learners' long walks to school and the influence on their school activities.

Research: Mr Bafana J. Mahlaba

- I understand the request of using the school for research purposes.
- I understand that the school should give permission.

I agree / disagree to allow the _____ school to be used as a
Research site as indicated in Mr Mahlaba's letter.

Signature of the principal

date

Signature of SGB Chairperson

date