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**EXPLORING THE LITERACY LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN SECONDARY
SCHOOLS**

by

Houston Levert May Student Number: 2010008593

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SUPERVISOR: Dr B.O. Plaatjies

November 2021

DECLARATION

I, Houston Levert May (Student Number, 2010008593), declare that this document titled,

Exploring the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools

is my own dissertation. This is my own independent work and has not been submitted to any tertiary institution.

This research project and all relevant sources have been accurately cited and thoroughly referenced.



Signature:Date: 27 November 2021

Houston Levert May

PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING

CORNELIA GELDENHUYS

☎ 083 2877088
corrieg@mweb.co.za

28 November 2021

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Herewith I, Cornelia Geldenhuys (ID 521114 0083 088) declare that I am a qualified, accredited language practitioner and that I have edited the following dissertation:

EXPLORING THE LITERACY LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

Houston Levert May

Student Number: 2010008593

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.....
C GELDENHUYS
MA (Lin) cum laude, MA (Mus), HOD, HDL, UOLM

Accredited member/Geakkrediteerde lid, SATI, Membership/Lidmaatskap: 1001474 (A/E-E/A)
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explored the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools. The challenges educators, departmental heads, deputy principals and principals experienced were illustrated in the research study, as well as the aspects of literacy leadership affecting literacy. This research study is based on a theoretical framework with the focus on distributed leadership and instructional leadership.

This research study was conducted at three secondary schools in the Republic of South Africa, Free State Province, Motheo District (Bloemfontein). This study is grounded in the qualitative research method. Data were collected utilizing semi-structured individual interviews with all the members of the SMT (principal, deputy principal, departmental heads) and the literacy educators. Interviews with three principals, three deputy principals, six language departmental heads and six literacy educators were conducted. In addition, a documentary analysis was done in each of the three secondary schools.

From the data collected at each of these respective secondary schools, various categories and themes were identified. These categories and themes were centred on the literacy leadership challenges literacy leaders experience and how instructional and distributed leadership may assist in addressing these literacy leadership challenges in the senior phase.

The majority of the findings suggest that there are literacy leadership challenges in the senior phase in managing and leading the literacy curriculum at secondary schools. Additionally, the findings suggest that those SMT members who lack knowledge and skills will be unsuccessful in providing instructional leadership, which hampers literacy educators in promoting literacy in their classrooms. Thus, principals, deputy principals and departmental heads must take account for the literacy curriculum, support and enhance professional development, supervise the literacy instructional program and establish a positive literacy environment when monitoring educators. The study also revealed that parents does not fulfil their role when literacy challenges occur and this makes it challenging for SMT members to address literacy leadership challenges experienced in schools. It is therefore recommended that literacy leaders (principals) need insight and must comprehend the literacy curriculum in the senior phase to address literacy leadership challenges.

KEY CONCEPTS

Challenges Deputy Principal

Distributed Leadership

Educator

Head of Department

Instructional Leadership

Leadership

Literacy Principal

SMT

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CHAPTER 1 : ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Literacy acquisition is the ability to read and write, according to De Lange, Dippenaar and Anker (2018), and forms a vital element of any learner's development. Literacy skills are required right from the beginning of school education, through to employment and citizenship (Spaul, 2012; Gunning, 2014; Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena, & McLeod, 2017).

In terms of reading, can it be concluded that reading acquisition is crucial in addressing the needs of learners in languages. This is especially the case because classrooms have learners with diverse language backgrounds and educators are obliged to develop reading acquisition that meets the needs of all learners (Friesen & Haigh, 2018). Friesen and Haigh (2018) continue that an improved understanding of the knowledge and skills that support reading acquisition success in languages will permit educators to target instruction to learners in need of extra support better, irrespective of their language background. This also indicates that reading acquisition can alleviate the cognitive load placed on working memory, thus permitting more reading comprehension success.

Sound reading skills are also vital for the understanding and progress in generic subjects. Bicer and Capraro (2013:365) indicate that reading acquisition in subjects such as Mathematics, for example, is crucial, because mathematical language is only taught in schools, and it differs from learners' conversational language. Ferreira (2014) emphasizes that, among the various languages used in teaching Mathematics, visual language is used by all the educators. It is apparent that educators' approaches in language becomes pivotal to supporting learners to comprehend Mathematics. Educators must address this language difference by including reading acquisition or contributing on learners' prior knowledge. Aflahah (2018) elucidates that there are additional kinds of languages in teaching Mathematics. Aflahah (2018) adds that this includes audio, visual and written dimensions of the subject. Educators' use of multimodal communication can assist learners in making meanings rather than relying on print materials. As a result, this reflects a contemporary approach to conceptual disciplines. Finally, literacy or numeracy is the ability to use the means of thinking, using language and behaviour that learners acquire in their communities or during classroom discourse, permitting learners to build academic language and comprehension.

Writing skills, on the other hand, are equally important. Research done by Taylor, Van Der Berg and Mabogoane (2013:157) as well as Lenski and Verbruggen (2010:87) regards writing as a powerful tool that can help learners to improve their reading, speaking, thinking, communication and listening skills. Furthermore, writing has a positive influence on reading. It is central to education, professional success in our global society and for the occupational world. Joubert, Bester and Meyer (2010:163) opine that, “Those who write well, have more power and therefore more control over their lives.”

The consequences of poor literacy skills are farreaching. Van Rhyn (2018) indicates that literacy abilities can affect a variety of components in the child’s psychological wellbeing. For example, one is that the optimistic self-concept of a learner is influenced by literacy (Van Rhyn, 2018). It appears that a learner who is unable to accomplish literacy skills tends to develop a low self-esteem and often lacks self-confidence. Van Rhyn (2018:5) indicates in this regard that a learner’s lack of ability to read and write has an undesirable impact on the self-assertion of a learner; therefore, literacy plays a vital role in the socio-economic freedom of every individual. Van Rhyn (2018:5) further adds that basic literacy skills are pivotal to learners to function daily. Literacy skills are linked with improved employment rates as well as developed socio-economic status.

Many learners who do not master the basic reading and writing skills tend to become early school-leavers, with a negative impact on their quality of life. Van Rhyn (2018:5) states that their inability to read and write undoubtedly adds to their inability to succeed in life and to become meaningful citizens. Prinsloo (2011:29) remarks that South Africa’s socio-economic factors, 11 official languages and continuous changing curriculum should be regarded as important factors contributing towards our literacy challenges. Van Staden, Graham and Harvey (2015:5) agree, but adds that the psychological concerns of not providing support and necessary care are severe and they include reading and writing problems, which often results in learners failing, learners displaying poor social skills and peer relations and lastly, emotional problems.

In the next paragraph the researcher will explain the motivation and rationale for conducting this study.

1.2 MOTIVATION AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The researcher's interest in the theme of literacy education stems firstly from the poor, persisting results of South African learners in secondary schools in literacy of the last decade. Rule (2017:8) remarks that although the Annual National Assessment (ANA) tests (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2014) indicate a noticeable improvement in marks for home language, and of literacy for learners across the grades between the year 2012 and 2014, only 48% of learners in the senior phase (Grade 9) achieved a literacy rate of 50% or more. The figure below provide more detail to the performance of learners in Home and First Additional Language.

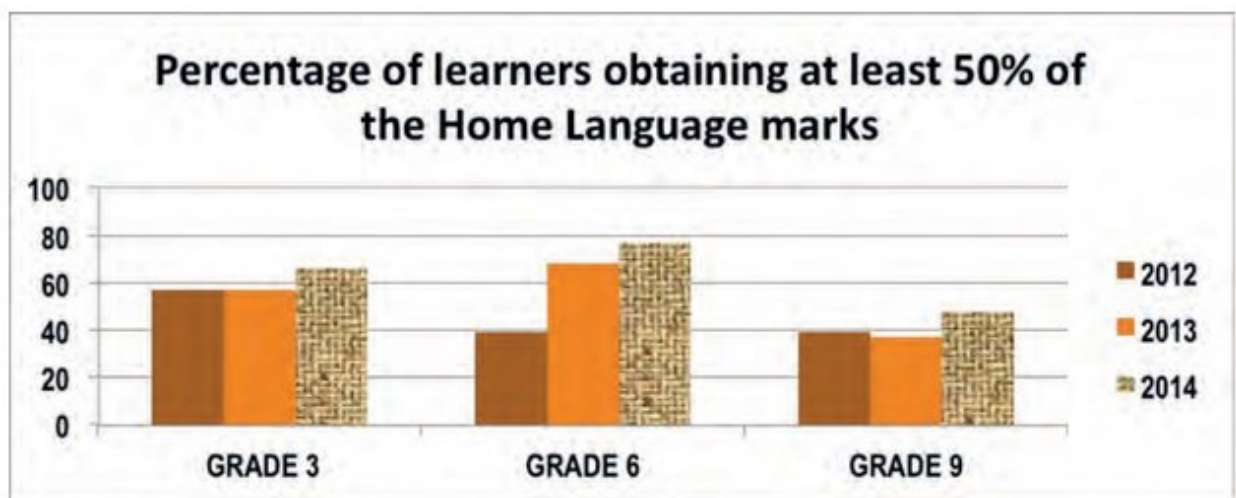


Figure 1.1: Performance of senior phase learners in home language

Figure 1.1 illustrates that the performance of Grade 9 (senior phase) learners in Home Language were still below 60% for the year 2014, when the ANA tests were still conducted. As illustrated, the data shows that Grade 9 Home Language marks are the lowest, compared to Grades 3 and 6. This clearly illustrates that literacy performance is problematic in this phase. Literacy leaders need to address this predicament, because this signals that senior phase learners are not ready to enter the further education and training phase (Grades 10-12).

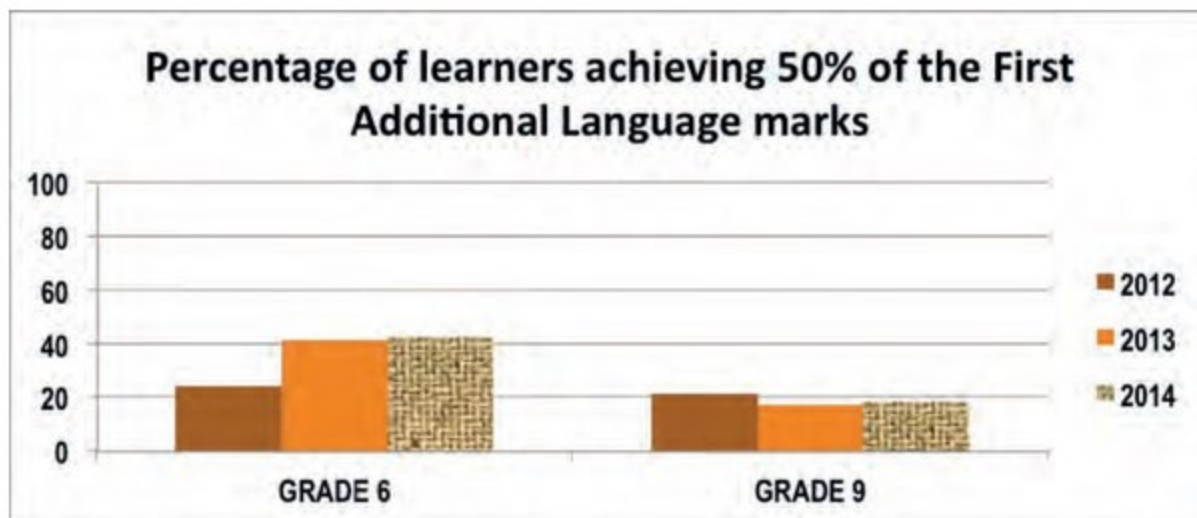


Figure 1.2: Performance in first Additional Language in the intermediate phase

It is apparent in the figure that displays the results of performance in the First Additional language that the intermediate phase (Grade 6) shows an increase in learners obtaining acceptable passing requirements/achievement levels. However, the percentage of learners in the senior phase (Grade 9) obtaining the passing requirements remains extremely low. Other research studies within the South African school context confirm the challenges with reading and writing

The secondly motivation to conduct this study derived from the researcher's personal experiences as language educator. The researcher had the opportunity to teach in two different secondary schools in the Motheo District and to experience and witness the literacy practices in both contexts. He observed that learners at both schools experienced challenges with literacy. Furthermore, it seemed that the school management team seemed to be unaware of the curriculum and instructional leadership role they had to fulfil with regard to literacy (see also Mestry, 2017; Hoadley, 2018 & Plaatjies, 2019). Being appointed in 2019 as the Departmental Head of a Secondary School, the researcher realized the important role that the School Management Team (SMT) should play as leaders of the school curriculum, including literacy. Coupled with the poor performance as described in the preceding paragraphs, the researcher deemed it necessary to conduct an investigation into the challenges from the perspective of the leadership roles. Scholars indicate that educators and leaders – who need to be at the forefront as literacy leaders – have insufficient pre- and in-service training in literacy education (Harris et al. 2013:539). This causes them to be

unprepared for the implementation of teaching and evidence-based interventions. It was this the aim of the researcher to look into this and other challenges that are experienced at secondary schools- specifically in the senior phase- in terms of literacy.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.3.1 Research problem

As is the case with learners from primary schools, learners in secondary schools, should be able to have strong literacy skills. According to the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document for languages Grade 7-9, learners in the senior phase should be able to demonstrate various competences in reading and writing (DBE, 2012:10-11). Literacy skills form part of the languages curriculum. The skills associated with the mastering of these two skills require sound teaching practices, as these aim to develop learners as critical and innovative thinkers. Furthermore, sound writing skills develop learners who are able to communicate functionally and innovatively (DBE, 2012:11).

According to an investigation done by Mbhalati (2017:9), reading and writing play a vital role in the development of an adolescent, as reading is an intermediary skill through which learning takes place. Both reading and writing determine the scholastic performance of adolescents (Mbhalati, 2017:9). The above statement is consistent with the study by Baruthram (2012:89), who states that literacy creates the foundation in terms of future endeavours as well as the attainment of an objective or goal the learner wants to achieve.

Over the past decade, the Department of Education tried various strategies to eliminate literacy challenges. At the heart of all these incentives was the aspiration to develop learners' scholastic achievements in the National Assessment for Grades 3, 6 and 9, where National Assessments were conducted in Mathematics and Literacy (DBE, 2014b). Furthermore, Mbhalati (2017:89) claims that in an attempt to address this challenge, the National Department of Education (DoE) presented guidelines and intervention strategies such as the Ithuteng Campaign back in 1996, the Masifunde Sonke Campaign at the start of the millennium 2000, the National Reading Strategy in 2008 and the Reading Program for all schools in 2018.

Despite these and other interventions, research indicates various challenges in terms of learner performance in literacy in secondary schools. The underperformance of learners in literacy assessment, especially in high-poverty South African school contexts, is of great concern (DBE, 2013; Spaul, 2012). South African learners have serious literacy incompetences, and their performance is also “frequently far below international benchmark standards” (Mbhalati, 2017:2). Motselisi (2012:14), for instance, argues that learners in secondary schools cannot make informed decisions, struggle to read a text meaningfully, cannot reason clearly and are unable to write legibly and confidently. The report on the Annual National Assessment [ANA] (2014) indicates that learners cannot write answers in their own words and that summarizing a text becomes extremely challenging for them. The report also highlights that learners cannot write a full sentence or even give an opinion on paper. The report also emphasizes that learners in the senior phase lack editing skills, especially when it comes to writing essays.

In terms of the challenges associated with reading, the report elucidates that educators struggle to identify learners who need amended reading instruction and do not know how to go about in doing that (DBE, 2014a). Furthermore, learners in the senior phase experience difficulties regarding literacy acquisition. The challenges put the spotlight also then on the role of the educator as driver of the curriculum. Researchers point out various problems that hamper performance in literacy. Grabe et al. (2009) opine that language educators struggle to monitor their own comprehension and organizing about what to implement or how to complete gaps or resolve ambiguities. Grabe et al. (2009) add that language educators are unable to identify how elements of specific information or content relate to one another and to decide which of those are vital. Language educators also seem to experience challenges in subject content as well as assessment techniques. Of great concern also is that educators are unable to evaluate the rates of reading improvement shown by learners.

Contextual challenges contribute to the challenges. According to Van Rhyn (2018), these include limited resources, reading material, language experiences in impoverished communities and limited exposure to literature. To add, Plaatjies (2021) refer to a lack of parental support, low literacy levels and the lack of involvement of South African parents. Providing the many research interventions, especially from a classroom perspective that has been devoted to investigate the literacy challenge, the question is what could be done more to obtain a better understanding of the

problem. One way of looking at it is through an investigation on what could be done from a leadership perspective. Little is known about the role of leaders in terms of literacy leadership. Houck and Novak (2017a:30) point to this issue and claim that “little has been done for instance to examine the specific knowledge that principals require in terms of literacy leadership”. Research is also scanty in terms of the underlying challenges that principals experience in terms of literacy leadership in secondary schools in particular. When considered against the backdrop of what leadership experts proclaim about the important role that leaders should play, this is quite strange. In a landmark examination on school leadership, for example, the importance of leadership in improving learner performance is highlighted by Leithwood et al.(2004:5). For these authors “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among in-school influences that contribute to what students learn at school on student success”.

This study therefore aimed at *Exploring the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools*. An understanding of the challenges that leaders experience may equip role-players with a much better understanding of what the specific challenges are and how to address these. With this in mind, the research questions of the study were framed as follows:

1.3.2 Primary research question

What are the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools?

1.3.3 Secondary research questions

- What are the challenges that educators experience with literacy education?
- What are the roles of the SMT in literacy leadership at secondary schools?
- What are the challenges that the SMT encounter in performing their roles as literacy leaders in secondary schools?
- Which strategies could be implemented to address the literacy challenges in secondary schools?

1.3.4 Research aim and objectives

The overall aim of this study is to explore literacy leadership practices at selected secondary schools. In pursuing this aim, the objectives of the study were to:

- Establish, by means of a literature study, the challenges that educators experience with literacy education in order to create a theoretical foundation for the study.
- Explore the roles of the SMT as literacy leaders in literacy leadership at secondary schools.
- Describe how other members of the school management team (SMT) and staff perform their roles as literacy leaders at secondary school.
- Propose strategies that can be implemented to address the literacy challenges in secondary schools.

1.4 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

In this section to follow, key concepts that are central to the study and associated with the central theme of the study are clarified and defined.

1.4.1 Challenges

A challenge is something different and problematic which involves great effort and determination (Crouch, 2017).

1.4.2 Literacy

The capability to speak, write, listen and read, identify, comprehend, interpret and create using written or printed materials associated with various contexts (Crouch, 2017).

1.4.3 Mother tongue language

Better known as L1. It refers to the language that learners have learnt in their early years and which have become their natural instrument of reasoning and communicating (DoE, 2010:3).

1.4.4 Educators

An educator/teacher is an individual who specialized in educational philosophies and methods (OECD, 2020).

1.4.5 Head of Department

This term refers to a senior educator with subject specific knowledge and skills in terms of the methodology in order to manage a specific subject (Elliotte & Clifford, 2014).

1.4.6 School management team

This is a vital organizational sub-unit in schools that serves to combine professional colleagues from the same educational setting. There is collaborative and participative preparation and execution of duties in subject departments (Dumitru &Jinga, 2015:15)

1.4.7 Literacy leadership

Leadership reflects important transformations in the extent of independence, levels and patterns of accountability and the nature responsibility in terms of literacy as subject (Bush, Hamid, Ng & Kaparou, 2018; Bush, 2010).

1.4.8 Instructional leadership

A term used to describe the leadership and management of aspects of a school that directly influence learner achievement delivery every day (Van Deventer, 2016:342)

1.4.9 Distributed leadership

The distributed leadership theory integrates the view of multiple leaders who cooperate with followers in dynamic and innovative ways (Grant, 2017:1).

1.5 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

A theory is articulated to clarify, predict and comprehend phenomena to ultimately challenge current knowledge within the boundaries of critical assumptions. Gabriel (2013:178) proposes that a theoretical framework is indeed the structure that can embrace or support a theory of any research study. One can say that the theoretical framework presents the theory that clarifies why the research problem occur. Van der Walt (2016: 51) states that a theoretical framework is set to play a vital role, as it offers an inclusive understanding of the research conducted. William (2017) further indicates that the theoretical framework stipulates which vital variables have an impact on a phenomenon of interest and emphasizes the importance of examining how the variables might differ.

Theories that support this study are proposed to provide knowledge about the literacy leadership challenges that are explored. The theoretical lens through which this study is approached are the Instructional leadership theory and the Distributed Leadership theories. These two theories and their relevance to the study will be unpacked in more detail in Chapter 2.

1.6 THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research paradigm, design and research approach adopted for the study are briefly explained in the following paragraphs. The design and methodology are unpacked in detail in Chapter 3 of the study.

1.6.1 The nature of the research and research paradigms

This study is undertaken within the interpretive paradigm. Thanh and Thanh (2015:25) affirm that the interpretive paradigm allows scholars to view the world through the thoughts and experiences

of the participants in the study. The aim is to comprehend the views that principals and SMTs hold on reality (ontology) and to understand the correlation between the knowers (principals, SMTs, staff, learners) and their knowledge on literacy leadership.

1.6.2 The research design: Phenomenology

Nieuwenhuis (2016:72) states that a research design is a strategy that seeks to move from fundamental theoretical assumptions to specifying the selection of partakers, data-gathering methods to be used and the data analysis to be done. It is apparent that educational research involves developing innovative approaches of inquiry and amending our thinking slightly from one-dimensional ideas conveyed by news reports. The design adopted for this study is a phenomenological research design and it is seen as a familiar design in qualitative studies (Gill, 2020:4). Nieuwenhuis (2016) upholds that phenomenological studies determine what an experience means for the participants who have had the experience and which will enable a detailed description of the phenomena studied. Researchers are required to set aside personal biases when utilizing a phenomenological approach (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio (2019:91) note that phenomenology entails the individual experiences people encounter in their lives and seeking the understanding thereof. Neubauer et al. (2019:94) further emphasise that phenomenology is an investigation of underlying challenges and is thus very powerful.

This study focuses on literacy leadership challenges. Consequently the design selected lends itself to exploring the phenomenon comprehensively.

1.6.3 Research approach: Qualitative Research

Leavy (2017:38) claims that a research approach is the tool that researchers use to accumulate information. Nieuwenhuis (2016:15) agrees, but adds that a research approach brings our ontology and epistemology as well as the method together. The research approach will help us to collect information from a specific group of people, or it can focus on the individual itself. This study has adopted a qualitative research approach. The main reason why the researcher has decided on this approach is that qualitative research enables one to make meaning of the data. The collective

meaning that individuals attribute to their experiences and circumstances as well as the meaning people insert into texts is important (Leavy, 2017:148). In the case of this study, the experiences principals, HoDs and educators have in terms of literacy challenges in secondary schools were investigated in order to make sense of the research problem. Qualitative research is a research tool that seeks to collect data through participants' spoken words (Taylor, Bogdan & Devault, 2015:7) as well as how each stage of the research process is intertwined with one another. As with any method, qualitative research also has its limitations. Nieuwenhuis (2016:53) states that appropriate analysis of qualitative data is challenging and time consuming. The researcher addressed this challenge by analysing data during and immediately after the data collection process.

1.6.4 The selection of research participants

The population from which the participants were selected is secondary schools. This study has utilized purposive sampling strategy. Strydom and Delport (2011:392) explain that purposive sampling focuses on a specific case, because it illustrates characteristics or notions that are of interest for a specific study. Participants were selected because they are involved in literacy instruction and as leaders they are confronted with leadership challenges and practices. The research environment for this qualitative study is secondary schools situated in the Motheo District (Mangaung, Free State Province). The educators and SMTs were chosen from three selected secondary schools. The focus therefore was on six Grade 7 to 9 educators, two from each school, who are responsible for languages, four deputy principals, four heads of departments (HoDs) and four principals. This group was able to provide the data that are related to the general aim of the research; that is, to explore the literacy leadership challenges at secondary schools.

1.6.5 Ethical considerations

Permission to conduct the study was first obtained from the Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State. Permission was also obtained from the Free State Department of Education and the three selected secondary schools in Bloemfontein. In line with what Creswell and Poth (2018:54) propose, ethical issues are linked with demonstrating mutual respect for other individuals, and the participants' identities were subsequently protected, including the need to respect participants'

views. During the data collection process, the researcher followed the advice of Leedy and Ormrod (2005:101), who identify critical categories regarding ethical aspects in research. These include embracing shielding from harm, knowledgeable permission, privacy and professional trustworthiness. For example, participants were not forced to participate in the study, and consent forms were distributed to all the participants. Participants were made aware that participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point during the research if they felt comfortable (Makibi, 2010:50). Participants' names and the schools' names will remain anonymous.

1.6.6 Data collection methods and procedures

Myers (in Rejoice, 2015) indicate that data collection can be defined as a methodology to how reality, ideals and what counts as knowledge update research. Nieuwenhuis (2016:51) agrees but adds that data collection will enable the researcher to gather data about social reality from individuals that the researcher focuses on. It is imperative to note that there should be alignment between the data collection method as well as the purpose of the research questions.

In exploring literacy leadership challenges in the senior phase the data generating instruments used were individual semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. Interviews were conducted with four principals, seven HoDs, four deputy principals and eight educators, while the document analysis was done with language educators' portfolios. Through the strengths of interviews as data-collection method, the researcher aimed to gain a wealth of information on a specific phenomenon to obtain a meaningful understanding of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018:1202). Documentary analysis is viewed as a research method for thoroughly and analytically analysing contents of portfolios and other written documents (Bardach & Patashnik, 2019). In this study, the documents that were analysed were the planning files of lesson plans, pre- and post-moderation forms, error analysis/subject improvement plans of educators. Furthermore, the principals were requested to supply the internal monitoring and moderation reports that were conducted by themselves and or the HoDs. Qualitative document analysis is worthwhile for comprehending policy content, documenting processes, triangulating with semi-structured individual interviews and other valuable sources (Weber, 2015). Document analysis is useful during data collection to assist in answering the primary and secondary research questions (Gurung, Derret & Gauld, 2020).

Document analysis has a few disadvantages, for example, that they have inadequate detail, irretrievability and in some instances a biased selective (Harvey, 2018). Nieuwenhuis (2016:88) mentions that written data may include letters, articles, reports and journals. Document analysis will assist the scholar in understanding the phenomena and they are valuable data sources when utilized in conjunction with other methods.

Chapter 3 will provide more detail about the strengths and limitations of the data collection methods, and also how the researcher minimized the limitations through rigorous processes to ensure high quality data.

1.6.7 Data Analysis

Scholars utilizing the interpretive paradigm choose themes that are permitted to develop from the data itself. It appears that interpretivism is grounded on the notion that there is not one reality but many when a scholar is analysing data. Yin (2011) suggests that throughout the evaluation and data analysis process, the researcher must remain transparent towards new and innovative opportunities.

The recorded data were firstly transcribed verbatim. After that, following the advice of McMillan and Schumacher (2001:462), the data were analysed in a systematic manner by selecting, categorising, comparing, synthesising and interpreting the data to provide explanations pertaining to the challenges experienced in literacy leadership. This included the processes of coding, categorising and developing themes, before the data were compared with existing literature. Gale et al. (2013:5) highlight the fact that when themes are identified and used, the researcher should be attentive about not omitting valued aspects of the data collected during the process of conveying the data into themes.

1.7 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE RESEARCH

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, issues pertaining to validation, credibility, transferability and dependability will be adhered to. These trustworthiness aspects are important for qualitative researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2017:121). Aspects pertaining to ensuring the

quality of the study will be described in detail in Chapter 3. Below follows just a brief exposition.

1.7.1 Validation

Nieuwenhuis (2016:122) confirms that validation is indeed an interpretive understanding of what is true. Kelliher (in Nieuwenhuis, 2016:122) adds that validity is subject to the presentation of descriptive data in order for the researcher to lead the reader to an understanding of the significance of the experience under the study. It is vital to mention that validity focuses on transparency of the research.

1.7.2 Credibility

Bertram and Christiansen (2017:188) emphasize that credibility relies on familiarity with the participants as well as a defined purposive sampling and data collection method. This indicates that there needs to be regular interviewing sessions. It is also vital to note that the theory needs to be aligned with the research questions. The findings of the study must be defined and explained truthfully; therefore, the perceptions and views of participants were captured accurately.

1.7.3 Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the scholar can demonstrate that the findings of the study can be applied to other contexts (Bertram & Christiansen, 2017:188). In this study the research process adopted were extensively outlined and described for other researchers to follow and replicate.

1.7.4 Dependability

McIntosh and Morse (2015:19) elucidates that a dependable study may be described as one that can frequently be repeated and similar results will surface.

Therefore a reliable research method should be used. This study maintains consistency and stipulates the procedure of the methodology. One can say that dependability is demonstrated in the reflective appraisal of the study.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study envisaged supporting the efforts of the Department of Education to improve the teaching of literacy in secondary schools. Furthermore, the study aims to provide data on how principals and other SMT members can address the challenges in secondary schools. It is also foreseen that the outcomes of the study will be of value to all stakeholders such as educators, subject advisors, circuit managers and other relevant departmental officials. Also, literacy leaders must stay informed about literacy leadership challenges and possess a refined comprehension of research based instructional practices that support literacy learning among learners and educators in the senior phase (Wepner, Gomez, Cunningham, Rainville & Kelly, 2016). Ultimately, engagement with literacy leadership practices creates teaching professionals a sense of vitality that is enriching and empowering (Cobb, 2005, Turner, Applegate, & Applegate, 2009, Wepner et al. 2016, Graham, 2019). Finally, this research may add to the knowledge base of research about literacy leadership, which is currently a neglected area in studies.

1.9 DEMARCATING OF THE RESEARCH

Any research study must be demarcated in a specific discipline/field, and it will be conducted in a specific area.

1.9.1 Scientific demarcation

This study is located in the field of Education Management and Leadership, in particular on the concept of Instructional leadership. As indicated in the title, the focus is on leadership issues. Moreover, both Management and Leadership are indeed sub-disciplines of Education. This study concentrates on the literacy leadership challenges. Obviously this means a focus on the role of the SMT as leaders of the literacy curriculum.

The leadership role of school management teams, specifically principals, is pivotal, because they sustain the livelihood of the whole school environment.

1.9.2 Geographical demarcation of the research

The research were conducted at four selected secondary schools in the City of Roses (Bloemfontein) in the Motheo District. The district is one of five districts in the Free State (DoE, 2017:1) and the four selected secondary schools are part of 327 secondary schools in the Free State. The sample of population of educators and school management teams was chosen from three secondary schools in the Motheo District. The four secondary schools were purposively selected to ensure that they meet the necessary requirements. One of the three secondary schools are categorized as Quintile 3, another one as Quintile 4 and the other one as Quintile 5. Two of the secondary schools are located in disadvantaged areas of Bloemfontein, whilst the other is in an economically strong suburb.

1.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research study is restricted to only selected secondary schools in one district due to time, logistic and financial limitations. Fraenkel and Wallen (in Dumitru & Jinga, 2015:9) elucidate that the research findings cannot be generalized when the studied population is too small to be representative of the enormous population from which it is drawn. The COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to the data collection being time-consuming, as schools opened and closed frequently.

1.11 LAYOUT OF CHAPTERS

The following is an outline of this study:

Chapter 1 includes the background and orientation: This section constitutes an introduction and background to the research problem. Reference is made to the conceptual framework that guided the study, objectives and question questions, research design and methodology and ethical considerations.

Chapter 2 focuses on the discussion of the conceptual framework adopted – Instructional leadership and distributed theory – adopted as well as the literature review. The review focuses on the challenges experienced in secondary schools as well as the role of the SMT in addressing the challenges.

Chapter 3 discusses the research design and methodology used that guided the empirical part of the study. The chapter also outlined the data collection methods as well as issues pertaining to trustworthiness and ethics protocol.

Chapter 4 offers the findings from the data collected from the participants. The findings are discussed according to categories, divided into themes and analysed and supported with literature and the theoretical orientations of the study.

Chapter 5 offers a summary of the chapters as well as the findings. Recommendations for policy and practice are discussed and topics for further research are identified. The study concludes with the limitations and summary of the research study.

1.12 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This study deals with the literacy leadership challenges at selected secondary schools in Bloemfontein. Chapter 1 served as an orientation and overview to this study. The study was introduced with a discussion of the introduction and background, focusing on the importance of literacy skills, and the challenges that are experienced in secondary schools. The research questions, aims and research methodology were also outlined. Issues pertaining to ethical and trustworthiness measures were described as well as the significance and limitations of the research.

Chapter 2 will subsequently attend to the theoretical framework adopted for the study as well as the literature review.

CHAPTER 2 : CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of the study was to *explore the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools*. The previous chapter dealt with the orientation to the study, statement of the research problem, motivation and rationale of the study as well as the research questions. This chapter will focus on the research design and methodology, a brief discussion on the theoretical framework, ethical considerations and the clarification of key concepts. Chapter 1 was rounded off with the demarcation of the study and the limitations of the research.

This chapter deals with the review of the relevant literature. According to Randolph (2009:2), conducting a literature review is a means of demonstrating an author's knowledge about a particular field of study, including vocabulary, theories, key variables and phenomena, and its methods and history. Recent studies suggest that by exploring significant literature, we comprehend the depth of existing work and identify gaps to explore. Moreover, literature reviews can be divided into four categories: critique, extend, describe and test (Templier & Pare, 2015). This suggests that literature reviews form the foundation of academic studies. Conducting a literature review also informs the student of the influential researchers and research groups in the field. Drawing from these authors' advice, the researcher embarked on a thorough study of the field of literacy leadership, including the related concepts and variables. As part of the study, the work of influential International scholars like Yurkewecz (2020), Townsend (2018), Dempsey (2017) and Faulkner (2016) were studied. Local research on the topic produced by Plaatjies (2019; 2020) were also included. Following Gall, Borg and Gall's (1996) advice, the researcher used the literature review to delaminate the research problem, seeking new lines of inquiry, avoiding fruitless approaches, gaining methodological insights and identifying recommendations.

2.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS RESTATED

In line with the research questions which emanated from the research problem, the researcher engaged critically with specific themes to address the following research questions:

- What are the challenges that educators experience with literacy education?
- What are the roles of the SMT as literacy leaders in literacy leadership at secondary schools?
- What are the challenges that the SMT encounter in performing their roles as literacy leaders in secondary schools?
- Which strategies could be implemented to address the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools?

2.3 CHALLENGES WITH LITERACY EDUCATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Under this section, the discussion centres around the literacy difficulties that learners are experiencing. It also includes the challenges that educators experience in terms of instruction and assessment. The section is rounded off with a discussion about ineffective writing instructional methods. Lastly, the issue of the lack of support that teachers experience, is investigated as well. All these matters pose a severe challenge to the SMT as literacy leaders, and provide a better understanding of the demands on principals.

2.3.1 Reading difficulties experienced by learners

Reading problems amongst secondary school learners are daunting. Gerner (2018) and Crevecoeur (2011) indicate various problems, including that of a slow reading and comprehension rate, insufficient reading interests and insufficient vocabulary. Other challenges include an uncritical reading behaviour, an ineffective and an unproductive ability to recall what has been read, and an inability to make summaries. This is not where the problems stop. Learners also display an inability to read independently, they have difficulty in reading for gist, and have a difficulty in differentiating main concepts from applicable or inappropriate details (Gerner, 2018; Crevecoeur, 2011).

The issue of secondary school learners' struggles in literacy is an universal one. It is highlighted in the report of the National Reading Panel (2000) based in the United States of America, that learners in this phase struggle to master the necessary basic reading abilities. In another study, Wilkerson et al. (2012:85) conclude that 37% of secondary school educators are accountable for offering reading instruction in any language, indicating that over half of the learners were unable to read in order to gain basic information from the text. In South Africa, the results of the ANAs state that secondary school learners experience challenges with reading and writing (Grades 7 to 9) and that the majority of learners in the senior phase are underachieving relative to the curriculum demands. Furthermore, while those assessment tests were vital for understanding the challenges and promoting literacy (and numeracy) education in South Africa, the implementation thereof reduced its value. Spaul and Kotze (2015) caution against deeper-lying problems and say that in the senior phase an uneven functioning of the whole school system contributes to learning gaps. The assessments demonstrated that because of these, learners illustrated volatile coherence in writing, ideas were unclear and not original, no organization and coherence were illustrated and learners possessed a limited vocabulary (Spaul & Kotze, 2015).

2.3.2 Ineffective reading instructional methods

Reading is generally viewed as a skill by which learners access educational prospects, employment and social independence (National Reading Panel, 2000). The report by the panel draws attention to the need for educators in secondary schools to offer reading instruction that is aligned specially to the needs of learners in the senior phase. Compelling evidence exists in the literature that there is indeed a critical connection between ineffective reading instructional methods, learning-focused leadership practices of literacy leaders and effective classroom teaching and learning (Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Southworth, 2004; Hallinger, 2005; Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009). Therefore, literacy leaders must ensure that quality literacy teaching learning must be prominent. Furthermore, leaders should function as high-quality literacy leaders who promote the levels of literacy within the school to combat ineffective reading instructional methods.

One of the main concerns highlighted, though is the insufficient instructional approaches from educators. In this regard, Wexler et al. (2018:12) state that secondary school learners seldom

receive individualized literacy support and in doing so, found that they regularly receive whole-group instruction or work independently. It is challenging for literacy leaders to address individualized literacy support, because literacy research and interventions only focus on the primary school years (Merga, 2020:372). Another point of concern, according to Wexler et al. (2018:12) and Wigent (2013), is that learners in secondary schools ineffectively use approaches when reading expository texts, signifying that they require better instruction on the use of effective strategy. The literacy challenge espouses the notion that literacy leaders reckon that an array of secondary school factors such as school resourcing issues, learners' prior literacy learning and teaching or a lack thereof, limitations in the literacy curriculum and lastly a lack of a conducive secondary school culture for reading deepens ineffective reading instructional methods.(Merga, 2020:388). Shaffer and Thomas-Brown (2015:118) further argue that learners in the senior phase struggle to understand content materials. Conversely, numerous scholars claim that a lack of planning time and thorough use of co-planning time definitely impacts the execution of quality reading instruction of educators (Wexler *et al.*, 2018; Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015; Isherwood, Barger-Anderson, Merhaut, Badgett & Katsafanas, 2011; Gurgur & Uzunur, 2010).

For leaders the lack of sound instructional practices present a frightening challenge, especially as they lack capacity as curriculum and instructional leaders. They lack the skills and expertise to support educators in the literacy curriculum (Plaatjies, 2019) and role clarification amongst SMT members is often vague in terms of subject leadership, in this case, literacy. The magnitude of the problem is also pointed out by Dowell, Bickmore and Hoewing (2012:7), who claim that principals display an inability to understand the essential elements of effective literacy instruction. Gorr (2016) further explains that literacy leaders are unable to function as capable and dedicated leaders who craft a reading instruction vision of learners in the senior phase and building the learners and literacy environments' ability to endorse this reading instruction vision.

2.3.3 Challenges in assessing reading abilities

Assessment forms an important ingredient in learning. There are various challenges that educators are facing when they are assessing learners' reading abilities. Kamardeen (2014:18) articulates that educators do not have effective integrated assessment schemes and that influences the

learners' marks and learning. Although it is evident that literacy leaders play a pivotal role in nurturing the literacy classroom (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2012), there is a need for an examination of the leadership practices of literacy leaders in evaluating how educators assess the reading abilities of learners. Gorr (2016) claims that SMTs who are literacy leaders will plan, present and monitor reading abilities that are part of a schools' literacy initiative to ensure that schools have effective assessment schemes. In the South African context, this evaluation should be done in conjunction with the Curriculum requirements of the Senior Phase. In terms of the support that literacy leaders provide, it may be that they do not possess a sufficient understanding of the assessment of reading activities, which hampers guidance to educators. Day and Sammons (2013:12) warn that school leaders will struggle to perform essential functions such as monitoring, instruction and teacher development if they lack an understanding of monitoring, instruction and assessment. Routman (2014:11) declare that principals often do not recognise key aspects of literacy in classrooms (including assessment) and struggle to assess the quality of teachers' work.

2.3.4 Writing difficulties experienced by learners

Getting mastery over writing skill is extremely challenging and this skill is problematic for learners in the senior phase. Richards and Renandya (2010) argue that learners in the senior phase have to focus on higher level skills of writing as well as lower level skills such as spelling and punctuation. Learning to write through instruction is a complex activity for learners in the senior phase. Reports from the Department of Education indicate that learners in the senior phase are incapable of interpreting sentences, write coherent and cohesive sentences, and they lack editing skills when reviewing their first drafts (DBE, 2014a:11). Furthermore, writing in the senior phase is a challenge for learners who do not have sufficient exposure to the language being assessed (Akinyeye, 2015:iii). Nondabula (2020) remarks that learners spell phonetically and are unable to differentiate between spoken and written language. Due to a lack of vocabulary, learners face challenges in obtaining writing skills taught and instructed (Misbah et al., 2017:48). Fareed (2016) agrees, but adds that educators in the senior phase illustrate that during writing instruction learners make mistakes in subject-verb agreement, prepositions, pronouns, tenses and articles. Furthermore, learners in the senior phase cannot comprehend basic sentence structure. This approach to vocabulary fails to take into account the influence of learners' poor spelling. If

learners' in the senior phase struggle with spelling, they will not be able to express themselves and it will lead to a frustrating reading effort experienced by the educator.

According to Foster and Anderson (2015:43), learners' eagerness and readiness are other challenges in writing instruction. Winars (2016) supports this notion, because the scholar states that readiness is vital in order for a learner to successfully complete a task. Finally, Anyiendah (2017:49) reveals that a lack of learners' interest also seems to be a barrier of educators teaching language in the senior phase. This can be illustrated by learners' lack of interest in writing, because they need to be aware of many features in order to produce a quality piece of work.

Providing the challenges that learners experience in terms of writing as a key literacy skill, the question needs to be asked as to what the role of the leaders should be to address these. Research (Khosa, 2013:23; Bean & Dagen, 2012:149) indicates that literacy leaders should focus on various aspects of literacy with the aim of improvement in subject specialist knowledge, subject-specific content, methodology and assessment. Support is impossible without a grounded understanding of the aforementioned concepts. Sufficient knowledge of the literacy curriculum is therefore vital for leaders. Once again they experience however challenges. Many principals, for example, do not possess a sufficient understanding of aspects of the literacy curriculum; many are considered generalists in curriculum areas and lack in-depth knowledge of specialist knowledge and instruction (Plaatjies, 2019:139). This includes writing.

Burdette (2018:9) remarks that secondary school literacy leaders face the challenge of acting as instructional leaders who must lead the implementation of curricular changes that highlight the integration of literacy in various areas such as writing skills. In addition, the scholar adds that this serves as a challenge, because literacy leaders must have a firm understanding of the instructional techniques and it requires of them to possess the skill to utilize learner achievement information on writing to ultimately inform their decisions. Unfortunately, this understanding is lacking amongst many school leaders due to their lack of expertise (Routman, 2014).

2.3.5 Challenges with writing instruction

The ability to teach writing competently in secondary schools is one of the essential skills among language educators. Mohamad (2019:12) notes that writing instruction has been conducted as in

the early years where learners start to learn how to form letters appropriately. Mohamad (2019:12) further adds that writing instruction is not only important to improve academic performance, but also adds to learners' social and emotional development. This suggests that learners' inability to write cohesively and coherently may affect their chances to secure a satisfactory job in the near future. Consequently, this issue needs to be addressed. A question that needs to be asked, therefore, is: What are the challenges that educators are confronted with while giving writing instructions?

Harmer (2007:151) makes the very valid point that the main problem educators should cope with in writing instruction in the senior phase is a lack of time to teach the skill effectively. In a very comprehensive study about the challenges that educators experience with writing instruction, Plaatjies (2016:190-192; 2019) claims that educators lack of understanding of policy requirements, implementation and lack of planning, theoretical and subject knowledge of writing skills, hampers sound instruction. Plaatjies (2016) further claims that literacy educators display limited knowledge and understanding of the policy requirements for writing instruction. As a result, educators struggle to interpret curriculum documents and do not know how to use these to teach writing instruction. Several scholars affirm that principals must support literacy educators by providing extra knowledge, skills, training and sufficient time to attend training sessions on writing instruction (Hoadley & Jansen, 2010; Plaatjies, 2016; 2019). The school management team must ensure that should complex challenges with writing instruction appear, that a variety of resources in preparation for writing lessons must be available to literacy educators to address the writing challenges that educators experience in class (Plaatjies, 2016).

In another study, Karki (2019:8) found that one of the concerns educators have been experiencing daily in their writing instructions lessons is the size of the class. Large classes hamper the involvement of learners, making participation difficult. Another issue that hampers efficient writing instruction is insufficient instructional resources (Karki, 2019:8). A serious concern in this regard may be that many language educators in the senior phase have been using only the practice book and textbook as resources during classroom discourse. Killen (2015:13) alludes to the fact that the majority of language educators do not use other materials. The role of the literacy leader as Instructional leader should be rigorous observation, monitoring and supervision of classroom practices. Francois (2014:591) suggests that these strategies are an excellent opportunity for principals to provide targeted support to educators. The challenge, however, is that SMT members,

and in particular the principal as main Instructional leader, is seriously wanting. Austin et al. (2018:41) claim that “principals spend only 10 per cent of their day in instruction-related tasks”.

Teaching writing is also challenging because of the contextual influences. Many learners come from challenging environments, with a lack of stimulation, poor reading habits and little support from parents (Plaatjies, 2021). These issues appear to demotivate educators, and present an enormous challenge to the SMT. According to Ntshoe and Selesho (2014), the SMT must ensure that motivation, academic performance and literacy instruction are improved. Moreover, their role encompasses content knowledge of literacy instruction and leadership and they must support learners in the form of mentorship for those that are affected by socio-economic issues. For Bomer and Maloch (2019:261), addressing contextual challenges are vital to meet the needs of all learners in literacy. This is especially important as teachers often encounter children who are racially, socioeconomically and culturally different from themselves. Subramoney (2016) argues that quality literacy teaching requires of SMT members to fulfil their responsibilities as leaders who steer academic performance, improve the livelihoods of educators and learners to be a leader within a team of other literacy managers. Subramoney (2016:8) maintains that SMTs must build healthy relationships within their literacy environment through trust in order to address literacy leadership challenges.

2.3.6 Writing assessment challenges

Writing assessment is a complex activity practised by educators Ling (2016:47). The poor performance of learners in the senior phase during writing assessment is indeed a challenging reality (Mbhalati, 2017:119). Moreover, research traditions offer a valuable set of categories for observing theories of measurement, writing and writing assessment. However, there is an overall lack of alignment between theory and practice has been discovered in executing writing assessment in the senior phase.

Philosophies and opinions considerably affect educators’ actions and assessments in the classroom and impacts their relationship with learners. Educators’ negative views about linguistically diverse learners are perpetuated when the opposing views are not challenged interpreting negative views into actions that are detrimental to learners’ learning.

In view of this strong association, educators' views need to be explored critically (Tamaha, 2014; Peterson, Scriber & Moss, 2011; Mansfield & Volet, 2010; Tanase & Wang, 2010) in order for educators to comprehend their role in the construction of their own knowledge including that of their learners' especially when assessing learners' written assessments.

According to Webb (2005), secondary schools' organization, traditions, needs, duration of a period, learner enrolment and curriculum expectations impact writing assessment. Tamaha (2014) remarks that an unfavourable classroom size of more than 50 students makes it quite challenging to assess learners' written assignments. It is logical that educators will struggle to maintain discipline and experience tiredness after marking a certain amount of scripts. To read each learner's written texts requires thorough reading. Tamaha (2014) further adds that time limitations also play a role, because the CAPS document only allows a few hours for English writing instruction per week. Finally, language educators' limited proficiency and a test-driven curriculum also seem to be a barrier to assess writing. The key implication drawn from all these statements by Tama (2014) is that the opportunities for learning available in the classroom setting are therefore limited, consisting of a restricted variety of discourse and literary practices to conduct writing assessments.

Educators in the senior phase resist the change of rubrics as a marking tool for written assessments. This rejection might be observable immediately or might surface slowly over time (Tamaha, 2014; Wedell, 2012; Bolitho, 2005). This research suggests that educators manage change in their own personal contexts and reformulate rubrics to fit into their own contextual set-up. Writing assessment must be viewed as an instrument and an agent for reorganization (Lumadi, 2013:7). This statement implies that writing assessment as an agent for reorganization is affected by forces and demands of life including the present changeable South African context.

In their quest to lead the continuous improvement in literacy instruction- including the assessment- principals and other literacy leaders should possess sufficient knowledge of the literacy curriculum, instructional methods and assessment. For Louis et al. (2010:39), therefore, an understanding of the tenets of excellent instruction and adequate curriculum knowledge is crucial to ensure the appropriate delivery of content.

Interpreted in terms of the role of the SMT, it can be concluded that they should ensure that they have a solid understanding of writing assessment as well. This will enable them to support educators with more clarity in aspects of assessment such as the development of appropriate rubrics and in large class settings.

2.3.7 Lack of support to teachers in literacy

There is a concern about the effectiveness of the South African education system and it is revealed in the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (NPFTED) (RSA, 2007:4) when it argues that “Most educators have not been adequately equipped to meet the education prerequisites/needs of a fast developing democracy in a 21st century.” Support to educators is an essential ingredient in education systems across the spectrum. Moreover, educators require support as they try to find their way in the profession and constantly making sense of reorganization initiatives; and as a result implement policies. The reality of providing and receiving support appears to be far removed from policies according to Cammarata & Haley (2018); Van der Berg et al. (2016) and De Clercq (2007). Finally, educator support in languages is variously defined as mentoring, guidance, professional development and giving response on classroom observations. A weakness with this argument, however, is that the majority of South African studies (Cammarata & Haley, 2018:8; Smith; 2011; De Clercq, 2007; Narsee, 2007) disclose that language educators do not receive comprehensive, appropriate and adequate support in the schools. Cammarata and Haley (2018:8) remark that systemic changes often bring countless challenges which educators cannot conquer without support. Recent studies about principals support in literacy show that there are many factors that make support to educators difficult. According to Plaatjies (2019:152), principals’ challenge are that they lack strong subject-specific Instructional leadership knowledge, which leads to negligence of targeted support to teachers in all aspects of literacy instruction and assessment. Other support measures such as data-driven assessment and the implementation of professional development activities to enhance the quality of literacy instruction is of poor standard and absent (Plaatjies, 2019:152-153).

Policies that guide the role of principal in this regard such as The Standard for Principalship (DBE, 2015a:9) place emphasis that principals as instructional leaders should ensure that the school is a professional learning community and develop and implement an instructional framework that is data driven as part of their strategy to increase learner achievement.

In the preceding paragraphs, the challenges that educators experience in terms of literacy were explained. Principals, SMT members and subject heads form part of the leadership teams of schools. Hence, as Curriculum and Instructional leaders, they are responsible for and accountable to address the challenges related to literacy.

Before the researcher looks further into specific areas in literacy that needs leadership attention from principals and other leaders, first an exposition of the role of the SMTs as literacy leaders. Challenges in fulfilling these roles will also be discussed. The discussion will also focus on the challenges that literacy leaders experience in the specific key areas as well as how SMT's should deal with these.

2.4 THE ROLE OF SMT MEMBERS AND SUBJECT HEADS AS LITERACY LEADERS

The SMTs of schools normally comprise the principal, deputy principal and heads of department (HoDs) (Subramoney, 2016). Some schools may have two deputy principals and even three to four HoDs, depending on the size of the school. As said previously, the leadership role of principals in a subject such as literacy, necessitates a focus on the delivery of the curriculum and instruction. Therefore, the study was approached from the angle of Instructional leadership. From a legislative perspective, two key documents provide guidance to the SMT as to the role of them in curriculum matters, including literacy. These are the Personnel Administrative Measures (DBE, 2016:27) and the Policy on the South African Standard for Principalship (DBE, 2016:21). These documents do not specify the roles of the SMT to any subject in particular, including literacy. The roles of each member of the SMT in terms of curriculum matters will be briefly discussed, in conjunction with the challenges that principals, deputy principals and HoDs may experience to fulfil this mandate in secondary schools. Aligned to the central focus of the study, this discussion focuses on their role as literacy leaders.

2.4.1 The principal

The PAM document maintains that the principal is responsible for providing professional leadership within any school setting, supervise and guide the work and performance of staff members, countersign reports on teaching support, promote staff development training programs, developing and accomplishing educational aims and objectives in accordance with the needs of the school. Instructional literacy leadership in the senior phase reveals challenges relating to SMTs' ignorance and lack of expertise. Plaatjies (2016:257) argues that literacy instructional leadership initiatives in schools appear ambiguous. Mbhalati (2017:v), on the other hand, mentions that principals struggles to give guidance and support to educators and that literacy instructional leadership should gain more prominence in South African schools. Nowhere does the document state that these professional leadership duties imply guidance in specific subjects like, for example, languages, but it is assumed (Sharp, Armstrong & Matthews, 2017). Furthermore, it suggests that principals should participate in educator appraisal programs to examine their professional practice in order to improve teaching and learning. This should include languages (including the literacy component) as well. Houck and Novak (2017a:30) argue that principals' knowledge of literacy leadership is limited and that limited studies have been embarked on this topic. Moreover, Samuel and Berhanu (2019:47) highlight that the major challenges encountered in educator appraisal programs is a lack of awareness about educator appraisal programs, lack of rewards for educators performing in literacy and inadequate support principals.

Furthermore, it is imperative for the principal to liaise with appropriate structures involving school curricula and the development of the school curriculum. Finally, it is important to mention that the PAM document elucidates that the principal participates in departmental and professional committees and various workshops to add towards professional perspectives and standards (DBE, 2016). This is quite challenging for principals as literacy leaders, because effective Educators' Performance Appraisal Systems lack instructions to principals on how to implement various workshops to improve their professional perspectives, and principals have limited knowledge about conducting workshops and appraising performance (Samuel & Berhanu; 2019).

The Standard for Principalship (DBE, 2016:21) highlights key areas of principalship that focus on leading the learning activities in the school. This should include literacy learning. Also, the document highlights the importance of managing quality and securing accountability. In terms of

literacy this means that the principal should play an important role in setting a literacy environment that is positively associated with developing literacy learning and improving literacy skills (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2012). As a literacy leader their actions impact quality and accountability of the educators' literacy classroom practices, which affect learners' acquisition of literacy (Gorr, 2016). Furthermore, he/she should develop him/herself and staff, managing the school as broader organization and working with the broader community. However, the dilemma that faces literacy leaders is trying to get educators to work together as a team (Subramoney, 2016:10). It is therefore the primary task of the literacy leader to turn around the literacy challenges to ensure cohesion. Wieczorek and Manard (2018) elucidate that it is challenging for principals to navigate their leadership role in developing staff and managing the school. The implication of this demonstrates that they need to develop an understanding to balance management and leadership and curriculum knowledge on matters such as literacy. Finally, it is also challenging for them to develop staff, because of other responsibilities and lack of enough time. Principals struggle in areas such as time management, keeping track of policy amendments, keeping up with paperwork and budget management (Lee, 2015).

As drivers of the literacy curriculum, leadership will obviously have to focus on the Instructional duties of the principal, therefore Instructional leadership will play an important role. This form of leadership is specifically outlined in the Standard for Principalship and the PAM document. The principal must be able to facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of language classroom practice in the senior phase, ensure that the necessary data at school level are collected and utilized to inform the on-going monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning (DBE, 2016). Apart from being confronted with a high workload, principals face demanding and changeable literacy environments, limited knowledge on literacy, educational policies, and community engagements all of which requires his/her attention (Preston & Barnes, 2017). Furthermore, he/she needs to make sure that educators comprehend the National Curriculum Statement and possess the skills required related to teaching, monitoring and evaluation. The principal needs the following knowledge related to teaching and learning in the school. Finally, the principal has the responsibility to ensure a productive, harmless and supportive learning and teaching environment (Preston & Barnes, 2017).

Critique against these two policy documents are that they appear to be vague in terms of the role that principals should play in terms of subject leadership, which includes literacy. Another point of concern is that the principals' role in terms of subject leadership such as planning, organizing, embracing subjects and subject changes are not necessarily their biggest challenge; it seems that the implementation thereof is the real dilemma (Nkosi, 2014). Nkosi (2014) further adds that untrained principals in subject leadership leads to literacy educators inability to organize and create classroom resources, profiling of learners' literacy skills and to discuss cooperation amongst the staff to address challenges. In addition, the critique against the NCS and lack of attention to the issue of literacy leadership are highlighted in the work of Plaatjies (2020) and Taole (2013), because principals are the main mediators in subject leadership and curriculum reviews. As a result, they can be viewed as the primary source of evidence to subject leadership and literacy leadership in secondary schools.

2.4.2 The deputy principal

According to the PAM document, the deputy principal should support the principal in managing and leading the school, promote the education of learners appropriately and provide assistance to the principal (DBE, 2016). In terms of providing assistance in leading the literacy program, deputy principals should assist the principal as literacy leaders or be responsible for the literacy program of the school, because they seek to assist the principal in leading and managing the secondary school in an appropriate manner. This is in line with the PAM document emphasizing that deputy principals must maintain cognizance of all curricular and administrative aspects across the school (DBE, 2016). Furthermore, it is expected that he/she should provide leadership in moderation and assessment practices, organizing the work of subject committees and arranging teaching practices. Deputy principals should also participate in departmental and professional committees and workshops, oversee the work and performance of staff members and participate in educator appraisal processes in order for them to reflect on their professional practice (DBE, 2016). However, research shows that in secondary schools deputy principals experience challenges such as a lack of time for administrative duties, a lot of administrative duties, evaluating educators and conducting classroom observations (Khumalo et al., 2018). Moreover, research claims that deputy principals frequently experience resistance when working with educators who are not motivated,

having an extremely low self-esteem and those that are not putting the learner first (Khumalo et al., 2018). Finally, the deputy principal must be able to assist the principal in liaison work with all committees and organizations vital to the school (DBE, 2016). When looking at the policy documents, it is once more evident that the description of the role of the deputy seems vague in terms of subject leadership. Consequently, this may create uncertainty amongst them and lead to poor involvement in the execution of their duties as curriculum and instructional leaders. This being said, it is imperative to mention that critical instructional literacy leadership skills needed by deputy principals must be identified to develop programs to address literacy leadership challenges.

2.4.3 The head of department (HoD)

HoDs are responsible for the coordination and guidance on the most recent approaches to the subject, practices, evaluation, methods, teaching aids required in the subject and to successfully convey these to post-level one educators. They need to offer guidance on remedial work, curriculum, work schemes, homework, and practical work to post-level one educators and inexperienced staff members (DBE, 2016). According to The Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC, 2003a:43) Performance Standard 9, HoDs need to provide

- Staff development: Ensures that educator preparation and mentoring programs are developed, applied and assessed.
- Provision of leadership: Gives guidance to educators in understanding the school's strategic goals and objectives (ELRC 2003a:43).

Drawing from these and other documents, it appears that HoDs play the most important role of the SMT as curriculum leaders. According to Simpson et al. (2016:9), they are as middle managers HoDs accountable for managing teaching and learning of a specific subject. To sustain teaching and learning, HoDs should ensure that there is quality curricula supervision. Bush et al. (2018) elucidate that language HoDs will have to spend more time in overseeing and administering the teaching and learning activities that take place in languages.

It seems though that HoDs experience quite some challenges to fulfilling this role. These include lack of professional development activities in literacy leadership, inadequate facilities to develop

educators professionally, lack of comprehending their role, lack of literacy teaching resources and limited time to address instructional and non-instructional aspects. In his analysis of the role and support of HoDs, Bush et al. (2018) indicate that HoDs should allocate more time evaluating learners' results, cooperatively develop departmental improvement plans with the rest of their department and observe educator's classroom records regularly. However, most language HoDs fail to match this perfect model (Bush et al., 2018). They are supposed to monitor the work of post-level one educators, particularly through examining their lesson plans and learner assessments and a few may conduct classroom visits (Plaatjies, 2020). It is possible that the emphasis is placed on inspection rather than assessing the quality of planning and learner achievement. What seems to be missing also is that at numerous secondary schools there is little shared responsibility and accountability for managing teaching and learning (Van Vuuren, Van der Westhuizen & Van der Vyver, 2018).

Jaca (2013) points out that HoDs have not been successful in supporting educators due to mitigating aspects, some of which are a lack of professional development to enhance their competency in education and subject matter. Also, the unsatisfactory training facilities such as workshops, seminars and in-service training to promote educators for professional development and a lack of commitment to supervision by many school leaders tend to work against their roles. Howard and Peligah (2016:9) further add that a lack of understanding of their role, lack of teaching resources, lack of pedagogical content knowledge, inadequate training, uneven distribution of power and a lack of time to adhere to and attend to both non-instructional and instructional issues are some of the challenges experienced by educators when requiring support from their HoDs. In a milestone study about the roles of the HoDs, Bush (2013:30) found that HoDs have a limited understanding about the management of teaching and learning. In some cases, a clear-cut system for observing and evaluating teaching and learning is absent. As a result, their instructional leadership approach is often restricted to inspecting if work has been completed instead of executing an in-depth judgement about the quality of teaching and learning during classroom discourse.

Another role-player in terms of leadership is the subject head or language heads in departments. Their roles will be discussed next.

2.4.4 Distributing and sharing responsibilities: The role of subject heads/language HoDs

Devine and Alger (2011) claim that a school's success is due to a shared and/or distributed approach to leadership. Spillane (2009:15) similarly postulates that the role of a school leader should be challenged, and an important transformation necessitates a shift towards a more cooperative community like structures within secondary schools. Importantly, this suggests that secondary school principals can no longer function in leading the entire school instructional program without extensive participation from other educators at the school. In this regard, subject heads have occupied the roles of instructional leaders in the areas of teaching and learning at secondary schools. Subject heads are educators who function in several capacities within the school setting. Irrespective of the specific position that the subject head may occupy at that the specific time, for instance, literacy leader, facilitator, or curriculum advisor, the cooperative force of principals as literacy leaders and subject heads working collaboratively is vital for learner achievement (Davis & Boudreaux, 2019:15).

Subject heads may participate in implicit and explicit roles of literacy leadership. Subject heads may be leaders in the classroom by constantly conducting self-reflection, accepting learner and educator differences and broadcasting own instructional practices, opinions, principles and visions about literacy teaching (Lieberman & Miller, 2005:36). Jang Tamanaha (2014:20) declares that subject heads are often well respected by their peers, and utilize group skills to influence and enhance literacy practices of their fellow educators. This author also maintains that subject heads strive to collaborate with school administrators in order to maximize one another's potential impact. Subject heads are not necessarily part of the SMT, but they seem to have skills that can promote the management of tasks and effective leadership of departmental teams in secondary schools. Hobby (2012:23) claims that subject heads have a stronger daily impact on standards than departmental heads, because they often work more closely in the leadership and management of literacy instruction. Malatji (2018:5) affirms that subject heads are viewed as managers responsible for monitoring educators and as conduit for pivotal information and managerial tasks delegated from top management in schools.

Finally, subject heads are able construct a school culture that enhances leadership from the literacy classroom and distributes the responsibility to influence learners' learning. Davis and Boudreaux (2019:15) also indicate that subject heads can increase literacy educators' cultural framework by navigating teaching settings from various viewpoints of the learners and educators.

Their roles include also to instil and shape positive culture for literacy educators, utilize continuous research to guide their actions, encourage professional learning and maintain instruction that promote learning, use assessment to steer action, build relationships with various stakeholders and the literacy achievement of learners is a priority. Subject heads create new knowledge by using their own practice, educators and literacy classrooms to examine and analyse while including applicable theory and research to promote literacy practices. They must guide, support and model the growth of individual educators (Sio Jyh Lih Ismail, 2019:12). Qadach, Schechter and Da'as (2019:13) argue that instructional subject heads must highlight monitoring learners' progress and developing quality literacy practices. To that effect, Hallinger et al's (2017) research reiterates the role of instructional subject heads in creating a shared educator self-efficacy beliefs – a well-recognized aspect for successful literacy teaching and learning.

In executing their role, subject heads are likely to experience challenges with regard to the lines of distribution and accountability of responsibilities, because they have a wide span of duties to attend to. In addition, they must also still line manage educators and SMTs (Malatji, 2018:25). It would be challenging for subject heads to create a shared educator self-efficacy belief system if they lack intrinsic motivation, incentive, professional quality and experience and training as subject heads (Malatji, 2018:80). In conclusion, it can be postulated with a fair amount of certainty that secondary schools need general and domain-specific language subject heads to offer customized support to aid educators in adhering to the essentials of a diverse array of learners in the senior phase and for developing and leading curricula assessments and professional growth of language educators.

2.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: LITERACY LEADERSHIP

Literacy leadership can be defined as to provide leadership in the subject area of literacy. Due to the focus on instruction and the role of the entire SMT in leadership, Instructional and distributed

leadership are central. Therefore, aspects of Instructional leadership and distributed leadership were combined into the development of a conceptual framework to promote literacy leadership (Figure 2.5.1). This framework includes seven key elements related to instructional leadership: These include supervision of the literacy curriculum, monitoring of instructional practices, classroom visits and observations, mentoring of educators, promoting professional development activities, promoting well-resourced, print-rich classrooms and creating a vision and mission for literacy instruction. The distributed leadership provides a framework in which leadership is viewed as a set of interactions and activities shared across multiple people in an organization, rather than leadership involving the actions of a singular, formal leader (Gorr, 2016:10). The term “literacy leadership” in schools is, according to Lewis- Spector and Jay (2011:6), a broad concept that can involve educators, parents, students, principals and community members. However, in this study it will only focus on the roles of the SMT and subject-heads.

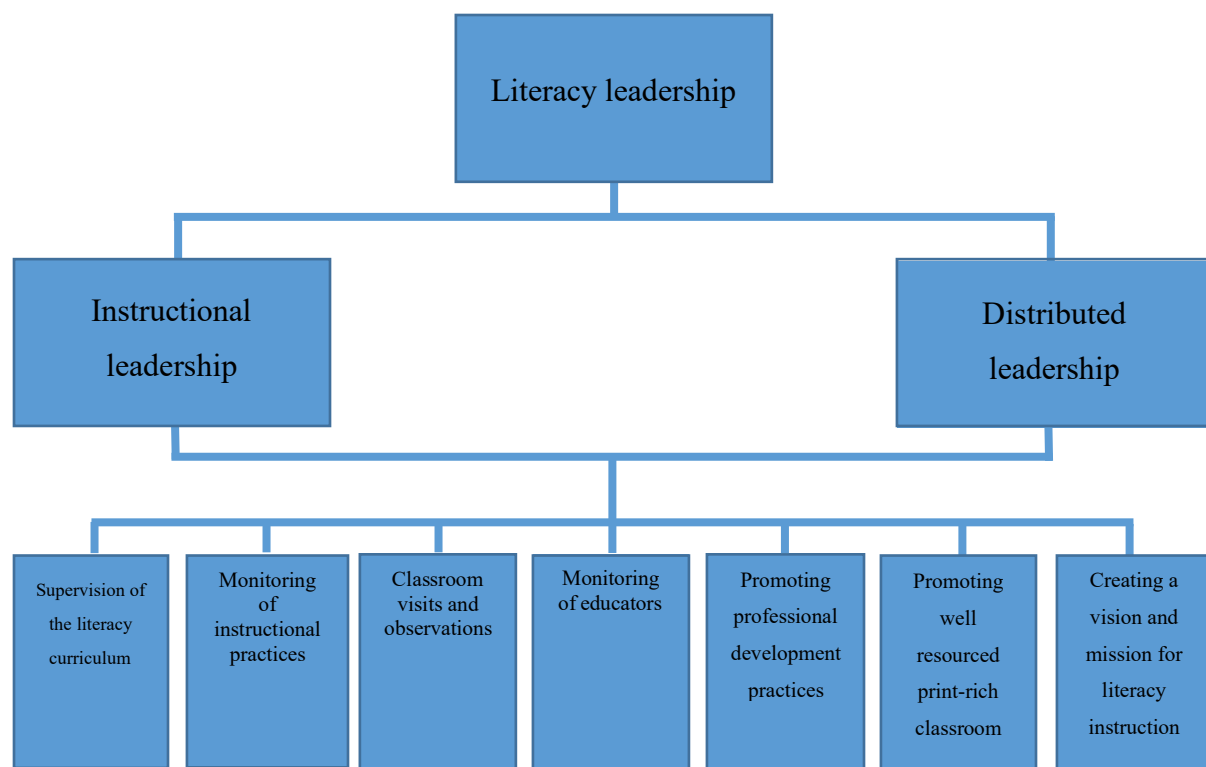


Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework literacy leadership

2.5.1 Role of the principal as Instructional leader

The importance of leadership in boosting learner achievement is confirmed by a landmark examination on school leadership. Leithwood et al. (2004:5) declare that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among in-school influences that contribute to what students learn at school on student success”. The Standard (DBE, 2016) in outlining the vital purpose of principalship emphasizes the need to manage teaching and learning successfully, which will promote learner achievement. This function resorts under Instructional leadership. The role of the principal as instructional leader is described as being able to support the approaches and activities of the school, with key aspects including the schools’ own vision and mission (Plaatjies, 2019). In addition, literature emphasizes the principal’s role in fulfilling the accountability of principles through classroom observation and evaluation of teaching and learning Townsend, 2018; Mendels, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al. 2009; Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2004). Plaatjies (2019; 2020) also points out that specific abilities intertwined with literacy instructional leadership entail the SMT’s knowledge and skills of the literacy curriculum, the promotion of print-rich literacy environments, supervision of the instructional program and the active involvement of literacy educators through professional development activities.

2.5.2 Distributed leadership approach

Bush et al. (2018) claim that distributed leadership spreads leadership across the learning environment and empowers educators to develop and implement leadership abilities. The literature espouses the notion that distributed leadership focuses on engaging expertise wherever it exists within the institute rather than seeking this only through formal position. Researchers view as an emergent model (Bust, 2018; Bush & Glover, 2016; Gronn, 2010, Harris, 2010; Spillane, 2006; Bennet et al., 2003). Gronn (2010:70) cautions against an interpretation that distributed leadership necessarily means any decline in the scope of the principal’s role. Crawford (2012:7) asserts that distributed leadership can be observed as shared approaches to leadership and that it replaces the collegial and participative leadership model of the 1900s. Shava and Tlou (2018) uphold that this leadership model is a collective, shared leadership practice according to their capabilities. From these definitions and statements, it can be alluded that this form of leadership could be applied to

address the literacy challenges in secondary schools. These arguments hold especially value as the composition of the leadership of the school (SMT) makes room for the distributed leadership approach.

A study by Abdullah et al. (2012:11) identifies three components of distributed leadership; sharing accountability, teamwork and professional learning community, participating in the school's goal, mission and vision and ultimately comprehending the school culture. When this components are applied in addressing the literacy leadership challenges, it means the SMT should share accountability in providing directives to educators and promote teamwork to address the literacy leadership challenges. Furthermore, cooperation includes also participating in the school's goal, mission and vision with respect to literacy leadership (see Plaatjies, 2019). Spillane (2006) and Shava and Tlou (2018) add that three categories of distributed leadership patterns are important, which include cooperated distribution, collective distribution and coordinated/organized distribution. Principals, as the overall leaders, will make efforts to encourage collegiality and synchronization in secondary schools with respect to literacy instruction (Harris, 2014). Furthermore, they will establish supporting structures that include teams that teach languages work together, creating settings to support partnerships and generally promoting innovation and transparent feedback about literacy practices (Imoni, 2018). Distributed leadership approaches propose active teamwork between the principal and the rest of the school management team on instructional, curricular and assessment practices within the school (Bush *et al.*, 2018; Harris, 2014).

This being said, the next sections will focus on specific topics on how leaders should support educators in literacy instruction. Challenges in full filing their leadership duties, will also be discussed.

2.6 SPECIFIC ASPECTS RELATED TO THE INSTRUCTIONAL AND DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP ROLES OF SMT-MEMBERS

The following paragraphs will focus on a discussion of specific responsibilities that form part of the Instructional and distributed leadership roles of SMTs, including the supervision of the curriculum and classroom observations/visits. Also included in this discussion is their role in

mentoring, professional development, and the promotion of well-resourced and print-rich classrooms. The last section under this heading focuses on their role in creating a vision and mission for literacy instruction, internal moderation and demonstration lessons.

2.6.1 Supervision of the literacy curriculum

2.6.1.1 Importance of supervision

Grace (2019:8) claims that the aim of supervision of the literacy curriculum is to provide educators with detailed information and deeper understanding of what is happening in the language curriculum. Supervision is the key to trusting school development effort and enables improvement in educator quality. Simpson et al. (2016:5) pinpoint that supervision is viewed as one of the foremost factors that add to the effective curriculum delivery in senior phase education. Supervision of instruction is the monitoring and feedback to literacy educators, continuous monitoring of progress, giving feedback and creating a vision of literacy learning (Osborne-Lampkin, Folsom & Herrington, 2015:9). Supervision of instruction in the literacy curriculum in the senior phase will ensure that literacy educators receive the necessary support to permit them to promote literacy teaching and learning (Plaatjies, 2019). Supervision of instruction in the literacy curriculum is pivotal to exploring literacy leadership challenges and improving the quality of literacy teaching and learning by identifying challenges faced by educators (Khun-Inkeeree et al., 2019; Stephen, 2018). It is also imperative, because supervision of instruction in the literacy curriculum provides educators with important information surrounding the literacy curriculum in order for educators to achieve the desired outcomes (Khun-Inkeeree et al., 2019). In addition, the supervision of instruction in the literacy curriculum is paramount, because the departmental head of a secondary school has to oversee the literacy curriculum in languages and that a defined literacy curriculum is followed and executed (Ngole & Mkulu, 2020). Finally, to corroborate this statement, Thakral (2015) highlights that through supervision educators must be constantly evaluated and supported to improve the instruction of the literacy curriculum.

2.6.1.2 Challenges in executing supervision

Some of the challenges experienced with supervision were highlighted elsewhere in this chapter. According to Ngole and Mkulu (2021), Simpson *et al.* (2016) and Mbezi (2015), SMTs sometimes lack efficient resources to supervise the literacy curriculum. They have inadequate literacy resources to facilitate supervision, have limited opportunities for training in supervision and the overall pessimistic views and lack of commitment of literacy educators on supervision are also problematic.

2.6.1.3 Distributing the supervision load

In distributing or sharing responsibilities with other leaders, the daily instruction oversight rest in most cases with the head of department as instructional leaders (Simpson et al., 2016). This being said, the policy document states that it is evident that in order to sustain teaching and learning, HoDs should ensure that quality curricula supervision transpires (DBE, 2016) Okumbe (1999, in Simpson et al., 2016:8) points out that setting standards of work (language curriculum) and to guarantee that the rest of the department is working towards those standards and conducting weekly or monthly or quarterly departmental meetings are among the roles of HoDs as supervisors of the literacy curriculum.

2.6.2 Monitoring of literacy classroom practices

2.6.2.1 Defining monitoring

Monitoring is in effect aligned to supervision. Prinsloo (2010:15) and Smith (2015:7) define monitoring as a strategy of professional development that includes observation of the teaching and learning literacy practices. In a similar way, Sarker (2016) states that monitoring is viewed as continuous assessment, which indicates progress in achieving goals and it assists with literacy decision making, ensuring accountability in literacy classroom practices (Ferdaus, 2016). Furthermore, it should include classroom visits whereby educators are equipped with constructive feedback and recommendations from leaders on how to improve and promote their teaching and learning of literacy. In a similar way, monitoring refers to the support that should be offered to

language educators, pinpointing mentoring moves such as providing models for instruction, providing recommendations, posing questions, providing confirmation and presenting praise (Hoffman et al., 2019; Hoffman & Loughstead, 2016; Kindle & Schmidt, 2013; Collet, 2012).

2.6.2.2 Importance of monitoring

Compelling evidence exist in the literature on the importance of monitoring literacy in secondary schools and that it is an essential element towards learner achievement. Tulowitski (2019:8) notes that intentional monitoring of literacy by school leaders such as the principal may be executed in conjunction with professional development to effect impact on learners' outcomes. Hall (in Lih & Ismail, 2019) postulates that the significance of instant feedback for teaching and learning performance emphasizes the discomfort confronted by instructional leaders in coming to terms with poorly performing language educators. Despite this, principals as school leaders need to reflect on how to provide support and institute collegiality in order to build trust among the school management team.

Using a narrower view, Hoffman et al. (2019:12) argue that literacy monitoring not only avoids the disapproval associated with tutoring, but also reflects on the importance of relationships and the goal and objective of learning innovative ways to teach by following communities of practice framework. It can then be concluded that literacy monitoring will build a dialogue among educators and educators around the aspects of literacy monitoring that are vital to transforming literacy teaching in secondary schools. One of the main challenges entails inadequate funding of literacy monitoring in secondary schools, insufficient professional monitoring literacy leaders and insufficient literacy monitoring evaluation tools to transform literacy teaching in secondary schools (Oluseye et al., 2020:3).

The literature embraces the notion that work progress in promoting literacy need to be assessed against agreed-upon standards of improving and promoting literacy. Cole and Graham (in Grace 2019:4) write that literacy monitoring may encourage educators' responsibility for their work provided and it is led in a regulated and well-managed manner. This being said, it can be recommended that questionnaires, interviews, educators' language files/portfolio and observations may be implemented for progress monitoring purposes. As part of performance management,

monitoring must be conducted by skilled mentors or HoDs who are able to offer support regarding teaching and learning and classroom observations during and after lesson observation sessions (Grace & Bay, 2019; Blanchard, 2018; Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2007).

2.6.2.3 Challenges in executing monitoring

SMTs face various challenges with monitoring literacy instruction. Ferdaus (2016) remarks that literacy leaders should conduct classroom visits twice a year, although they randomly do it. Fewer classroom visits will lead to inadequate support and feedback for literacy educators. Finally, improper monitoring literacy practices impact educators' quality literacy teaching, which negatively impacts learners' quality literacy learning (Ferdaus, 2016). Yet, there are still few challenges when it comes to monitoring the literacy leadership at secondary schools. Maxwell (2017) remarks that the focus shifts to evaluative measures instead of monitoring an educator to transform his or her practice. Finally, monitoring becomes unsuccessful and educator shifts do not take place. Without monitoring educators' literacy practices, transfer may be unsuccessful, especially if the educators are learning new skills.

2.6.2.4 The process of monitoring

The principal who is part of the literacy team must determine to which extent literacy practices of educators should be monitored. It is evident that the literacy team should create an inquiry-driven process for monitoring educators. Irvin, Meltzer and Dukes (2007), and more recently Nugroho, Hartando and Winaryo (2019:13) *propose the following monitoring criteria of educators' literacy practices*:

- Determine what needs to be established. For example, how will educators know if the current reading program is working?
- Select suitable data sources to answer questions. These might entail portfolios, reading logs and numerous actions taken before and after employment of the literacy action plans, such as reviews of learner attitudes, learner test scores and observations of educators.
- It is imperative to describe evidence of success. This implies that the literacy team will

describe what success would look like for different groups of learners.

- Collect and examine the data and establish if there are specific groups of learners in the senior phase who are not making a year's worth of literacy growth per year? The literacy team should ensure that a record of each learners' literacy progress is maintained. It appears that the record will be utilized to establish the success of the interventions and to assist in determining future action for the learners. This can also be quite challenging, because the leaders' inability to be transparent with the literacy progress, anxiety can interfere with drawing conclusions about the literacy progress and this will lead to unconstructive feedback which will not improve the literacy progress of learners (Wahid et al., 2018:165). This being said, it is clear that literacy progress will not be maintained and literacy practices will not be promoted. This will lead to educators inability to comprehend their strengths and weaknesses to improve literacy instruction and to monitor the progress of learners.

2.6.2.5 Monitoring of workbooks

The monitoring of workbooks has become a vital part of the teaching profession. It can contribute meaningfully to professional development and monitoring of literacy educators by pinpointing their strengths and weaknesses during the assessment process. The monitoring of workbooks can be regarded as a significant aspect in the quality of literacy education, as it promotes teaching and learning by taking on the responsibility and accountability of professionally developing educators and improving academic achievement of learners (Aldaihani, 2017:36). Aldaihani (2017:36) further argues that the monitoring of workbooks by the HoD is one of the responsibilities of the HoD in developing educators through monitoring functions. Lenski and Verbruggen (in Plaatjies, 2016) list examples of the monitoring of workbooks, which entail informal assessments, checklists, rubrics, portfolios, dialogue journals and formal school-based assessments. This indicates that the monitoring of learners' workbooks will signal the level of progression of the learners. The monitoring of learners' workbooks also poses challenges to literacy leaders. Time on task is a challenge for secondary schools, because the quantity of written work in literacy practices does not always reflect the work schedule and lesson plans (Mngomezulu, 2015). It therefore implies that written work does not relate with the precise amount of written work that learners in the senior phase are expected to complete.

Effective language HoDs are those who implement and use a schedule to manage teaching of languages through educators. They will meet with them per grade or phase and organize the monitoring of learners' language, literature or writing books to evaluate the support needed from the educators (Grace, 2019:61). It therefore implies that HoDs are viewed in the interface of transmission of abilities, standards and knowledge with the educators in handling teaching of literacy. Compelling evidence in the literature indicates that leadership and educator commitment are prominent aspects in secondary school organizational efficacy. However, most secondary senior phase HoDs fail to comprehend this ideal model. The key emphasis is on managing the teaching through examining their work, rather than evaluating learner achievement. Bush et al. (2018) believe that this may be due to the restricted time allocated for HoDs for management because of their own teaching obligations or as a result of weak leadership skills and motivation (Mngomezulu, 2015).

It appears from the aforementioned investigations that if literacy teaching and learning are to be improved significantly, language HoDs will have to allocate more time to monitoring learning activities that occur frequently. Moreover, HoDs should develop and implement a routine of exploration and analysis of results, preparation for improvement, monitoring literacy practices and utilizing observations (Bush & Glover, 2016). However, this does not occur in many South African literacy classrooms. Monitoring is viewed as an afterthought and instead of being utilized as a procedure for judging and promoting the literacy program quality, monitoring of literacy practices becomes an act whereby literacy leaders are compelled to do it to fulfil external needs (Wexler et al. 2020). The result is that no individual seems to be aware why the literacy practices are monitored and how it can be utilized to improve literacy instruction. The monitoring may be hampered by undistinguishable objectives and some literacy leaders equate monitoring with assessment, although the two terms are not the same (Wexler et al., 2020).

2.6.3 Classroom observations and visits

2.6.3.1 Defining observations and visits

Wahid et al. (2018:162) define classroom visits as a way of observing the literacy teaching process and its relationship to literacy teaching and learning. These scholars uphold that through classroom

visits educators can become cognizant of how their literacy environments function and to bring about transformation in addressing literacy challenges. The researcher believes that classroom visits entails sitting in at another educators' class and to critically reflect, learn and to observe. During the process of observation, the principal as literacy leader must communicate with educators individually in goals conferences in the department, or even in focus groups aimed at specific literacy aspects such as motivation and engagement (Hoffman et al., 2019). Moreover, instructional mentoring could be made available by the principal for educators who do not comprehend how to implement reciprocal teaching in their respective literacy classrooms.

2.6.3.2 Implementation of classroom observations and visits

In a different study, Hoffman et al. (2019:20) build on the construct of apprenticeship of observation, proposing that adding more practicum experiences may not contribute towards the goal of preparing influential educators who can step beyond the status quo. Hoffman et al. (2019:20) examined that, the more we engage educators in literacy classrooms that reflect the status quo of teaching and learning, the more likely is it that educators will be inducted in these teaching and learning practices and move away from original and unique practices that are often the main focus for preparing literacy educators. An example is engaging educators in literacy as a manner for examining and cross-curricular teaching by pushing into classroom environments for an intensive period joining small group and whole-class mentoring work.

Classrooms observations/visits conducted by principals indicate that educators' beliefs have an important impact on how they organized the literacy curricula and designed lesson and instruction (Ayodele & Govender, 2018:5). In addition, these scholars add that educators should observe their peers busy teaching in clusters and they must take notes. Ayodele and Govender (2018:5) conclude that discussions should be held between these parties after a lesson was conducted and observed by the other party on how to improve the lesson should also be thoroughly discussed. The key implication drawn from this is that classroom visits/observations are indeed a multi-process of cooperative observations, data analysis and continuous lesson reviews.

2.6.3.3 Challenges of classroom visits and observations

Some of the challenges of classroom visits are to identify the specific literacy challenge and it necessitates professional ethics and impartiality and training in classroom visits and analytical skills of the literacy leader (Wahid et al., 2018). Moreover, the leaders are not provided with training, because of the lack of motivation and institutionalized support (Wahid et al., 2018).

2.6.4 Mentoring

2.6.4.1 Defining mentoring

The Education Labour Relations Council founded by section 6 of the Labour Relations Act 146 of 1993 stipulates that the responsibility of the HoD as part of the school management team is to act as a mentor for post-level one educators (DBE, 2015b). The HoD must be responsible and held accountable for the improvement of teaching and learning including the professional practices of educators. Mentoring is a professional development approach. It can be defined as the process where the HoD observes a mentee and makes recommendations and proposals to improve teaching practices (Smith, 2015). Educators as peer mentors reflect on one another's practices and philosophies to improve their own teaching practices. What this means is that educators are professionally enhancing one another.

The mentoring process emphasizes mentors using their capability and knowledge to guide other educators (Smith, 2015; Ellinger et al., 2010; Hopper, 2001). Mentoring is observed as a relationship between an experienced mentor and a beginner protégé and it gives mentees the opportunity to discuss literacy leadership, objectives, as well as to receive feedback and support from their mentor (Lowery, Geesa & McConnell, 2018; Fleck & Mullins, 2012; Terrion & Leonard, 2007). Mentoring serves literacy leadership development by giving mentees a leader who shows them the norms of the learning environment and it gives mentees self-assurance in their place within the literacy program which will ensure educator-retention, job satisfaction and career advancement in education (Roupnel, Rinfre & Grenier, 2019).

2.6.4.2 Mentoring in literacy practices

Mentoring in literacy indicates that literacy mentees must be equipped with literacy knowledge and skills to address literacy challenges in secondary schools (Tahir et al., 2014). Botha and Hugo (2021) claim that literacy leaders in secondary schools must focus on mentoring of literacy educators to enhance job satisfaction. Mentoring in literacy is pivotal, because it supports educators' ability to interpret literacy challenges in classrooms, improves classroom management skills, promotes literacy leaders' job satisfaction and improving learners' literacy abilities. Mullen and Klimaitis (2021) state that mentoring in literacy increases the productivity of educators and this is supported by Mundla and Iravo (2015), who mention that literacy leaders' ability to implement a literacy mentoring program may enhance their work ethic and it serves as an opportunity for career development in literacy education. Mentoring plays a vital role during literacy leadership at secondary schools.

2.6.4.3 Challenges during the process of mentoring

There are various challenges with mentoring in literacy education. Mukeredzi (2015) highlights that mentees who are not supported by experienced mentors will be unable to address literacy challenges and literacy leaders will be unable to address literacy leadership challenges. They will also not be able to comprehend their workload and challenging literacy working environment (Mukeredzi, 2015). Botha and Hugo (2021) further add that challenges such as inadequate opportunities for literacy training, inadequate literacy leadership support and guidance and a dysfunctional literacy working environment serve as challenges with literacy mentoring. Other challenges that may occur during the mentoring process are a lack of time, personality mismatch, lack of professional knowledge and skills, lack of formal *administration* procedures leading the mentoring process (Hansford, Ehrich & Tennent, 2004:11; Smith, 2015:44). The authors continue to say that when there is no formal structure to support to schedule meetings between a literacy mentor and literacy, mentees serve as barriers in mentoring literacy leadership. This calls attention to a cluster system that supports mentoring opportunities for educators, because new language senior phase educators will have the opportunity to be mentored by experienced literacy educators in the teaching profession (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021).

2.6.5 Professional development activities

The Personnel Administration Measures (PAM, No. 79 of 1998) highlight the essential responsibilities of the school-based educator that must consist of professional development during the formal schoolday and outside the schoolday. Therefore, these education policies accentuate that professional development is indeed a legal obligation of an educator. The implementation of professional development activities to improve literacy instruction describes all activities that educators can be exposed to in the teaching profession (Smith, 2015; Hopper, 2001). Whilst school-based literacy mentoring entails giving support and feedback to educators, professional development entails the constant support of the mentoring process (Hopper, 2001; Smith 2015). Continuous professional development is vital for educators to stay updated with the growing research base and to constantly improve literacy practices and learning outcomes for learners (Smith, 2015). Professional development activities can be viewed in the same light as staff development activities and they entail any activity that increases the expertise and understanding of educators and its usefulness in their respective schools. Guskey (in Maxwell, 2017:13) believes that professional development activities are organized efforts to bring about transformation in our literacy classrooms. This proposes that professional development is the driving force of every secondary school improvement proposal suggested by districts. Finally, educators will attend professional development activities to gain practical philosophies that could be implemented in classrooms.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Teaching and Learning International Survey (Talis, 2009) stipulates the following professional development activities to improve literacy instruction in secondary schools: mentoring, coaching and peer observation within the schools, workshops on various literacy aspects for all language educators, colloquia or conferences where language educators have a platform to discuss challenges and to present their own research within their classroom discourse, formal courses where a qualification could be attained, informal development through observation and to ultimately form a link with other educators in the profession. Well-implemented literacy programs must entail aspects of linking literacy experiences to those in the real world including opportunities for learners and educators to practise these experiences. Bransford et al. (2003, in Maxwell, 2017:55) state the following professional development activities to improve literacy instruction: Educators can learn from their

own practice and from being in a parent role they acquire the moral and social development of learners. However, Maxwell (2017:55) adds that job-embedded professional development activities in improving literacy instruction refer to educators' learning that is embedded in daily teaching of literacy, occurs frequently, entails educators evaluating learners' learning and literacy competencies, finding explanations to literacy challenges, and is aligned with learners' standards, curricula and the literacy vision and mission of the school.

The principal as an instructional leader, as well as the language HoD, is held accountable for laying the foundation for professional development and should support language educators to improve their literacy instruction. Greenleaf, Litman and Marple (2017:9) confirm that professional development must be a partner to curricular restructuring in constructing educators' ability for teaching literacy in conjunction with content. Also, a combination of research on professional development focused on enhancing content area literacy instruction reveals that educators with district and secondary school level support apply professional development strategies with better fidelity, even when they originally assumed the professional development was not suitable for their learners (Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017; Kauffman, 2016; Reed, 2009).

2.6.6 Promoting well resourced, print-rich literacy classrooms

According to Pratiwi, Padmadewi and Paramartha (2019), a print-rich literacy classroom is a setting that stimulates learners to participate in various literacy tasks in their daily livelihoods by providing them with the comprehension of the function of written and reading language. Ensuring a print-rich literacy classroom is definitely the responsibility of the literacy educator and they must be supported by literacy leaders to provide conducive literacy environments for learners (ILA, 2019:4). This corresponds with Lewis-Spector and Jay's (2011:15) statement that the principal as literacy leader should provide literacy leadership in monitoring classroom resources and the physical arrangement of the literacy classroom to promote effective learning and the utilization of print or innovative technology.

A print-rich literacy classroom provides opportunities for engaging in literacy behaviours in a significant and authentic manner (Veyldf, 2016). Furthermore, as learners continuously learn and develop, access to print-rich settings and interactions with educators and adults who model and

respond to learners' written and spoken messages will support the progression of literacy learning in secondary schools (Veyldf, 2016). This will help to consolidate learners' comprehension of the functionality of literacy in the senior phase. Finally, once a print-rich literacy environment has been established, it is imperative that literacy educators participate in scaffolding, demonstrating and extending literacy terminology during classroom discourse (Veyldf, 2016). A print-rich literacy environment provides learners access to the literacy curriculum and provides educators with information on why a print-rich literacy environment is pivotal (Gerde, Bingham & Pendergast, 2015). Literacy classrooms with literacy resources increase the frequency of reading, motivations to read independently which foster learners' literacy development (Lee, Zuilkowski & D'sa, 2020). For example, a literacy print-rich classroom that portrays writings of varying forms and contents motivates learners to recognize connections between written text and reading aloud (Lee et al., 2020).

However, limitations do exist regarding the utilization of print-rich literacy environments. Often the print is not meaningful and when the print does exist, it is barely used or implemented by educators or learners to promote reading and writing (Lee et al., 2020). Moreover, the print posted in secondary schools lacks applicability or purpose and although educators' significant investment of time in creating a literacy print-rich setting (Gerde et al., 2015), the print is not used to purposely promote reading and writing.

To promote well-resourced classrooms, the National Library of New Zealand (2014) proposes that the school management team and educators comprehend the effect of reading on learners' achievements, shared vision and mission of the schools' reading culture, realize the importance and fully support the schools' library and its resources. Findings from rigorous studies suggest that school management teams must make use of teacher-librarians in order to promote a well-resourced literacy classroom, because they provide access to print collections and seek to enhance independent reading (Ukpebor, 2017).

It is imperative to note that the emphasis needs to be on classroom teaching aspects, including the teaching contexts and essentials such as resource availability and accessibility that may support learners' reading and writing literacy development.

Zimmerman and Howie (2016:8) remark that, in order to improve the literacy development of learners in the senior phase, each school must ensure that educators have access to basic literacy resources in the language classroom, which includes workbooks, textbooks, writing stationary, phonic friezes and wall charts.

2.6.7 Creating a vision and mission for literacy instruction

The mission is the main key content basis of the learning environment based on which its daily operations and decision-making processes are planned and implemented (Roblek et al., 2017). The mission statement of the learning environment includes the goals and timing of implementation (Roblek et al., 2017). The vision statement describes the idealized future of the learning environment and the direction for staff members to follow (Bertancelj et al., 2015). The scholar believes that the vision of the literacy environment symbolizes the vision of the school in the future, which aims to be sincere and feasible. When planning a clear vision and mission for literacy, it refers to the extent to which a vision and mission gain extensive acceptance by members within a team. When planning a vision for literacy, leaders must go beyond their own interests and focus on the interests of all educators of the secondary school including external stakeholders (Bertancelj et al., 2015). Shared vision is the extent to which individuals of an entity come to an agreement on a vision for the future, which as a result form the foundation for action and this ensure that educators comprehend that the vision is based on incorporating educators of the school into future literacy engagements.

The vision and mission for literacy are observed as a vital weapon to develop civilization within a nation (Bifuh-Ambe, 2020). This implies that the higher literacy levels learners have, the better their quality of life will be. The vision and mission statement for literacy are imperative to maintain and guide the existence of the school. The vision and mission for literacy instruction must be consistent, comprehensive and define literacy. It should emphasize instruction that will be cognitively and academically engaging for learners and literacy instruction should have a central role. Plaatjies (2019) states that the vision and mission should embrace learning and teaching goals. Houck and Novak (2017b) agree, but add that principals are responsible for developing strategies to assess their progress. This calls attention to provide a setting in which learners are stimulated to

inquire, apply and extend their understanding of literacy and literacy aspects through problem solving. It is also pointing to the need for school management teams to differentiate the curriculum as well as instructional strategies to increase success for all learners.

It is evident that a vision and mission for successful literacy instruction must be associated with the classroom and that school leaders (literacy leaders) should provide, comprehend, monitor and communicate an instructional vision and mission in order to direct the secondary school (Plaatjies, 2019; Nelson & Dunsmore, 2018; Francois, 2014; Day & Sammons, 2013). There are also challenges when literacy leaders want to develop and implement a mission and vision for literacy. Many secondary schools do not possess a mission or vision statement for literacy, many literacy leaders do not know to distinguish between a mission and vision statement, and some literacy leaders are unclear on how these respective statements may be defined (Papulova, 2014).

2.6.8 Internal moderation process

The policy documents indicate that quality assurance processes require that moderation that is conducted by the language HoD, as curriculum manager (DBE, 2016). Therefore, this suggests that the successful implementation of language SBAs not only primarily depends on the educators' theoretical understanding, but fundamentally on how language HoDs fulfil their role in terms of moderating the tasks. Moderation is consequently the foundation of quality assurance to guarantee that SBAs adhere to acceptable standards (Xaba, 2016:2).

The new and amended curriculum and assessment policy statement (DBE, 2019) stipulates the procedures to be adhered to in moderation, while Umalusi (The General and Further Education Quality Assurance Agency) has outlined instructions for quality literacy assessment that have had an influence on the execution of moderation in secondary schools and in the senior phase. The language HoD is accountable and responsible for sustaining the standard of assessment practice in secondary schools and maintaining that educators have a good understanding of assessment policies (Grobler, Looock & Govender, 2012). This is worth noting, because the successful implementation of SBAs is not only influenced by educators' theoretical understanding, but mainly on how HoDs play their role in moderating language tasks. Internal moderation in language should be consistent, precise and thoroughly designed.

Adequate knowledge of the literacy curriculum will permit principals and other leaders to conduct rigorous moderation activities and this will help educators in literacy instruction. Handa (2018) emphasizes that moderation is a quality assurance process that is an important component of assessment in secondary schools. Therefore, it is the assurance technique that supports the enhancement of each component to ensure that the entire assessment process is reasonable, authentic and valid, permitting equivalence (Handa, 2018). The challenges literacy leaders experience with moderation are the excessive workload and accountabilities that can hinder the progress of lecturers, assessors and the markers in terms of grading and unbiased feedback (Handa, 2018). Secondly, another challenge is that the final award qualification should rather be portraying achievement in a consistent manner across all secondary schools, which is often challenged as the moderation practices engaged are often aimed as literacy assessment for certification instead of assessment for literacy learning (Handa, 2018). This suggests that moderation is not only literacy educators and assessors' responsibility, but also the literacy leaders within secondary schools who are responsible for overseeing all literacy moderation practices.

2.7 DEMONSTRATION LESSONS

Demonstration lessons, an element of the language department in secondary schools are generally believed to assist educators by using other competent educators who is skilful to demonstrate how instruction should be conducted (Delaware DoE, 2015). A demonstration lesson necessitates preparation by secondary schools and educators observing the demonstration lesson, follow-up and reflecting with literacy educators, assessing demonstration lessons and then notifying the educators on how to go about in their literacy practices (Delaware DoE, 2015). Yet, research illustrates that most learners learn more from instruction that actively and cognitively engages them, rather than from traditional approaches in which they are passive observers.

Plaatjies (2016:56) outlines that these elements can contribute to transformation in the manner lessons will be conducted during literacy classroom discourse. The following factors must be considered: the emphasis of the program aimed at promoting skills, capabilities and global development. This author also maintains that demonstration lessons in languages must impact learners, educators and how the curricula are managed. TNTP (2012) and Crouch et al. (2004)

similarly postulate that demonstration lessons may predominantly be valuable when there are concerns about literacy educators' encounters with their peers' teaching competencies. This being said, it is evident that demonstration lessons provide opportunities to evaluate educators' skills and outlooks required for a position within the school setting. Demonstration lessons envisaged contributing to a planned lesson for a specific group of educators, in this regard literacy educators (Plaatjies, 2016).

Demonstration lessons typically occur over a moderately short period of time emphasizing the general classroom setting and educator actions in one lesson. This suggests that demonstration lessons consist out of a pre-brief, teaching and debrief process/evaluation (Loong et al., 2017:5). Motselisi (2016) similarly postulates that demonstration lessons in literacy will enable HoDs to be well aware of what is taking place in language classrooms. It can be concluded that principals as literacy leaders should implement structures such as demonstration lessons to assist and influence educators and their literacy practices. There are also challenges that literacy leaders face with demonstration lessons. These challenges include planning and programming of demonstration lessons, critically assessing demonstration lessons, meeting the different interests, skills and abilities of literacy educators, and finally the challenge of teaming with other literacy educators (Meador et al., 2015).

CHAPTER 3 : THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature on literacy challenges in secondary schools. This chapter discusses the philosophical orientations of the research, which includes the research paradigm. Furthermore the chapter focuses on the research design and research. Included in this discussion is the data gathering methods and sampling techniques that were deemed the most applicable for this study. The intention was to collect empirical evidence that is in line with the aim of the study; that is, to explore the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools. The data were collected, using a qualitative approach within the interpretive paradigm. While the study is emphasizing instructional leadership, literacy leadership, literacy education and literacy challenges in education, the role of all the role-players, including the principal, HoDs, eputy principals and educators were also considered.

The researcher wanted to explore the views and experiences about the research topic. I wanted to explore and comprehend the link between literacy leadership challenges and instructional as well as distributed leadership. The questions will stem this from both an instructional leadership perspective and a distributed leadership perspective, focusing on how educators understood and implemented literacy education and how literacy leadership in secondary schools impacted educators in the senior phase.

3.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTIONS RESTATED

3.2.1 Research Problem

As mentioned, research reports indicate that learners in the secondary school's performance is not up to standard (Mabena, Mokgosi, Ramapela, 2021; DBE, 2015). Also, educators in schools struggle to cope with and address the challenges associated with literacy in the classroom. This begs the questions as to what could be done more to address the challenges related to literacy. Plaatjies (2020:3) declares that although considerable research has been done to address the problems with literacy – especially with regard to classroom practices – less is known on how to

approach the challenges with poor literacy performance from a leadership perspective. Another point of concern is that studies have focused predominantly on the literacy issue in primary schools, whilst data on the challenges in secondary schools are still wanting. This study therefore aimed to provide more data on the challenges that exist in secondary schools in terms of literacy leadership.

3.2.2 Primary research question

What are the literacy leadership challenges at secondary schools?

3.2.3 Secondary research questions

There are five secondary research questions in the study:

- What are the challenges that educators experience with literacy education?
- What are the roles of the SMT as literacy leaders in literacy leadership at secondary schools?
- What are the challenges that the SMT encounter in performing their roles as literacy leaders in secondary schools?
- Which strategies could be implemented by literacy leaders to enhance literacy performance at secondary schools?

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

3.3.1 Aim and characteristics of the interpretive research paradigm

This philosophical lens adopted for this study is the interpretive paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:53) argue that the interpretive paradigm does not consider a quantitative positivist approach and that the researcher primarily depends on what the participants mention and think. Thanh and Thanh (2015:25) similarly postulate that the interpretive paradigm allows scholars to observe the world through the thoughts and experiences of the participants in the study. In search of explanations for research, the researcher who follows the interpretive paradigm

utilizes those experiences to create and interpret his or her understanding from the gathered data. This study strives to do direct interpretations on real-life experiences within secondary schools in the senior phase about the challenges in terms of literacy. Interpretivists become accustomed with a relativist ontology where a single phenomenon may have multiple interpretations. Virtually, scholars tend to gain a comprehension of the phenomenon and its challenges in its unique setting rather than seeking to generalize the base of understanding for the whole population (Creswell, 2007).

3.3.2 Strengths and limitations of the interpretivist paradigm

The strength of this paradigm is that by expanding views and interpretations to look into the phenomena, these researchers can not only describe human or objects, but also comprehend them in their social context (Nieuwenhuis, 2016; Packer, 2011). Additionally, scholars also can conduct these types of research in a natural setting by utilizing a methodology, theory, case study to gain insight (Tuli, 2010) to offer authentic information related to the research.

Despite the above advantages, the interpretive paradigm also has some limitations. The interpretivists seek to gain understanding of the phenomena within its difficulty of the setting instead of generalizing these outcomes to other individuals and other settings (Cohen, Manion & Marison, 2011); therefore, it leaves out a gap in authenticating validity and effectiveness of research outcomes. Moreover, the research outcomes are affected by the scholars' interpretation, own ways of thinking and reasoning, belief system which contributes to many bias (Lan Thi Mai Pham, 2018:4).

3.3.3 The philosophical beliefs for interpretivism

3.3.3.1 Ontology

Ontology is the study of being and classifications of aspects that exist or may exist in some domain (Aliyu et al., 2015). Given the domain, its ontology can be viewed as the heart of any system of knowledge and skills representation for that area (Aliya et al., 2015).

The subject of ontology researches the pivotal questions in daily parlance and one can boldly say that it seeks to study the nature of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.3.3.2 Epistemology

Creswell and Poth (2018:74) describes the epistemology as inherent and as a way of observing the world and making sense of it. The subject of epistemology entails knowledge and represents a specific understanding of what is involved in knowing that exemplifies how we know what we know (Abaneh, 2020). The researcher can state that epistemology is focused on accepting knowledge in the field of study to draw subjective interpretations and social phenomena. Finally, the researcher will interact with what is being currently researched.

3.3.3.3 Methodology

According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), methodology is the umbrella term used to refer to the research approaches and procedures used in a study and that it expresses the logic of the methodical processes applied whilst conducting research in order to gain understanding about a challenge or problem. It encompasses expectations made, limitations countered and how they were mitigated or lessened (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

3.3.3.4 Axiology

Axiology can be defined as the ethical concerns that need to be considered when organizing a research study (NHMRC, 2015). It also involves describing, evaluating and comprehending terminology of either right or wrong behaviour relating to the study (NHMRC, 2015). Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) remark that axiology considers what value one can attribute to the different facets of research, the participants, collection of data and the audience who will view this data.

Using this paradigm will provide the researcher with an understanding of the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools and the reality about the role of literacy leadership.

Through the use of data collection methods such as interviews, the researcher aims to probe the interviewee's opinions, emotions, viewpoints and prejudices (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007).

3.4 THE RESEARCH DESIGN ADOPTED: PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

A research design is defined by various researchers in different terms. Nachmias and Nachmias (2008, in Yin, 2003:2) state that it is a strategy that guides the study in the process of interpreting observations. More recently, Akhtar (2016:68) echoes that a research design is the organization of environments for the analysis and collection of data in a way that proposes to combine relevance to the research purpose. The literature espouses the notion that a research design ensures an agreement between the research questions and findings.

This study adopted a phenomenological approach and it is seen as a familiar design in qualitative studies (Gill, 2014:4).

3.4.1 Definition of phenomenology

According to Gill (2014:4), phenomenology can be described as “both a philosophical movement and a family of qualitative research methodologies”. Furthermore, it can be characterised as a philosophical approach that allows a better understanding and greater significance of a certain phenomenon of the participant's perspectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016:497; Hickman, 2015:2; Creswell, 2014:14). Neubauer et al. (2019:91) note that phenomenology entails the individual experiences people encounter in their lives and seeking the understanding thereof. Neubauer et al. (2019:94) further emphasise that phenomenology is an investigation of underlying challenges and is thus very powerful.

3.4.2 Aim of a phenomenology

Phenomenology aims to investigate a particular phenomenon's perceptions (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012:432). The latter will lead to a greater understanding of the individuals participating in the study and the experiences and perspectives of the participants related to phenomenon of the

study will be described (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018:1003; Fraenkel et al., 2012:432). According to Neubauer et al. (2019:91), the aim of a phenomenological study is to “describe the meaning of this experience – both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced”.

3.4.3 Strengths and Limitations of phenomenology

This research designs have numerous strengths. This study is incited by the fact that the researcher uses their own personal interest and motivation (Hickman, 2015:3). According to Maxwell (2013:24), if the researcher is motivated and shows great interest in the topic, the study would be completed successfully and this is seen as an advantage. The method according to which data are collected is also a strength of phenomenology. The manner in which data are collected allows for direct, subjective responses that enables the researcher to gain first-hand knowledge of the participants experiences through enquiries that are open-ended and broad (Hickman, 2015:3; Rudestam & Newton, 2015; Maxwell, 2013). Themes and patterns can be constructed through the experiences of the participants that can be reviewed throughout the study (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014:9).

This research design also has some limitations. Participants participate in the study and have to relive past experiences to give their views and experiences, and this process might be time consuming (Fraenkel et al., 2012:433). Voice-recorded interviews were conducted individually with the three principals, three deputy principals, six departmental heads and six literacy educators. According to Neubauer et al. (2019:95), another limitation is that the researcher’s perspectives and interpretations may be biased and the establishment of thoroughness and trustworthiness is the cornerstone of research.

3.4.4 Reason for adopting phenomenology

For this study a phenomenological approach was deemed appropriate as this approach allows the participants to share their views and experiences and in this manner a greater amount of information can be obtained (Bryant, 2020:58). This will allow the researcher to further explore the literacy leadership challenges at secondary schools. This approach allows for greater

involvement between participants and the researcher and the values, feelings and perceptions are comprehended to a greater extend (Berger, 2015; Broomé, 2011).

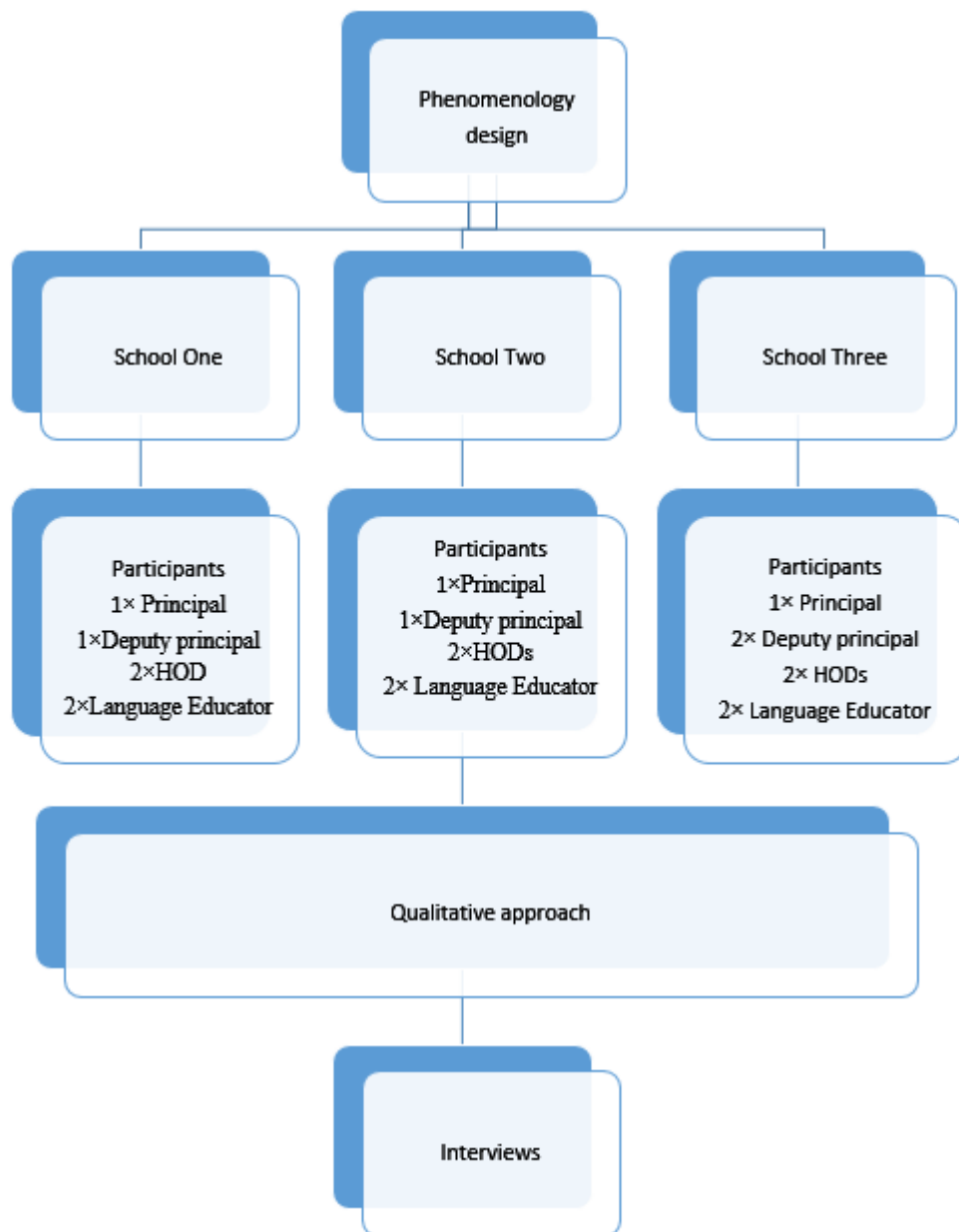


Figure 3.1: The qualitative approach

3.5 THE RESEARCH APPROACH FOR THE STUDY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. Therefore, next follows an in-depth discussion of this approach.

3.5.1 Aims and characteristics of qualitative research

The current research study seeks to explore the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools. Additionally, and to comprehend how the literacy leaders view, experience and enact their leadership obligations, a qualitative approach was espoused, because it enabled the exploration of the participants' experiences, approaches, interpretations, beliefs and values (Cohen et al., 2011). In the same vein, McMillan and Schumacher in (2010, in Jinga, 2015:62) affirm that studies that necessitate an understanding of human behaviour in certain settings are effectively executed through direct interaction with the participants. The literature suggests that qualitative research is aimed at explaining complex phenomena through verbal explanations rather than using numerical data (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Henceforth, the qualitative research approach offers the researcher an opportunity to directly interact with the participants involved in this study through in-depth interviews. By doing so, the researcher aimed to get the views of the participants about the challenges in terms of literacy leadership, as stated by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011). These two authors state that qualitative research is a stimulating interdisciplinary landscape encompassing diverse viewpoints and practices for producing knowledge.

It is envisaged that by utilizing the qualitative approach would add towards gaining a clear understanding of the instructional and distributed leadership roles specifically by literacy leaders in the senior phase, and the nature of interaction needed in addressing literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools. The adoption of the qualitative approach was also influenced by Nieuwenhuis' (2016:53) argument that it permits the scholar to explore the phenomenon in its natural circumstances. In this study the setting is secondary schools' language departments. Interviews were therefore conducted at schools, while the documents studied were done in the classrooms, offices and staffrooms of the participants. Studying the literacy leadership challenges in their natural environments accommodated what Tsumura (2015) and Bogdan and Biklen (2007) denote as the scholar being directly performing the core data collection process. Furthermore, the

scholar will be permitted to obtain first-hand information and a comprehension of literacy leaders' practices.

3.5.2 Advantages of qualitative research

There are many advantages of qualitative research. Firstly, it generates detailed explanations of participants' viewpoints, experiences and emotions and it interprets meaning of actions (Maxwell, 2013; Denzin, 1989). Secondly, qualitative research comprehends the human experience in certain environments (Rahman et al., 2016:3). Thirdly, qualitative research has the ability to comprehend various participants' voice, meanings and events (Richardson, 2012). Fourthly, qualitative research enables researchers to establish the participants' inner experience and how their views are constructed (Maxwell, 2013). Fifthly, qualitative research approaches such as observation interviews are used the most for data collection (Buchan & Daly, 2016:15). Finally, qualitative research has a flexible structure, as it can be constructed to an effective extent and it can contribute to the understanding of complex features. These advantages suggest that the qualitative research approach permits participants to be understood from their own viewpoints. As a result, the researcher will draw informed conclusions from the findings. On a similar note, I took my cue from Rahman et al. (2016) who confirm the significance of the qualitative approach for the present study by stating that this approach are suitable when there is a gap or when the phenomenon is unknown. It is apparent that little has been written about literacy leadership challenges, especially in the senior phase. Henceforth there was a need to get participants' opinions on the monitoring, supervision, mentoring and instruction that are given to address literacy leadership challenges at secondary schools.

3.5.3 Limitations of qualitative research

Despite the above advantages of qualitative research, some limitations are also apparent. Firstly, Silverman (2010) reveals that the qualitative research approach leave out contextual understandings and tends to focus on viewpoints and experiences. Secondly, Rahman et al. (2016:4) elucidate that policymakers often give low credibility to results from a qualitative approach and that it may abandon social and cultural constructions.

Thirdly, Lam (2015:1) admits that qualitative research provides smaller sample size and it raises the concern of generalizability.

Finally, the evaluation and exploration of cases are time consuming (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:53). These limitations suggest that qualitative research is multifaceted and it requires creative thinking abilities. However, despite these limitations, qualitative research is pivotal, because qualitative researchers believe that the significant understanding of education practices in context is likely without the external control of enforced designs. Ultimately the researcher would suggest that this approach will promote creative thinking, deep perception of patterns among ambiguity including the development on good writing skills.

3.5.4 Addressing the limitations in this study

The limitation of qualitative research as pointed out by Silverton (2010) and explained in the previous paragraph were addressed by following the advice of renowned scholars in the research methodology field. Creswell and Poth (2018) affirm that taking context into consideration is important, while Maxwell emphasizes that contextual features and their influences on the participants' experiences are important for qualitative researchers" (Maxwell, 2013:30). In terms of credibility of the results, the researcher adhered to rigorous quality assurance processes such as triangulation. Cohen et al. (2007:141) highlight that ensuring credibility can be done through triangulation by using multiple methods to gather the data. To increase the confidence in the generalizability of the study, the researcher will ensure its done through the process of transferability. This is the method of ensuring that qualitative research findings are transferred to other respondents or contexts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In order to minimize the excessive time spent to qualitative research, as pointed out by Nieuwenhuis (2016:53), the researcher ensured that the focus was aligned rigorously to the central theme of the research. However, despite these limitations, qualitative research is pivotal, because qualitative researchers believe that the significant understanding of education practices in context is likely without the external control of enforced designs. Ultimately the researcher would suggest that this approach will promote creative thinking, and deep perception of patterns among ambiguity, including the development on good writing skills.

3.6 THE DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY AND PROCESS

Data collection can be defined as the process of gathering and evaluating information on variables of concern, in a recognized systematic manner that permits the researcher to respond to the research questions, test hypotheses and measure the outcomes (Kabir, 2016:202). This author also maintains that the data collection process is known to all fields of study and it highlights the importance of ensuring accurate and authentic information. It therefore implies that data collection processes striving to capture evidence that translates to in-depth data analysis, allow a substantial and trustworthy answer to all research questions posed and it wants to uphold the integrity of the research. The data collection tools are vital in supporting the acquisition of information. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:342), qualitative research draws from a variety of data collection methods, including interviews, observations and documents (see Figure 3.1 below). As mentioned previously in Chapter 1, this research project utilized individual interviews, observation and document analysis. The researcher primarily relied on his experience of being a language educator and background to draw conclusions about what to focus on and choose valid data in relation to instructional practices for instance educators' assessment, literacy curriculum, mentoring, monitoring etcetera (Nyawaranda, 2007).

3.6.1 Research environment and population

Research studies require of the researcher to make informed decisions in terms of what should be investigated. As a starting point thus, the identification of the population of the study is vital. Murphy (2016:4) mentions that a population is a set of subjects, for instance, individuals, groups or objects, from which samples are taken and it exists only if its subjects can be differentiated from other subjects that do not belong to the very population. This study's population was secondary schools in the Free State, Motheo District.

3.6.2 Selection of the participants

Maree (2008) pinpoints that sampling (selection process of the participants) is the procedure of selecting a segment of the population for research purposes. A study by Taherdoost (2016:21) suggests that sampling indicates that every case of the population has the same probability of

inclusion in the sample. Taherdoost (2017:237) reiterates that in qualitative research, the sample size needs to be large and adequate to produce descriptions and significant data. Taking into account the wide variety of selection procedures, I was guided by the qualitative nature of the research and therefore made use of purposeful participant selection. Palinkas et al. (2015:3) suggest that irrespective of the methodology used – qualitative or quantitative – the main aim should be accomplish maximum efficiency and validity. Also, the selection procedure should be consistent with the aims and assumptions relevant to the research approach. Given the qualitative nature of my study thus, I deemed the purposeful selection as appropriate.

Ritchie and Lewis (in Nieuwenhuis, 2016:85) assert that purposive sampling entails participants of a sample are selected with a purpose to embody a group, location or phenomenon in relation to a vital criterion. As the researcher needed to select participants who were familiar with the challenges in terms of literacy leadership, he selected leaders from the four secondary schools. Leaders refer to the School Management Teams of each school, which includes the principal, deputy principal and heads of department. In total three principals participated, three deputy principals and six HoDs. Educators as experts play more and more a leadership role in term of curriculum delivery, and often being regarded as silent observers of leadership practices they were also selected as their inputs are deemed crucial in understanding the challenges at secondary schools. To this end, three educators were also selected as participants to the study. The fieldwork of this study was conducted during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and due to this factor it was extremely difficult get more educators to participate in the study. These role-players thus displayed defining characteristics due to their involvement as leaders of literacy. My approach was in line with specific requirements for the selection of participants, as stated by Creswell (2008:208) in which he declares that participants should be selected in terms of certain defining characteristics. Furthermore, the researcher used his own judgement to identify and select participants that he saw fit. To support this notion, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) emphasize that purposive sampling rests upon the scholars' own choice and discretion. Another point for consideration of the participants was the notion of convenience. Miles and Huberbam (1994, in Curtis et al., 2000) caution that cost of money and time as well as the accessibility of the geographical location should also be considered. Keeping this in mind, the researcher selected schools that were located within a radius of approximately 20 km, which made visits convenient for the researcher.

During the selection process, researchers need to be mindful to ensure scientific rigor. Mack et al. (2009:5) for example state that when participants are selected, this should be done being mindful of the objectives of the study. Also of importance is that participants should be willing to share their experiences and that the participants should have experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Barglowski, 2018). The participants selected were able to provide information that is in line with the aims and relevant to the central argument of the study (Kumar, 2011:176; Yin, 2011:88). The participants were purposively selected to come up with answers that would yield the data about the research questions surfacing. In this study, participants who was aware of the phenomenon were selected (Creswell, 2013). It is vital for me to mention that the participants must be available to participate in the study. Creswell and Poth (2018) and Creswell (2002; 2013) maintain that to get in-depth and meaningful explanations at least five participants must take part in the study.

The researcher purposefully selected educators at different post levels of the school management team to triangulate the data. My decision to include educators as well was influenced by the recommendation of Gill et al. (2010) who claim that larger sample size reduces error, and also to make use of the richest sources of information to assist in responding to the research questions.

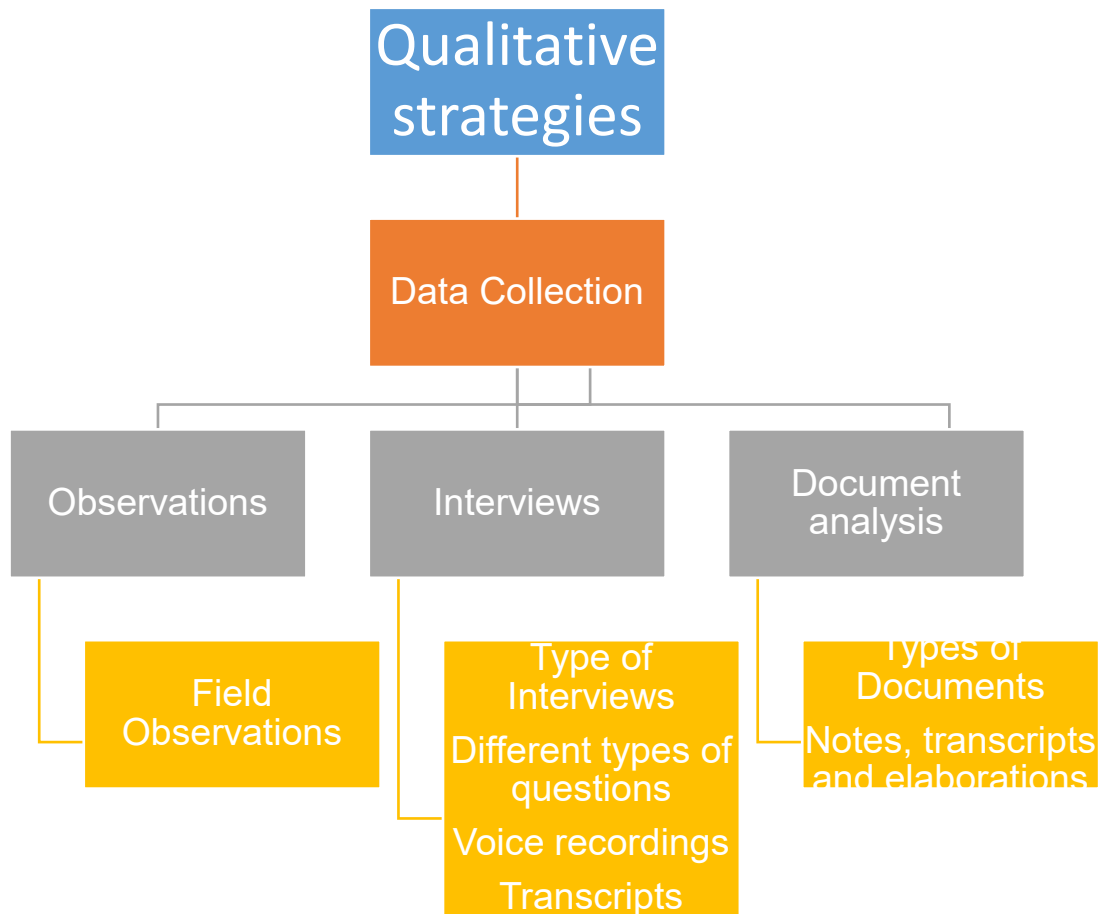


Figure 3.2: Qualitative data collection tools adapted from McMillan and Schumacher (2010:342)

3.6.3 Data collection methods

The data collection methods will now be discussed in depth.

3.6.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

Maree (2008) defines an interview as a cooperative/ two-way dialogue where the interviewer pose questions to participants for data collection and understand their views, ideas and behaviours.

In the next paragraphs the aims and characteristics, as well as the strengths and limitations of this method of data collection will be described.

3.6.3.2 Aims and characteristics of semi-structured interviews

The literature reveals that interviews lend itself to the exploration of a phenomenon. Stewart et al. (2008) support this view by arguing that a qualitative study is interconnected to the agenda of exploring and moderating why a specific phenomenon is the way it is. This view inspired the utilization of interviews for data collection where little was known about literacy leadership challenges. Interviews will facilitate conversations between the researcher and various participants and the interviewer will lead the process to confirm that the subject gains a comprehension of the underlying issue or phenomenon (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Jamshed (2014:4) agrees, but adds that the researcher must create a stable connection with the participants in order to build trust between the participants in the study. The key implication drawn from this is that an interview is a method in which the researcher strives to produce answers to the research questions between the researcher and the participants in a comfortable environment. In this study interview questions were prepared to elicit data that address the overall research aim of the study.

Four common types of interviews are known among qualitative researchers namely; structured interview, semi-structured interview, unstructured interview and focus groups. Semi-structured interviews with individuals were viewed as the most applicable interview for the study as it could confirm a stable relationship and thorough communication between the participants and the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Individual interviews were also appropriate, as the researcher wanted to hear about the experiences and perspectives of the participants as individuals. Thus, this data collection was in line with the scientific requirements of the research including the research paradigm (interpretivism), research design (phenomenology) and the research approach (qualitative research). Semi-structured interviews can be defined as an outline of topics and questions organized by the scholar (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017:89). These authors also maintain that the response of the participants provides the scholar the flexibility to pose enriched questions than the originally drafted ones.

3.6.3.3 Strengths of semi-structured interviews

The advantage of semi-structured interviews conforms to “an in-depth interview”, where the scholar can go deeper and emphasize personal concerns and it is appropriate for the task (Jamshed, 2014:6). To corroborate this assertion, Adhabi and Anonzie (2017:90) and Dicicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) suggest that semi-structured interviews give the scholars time to explore on the phenomenon. Dakwa (in Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015) remarks that semi-structured interviews enable the interviewer to probe if the participants’ answers are too brief or even when there is no input or response. Moreover, semi-structured interviews give the researcher flexibility in comprehending unstructured answers, which often lead to interesting and significant results (Dakwa, in Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015).

3.6.3.4 Limitations of semi-structured interviews

However, the limitations of qualitative semi-structured interviews are also present. It can be time consuming and face-to-face interaction might be costly because the researcher would need to travel. Ultimately, physically face-to-face interactions will put the interviewees on the spot as they would need to answer the question posed to them immediately (Adhabi & Anonzie, 2017:91). According to Kakilla (2021), semi-structured interviews are not practical when they are not conducted face to face. Kakilla (2021) maintains that limited probing may occur due to participants experiencing language barriers and that, even given the present COVID-19 pandemic and how it has impacted physical meetings, scholars have to depend on the utilization of technology. Limited comprehension of the phenomena when the conversation is not flexible during semi-structured interviews would impact the conversation negatively or even end the interview (Nguyen, 2015).

3.6.3.5 Motivation for using semi-structured interviews

The researcher chose semi-structured interviews because he would be able to ask follow-up questions to explore the views and experiences in relation to literacy leadership challenges in the senior phase. This would enable him to evaluate and interpret the participants’ (school management team and educators) experiences and how they perceived literacy leadership

challenges. It was apparent that semi-structured interviews would allow the educators and school management team to share their personal information (Turner, 2010:9). In this study, interviews were conducted with three principals, three deputy principals, six departmental heads and six literacy educators (see Appendix A and B).

It is imperative to indicate that all the interviews were recorded and notes were made throughout the recordings. The utilization of recordings will be discussed with the participants before it will be used. Turner (2010:10) posits that recordings simply serve as a back-up, should the notes get lost.

3.6.4 Document analysis

Qualitative document analysis is a research method in education management and leadership and it is challenging to conduct research without it. Document analysis is a methodical procedure for reviewing or assessing a document which can be utilized to provide context, meaning, supplement research data, generate questions, establish patterns, change over a period of time and substantiate other sources (Bowen, 2009). Qualitative document analysis can be used to explore the contents of policy as they progress over a specific period of time and vary across topographies (Bardach & Patashnik, 2019). Qualitative document analysis can be combined with other research methods to expand the significance of concurrent methods (Bardach & Patashnik, 2019). In addition, document analysis can be utilized with semi-structured interviews, focus-group interviews and any other forms of interviews or observations (Harvey, 2018). Moreover, document analysis is used as a method to access data in various disciplines and it has several meanings in the manner it is applied and conducted (Kayesa & Shung-King, 2021). It therefore implies that document analysis is a research method that necessitates the examination and clarification of data to elicit significant meaning, expand empirical knowledge and to ultimately gain comprehension regarding the phenomena. It is important for the scholar to reiterate that qualitative document analysis entails the process of reading, skimming and making conclusions from various content and documents.

3.6.4.1 Aims and characteristics of documentary analysis

In this study, documents as a data collecting technique were also utilized because I focus on different kinds of written communication that could assist in shedding light on the phenomenon that I was exploring and to enhance credibility of information obtained through semi-structured interviews and observations (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:88) The researcher explored pre- and post-moderation forms, lesson plans of literacy educators, subject improvement plans and error analysis of reading and writing done by the departmental head. Bell (2010:130) points out that some documents are true to education in particular, such as textbooks, school timetables, personal files, records of professional development, etc. Marshall and Rossman (2011:160) further explain that different documents can provide the background information that could help to provide material for the choice of a specific program. Other documents related to education specifically may include formal or informal documents used by participants for external communication and often produced for the public (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Informal documents such as suggestions, memos and drafts may provide internal perceptions of the school by describing its environment, functions and values (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Document analysis corroborate semi-structured interviews and observations, making the findings of any research study more credible and trustworthy (Kutsyurba, 2017).

3.6.4.2 Advantages of documents

Document analysis has several advantageous. Firstly, it will assist the researcher to gather background information on the phenomena studied (Harvey, 2018). Secondly, it will assist the researcher to find data to help you develop and expand various data collection tools for monitoring and evaluation (Hoadley, 2018). Thirdly, it will assist the researcher to determine if the implementation of the studied phenomena reflects the plans (Berner-Rodoreda, 2018; Harvey, 2018). Furthermore, data analysis is not time consuming; the documents are not affected throughout the process; and documents can even be frequently reviewed and consulted (Harvey, 2018).

Document analysis will assist the scholar to gain an understanding of the nature of important documents related to the challenge experienced and the espoused recommendations to resolve these challenges to promote the environment and address all the challenges experienced (Kutsyurba, 2017).

3.6.4.3 Disadvantages of documents

There are also limitations to document analysis. Bardach and Patashnik (2018) remark that it can be subject to concerns concerning a lack of representativity, validity, consistency and motivated authorship. Kayesa and Shung-King (2021) add that the documents may be private and not available to the public or even personal documents that are not available for public inquiry. In addition, accessing the documents may not be possible such as email exchanges between stakeholders that may be challenging to investigate and explore (Kayesa & Shung-King, 2021).

3.6.4.4 Rationale for using documents in this study

Appendix F indicate which documents were analysed in this study. These documents provided valuable insights into the matter of literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools. The internal monitoring and moderation reports, for example, aimed to look at how support was granted from the leadership team of the school. Also, the aim was to study how literacy challenges were documented in these reports. By doing so, the researcher aimed to look for concrete evidence about literacy challenges at secondary schools. The researcher was also looking for minutes of meetings, which addressed issues pertaining to literacy, as well as the planning files of educators and assessments related to literacy.

3.6.5 Non-participant observation

Chitiyo, Taukeni and Chityo (in Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015:281) describe this method as a qualitative method “used in qualitative enquiry across many research fields, including education”.

3.6.5.1 Aim and characteristics of non-participation

Observation is a vital data collection tool as it holds the possibility of providing an insider viewpoint of the dynamics and behaviours in different environments (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:90). This understanding is crucial, because observations are part of our daily activities as it permits us to experience reality as participants do. In his analysis of the observation strategy, Maree (2008:84) shows that observation seeks to record behavioral patterns of the participants without questioning them. This notion is upheld by Nieuwenhuis (2016:90), because he states that the researcher begins to build a relationship with the participants and as a result enable the researcher to employ data collection tools comfortably. One key feature of observation is that no intervention is employed, participants are not stimulated in any way, nor is there manipulation of conditions in their environment (Chitiyo et al., in Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015:282). By observing the participants in context will enable the researcher to explore how the participants deal with the situation and it will allow the researcher to be truthful as an observer (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:91).

3.6.5.2 Strengths of non-participation

Data collected through non-participation observation method are free from respondent bias (Chitiyo et al., in Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015:291). Non-participant observation is focused, because the researcher is able to concentrate on specific aspects rather than the whole context (Chitiyo et al., in Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015:285). Non-participant observation complements interviews, experimentation and document analysis therefore providing a vital strategy for the triangulation of data (Eldh et al., 2020). Finally, non-participant observation is effective, because it describes how specific activities are carried out and explaining the phenomena by itself (Eldh et al, 2020).

3.6.5.3 Weaknesses of non-participation

There are weaknesses of non-participation observation. One is unable to explain why the actions happen in the manner that they do or why individuals act the way they do and secondly the researcher has to wait for certain actions to occur in order to observe them which can be time consuming. (Chitiyo et al., in Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015:292).

Thirdly, observer bias can occur (Eldh et al., 2020).

3.6.5.4 Motivation for using non-participation as data collection method

In this study, the participation technique was limited to the observation of the context of each school. The data for the non-participant observation were not that comprehensive as it focused more on the context related to the school environment. However, the observations focused on aspects such as the location of the school, the environment or neighbourhood, the infrastructure and classroom spaces. Within the classrooms the observations focused on learning spaces, availability of learning material such as books and pictures relevant to literacy against the walls. The researcher also observed the general appearance in terms of neatness. As is the case with the documents, the data collected from the observations were also integrated in the themes emanating from the interviews.

3.6.6 Field notes

Field notes can be defined as thoughts and queries regarding interviews and observations (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). Using a narrower concept, Creswell (2013) denotes field notes as vital component of qualitative research which aid in constructing rich descriptions of the interview and documents that are available. More recently, Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018:382) conclude that field notes position qualitative studies within a societal context and when they are released with other information, they permit transmissions of the depth of the study setting. Field notes about the observations and incidents associated with literacy leadership will be made available. This highlights that field notes will assist the researcher in analysing transcriptions and to comprehend the responds that will be given with the different settings. These notes will help the researcher also to critically reflect and sustain him in keeping track of observations. These notes were definitely a true reflection of my personal journey and thoughts throughout the study.

3.7 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Creswell (2014:245) suggests that the analysis process of data includes the segmenting and taking apart of data; in other words, the preparation and organisation of the generated data for the actual analysis. In the following paragraphs the data presentation and analysis process of the interviews, documents and the non-participation will be described.

3.7.1 Interviews

The data that were collected by virtue of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. This step is regarded by Stewart and Shamdasani (2015:117) as the first one in the analysis of interviews. In order to provide a comprehensive account of this process, the data were supported with notes that captured certain gestures and non-verbal signs of the participants. Stewart and Shandasani (2015:118) therefore propose that researchers should keep record of additional notes, note-taking of specific occurrences and behaviour. This was followed by the process of coding and the categorizing of the data into themes and sub-themes. Theron (2015:4) postulate coding is an important link between data collection and describing the significance of the data. Engler (2014:257) similarly suggests that coding captures the essence of the data. Braun and Clarke (2013:206) refer to this process and emphasise that aspects should be identified that are aligned with the research questions or aims of the study. After all the transcriptions were coded, the researcher reviewed the transcriptions and then grouped codes into manageable themes. The themes ensured a detailed interpretation of the findings of the study (Creswell, 2014:249). The data were presented from the perspectives of the participants, with direct quotations from the participants (Silverman, 2014:214).

Within the thematic analysis, the data were further analysed in depth by virtue of a content analysis approach. Content analysis is a reflective process and coding entails the breakdown, comparing, and classifying of data to choose the core category and associate it to other categories and to clarify these associations (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017:2).

3.7.2 Analysis of the documents

In the analysis of the documents the researcher focused on the pre- and post-moderation reports of the leaders (SMTs). The following questions provided some direction to reveal information about the challenges experienced:

- Is there a written monitoring plan for each term?
- Does the pre-moderation process take place before a reading or written school-based assignment is given to learners in the senior phase?
- Does the post-moderation take place after the assessment took place?
- Does the literacy leaders monitor/moderate those tasks with a green pen as required by the Department of Basic Education?
- Does the moderator who is supposed to act as literacy leader comment on the post evaluation form? Does he/she give valuable inputs about the assessment activity?
- Which marking tool is utilized by the moderator, i.e. a standardized rubric or a memorandum?
- Are the lesson plans completed and up to date?
- How does the educator indicate on the lesson plan on how they go about in teaching reading instruction and writing instruction?
- Does the educator seeks to address literacy challenges in the lesson plans?
- Are there any subject improvement plans and error analysis in the educator portfolio?
- Are there any interventions on how to improve reading instruction and writing instruction?
- Is the educator portfolio up to standard?
- What are the intervention strategies by the SMT (Departmental Head, Deputy principal and Principal)?

The data from the documents were grouped under the same themes of the individual interviews; consequently the data of all three data collection methods were presented in an integrated manner and not as separate constructs.

3.8 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

In this study, the researcher has put aside his understanding and expertise to provide the participants with an opportunity to respond to questions without influencing their reasoning abilities. In the same vein, Roller and Lavrakas (2015) correctly argue that the researcher is fundamental in the data collection process. It, therefore, implies that the researcher should build a relationship with the participants and patiently listen to the participants. Every researcher should be able to interpret data, stand back in a sense to understand the meaning of the phenomenon usually based on observations or comparisons with previous studies (Creswell, 2008). This will provide new perspectives on the exploration of literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools.

3.9 ENSURING THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Qualitative researchers implement specific strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of their research. According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), trustworthiness in a study refers to the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Trustworthiness of the research study is pivotal. Trustworthiness simply poses the question whether the findings can be trusted or not? It is an interpretive understanding of what is valid or the truth and highlights the transparency of the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:122).

3.9.1 Credibility

Korstjens and Moser (2018:121) echo that credibility refers to the assurance that can be placed in the validity of research findings. This implies that credibility establishes whether the research findings characterize reasonable information drawn from the participants' original data and is an accurate understanding of the participants' original viewpoint. Therefore, strategies to confirm credibility are sustained engagement, observation, triangulation and regularly checking up on participants. Korstjens and Moser (2018:121) also maintain that triangulation enhances the process of qualitative research by utilizing numerous approaches. The researcher will for opt data triangulation to increase the validity of the study and these approaches include semi structured interviews, field notes, document analysis and observations. Feedback from the various

participants from three different secondary schools will be compared and triangulated, consequently determining the areas of disagreement and agreements. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researchers' notes will also be utilized to confirm the credibility of the data. Credibility is ensured also through member checking. Anney (2014:277) suggests that to improve the quality of the data, checking forms part of a credibility strategy.

3.9.2 Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the scholar can demonstrate that the findings of the study can be applied to other contexts (Bertram & Christiansen, 2017:188). Further illuminating the nature of transferability Lincoln and Guba (2006) mention that the researcher facilitates transferability judgement by a prospective user through meaningful description. This suggests that transferability signifies the degree to which results can be transferred to other settings with other participants. Transferability is indeed a construct that can be utilized in qualitative research. Following the advice of Shenton (2006:69), in this study, transferability was ensured through providing a detailed background about the participants in terms of their experience as literacy leaders.

3.9.3 Dependability

Nieuwenhuis (2016:124) declares that dependability is validated through the research design, including its application, the operational facet of data collection and the reflective assessment of the study. To corroborate this declaration, Korstjens and Moser (2018:121) emphasize that dependability confirms the stability of findings over time. This being said, it can be mentioned that dependability encompasses participants' assessment of findings, explanations and recommendations of the study such that all supported the data as received from the various participants of the study. To ensure the dependability of the study, detailed records of the study were kept safe for other researchers on the same topic. The participants were also granted the opportunity to evaluate the findings to ensure transparency of the data.

3.9.4 Confirmability

This process refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be confirmed by other researchers. Kheswa (2017:65) and Connelly (2016:435) add that this also means that the concept refers to issues pertaining to consistency and the degree to which the findings can be repeated, as well as to make sure that the findings indeed derived from the data. In this study confirmability was ensured through an audit trail a reflexive journal that was kept by the researcher and through triangulation. Black, Palombaro and Dole (2013:641) suggest that these three techniques are valuable in ensuring confirmability. In order to adhere further to the quest for confirmability, the researcher kept in his journal thorough notes and records of important decisions during the collection process and making notes of participants' non-verbal communication cues during the interviews.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research ethics refers to the moral principle and regulatory behaviour guiding research which are held by a group or a profession (Wellington, 2015). It is evident that research ethics offer a guideline that supports a researcher in conducting research to ensure that it is done honestly without hurting any participant. In conducting research, it is vital for the researcher to think and reflect about how to go about gaining access and permission. As a researcher, I looked for a comprehensive description of the phenomena that I am studying and I would expect viewpoints and experiences described by the participants. In adhering to research ethics, the researcher followed the following steps.

3.10.1 Permission to conduct the study

Permission and authorization for ethical clearance were requested from and granted by the University of the Free State Ethics Committee clearance number **(UFS-HSD2020/1041/2110)**. Permission and authorization for ethical clearance were also requested from and granted by the Free State Department of Education. Thereafter, literacy leaders (school principals) were consulted to participate in this research study as well as other SMT members and literacy educators, with the

permission of the literacy leader.

3.10.2 Informed consent

Informed consent is an agreement given voluntarily without any responsibility (Gelinas, Wertheimer & Miller, 2016). All the participants received transparent information regarding the nature of the study, researchers' contact details, discretion and the participation requirements. Informed consent letters were distributed and signed by all the participants taking part in the study and all the interviews were recorded only after they had given permission.

3.10.3 Voluntary participation

Voluntary participation entails the freedom of participants and that they should not be forced to take part. All the participants were aware that they could quit at any given time. In terms of research ethics protocol during the empirical process, the participants were reminded that they were not forced to participate in the study, but that participation was voluntarily and that they could withdraw at any time. They were also made aware that if a question posed made the participant uncomfortable he/she had the right not to comment on the question.

3.10.4 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality of participants and information supplied were respected at all times (Hickey, 2018:26). This notion is upheld by several scholars that the participants must have confidence in the researcher and should strive to be transparent with their responses should informed consent be obtained (Showkat & Parveen, 2017:2; McMillan & Schumacher, 2011). The participants' confidentiality and anonymity were protected and well maintained by not revealing identities such as names or surnames during the collection of data or reporting of findings. This study utilized codes to ensure the identities of the participants were kept safe.

3.10.5 No harm to participants

An accumulation of studies (Hoekveld & Needham, 2013; Vanclay, Baines & Taylor, 2013; Maree, 2008) warns against mental harm to human participants. All the participants were protected against any harm, discomfort or dangerous circumstances. Their safety was a priority for the researcher, especially during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic when COVID-19 measures such as social distancing, wearing of masks and availability of hand sanitizer were ensured. The researcher followed the advice of Miracle (2018), who recommends that there must be no coercion, whether implied or explicit, and the safety of all the participants must be at the forefront. The researcher tried to treat all the participants respectfully to uphold their human dignity.

3.11 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

CHAPTER 4 gave an account of the research design and methodology of the study. The researcher utilized a qualitative research approach which permits a grounded approach to the study that sought to explore the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools. The approach enabled a thorough understanding of the nature of interactions for instruction between literacy leaders and language educators in the senior phase. The study was carried out at four secondary schools and all the participants were purposively selected. The study was based on a phenomenological research design and the interpretive paradigm was therefore chosen. Semi-structured, individual interviews were the main method of data collection, whilst non-participant observation and document analysis were also used to provide more depth to the data. Furthermore, notes were rigorously kept to give an account of all the processes during the research findings. Using multiple data collection tools contributed towards the trustworthiness of the research findings. Chapter three highlighted the research design and methodology. Chapter four will critically discuss the presentation, discussion and analysis of data.

CHAPTER 4 : PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter one it was argued that there is evidence that illustrates that a large group of learners and school management teams in the Senior Phase (Grades 7 to 9) lack suitable and effective literacy skills. Intervention regarding this phenomenon is urgently needed, that is only possible through a sufficient understanding of the challenges that surround the phenomenon. So far, however, there has been little research about the challenges that leaders experience in terms of providing leadership in literacy, especially in secondary schools in the senior phase. This study therefore focused on investigating the problem namely, *“What are the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools.”*

This chapter will present, discuss and analyse the findings in order to respond to the research questions and aims of the study. The findings were obtained from the individual interviews with the Principals, Deputy principals and HoDs as well as the educators. Furthermore, the observations and documentary analysis contributed to the depth of the data. The researcher followed Rossman and Rallis’ (2017:237) eight-phase approach in “bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data”. The authors propose that one should organize the data, familiarizing oneself with the data and identifying categories. Then the researcher should code the data and generate themes. After that, the process of interpreting the data should commence. Searching for alternative understandings should follow and then the writing of the report. The categories that emanated are indicated in table. The process of categorizing the data was preceded with grouping the data into meaningful segments. After that the data were coded, which is defined by Rossman and Rallis (2017:244) as “thinking through what you take as evidence of a category or theme”. Before explaining the thematic analysis process, a presentation of the biographical data of the participants is presented first to provide a proper context for presenting the findings in this study.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA AND ENSURING ANONYMITY OF PARTICIPANTS

At each of the three participating schools semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with post level one language educators in the senior phase and school management teams. Eighteen participants took part in the interviews: three principals, three deputy principals, six language departmental heads and six post-level one educators in the senior phase. Six of the participants in the semi-structured individual interviews were male and twelve were female. The participants' ages ranged from 27 to 55 years, while their years of experience ranged from 6 to 33 years. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, codes were used to describe the participants and the different schools. In order to explain the meaning of the codes, an explanation of the code references SS1/P-A is briefly provided. The first part of the code (SS1) indicates the schools where the interviews were conducted (Secondary School 1), while the second part (P-A) indicates the participant (Participant P-A). To validate the findings, the researcher opted to conduct semi-structured individual interviews with the school management team (SMT) as secondary school-based instructional leaders and language educators in the senior phase. The researcher also used document analysis to analyse important documents explained underneath.

Three principals, three deputy principals, six departmental heads and six language educators in the senior phase were interviewed using semi-structured questions. The researcher utilized pseudonyms to safeguard the identity of all the participants and secondary schools.

Secondary School 1 (SS1)

- Language educator – P-A
- Language educator – P-B
- Departmental head – P-C
- Departmental head – P-D
- Deputy principal – P-E
- Principal – P-F

Secondary School 2 (SS2)

- Language educator – P-G
- Language educator – P-H
- Departmental head – P-I
- Departmental head – P-J
- Deputy principal – P-K
- Principal-L

Secondary School 3 (SS3)

- Language educator – P-M
- Language educator – P-N
- Departmental head – P-O
- Departmental head – P-P
- Deputy principal – P-Q
- Principal – P-R

Most of the literacy educators in the study are relatively young. They do not have much experience as SMT members and that may have impacted the responses from the participants. Furthermore, for most of them the term literacy leadership challenges appeared to be new.

4.3 DESCRIBING THE CONTEXT OF THE PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

4.3.1 Secondary School 1 (SS1)

This is a Quintile 3 secondary school. This secondary school possesses unique characteristics and experiences challenges that are exceptional, as is clearly evident in this research study. This community experiences high level of socio-economic issues. The infrastructure of the school is dilapidated. The secondary school clearly struggles with late-coming learners, which makes a professional atmosphere difficult to maintain. The principal has just over 20 years of teaching experience and one year's experience as the principal of the secondary school. The deputy

principal has over 20 years' teaching experience and one year' experience as the deputy principal of the school. The one departmental head has over 31 years of teaching experience and 5 years of experience as a departmental head of the secondary school (Afrikaans). The other departmental head has five years of teaching experience and one year as departmental head of the school (Sotho). The two senior phase educators have experience of between five to seven years. All of the above participants took part in the study.

4.3.2 Secondary School 2 (SS2)

This is a typical Quintile 4 secondary school that is located in an impoverished area where low-class housing is prominent. As indicated by the principal, the area is not safe whatsoever. It is striking to note that demographic and geographic characteristics determine how the SMT of this secondary school exercises their leadership role. The infrastructure of the secondary school is deteriorating and asbestos classrooms are still prevalent at this secondary school. The area is untidy and municipal service delivery does not frequently take place in that area, as the rubbish has not been collected for a few weeks. The principal has 20 years of teaching experience and is quite vocal and outspoken. His nature speaks volumes. This secondary school has three language departmental heads, but only two took part in the study. The one departmental head has 24 years of teaching experience and eight years as a departmental head (Afrikaans). The other departmental head has over 20 years of teaching experience and just over 13 years' experience as a departmental head (Sotho). The deputy principal has only one year experience as deputy principal and over 20 years of teaching experience. The two language educators have between six to ten years of teaching experience. Challenges such as poverty and high rates of crime are characteristic of the community. These challenges put pressure on the SMT to manage this school effectively.

4.3.3 Secondary School 3 (SS3)

This Quintile 5 secondary school is based in an upper class neighbourhood. This secondary school is situated in a business neighbourhood and is viewed as one of the biggest secondary schools in the Free State. The infrastructure of the school is in an excellent condition. The schoolgrounds are spotless and the SMT is professional at all times. They were very welcoming and accommodating.

The principal is passionate about teaching and have three years of experience as a principal. It is evident from the outside that the school is maintained and managed well. The deputy principal has over 20 years of teaching experience and two years' experience as a deputy principal. The two departmental heads who also took part in the study has just over 10 years of teaching experience and they have both been just departmental heads for two years (Afrikaans and English). The two language educators who participated in the study have between seven to ten years' experience.

4.4 THEMATIC DATA PRESENTATION OF THE INTERVIEWS

This section discusses the findings under each category and theme identified through the individual interviews, documentary analysis and observations. The categories and themes identified through the data collection are displayed below in Table 4.1. From the raw data collected, the following main themes were identified: Challenges experienced, principal literacy leadership, school management team (SMT) as literacy leaders, literacy performance and understanding literacy education. The categories are aligned to the research questions (RQ) of the study.

Table 4.1: Categories and themes

Categories	Themes
Category 1 (RQ 1) 4.3.1 Challenges experienced by educators with literacy education	Reading and writing Learners have a poor frame of reference Leaders' lack of knowledge of assessment of reading and writing
Category 2 (RQ 2) 4.3.2 The role of the principal in literacy leadership	Understanding their role as instructional leader Guidance and support to educators and learners Leading continuous improvement in the literacy curriculum

Category 3 (RQ 2) 4.3.3 The departmental head and Deputy principals as literacy leaders	Supervision of the literacy instructional program by the Departmental Heads of languages Supervision of the literacy instructional program by Deputy principals Other instructional leadership roles by SMT-members Role as instructional leader in the literacy program as Deputy principal
Category 4 (RQ 3 & RQ 4) 4.3.4 Challenges in and strategies to enhance literacy instruction	Professional development activities for educators Empowering language educators through professional development activities presented by SMT members Challenges: Implementation of professional development activities Challenges: Lack of involvement from the SMT Sound literacy practices
Category 5 (RQ 4) 4.3.5 The literacy environment	Addressing the needs of learners Physical environment Promoting the classroom literacy environment Intervention programs for extra support in literacy Parental involvement in literacy programs Collective efficacy among staff to enhance literacy instruction

4.4.1 Challenges experienced by educators with literacy education

The first theme portrayed the participants' challenges they experience with literacy education as outlined in the classroom in the senior phase. In this regard, educators and school management teams expressed different opinions.

4.4.1.1 Reading and writing

The feedback from the educators in general revealed that secondary school learners in the senior phase, cannot read or write properly. It seems that they possess very limited reading and writing skills. One of the participants, a 34-year-old educator with nine years' experience as a language educator, explained as follows:

My biggest challenge is that everyone cannot read or write and sometimes during the exams there are learners that just copy the question on the answer sheet ... (SS2/P-G).

This view is confirmed by another participant at the same school. According to a Grade 8 English First Additional Language educator,

Learners do not possess the ability to spell which is crucial for the work environment after school ... (SS2/P-H).

This comment also illustrates this educator's awareness of the importance of literacy skills. This participant pointed out some other strange, but serious problems related to reading:

What my learners read for me in class and what I saw on paper was two different things. The one learner for example attempt to write 'door' but spelled it as 'droor' ... (SS2/P-H).

This finding is supported by other research about literacy. According to Suvin (2020), reading and writing is a major concern for high school learners and most of them do not comprehend the importance of the text and they cannot answer the questions cohesively.

Most learners' inadequate literacy skills reduce their ability to advance their reading and writing comprehension and vocabulary skills in order to develop effective reading and writing skills (Suvin, 2020; Roberts, 2008).

In their work, Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) found that learners in secondary schools are unable to develop sight words, build vocabulary, spell and making sense of clues while reading aloud. Furthermore, these two scholars highlight that learners struggle to predict, summarize and infer while reading and writing activities are completed in the language classroom.

The data also showed an interesting finding in terms of how the majority of the learners in SS1 and SS2 progressed throughout their schooling years. The participants critiqued the progression system in schools which allows for the progression of learners who seem to be not ready for passing a grade. This concerning issue is highlighted as follows by (SS2/P-G):

I have learners supposedly that has been progressed the entire time in primary school (SS2/P-G).

One of the advantages of this situation, is that it leads to gaps in terms of learning. Goss and Sonnemann (2016:1) found that learning gaps are affectedly intensified as learners move through their school years, so that by the end of primary school year the spread of achievement spans six years. This may pose a considerable challenge to educators seeking to offer learning experiences that acts in accordance with the abilities of learners in the senior phase, as these learners are simply not academically ready for the new grade. Furthermore, Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) agree that if learners are progressed through each grade it signals that attention to comprehension, reading and writing remains neglected in the literacy classroom, which is challenging for literacy educators receiving learners in the next phase. In addition, aiming to comprehend the situation, several scholars indicate that little if any programs are available to assist literacy educators on dealing with progressed learners as they are the literacy leaders of their classrooms (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Zimmerman, 2014; Zimmerman & Smit, 2014; Klapwijk, 2011; Dreyer & Nel, 2003).

The document analysis also illustrated that the educators does not regularly complete a written monitoring plan each term to monitor the reading and writing abilities of learners as indicated in the document analysis checklist. This is why learners experience reading and writing challenges.

4.4.1.2 Learners have a poor frame of reference

From the feedback from the semi-structured individual interviews it appeared that participants are concerned with the frame of reference of learners. This issue was raised by many of the participants. SS1/P-A for example declared that:

The content is out of the frame of reference for my learners and I try to be adaptable... (SS1/P-A).

This comment suggests that the learner's frame of reference has an impact on the learners' reading and writing abilities. Another participant voiced a similar opinion referring to the impact that the lack of learners' background has on for example their performance in comprehensive tests. The participant of SS1/P-B for instance pointed out:

Learners cannot make inferences from comprehension tests because of background knowledge ...

The data revealed that all the participants indicated that their learners did not have a frame of reference when they arrived in the senior phase in order to comprehend a comprehension test or understanding the visual literacy. The document analysis pointed out that educators does not indicate on their lesson plans how they will address learners lack of background knowledge to assist with their lack of frame of reference. This poses a serious challenge. It is alluded by researchers that as learners get older their cognitive outcomes enlarge; however, their mental skills are lacking development due to their economic disadvantages and background challenges (Plaatjies, 2021:403; Van der Bergh, 2015:29; Crosnoe & Cooper, 2010:259).

This worrying situation calls into question the responsibility of language educators and school management team members to activate learners' background knowledge and especially creating opportunities to counter this challenge. Yang (2010:180) declares that language educators should activate organized background knowledge during the introduction of a language or literature lesson, which will enable learners to imagine or predict aspects in their understanding of discourse.

The data showed a positive development in the sense that some SMT members have some form of measures in place to address the learning difficulties that some learners are experiencing. A 49-year-old deputy principal from secondary school one testified in this regard:

It is important to use teaching programs and materials that are designed for different type of learners and that is part of their lives ...

From further comments made, it appears that the participants are stranded on how to address the issue of a poor referencing system. This is especially the case when educators have to connect the content to the frame of reference in terms of reading and writing activities. This finding is supported by Plaatjies (2016:205), who also points out that learners' poor referencing system leads to writing pieces that are not interesting and that learners have little practical experience outside the classroom. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017:233) argues in this regard that frames of reference play a pivotal role in the development of literacy abilities, because learners' judgements of their own literacy achievements as well as educators' judgments on how they lead the literacy environment have to be made against a frame of reference as starting point. Consequently, the South African schools' policies do little to address leadership on how to activate learners frame of reference for equity in the literacy environment (Lebeloane, 2017:2).

This hampers their ability to perform well. From the data it can be alluded that this is an area where leadership intervention is urgently needed.

4.4.1.3 Leaders' lack of knowledge of assessment of reading and writing

It appears that there are inconsistencies in the data in terms of SMT members' knowledge of the assessment of reading and writing. The data from the interviews disclosed that some leaders lack a sound understanding of reading and writing assessment requirements. This view is evident when looking at the vague response by a statement of a thirty three year old departmental head:

Teachers assess learners' literacy skills for the sake of identifying their abilities in those particular skills and content that is targeted ... (SS1/P-D).

However, another departmental head (SS2/P-I) with 24 years of teaching experience indicated that the assessment of reading and writing skill forms a big part of the school year of the learner and that it is important to understand the requirements of the literacy curriculum. However, the data that were presented by virtue of the documents of both these departmental heads, display that no evidence of the lesson plans could be found. From this evidence it is clear that no structure is used as a framework to indicate the literacy leaders' knowledge of assessment of reading and writing.

One of the findings in this study indicated that is vital for educators to comprehend the assessment of reading and writing in the CAPS document. The latter is also confirmed in a recent studies and it was emphasized that this underpinning logic and focus on assessment of reading and writing in the CAPS place tremendous burdens on teachers, which may be a result of the learner outcomes (De Lange, Winberg & Dippenaar, 2020:1; Govender & Hugo, 2020; Spaul, 2015:36). In order to understand the value of reading and writing assessments better, Taylor et al. (2013:160) emphasize that the CAPS document aims to provide clarity on the skills or topics that needs to be covered in each subject. It is apparent for the researcher that this document contains an outline of the reading and writing assessments and the mark allocation for each task. Language educators' comprehension as to what reading and writing assessment entails, how it functions, and what is necessary determine the success of the learners in the senior phase (Fleisch, 2008:123). This view is supported by Habib (2016), who states that literacy leaders' lack of knowledge in assessment in reading and writing is a challenge, because leaders are unable to gather vital information about

learners' reading and writing strengths and weaknesses. This is further supported by the data obtained from the document analysis that literacy leaders do not have intervention strategies to address reading and writing challenges during school-based assessment tasks. Habib (2016) further illustrates in this regard that educators' lack of knowledge of assessment prevents them from detecting immediate demands in literacy and to give valuable feedback to departmental heads and to improve their own literacy practices. Govender and Hugo (2018) critique that the CAPS document continues to focus on assessment in its underpinning logic. Spaul (2015:36) elucidates that educators not comprehending reading and writing assessments are concerning, as it highlights the inconsistencies in the assessment of reading and writing activities. The data in this study show, however, that the participants lack a solid understanding of the content of the CAPS documents.

4.4.2 The role of the principal in literacy leadership

The data in this theme described the role of the principal in literacy leadership and the challenges that they are experiencing in providing guidance as instructional leader to the rest of the school management team. Obviously they have to play the role as the main instructional leader to provide guidance to post level one educators in the senior phase (DBE, 2016).

4.4.2.1 Understanding their role as instructional leader

The data indicated that principals do not have a sufficient understanding of their roles as instructional leaders. This came through in the responses in the individual interviews. Although they indicated that their role is to provide support to their school management teams, their knowledge pertaining to the different aspects of instructional leadership was vague. This is best illustrated by the following comment of one of the principals

As an instructional leader I need to be committed and I must practise what I preach and assist language departmental heads ... (SS1/P-F).

An experienced principal with 21 years of teaching experience also demonstrated the lack of depth in terms of the required knowledge of instructional leadership:

Through the annual academic progress reports that I have that will be my guiding tool and I must guide the language educators and zoom in where there are shortcomings in Home Language and First Additional Language ... (SS1/P-L).

Although it seemed that Participants F, L and R were in agreement that their role as principals in the literacy curriculum and as instructional leader can be viewed as the management of the national curriculum and instruction within secondary schools, they could not identify key aspects related to this form of leadership such as developing a vision and mission, supervision, managing the instructional programme and attending to school climate (Botha, 2016:195). As curriculum and instructional leader, the principal should have proficient knowledge of the curriculum in order to guide and instruct subject leaders and teachers in the desired direction to help improve and create a conducive and improved curriculum management environment (Kiat et al., 2017; Mestry, 2017).

Data for this study reflect that all four principals thought that they needed to act as instructional leaders of their respective schools. In addition, they added that they were aware that they needed to act as literacy leaders of their respective secondary schools. The findings are consistent with what Hoadley (2018) highlights that principals as instructional leaders need to comprehend literacy and how it is learnt, resources required for reading and writing and the extent to which these reading and writing materials are mobilized in leading a comprehensible literacy program. Although Botha (2015:195) notes that the principal as an instructional leader only focuses on the quest for excellence in education, the researcher wants to confirm that the principal as instructional leader does not only align the policies and activities of the secondary school with the school's academic aims; instead, they aim to promote literacy instruction by tactically managing activities such as employing qualified staff who can implement a literacy program. The instructional leadership model is imperative for principals and they must have the knowledge and skills of how this leadership model can be implemented within a secondary school environment in order to guide them so they need to intervene and for school effectiveness (Chaseling et al., 2017; Beauchamp & Parsons 2012; Gülcan 2012). This proposes that the principal will be unable to guide and lead the literacy program and the school if they lack instructional leadership skills. Instructional leaders enhances educators' capacity through the cooperative evaluation of literacy teaching and its impact

on learners' academic achievements (NSW Government, 2012:9). Also, this is in line with the statement by Arizona State University (2019) that indicates that the principal as literacy leader serves as an intermediary between the education system and the schools they are employed at. This finding is further supported by various scholars that emphasize that a principal as an instructional leader knows how to plan the literacy program effectively and they are aware of the strengths and limitations in the literacy curriculum (Plaatjies, 2019:137). In a recent study Plaatjies (2019:139) concurs that the inability of principals to understand effective literacy and the elements that come along with it, may considerably be due to principals' lack of instruction and in-depth knowledge.

The document analysis affirmed that the principals of secondary schools one and two does not have any written plan on how they will go about in acting as literacy leaders. There was no proof of any intervention strategies to assist educators with addressing literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools.

4.4.2.2 Guidance and support to educators and learners

Based on the feedback from the participants as well as the feedback from the documents, it seems that principals do not provide sufficient support to educators. This may stem from their lack of knowledge on reading and writing, lack of knowledge in terms of assessment and their role as instructional leader (see discussions in previous paragraphs, 4.3.2.1 and 4.3.1.3). For example, the documents revealed very little input from principals about literacy practices. Documents provided were merely tick-offs regarding aspects related to teaching and learning. The documents also provided no evidence of the key aspects related to principals' instructional leadership duties. Responses about types of support were also very vague, and principals could not really pinpoint specific strategies that they utilize as guidance and support to educators. This is evident in some of the vague feedback provided:

We need to assess what educators need when it comes to literacy to improve literacy skills in the senior phase and to strengthen our approach to literacy leadership challenges and helping learners that are at risk (SS2/P-L).

Another indefinite reply came from SS3/P-R, who merely indicated that learners needed to be motivated and supported in their attempt to speak the language that they are taught in. This same

participant also alluded to some possible strategies, which include creating a culture of effort in wanting to speak and creating an invitational setting. On a follow-up question on how they would conduct this, principals could not come up with definite answers to address the challenges. It is also evident that they rely on other members of the SMT to provide support:

I must make examples, suggestions as a principal and allow my Deputy principal to give his or her opinion (SS1/P-F).

The findings as described above are consistent with other research, which also points out the lack of expertise of principals as leaders. Hoadley (2018) and Kgatla (2013) declare that curriculum and Instructional knowledge are lacking in general amongst South African school principals. This prevents them from providing support to their staff on aspects related to teaching and learning. Consequently, leaders have no clue about providing guidance and support to educators and learners in self-directed activities such as re-writing and re-reading to resolve misunderstanding, summarizing to enhance memory and comprehension, educators making unambiguous associations from the text to the learners' prior knowledge and other segments of the text, continually teaching learners to underline and to take notes and finally envisioning relationships and events in the text (Chaseling et al., 2017:174). According to Edmonton Public Schools (2018), the lack of expertise of principals as leaders causes them not to become leading leaders, who are able to collaborate with other literacy leaders that is able to promote a learning community that supports learner achievement. However, comparable findings were found by Shariff (2020) that illustrates that principals as leaders must be aware of the fact their instructional leadership role is evolving daily and their needed expertise as leaders leads the school in creating an instructional literacy environment that can tap into collective wisdom and energy to address literacy leadership challenges.

One of the major issues the researcher was fascinated with was in the language educators' views about the support that they receive from the principal in literacy instruction. The data revealed that at some of the schools the principals were not very actively involved. It seems also that educators have a negative view of how principals fulfil their roles as literacy leaders. Principals do not provide guidance with IQMS (SS1/P-A), and do not provide supervision in instruction. Participant G also echoed similar sentiments when she commented that:

The principal does not provide supervision in literacy instruction. We are on our own in our classrooms and I must say even us as educators do our own thing. Supervision of instruction in literacy education needs to be improved in Secondary School B and the principal needs to exercise instructional leadership... (SS2/P-G).

Concerning is the following remark by one of the participants:

The principal is not involved. He/she is not actively involved and does not know what is going on in the language and literacy classes. He/she should instruct the Departmental Head and encourage him/her to fulfil their work as an instructional leader. They should be able to instruct and say what should be done. The hierarchy at our school is messed up and there is always conflict when it comes to instruction ... (SS1/P-A).

It is imperative to mention the role of the educator in giving guidance and support to learners in the literacy classroom. According to the PAM document (DBE, 2016), the workload of school-based educators in secondary schools entails 3.1(b)(ii) planning, preparation and evaluation and 3.3(b) the teaching time should maximize each learners' individual ability and those of educators. This suggests that the SMT should practise instructional leadership when supporting and guiding language educators in addressing the challenge of medium of instruction in the senior phase.

It was also interesting to note how language educators perceive the role of the SMT in the improvement of literacy. The participants proposed regular class visits by the Departmental Head, peer assessment and collaboration in classroom evaluations. The participants also highlighted the importance of constructive feedback. It is clear that participants want the program to be planned well. Participant A concluded:

A program should be designed that say: 'On this day monitoring of teachers way of teaching and then literacy will improve.' There must also be a checklist of various things and then only monitoring and mentoring will take place all at once... (SS1/P-A)

From this data it can be alluded that systems such as clear planning are absent from the side of the SMT.

4.4.2.3 Leading continuous improvement in the literacy curriculum

The data demonstrate that the participants do not have a sound understanding in how to lead continuous improvement in the literacy curriculum. Participants did not refer in their responses to what is needed from a leadership perspective to address the challenges, but they rather alluded to didactical issues. The feedback by one of the principals is evident of this dynamic:

When leading the continuous improvement in the literacy curriculum I must make sure that language educators teach learners how to structure their sentences when speaking and on the other hand with reading writing the learners must be able to articulate words correctly ... (SS1/P-F).

The lack of strategies in leading continuous improvement is also evident from the other principals such as SS3/P-R, whose idea of leading improvement was:

the principal must ensure that with all subjects being interrelated in the CAPS curriculum the principal must be aware that a lot of emphasis on reading and viewing, thinking, reasoning and writing must be done efficiently in the Home Language so that it translates to all other subjects (SS3/P-R).

The findings in terms of the lack of continuous improvement are in line with what Mbhalati (2017:58) found in her study, namely that principals and other members of the SMT are seriously lacking in terms of providing opportunities for professional development in literacy.

It is pointed out by Dayson (2016:14) and Pinello (2015:49) that it is vital for principals and other school leaders to take the lead when it comes to professional development, as the principal still remains the accounting officer and thus sets the standards for accountability in literacy and the rest of the school's curriculum and instructional needs. Bocala and Holman (2021) state that to lead the continuous improvement in the literacy curriculum successfully, internal coherence must be constructed around the instructional core. It is the responsibility of SMT members to develop the skills of educators and support them. Literacy leaders should lead the continuous improvement in the literacy curriculum by building improvement capacity, because SMT members build educators' capacity by themselves by engaging in improvement projects, demonstrating continuous improvement by leading or being active participating in improving the literacy curriculum (Hough et al., 2017). In this regard, principals and other leaders should promote

professional development activities for professional growth and as an instructional management-leadership strategy. This can include emphasising teaching and learning, collaboration among educators, the developing of coaching relationships, encouragement and support” (Van Deventer, 2016:344). Numerous researchers, such as Shariff (2020) and Edward and Gammel (2016) confirm that literacy leaders who are incapable of leading the continuous literacy curriculum result in the inability to achieve literacy and educational objectives at school, the inability to be responsive to literacy needs, and the inability to ensure that the process and content of the literacy curriculum are current and applicable in addressing literacy leadership challenges.

4.4.3 The departmental head and deputy principals as literacy leaders

Under this theme, the opinions of participants regarding the role of the rest of the school management team as literacy leaders are unpacked. The participants identified their role in mentoring, evaluation and internal moderation processes relating to literacy and providing leadership in the literacy instructional program. Moreover, responses focused on the challenges that they are experiencing to fulfil the role.

4.4.3.1 Supervision of the literacy instructional program by the departmental heads of languages

This theme is based on the challenges that departmental heads experience. The researcher specifically wanted to gain their views on how the supervision of the literacy instructional program should be carried out in the senior phase. From Secondary School 3, Participant O, a 36-year-old departmental head expressed the interesting view that,

The taught literacy curriculum is supervised through various levels of moderation. In Secondary School three we will moderate to ensure that the taught literacy curriculum is kept timeless and I have a work schedule to supervise the taught literacy curriculum ...

When the researcher asked about the measurement of experience and if there were guidelines that directed the decisions, it seemed that there is some good management of the supervision

programme:

I ensure that language educators in my department stick to the pacesetter and communicate to me if they miss the pacesetter so that I can mentor them and it happens in a written format and informal format. You pick up when a certain class is behind with work ...

This sentiment was shared by P-I from SS/2:

I will monitor weekly and then there will be expectations that will be set by the Departmental Head including important due dates ...

From these responses it is clear that the departmental heads have a good grip on ensuring that the literacy curriculum is being delivered and that they monitor its implementation closely. The document analysis indicated that some departmental heads apply pre-moderation and post-moderation as it was visible in all the educators' portfolios. Post-moderation does take place and all tasks are moderated with a green pen as required by the Basic Department of Education. The reports provided by Secondary School 1 indicate though that post-moderation and monitoring of literacy activities are not done properly, as the post-moderation forms of the reading aloud school based assignment task (SBA) were not completed. Moreover, some of these post-moderation forms were incomplete. No evidence was found from the documents of an internal moderation process taking place, while reflection in which the good and bad areas of the literacy task are analysed is also lacking. This finding is in contrast with other studies done in the South African context, which indicate that SMTs are often very dedicated in internal monitoring and moderation processes (Plaatjies, 2020). However, it seems strange that what came out in the Individual Interviews was that departmental heads place emphasis on mentoring, communication, distributing and ensuring that educators are still on par with the pacesetter, except for Secondary School 1. This is in line with what Seobi and Wood (2016) and Maxwell (2006) raise as quality assurance procedures that must be adopted by school leaders to uphold the principles of trustworthiness and fairness when it comes to the literacy instructional program. Supervision of the literacy instructional program is therefore the foundation of quality assurance to ensure that the literacy program adheres to standards. This finding further supports the idea of Plaatjies (2019) that suggests that supervision of the literacy instructional program will ensure excellent teaching and learning of the literacy curriculum, and it will compel departmental heads to ensure that literacy educators integrate a sound

grasp of literacy knowledge within a comprehensive literacy curriculum.

4.4.3.2 Supervision of the literacy instructional program by deputy principals

Interestingly enough, the deputy principals shared diverse views with regard to the supervision of the literacy instructional program. Participant E from Secondary School 1 stated:

I use only teaching programs and materials to supervise the literacy curriculum ...

On a slightly diverse note, of comfort was the view Participant Q from Secondary School 3:

I draw up the work schedules from the CAPS document and making sure that I delegate to empower my Departmental Heads ...

When the researcher probed her opinion regarding, feedback from Departmental Heads, she stated:

I am still hands on and making sure that they understand what they are doing and if moderation is taking place before and after the literacy task has been completed between the literacy educator and the departmental head...

The document analysis illustrated that the value of the CAPS policy document was further elucidated by the mere fact that document analysis showed that the deputy principal of SS3's planning with regard to the different reading and writing genres and tasks to be executed met the requirements set out in the CAPS curriculum.

The data revealed some good leadership practices. The collaboration between departmental heads and the deputy principals seemed to be something that happens regularly, and it is especially good to note that discussions after the moderation process are conducted with language departmental heads to guide and rectify moderation reports. Nevertheless, these literacy leadership practices appeared in no way comprehensive enough to address the literacy challenges. Supervision is a far more extensive concept than what was shared by these participants. Supervision of instruction by deputy principals may include evaluating educators' literacy knowledge and their lesson planning (Plaatjies, 2020). As stated, supervision of instruction requires a focus on classroom observation and that it should be purposefully conducted, concentrating on a specific criteria (Plaatjies, 2020). If deputy principals enter classrooms, they should observe learners interacting in groups and

working purposefully to solve literacy challenges or making sense of a literacy text (ILA, 2019:5). This is also vital, as literature indicates that deputy principals should place emphasis on curriculum supervision that entails supporting departmental heads in their professional development, evaluating departmental heads, revising the literacy curriculum and generally observing literacy teaching and learning (Jonyo & Jonyo, 2019). Earlier literature studies did not find any significance on the role of the deputy principal in the literacy curriculum. However, Jonyo and Jonyo (2019) did find that supervision of the literacy instructional program increases the possibility for deputy principals to work with departmental heads and departmental heads with literacy educators to facilitate effective partnership between the deputy principal as curriculum leader and supervisor and to help identify and resolve literacy leadership challenges.

4.4.3.3 Other instructional leadership roles by SMT members

The data indicated that departmental heads regarded their role also as providing guidance to educators. The Afrikaans departmental Head from Secondary School 1 stated that:

The Departmental Head must give guidance and the rest of the school management team must support the language Departmental Head ...

Participant D from the same secondary school mentioned:

I need to guide as a literacy leader and set an example on how the instructional program should be conducted for the rest of the Sotho department ...

Follow-up questions indicated that the participants could not specify what exactly the forms of guidance and support are. The Departmental head from SS/3 noted, for instance, that:

My role as Departmental Head in providing leadership in the literacy Instructional program is to provide an example of how an English teacher should perform at all times ...

This findings indicate that the Language departmental heads view their roles as Instructional leaders in literacy as their primary job. This finding is in line with what other researchers suggest, namely that the departmental head that can eventually tactically target the literacy program in the senior phase (Du Plessis & Eberlein, 2018; Clarke, 2007). Du Plessis and Eberlein (2018) agree

that departmental heads have a pivotal role in managing the literacy program and they must be supported by school management teams to develop leadership skills to lead the literacy program. Rajoo (2012) states that departmental heads in languages must be professionals in the literacy program and content knowledge and by leading the curriculum. Finally, the researcher observed that they developed anticipations and targets for learners and then aligned programs and resources for the accomplishment of specific outcomes.

It was interesting to note that deputy principals provided far more specific responses to what their roles are in terms of leadership. All three deputy principals indicated that monitoring, guidance and coordination of the literacy program were pivotal. Participant Q elucidated:

As a Deputy principal I monitor and assess the work of the Departmental Heads and with regard to the literacy instructional program I need to give guidance at all times ... (SS3/P-Q).

Participant L agrees with the above statement but adds that except for monitoring and controlling, it is imperative for him to request a monthly report on where the challenges are whether with textbooks, concessions or curriculum coverage within the language department (SS2/P-L). The third deputy principal concluded:

As Deputy principal I need to make the CAPS document available to all educators in order for them to grasp the Literacy Instructional program. I need to co-ordinate and guide novice teachers on how to approach literacy challenges in their classes ... (SS1/P-E).

These findings show something new, and that is that deputy principals play a far stronger role in terms of guidance in the literacy programme. This is confirmed by the findings from the documents analysed, as well as literature. The findings from the documents analysed showed that the deputy principals requested quarterly and monthly reports from departmental heads on literacy, assess and monitor the work of the departmental heads and finally to coordinate departmental heads. Compelling evidence in the literature suggests that deputy principals play a primary supportive instructional role to the principal and they are responsible for the improvement of the overall performance of secondary schools (Hattie, 2015). Erebus International (2017) postulates that deputy principals as instructional leaders in the literacy program offer classroom-based

professional development for language educators in diagnostic assessment, support unambiguous assessment of learners' needs, seek to adopt an intervention for learners who are in dire need of help when it comes to reading and writing, emphasizes whole-school instructional leadership by appointing specialized literacy instructional leaders.

4.4.4 Challenges in and strategies to enhance literacy instruction

The fourth major theme sought to explore strategies which can enhance literacy performance. This was critical to this study, because the researcher wanted to establish those strategies of both language educators and school management team that have a possible effect on addressing literacy leadership challenges in the senior phase. Based on the analysis of data, this theme was divided into various sub-themes that will follow.

4.4.4.1 Professional development activities for educators

The responses reflect that the educators of SS1 and SS2 do not perform professional development activities in literacy. P-A, an English Home Language Educator in the senior phase, remarked:

I do not want to sound negative or uninvolved but we do not have for example like anHoD sitting in class and watch how we instruct and the teachers sometimes struggle to make sense of the CAPS-document especially with changes frequently happening. If you as a teacher is not committed, you will fail as a language teacher, because there is no empowerment from the school management team ... (SS1/P-A).

The teachers in particular shared their dissatisfaction with the lack of professional development activities by pointing out that there was a total absence of professional development activities. Principals did not allocate time for such activities, meetings and there were not enough subject meetings where important issues could be addressed (SS1/P-B; SS2/P-H). The data from the documents illustrated that subject meetings were conducted only once a term, but no evidence could be found on professional development plans to improve literacy education. From the data it can also be concluded that some educators did not have a grounded understanding as to what professional activities really entail. This is evidenced by the following remark:

They oversee and make sure that the tasks are carried out effectively and efficiently... The SMT ensures that the directives are carefully and successfully carried out and the SMT members ensure that the educators do what is expected of them in professional development activities ... (SS3/P-M).

However, the data also revealed that some have an understanding of what professional development activities entails. Both SS/1 and SS/2 want mentoring from their respective school management teams when it comes to professional development activities whilst Secondary School 3 seeks to guide and mentor language educators to improve their literacy instruction. All six participants indicated that workshops should be conducted in order for professional development activities to be enhanced. Participant G had this to say:

Workshops should be presented to empower us and to better ourselves and the learners ... (SS2/P-G).

Participant H asserted:

The SMT must have extensive knowledge of what is going on in their department and must present presentations to assist post level one language educators in the senior phase and to develop them professionally ... (SS2/P-H).

Participant M said:

We should attend relevant workshops that will practically equip educators to gain more skills and knowledge and to better their teaching ...

The main finding that can be deduced from this information is that although principals and other leaders have an understanding of what professional development entails, they do not really execute the professional development activities. It may be difficult to perform, as Bomer and Maloch (2019:261) warn that it is sometimes difficult to get everyone involved and pulling in one direction. What is, however, clear from the data, is that teachers in particular recognize the need for professional development activities in the senior phase. The importance of Professional learning activities in literacy in particular is confirmed by various researchers and institutions (Parr & Gadd, 2018; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; The Alliance for excellent Education, 2007; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). This finding corresponds with research done by scholars indicating that professional

development activities for educators are imperative, because it promotes educators' understanding, skills, approaches and the latest innovations in the field of the literacy curriculum (Zhao et al., 2019). Interestingly, a similar result was found by Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) that educators' training and fruitful workshops can improve educators' effectiveness in the profession. Simultaneously, educators aim to improve teaching literacy strategies and views towards the literacy classroom environment that would affect the quality of literacy instruction learners in secondary schools will receive (Ajani, 2019)

4.4.4.2 Professional development activities promoted by SMT members

Evidence abounds that SMTs are important role-players in the empowerment of language educators in the senior phase through professional development activities presented by SMT members (Plaatjies, 2019:144). Given the essential role they play, opportunities for educators to enhance their competencies in literacy instruction through skills development training are important. Subsequently, the researcher sought out the interpretations and viewpoints of all SMT members involved in empowering language educators through professional development activities.

The data displayed that SMT-members promoted the attendance of various professional development activities that focus on language, literacy, writing and literature. These include the ATKV (Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging) workshops, skills development workshops and others where subject advisors also are involved (SS2/P-I). Participant O resonated the same view:

I make them aware of any skills development workshops that will be taking place in the Motheo district. I also pass the circulars to them and I ensure that every educator in my department at least attends two workshops per year in order for professional development to take place ... (SS3/P-O).

Deviations from this are also evident. One of the participating schools' heads of department indicated that they did not empower language educators through professional development activities, because the school was underperforming. The value of this form of professional development is recognized in the literature. Plaatjies (2020) and Quint, Akey, Rappaport and Willner (2007) remark that enhanced involvement of principals as literacy leaders of schools in

developmental sessions for educators, focusing on teaching practices is in line with better execution in the literacy classroom and this will improve reading and writing abilities of learners. When probed further about taking the lead in developing exemplars and demonstration programs of quality literacy learning, all the participants indicated that it was indeed an effort that involved every educator in some way and was not solely the responsibility of the departmental head. This also indicates a gap and negligence in terms of the SMTs' approaches towards support in this regard. It is clear also that some good strategies are employed to promote literacy, especially at Secondary Schools 2 and 3. Participant O explained:

We have learning and study groups amongst ourselves that will be discussed by having meetings and I will share my ideas with the rest of the language department and we will have a discussion on how we are going to contextualize it to our own situation ... (SS3/P-O).

Participant J had this to say:

I take the lead in developing exemplars of quality literacy learning by having one-on-one meetings with my educators so that they know what is expected of them in order not to just depend on me but empower themselves ... (SS2/P-J).

A noteworthy finding in this study also revealed was that deputy principals emphasized the importance of sharing information and implementing Continuous Professional Development Programs (CPTD) to empower language educators through professional development activities. The findings also showed that the language educators long to work in a team and want to see the SMT taking lead in developing them. Teamwork is effective for professional development, because it opens opportunities to discuss challenges in literacy, educators can share materials, learners needs are discussed across the language level (Home Language or First Additional Language) and grade level and finally it promotes a shared professional culture (Gast, Schildkamp & Van der Veen, 2017:738). Therefore, the researcher affirms that the successful implementation of a professional development intervention focusing on teamwork will enable educators to acquire the knowledge and skills required to implement new literacy practices. This is also vital as literature indicates that one of the usual efforts of professional development activities at secondary schools is to enhance educator quality and it is the responsibility of the principal to ensure that professional development activities are offered at secondary schools (Shariff, 2020). This finding

further corresponds with research done by Darling-Hammond and Cook -Harvey (2018) indicating that the principal as literacy leader must act as an educational supervisor of professional development activities and that they must lead and foster educators through professional development activities.

4.4.4.3 Challenges: Lack of support in literacy instruction

Responses from language educators from Secondary Schools 1 and 2 suggest that they are in dire need of more active involvement in literacy instruction from their departmental head. One of the educators made the following insightful remark:

The Departmental Head should be a more present and us as language educators should be assessed and not just fill in a form. They should be more aware of what is going on and not just take a back seat ... (SS1/P-A).

The data indicated that the participants wished for support strategies from SMT members such as implementation, regular meetings on literacy improvement and that updates are shared. It is also evident that professional development activities should be intensified, and that training opportunities for educators are regarded as vital. This is especially the case as inexperienced novice teachers seem to be longing for more direction. A young, 28-year-old Afrikaans First Additional educator noted,

We as novice teachers does not always know what we are doing and doubt ourselves. It helps if someone tells you that everything is up to standard and it gives you more confidence ... (SS3/P-M).

From the above quotations the respondents almost suggest that novice educators and experienced educators must attend lesson observations from one another as well as workshops related to literacy instruction and essential subject content. These findings are consistent with what Robin and Margalef (2013) state that departmental heads can ensure that by participating in professional development activities such as observations and inductions educators will learn to reflect on their own literacy instruction practices. This will allow for critical reflection to take place and assist educators in making their literacy instruction beliefs explicit and ultimately viewing diverse

activities. It further points to the fact that the principal as literacy leader must support literacy instruction of educators by conducting an examination of the literacy educators in making educator preparations, observing the lessons when the educator is teaching, exploring and discussing the challenges in literacy instruction, assisting the educator in expressing aims and issuance of operational tasks that are supplemented by preventive measures (Ahmad & Ahmad, 2018).

In executing this role, it was also interesting to note that the issue of good marking practices came under the spotlight. In this regard a good practice was mentioned by departmental heads who claims that strive to coach language educators, while deputy principals mentioned that they did it through IQMS. This form of collaboration between the SMT and language educators can be regarded as sound collaboration in literacy improvement. Moreover, in the implementation of literacy instruction practices, there must be a collegial relationship between the SMT and the educators where the SMT can assist educators to improve their performance and not just identify their errors without providing feedback/input to assist with literacy instruction and practices (Ahmad & Ahmad, 2018; Kemmis et al., 2014).

4.4.4.4 Challenges: Lack of involvement from SMT-members

Disappointingly, and contrary to the above quotations, departmental heads from Secondary School 1 mentioned that they did not take the lead in developing exemplars and demonstration programs of quality literacy learning. Participants C and D from Secondary School 1 said:

We do not take the lead in programs of quality literacy learning as our school has been underperforming for several years ... (SS1/P-C/P-D).

The document analysis also illustrates that the literacy educators' files, specifically their lesson plans, showed no evidence of extra effort and lesson preparation in addition to the planning of the CAPS document. Subsequently, no provision was made by these educators for literacy lesson planning that focused on teaching skills or concepts that would be covered during lessons, whilst the order of teaching instruction set out the literacy educators' teaching function and the activities that learners would do were not stipulated either. This is problematic, as the school is underperforming, which makes a subject improvement plan and error analysis compulsory. This finding further supports the idea of Benoliel and Berkovi (2017:925) who claim that planning

could be done in sub-collaborations that address a particular performance, which ultimately contributes towards the compilation of a subject improvement plan and a school improvement plan done by the literacy leader.

The data also revealed that some schools lack enough literacy activities, they rely on the District Office to promote literacy education. These include in-service training. The data further revealed that there are cases where the roles are not clear in terms of who are responsible for providing leadership in literacy. The deputy principal of SS2/P-K said, for example, that he regarded the departmental head as the responsible person to take the lead with literacy:

As an acting deputy principal I do not take the lead in developing exemplars and demonstration programs of quality literacy learning. I think it is the work of the Departmental Head and we only have Professional Learning Committees (PLCs) and they focus on other things not literacy ...

It is especially the deputy principals and principals who showed some conflicting views on the matter of educator support. P-Q from Secondary School 3 posited that:

Opportunities for educators to enhance their competencies in literacy instruction is all about the CPTD-training (Continuous Professional Teacher Developmental Program) which is compulsory for all teachers. We are one of the schools that place a lot of emphasis on that. Our school gets a communal for all staff to go online and do Literacy courses online and it is a package ... (SS3/P-Q).

The same question was posed to the principals. In response to opportunities in literacy instruction a female principal from went on to say:

The teachers can use their own expertise and competencies through self-performance. This will definitely empower them ... (SS1/P-F).

It is clear from the manner in which this participant answered this question that the principal is not aware of her instructional capacity to the educators as a literacy leader of a secondary school and that the instructional capacity of educators also needs to be continually modernized and elevated in order for them to become literacy leaders in their own classroom. Plaatjies (2019:137) claims that it is the role of the principals not only, develop but also to implement an instructional

framework to help empower teachers to align themselves with the curriculum and become good instructional leaders. The findings revealed that other SMT members believed that it was best to encourage educators, attending workshops and assisting with exemplars and demonstration programs.

The study revealed that the language educators felt that they did not receive sufficient support from the principal and subject heads. During the interviews it became apparent that the principals did not show any interest in literacy instruction specifically. It maybe that principals lack enthusiasm, subject knowledge and skills to provide leadership. This finding is confirmed also by Plaatjies (2019). This is a serious predicament, because literacy leadership challenges are experienced by all senior phase staff, and the principal is the main role-player in ensuring that guidance and support should be prioritized (Mbhalati, 2017:5). Furthermore, and as alluded to in Chapter 2, principals should provide supervision, guidance, professional advice to help educators in obtaining educational aims in relation with the needs of each secondary school (DBE, 2016:33). It is pivotal to note that several scholars did not find the implications of SMT members not being involved in literacy practices and professional development. However, international studies confirm the significance of school leaders collaborating with educators (Dajani, 2014; Rosenblatt & Peled, 2002). According to Sethlodi (2020) and Mbokudi and Singh (2011), a lack of involvement from SMT members will contribute towards the inability to weave resources and approaches to achieve a specific outcome to address the underperforming in schools and to ensure the active involvement of SMTs. It has further been indicated by scholars that a lack of involvement will add towards the ineffective collaboration between SMTs, literacy educators and learners where professional development will not be enabled and literacy practices will not allow constructive literacy criticism to take place (Bechuke & Nwosu, 2017).

4.4.4.5 Sound literacy practices

The findings revealed sound literacy practices. Participant R, for example, a 36-year-old female principal have some valuable tips for improvement of literacy:

We place emphasis on achieving CPTD-points and that enhance competencies in literacy instruction through skills development training. We have CPTD files and

we get the points by attending courses, workshops, meetings, training, reading and research. Our language departmental Heads must make sure that novice teachers better their skills and understanding of language skills ... (SS3/P-R).

Other valuable strategies include that some schools' SMTs consist of ex-language educators, which helps to provide better support. At School 3, the SMT encouraged cooperation and teamwork. Also, there was feedback from educators or SMT members who attended workshops. Workshops are crucial to ensure professional development; however, it should be clear whether these workshops are for literacy instruction and, if not, it should be pursued and the focus should be shifted (DET, 2018:9; Espana, 2012:34).

There is evidence of some other good leadership practices to promote literacy education. One of the departmental heads (SS3/P-O) provided guidance to novice teachers in the marking process. What came also out is that some departmental heads emphasize self-development and taking responsibility for growth. Mentorship is also provided, where needed (SS2/I; SS2/P-J). Taking the lead with specific strategies such as the QMS (Quality Management System) are imperative for skills development to take place effectively. These strategies may help to improve literacy instruction. A 44-year-old deputy principal mentioned:

As an acting Deputy principal I try to do exemplars and demonstration programs of quality literacy learning by creating a positive learning environment, because I take the lead in the learning programs, assist with lesson planning and preparation should the need arises. Developmental appraisals is also part of my duty as a Deputy principal and these are the structures that are in place to help support teachers where there is a need for such support ... (SS2/P-K; (SS3/P-R).

This sentiment is shared by the Deputy principal of Secondary School two who emphasized:

The QMS help us to develop ourselves and to develop our subordinates ... (SS1/E).

It is apparent from the aforementioned quotations that the principal should develop the deputy principal; the deputy principal should develop the departmental heads; the departmental heads should develop each language educator; and the language educator should address the literacy challenges faced by the learners. Each body has their role to fulfil when it comes to exploring literacy leadership challenges. This finding is supported by research from other scholars such as

Zwart, Smit and Admiraal (2015) and Zwart Korthagen, and Atemma-Noordewier (2008), who highlight that induction, collaborative activities, reviewing one another's work and team teaching programs that adhere towards suitable time and resources can also be activities presented by the SMT to develop educators professionally.

In addition, both female principals indicated that that when it came to the empowerment of staff through professional development activities their role was managerial and they were the drivers of programs and ideas of professional development, especially when it comes to the development of literacy instruction through skills development training. This finding is in line with other research which stipulates that SMT members should direct the attention to clearly defined tasks of instruction rather than intangible deliberations, particular instructional methods and how to successfully teach literacy content to educators (Townsend, 2018). They further highlighted the fact that they seek to address the gaps in teaching and literacy instruction.

We promote literacy instruction through the IQMS systems steered by the Deputy principal, Peer work groups(PWGs), Developmental Support Groups (DSGs) and they assist educators with professional development and literacy instruction ...(SS1/P-F).

The other female principal from Secondary School three said:

From a managerial point of view I make sure that SMT members are involved in the CPTD program and that their file is up to date. We realized that we have a lot of postlevel one language educators that are qualified enough to teach everyone how to do Zoom classes and set "Google docs tests" and they presented the workshop for all the teachers and everyone's professional development was promoted ...(SS3/P-R).

In order to create sound literacy practices it is pivotal to align educator literacy education curricula standards for learners in the senior phase and licensing requirements for educators (Moats, 2020). When sound literacy practices are maintained, effective literacy leaders, meaningful literacy curricula and well-supported literacy educators will enable all learners to learn to read and write (Moats, 2020). This signals that literacy educators need sound literacy practices to connect the reading and writing skills using read aloud and stimulating activities with a rich literacy curricula.

The findings also revealed that principals do not understand how to act as a literacy coach. Once again this may be to a lack of dedication, knowledge about literacy practices. The researcher wants to reiterate that literacy-based learning activities, which encompass shared knowledge, skills and experiences amongst educators guided by a literacy coach serve as professional development activities offered by the SMT to mentor and coach language educators. In the work of Setlhodi (2020), sound literacy practices are highlighted, as well as that literacy leaders must know how to persuade educators, inspire collaborative action and supervise sound literacy practices and initiatives. This will lead to distributed efforts to address literacy leadership challenges that entail the improvement of performance in all areas of the school environment (Setlhodi, 2020). CPTD programs in literacy is important, because it is a continuous process of literacy learning over educators' career span intended to improve the educators' skills about how to approach literacy in the classroom and address the challenges based on various sources (Daso & Van der Merwe Muller, 2020). The researcher wants to point to the fact that CPTD serves as a professional development activity for educators and will help them with dealing with continuous literacy leadership challenges. Furthermore, literacy training leadership must be based on educators' challenges, needs, collaborative opportunities and it should view educators as active life-long literacy learners in schools (Macias, 2017:86)

4.4.5 The literacy environment in secondary schools

There was evidence from the semi-structured individual interviews that SMTs as literacy leaders are struggling to establish a positive literacy environment. Interestingly, two of the three secondary schools indicated that the situation was indeed dire. Under this section the researcher wanted to explore the literacy environment in these schools and how they addressed the needs of learners in the literacy environment. He also wanted to find out how they promoted a physical environment conducive for literacy instruction as well as the programs that are in place to promote the learning climate in classrooms.

4.4.5.1 Addressing the needs of learners

It is clear from the data that the current situation is not favourable for addressing the needs of learners to improve their literacy skills. The deputy principals argued as follows:

The literacy environment is not good. In order for the Afrikaans, English and Sotho learners to work together is really a challenge for us ... (SS2/P-K).

It is not that strong. Our learners are struggling in terms of literacy and academics. The learners also limit themselves and they fear because maybe their peers will discriminate against them or even their teachers ... (SS1/P-D).

Although some of the participants could not clearly indicate what needed to be done to look after the emotional, academic and social needs of the learners, it seemed that they realized the importance thereof. This was evident from the response of Participant D:

As a language teacher and deputy principal I put my learners first. What they feel matters to me. I ask them individually what they are struggling with for example reading or writing. What they feel matters to me. I ask them individually how they are feeling in order to bring them closer to me. I firmly believe that they need to know me and understand me. I even allow my Language HoDs to give them multiple chances to re-do a task if they fail the task ... (SS1/P-D).

Other forms of catering for the needs of learners include various strategies as displayed by the following comment by Participant Q:

Trying to address the needs of learners we provide extra classes, extra classes and more extra classes. We give them the opportunity to interact with resources by using computers, reading corners and the library that they can make use of. The debating, public speaking can also take place to look at the social, academic and emotional needs of learners. We support our learners for example if a learner cannot afford textbooks we will give it to them and expose them to wider opportunities outside of the school. We want to be there for our learners emotionally ... (SS3/P-Q).

It is crucial to point out that the deputy principal of Secondary School 3 seeks to create a positive environment and by bringing cultural activities such as debate into the literacy program will enable

learners to broaden their vocabulary and to work well with one another. Moreover, academically it appears that only the vice-principals of Secondary School 3 and 1 support the learners academically with the prescribed books to make sure that each learner has the prescribed books and is not lagging behind. Literacy leaders must comprehend that learners need supplementary and a variety of books at their level, which include electronic and digital texts (Plaatjies, 2019). This finding is supported by Gross and Opalka (2020), who describe that the needs of learners must be addressed through literacy instructional materials, and it must be applied consequently in the classroom. These scholars uphold that in order to address the needs of learners, high expectations for sustained literacy instruction must be set, learners' engagement in literacy learning must be tracked, and finally improvement in the literacy needs must be monitored to determine progress. This suggests that critical thinking must be practised to address learners' literacy needs.

4.4.5.2 The physical environment

The principals were also concerned about the literacy environment at their respective secondary schools. A principal with one year's experience as principal, but 19 years' teaching experience pointed out:

The school is not on a level that we expect it to be. There is still room for improvement.

We have to use our library as a classroom, because we are struggling with space.

We do not have a media centre or library ... (SS1/P-F).

In the same vein, a 52-year-old principal with more than 15 years' teaching experience and one year experience as a principal noted:

Our learners' literacy levels are poor. The only place they are exposed to literacy is within English First Additional Language, Afrikaans Home Language and Sesotho Home Language and that is not helpful for the learners at all. You need literacy in all of your subjects, because learners need to be able to read with comprehension otherwise they will fail ... (SS2/P-L).

These data point to the fact that the physical environment is not conducive to literacy improvement.

Both of these principals have years of teaching experience, but only one year's experience as

principals of their respective schools. This indicates that limited knowledge, experience and expertise are important factors that need to be considered and that may prevent them from initiating strategies to improve the literacy environment. Zimmerman (2017), however, confirmed that many South African primary schools did not have management and planning structures and strategies in place. This finding was also confirmed from the analysis of the documents. When the researcher requested specific plans from the participants that are indicative of their approaches to improve the physical environment, they could not provide such plans.

The scholar began his dialogue with the deputy principals by posing a question that sought to solicit responses about the physical environment conducive for literacy instruction. The deputy principal, who is also a Sesotho Home Language educator responded:

Sometimes high numbers do not allow you to exercise that free role with regard to physical space in class. In our school and the high numbers that we are having we are trying but it is difficult to promote a physical environment for literacy instruction. In future I would like to create a sense of “community” for literacy instruction and they will know one another and interact with each other ... (SS1/P-E).

The physical environment is imperative for literacy learning, because educators need to establish the physical environment in order to articulate literacy objectives in the physical environment and planning and organizing of visual and audio texts for literacy teaching (Rice, 2018). At the other school, the literacy environment appears to be positive, and it seems that the principal plays an important role to promote it.

The literacy environment in our school is positive. We do have a library set-up where we encourage our learners to read books. At the lower Grades (8-9) we have literacy and numeracy periods where one half is encouraged to read magazines and the other half does numeracy exercises on the computer. It is part of our timetable for the senior phase learners. We want our learners to matriculate with English Home Language abilities ... (SS3/P-R).

From the quotation above the respondent indicated that the literacy levels of Secondary School 3 are well above standard. It is evident that an invitational literacy setting is created by the principal

as literacy leader of Secondary School 3. When I asked about addressing the academic, social and emotional needs of learners in the literacy environment and what guiding principle are in place, the response was,

We try to determine where there are issues whether it is academic, emotional or learning disabilities. If a learner comes from a background or context where proper grammatical English is not used we will help them. We want our learners to understand the difference between academic language and colloquial language. We try to encourage them to always be themselves ... (SS3/P-R).

This implies that the language educators allow the learners to always be themselves whether in class or on the school ground. This gives learners freedom to express themselves whether on paper or orally, because they will write and talk from their context. It is noteworthy that the principal tries to ensure that there is a connection for the learner at all times and to their context to make the work interesting for them. Findings from previous studies suggest that the physical environment in literacy practices should give literacy educators time to explore and prepare for meaningful literacy instruction in which technology can be integrated to promote academic language and there should be access to higher level knowledge and background knowledge on the physical environment to address literacy challenges experienced by learners and leaders (Sander, 2020). This finding corroborates the results from Strong-Wilson and Ellis (2014), who mention that the well-endowed physical environment that is stimulating is important for literacy, because it offers diverse opportunities to explore literacy needs. In addition, the physical environment of the literacy classroom must boost a learner's sense of competence. More recently, scholars found that the physical environment for literacy is vital, because if the physical environment for literacy is up to standard, it will improve learners' attentional capacity for literacy learning (Amissah-Essel, Hagan & Schack, 2020).

Literacy-rich pedagogy must be explored by SMT members to implement reading and writing instructional practices by utilizing print, non-print and digital platforms to support learners in secondary schools literacy environment (O'Byrne et al., 2020:8). The researcher wants to indicate that, even though the impact of the physical environment on learners' development appears to be pivotal in secondary schools, literacy educators, departmental heads, deputy principals and principals understanding their literacy practices must be at the forefront.

4.4.5.3 Promoting the classroom literacy environment

It seems that literacy educators and leaders try their best to promote the literacy environment, despite the difficult challenges. The departmental head from Secondary School 1 posited that:

In my class there is not any posters on the wall as you can see. I need to put up posters. I do not have electricity in my class so I cannot play a video. I am basically handicapped. It has been five years that I do not have electricity ... (SS1/P-C).

The Sesotho Departmental Head from the same school lamented the fact that,

My class is not colourful, because I do not have posters. I am aware that a lack of posters and learning materials is not good for literacy instruction. At least it is neat. I will try to put up posters about the writing process, reading as well and a poem somewhere ... (SS1/P-D).

Further confirmation of the departmental heads not creating a physical environment conducive to literacy instruction was made by Participant D of Secondary School 1 as they acknowledged not having posters against the wall. Another positive finding emerged from one of the language educators who referred to specific strategies that can improve writing skills. These included having the writing process against the wall, and instilling a love for reading and engagement in literacy. Other measures include thorough preparation and creating a conducive, friendly and relaxed spaces for literacy learning (SS3/P-O; SS3/P-P). The findings indicate that these strategies were employed by educators without any directions from HoDs. This is another indication of the lacking support from leaders to enhance literacy.

The data also show that it is apparent that expectations and goals are identified at Secondary School 3 and that learners are informed at all times which implies that they know exactly what they are working towards with regards to literacy instruction. In addition, these departmental heads from Secondary School 3 ensure that rules, expectations, routines are promoted in class and so ensure that literacy instruction occurs harmoniously.

The data revealed in this study undoubtedly show that the participants at Secondary School 1 struggle to promote the literacy environment as there were not any posters against the wall of the departmental heads' classrooms. However, they did indicate that they were aware that they had to

try and put up posters to make the classroom conducive to literacy learning and to address the literacy challenges. According to MoE (2017)

SMTs should promote an all-inclusive view of literacy where learners engage with literacy in ways that reveal their continuous growing expertise and that integrates their home literacy practices.

This problem has been explored many times; yet the literacy environment in secondary schools seems to be a challenge. The negative side of this is that learners in the senior phase are not welcomed in an invitational setting that promotes literacy. This affects their literacy abilities and educators cannot address the literacy leadership challenges.

The findings indicate some sound delegation or shared approaches from principals. This is demonstrated by the deputy principal of School 2 who makes use of the departmental head and educators to help establish a conducive environment in which literacy can flourish:

I rely on the departmental head of languages to ensure that they create and promote a physical environment conducive for literacy instruction. Their knowledge and skills are required ... (SS2/P-K).

It is evident from the data that classroom management organization is important for some educators. These educators promote sound learning environments where rules, expectations, routines, procedures and schedules in classes are promoted. This is how he/she characterized it:

In our classrooms we make sure that every classroom has rules on the wall. Each learner has the school's code of conduct as well as their parents and our routines and procedures are visible in the corridors ...

From the responses it was, however, clear that it was a reference to general approaches, and not to literacy in particular. The data displayed also that participants believed in small classes, sufficient resources, visual computers and making use of the library at our school. We also make these resources accessible to our learners and all of our teaching staff. Our teachers are equipped thoroughly and we even have a media centre for teachers.

Resources or literacy instruction appears to be vital as well. From the responses it seemed that there are some sterling practices that principals use. The principal of Secondary School 3 declared:

We try to provide as many resources to our learners as we can. All of our teachers have access to data projectors so that they can use PowerPoint and videos in their classrooms. All our English classes for example are audio visual classes. We encourage books for learners who struggle to read so that they can follow while hearing what is being read. We believe in voice notes as well. Classroom management helps us to ensure that rules, expectations, routines, procedures and schedules in classes are promoted. for literacy instruction.

According to Ogbulogo, George, and Olukanni (2014) and Mahun (2012), to promote the classroom literacy environment is pivotal, because these aids increase learners' leaning performance and addressing reading and writing challenges in the classroom. Thus, the combination of texts and posters in the literacy classroom environment provides a critical role in supporting the effectiveness of literacy learning offered by the educator (Larasati & Harsono, 2017; Mahun, 2012). Finally, findings from previous studies state that the application of images and posters in the literacy classroom environment was found to be effective in developing reading and writing skills in the literacy classroom (Otzurk, 2017; Koshy, 2011).

4.4.5.4 Intervention programs for extra support in literacy

In order to address the impact of the social context on literacy instruction it was imperative for the researcher to explore which additional intervention programs existed at each secondary school. The Afrikaans Departmental Head of Secondary School 2, who has a BA degree and Higher Education Diploma, noted,

I only have an afternoon program for Grade 11 and Grade 12 where we continue with the syllabus after school and tries to incorporate literacy if there are time. Our learners are ethnically diverse. The Grade 12e learners started with profiling this year. We will zoom in on our level 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 learners individually and then we will work out a program to address the different literacy difficulties ... (SS2/P-I).

The Sesotho Departmental Head of Secondary School 2 with a Diploma in Education shared the exact sentiment:

We only present afternoon classes for Grade 12 learners and we do not have additional support programs for teachers that will enable them to adapt their learning and teaching strategies to address the social and emotional needs of learners with literacy difficulties ... (SS2/P-J).

These intervention programs are a clear indication from the participants that they regarded intervention programs as important to improve literacy. The findings showed, however, that the implementation of extra literacy programs are not evident at all schools. This was also confirmed by the lack of evidence from the documentary analysis. Furthermore, looking at the roles and responsibilities of SMTs, it seemed that not everyone seemed to have a clear understanding of their roles as literacy leaders. This is especially concerning with some participants (SS1/P-E) who indicate that the literacy abilities of Grade 8 and 9 learners are worrisome. The findings indicate that there is a dire need for intervention programs for extra literacy support in the senior phase. Furthermore, aiming to comprehend the phenomenon literacy, educators must place emphasis on reading and writing to develop vocabulary to address literacy challenges (Education Endowment Foundation, 2016; 2017). This foundation maintains that educators act as literacy leaders in their classrooms and that they must promote collaborative learning where learners share their thought experiences, teach modelling inferences and allowing learners to speak through their writing ideas before embarking to write (Education Endowment Foundation, 2016; 2017). On the contrary, Singleton (2009) argues that the need for literacy instruction is always systematic and highly intensive, making literacy experiences applicable to learners' interests and life. This implies that learners must be given the opportunity to engage in significant reading and writing activities such as reading/marking one's peers' work and one's own work. The literacy leader must then monitor and give constructive feedback that is not controlling but motivational, informational and that conveys realistic expectations (Education Endowment Foundation, 2016; 2017).

4.4.5.5 Parental involvement in literacy programs

It is an impossible mission to get parents involved in the literacy program according to the Departmental Heads. This is evident by the remark of one of the parents,

It is difficult for us to involve parents. We struggle to get hold of them even if we call them. They do not even sign learners' reading journal and some does not even know in which grade their learners are ... (SS1/P-C).

The data also displayed that parents are not involved in the improvement of the literacy program and that they do not attend meetings. The data showed that very little effort is made by the SMT to get parents on board. The document analysis also illustrated that educators does not attend parent meetings to address literacy challenges. The document analysis illustrated that the attendance register of parent evenings were either empty or only a few attended it. Some strategies that are used include contacting parents on social media platforms, but parents do not seem interested (SS1P-F). The present finding found that parents do not get actively involved in the literacy program. This is detrimental to literacy learning. Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) argue in this regard that parental involvement in literacy programs starts at home with parents and guardians providing a secure and healthy literacy environment at home, sufficient literacy learning experiences and supporting learners. An accumulation of studies indicates that parental involvement is the most effective when it is observed as a partnership between the school and the parents and guardians (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017; Emeagwali, 2009; Epstein, 2009). This finding is further supported by Plaatjies (2020), who mentions that parental involvement is related to the monitoring of learning as well as active participation in literacy activities organized at school (parent-educator conferences, seminars, workshops and volunteer activities).

4.4.5.6 Collective efficacy among staff to enhance literacy instruction

The findings revealed that there are not really a coordinated plan to enhance teamwork and collective efficacy to promote literacy amongst secondary school learners. It is also clear that the team lacks a strategy to support teachers in teaching socioeconomically and ethnically diverse learners in literacy (SS1/P-D). This finding also came from the Deputy principal of secondary school two said:

We do not have programs in place to support teachers in teaching socioeconomically and ethnically diverse learners in literacy and we are relying on the Departmental Heads to come forth ... (SS2/P-K).

There is evidence of mentoring and innovative teaching approaches, but very little collaboration amongst literacy educators and SMTs, although some of the participants alluded to the fact that they discussed some weaknesses and addressed it (SS3/P-Q). Strangely enough, the principal of Secondary School 3 emphasized the promotion of collective efficacy among staff to enhance literacy instruction:

There must be standardization of papers. There must be a bar set on what is acceptable and what is not acceptable and we have an open door policy to discuss issues. We place emphasis on good working conditions and professional development ... (SS3/P-R).

This statement is in contrast with that of the other principals that act as the literacy leaders of their respective secondary schools. It illustrates that this principal wants her SMT and educators to excel as literacy leaders and that they stay up to date with the skills that are relevant. It also signals that literacy instruction is indeed an on-going process and it will develop throughout one's life.

Collective efficacy among staff will address literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools. The principal as the leader of the school and the rest of the staff as advocates, the success of the school and well-being of the learners are primarily reliant upon the mutual leadership and collaboration efforts of these two parties (McCarthy, Wallin & Bogan, 2014; Finkelstein, 2009). Further illuminating the nature of collective efficacy among staff members scholars maintain that the benefits of such a partnership include the successful implementation of an all-inclusive literacy leadership strategy, satisfied stakeholders within the literacy environment, higher performance of all stakeholders to address literacy challenges thoroughly, lower educator turnover, better alignment of supervision, monitoring, observations and the executing of tasks diligently and finally an optimistic literacy school climate (Lowery et al., 2019; Rock; Remley & Range, 2017; Duslak & Geier, 2016; Clemens, Milsom & Cashwell, 2009).

4.5 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter contained a summary of the biographies of the participants as well as an outline of the categories, themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. These were discussed and analysed, supported with relevant literature. Chapter 5 will provide an overview of the study to

illustrate that the aims articulated in the study have been realized. Chapter 5 will further provide a summary, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5 : SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 presented, discussed, analysed, and critically reflected on the qualitative data collected for the study that were designed at exploring literacy leadership challenges at secondary schools. The objective of this chapter is not to expand on the findings discussed in Chapter 4, but rather to draw conclusions and make recommendations in an attempt to answer the central research question of this research study namely, *“What are the literacy leadership challenges at secondary schools?”*

This chapter also serves as an opportunity to share my reflections about the study, both on a scholarly and personal level. This includes how this study impacted on my growth as a language teacher and Departmental Head. I will also elaborate on the strengths and challenges experienced in the study, and how these informed my overall understanding of the study. This chapter focuses on bringing all the main points of the study together. To this end, I first provide a brief overview of the chapters to show how the chapters evolved. Followed by that, I will make suggestions and recommendations regarding the challenges that literacy leaders experience. First, a restatement of the research questions that guided the study.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The study sought to explore the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools. The primary research question is, “What are the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools?”

The following secondary research questions have assisted in answering the main research question:

- What are the challenges that educators experience with literacy education?
- What are the roles of the SMT as literacy leaders in literacy leadership at secondary schools?

- What are the challenges that the SMT encounter in performing their roles as literacy leaders in secondary schools?
- Which strategies could be implemented to address the literacy challenges in secondary schools?

The first step in responding to the research questions was to provide an overview of the topic in **Chapter 1**. The chapter provided in particular a clear description between reading acquisition and writing acquisition and how it forms part of literacy. This chapter also provided the importance of literacy and the motivation for conducting the study. Furthermore, the conceptual framework, research approach methodology and limitations of the study were all emphasized in Chapter 1. Moreover, clarification of key concepts were defined to provide their contextual application. Finally, a layout of the chapters was given to ensure that the reader is well informed.

Chapter 2 focused on the conceptual framework adopted as well as the review of relevant literature. The primary research question and secondary research questions guided the review of the literature. The literature review provided an overview of literacy skills within the senior phase language curriculum, challenges with literacy education in secondary schools and the role of the school management team to inform the reader's understanding of literacy challenges in the senior phase. The literature review thus highlighted pivotal concepts to shed light on how literacy leadership challenges can be addressed, which include instructional leadership roles, distributed leadership roles, instructional practices and behaviours and educators' development, which are fundamental to the study. It is vital to mention that the distributed leadership theory (Spillane, 2006) was important for organizing instructional leadership by SMTs and were utilized as a foundation through which the instructional practices with the SMTs were viewed.

Chapter 3 contained the explanation of the research design and methodology that were utilized to obtain descriptions of what the educators expected from the SMT as literacy leaders and how they enacted their instructional leadership roles in their respective language departments. A qualitative approach through phenomenological design was utilized. Moreover, the use of tools that sought qualitative data was elucidated. Ethical considerations, as highlighted by researchers such as Bertram and Christiansen (2017:188) and Nieuwenhuis (2016:122) assisted with observing the participants' rights not being violated and ensuring voluntary participation.

In **Chapter 4** the data were presented, discussed and analysed. The data collected through the semi-structured individual interviews, documents and observations guided the data discussion and analysis process. Categories and themes were identified in which the findings pertaining to literacy leadership challenges at secondary schools were indicated. The presentation, discussion and analysis of the data also focused on strategies in addressing the challenges, which should be regarded as the contribution to the study.

Chapter 5 focuses on the conclusion of the dissertation, providing an outline of the entire study. It also provides the summary of the findings from which conclusions were drawn and recommendations offered. This final chapter highlights the gaps which will indicate the possibility for future studies.

5.3 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings are predominantly discussed below per secondary research questions.

5.3.1 Findings and interpretation based on the first secondary research question.

What are the challenges that educators experience with literacy education? These findings are also aligned with category 4.3.1.

5.3.1.1 Poor reading and writing skills

The findings under the first theme (4.3.1.1) indicate that learners in the senior phase cannot read or write as per the requirements of the CAPS document. Findings regarding this theme also illustrate that learners exhibit limited knowledge regarding reading and writing skills. According to Roberts (2008:69)

Most learners' inadequate literacy skills reduce their ability to advance their reading and writing comprehension and vocabulary skills in order to develop effective reading and writing skills ...

This barrier has been explored for many years, yet it poses a challenge in secondary schools today (c.f. 4.3.1.1; 2.3.1). The findings revealed many other challenges that secondary school learners experience in terms of reading and writing. These include issues with spelling, an inability to comprehend a task and the problem of not responding to questions. These factors hamper advancement in literacy for senior phase learners in secondary schools (c.f. 2.3.5; 2.3.6). The last finding under this theme is another highly worrying one. That is the controversial issue of promoting learners to the next grade, even if they have not mastered their current grades. Goss and Sonnemann (2016:1) found that learning gaps are in fact intensified as learners move through their school years, so that by the end of their primary school years, the spread of achievement spans six years. Consequently, learners – when entering the senior phase – are confronted with severe backlogs, particularly in literacy. This has a ripple effect on other subjects, and consequently in performance (c.f. 2.3.1; 2.3.2).

5.3.1.2 Learners have a poor frame of reference

The data revealed in this study showed that all the participants indicated that their learners do not have a strong frame of reference when they arrive in the senior phase in order to comprehend a comprehension test or understanding the visual literacy (c.f. 4.3.1.2). This worrying situation calls to question the responsibility of language educators and school management team members to activate learners' background knowledge and how they should go about as literacy leaders in their respective subjects that they are teaching. Yang (2010:180) declares that language educators should activate organized background knowledge during the introduction of a language or literature lesson, which will enable learners to imagine or predict aspects in their understanding of discourse. What is concerning, though, is that the findings indicate that neither the educators, nor the SMT address this issue sufficiently by creating opportunities for learners and expose them to activities that enhance their reading and writing capabilities (c.f. 4.3.1.2).

5.3.1.3 Leaders' lack of knowledge of assessment of reading and writing

One of the findings in this study indicated that is vital for educators to comprehend the assessment of reading and writing in the CAPS document. This document contains a detailed outline of the

reading and writing assessments and the mark allocation for each task (c.f. 4.3.1.3; 2.3.1). It seems, though, that language educators have in general a sufficient understanding of the literacy curriculum. However, the same cannot be said about SMT members. The findings indicate that they do not possess a sound understanding of the curriculum, which makes it difficult for them to provide support to educators (c.f. 4.3.2.1; 4.3.1.3; 4.3.2.2). One interesting assumption derived from educators' critique against the large number of assessments in literacy is that they appear to be knowledgeable in their subject (c.f. 4.3.2.1; 4.3.1.3). As such, they will be able to teach and assess literacy well.

5.3.1.4 Lack of professional development activities for educators

The data show that two of the secondary schools' language educators indicated that no professional development activities take place at the school. It was also seen that none of the language educators was exposed to or has experience in professional development activities in the senior phase. The findings indicate that professional development activities are needed in the senior phase, as educators appear to be dissatisfied with the lack of support. Secondary schools must engage in whole-school Professional Learning Development (PLD), especially when it comes to literacy (c.f. 4.3.4.1). As foreseeable if the educators implement a consistent approach and explore the approach all of them will automatically complete a whole school PLD and this will add to a more developed comprehension of literacy challenges in their classrooms (c.f. 4.3.4.1; 4.3.4.2). The findings also revealed that principals do not fulfil their instructional leadership functions in this regard. Meetings are not conducted regularly and some do not understand what Professional Development (PD) activities entail (c.f. 4.3.4.2; 4.3.4.1). The literature about PD activities highlights that emphasis should be placed on comprehending achievement data to guide teaching learning in the language class, critically viewing the curriculum and understanding the continuum of literacy development in the senior phase and educators offering learners diverse activities and significant opportunities for reading and writing (c.f. 2.6.5). This implies that each learner's literacy journey will be differentiated and personalized, making literacy learning in the senior phase visible through promoting unambiguous learning objectives (c.f. 2.6.5). Direction from the leaders is wanting in these important facets of literacy instruction.

5.3.2 Findings and interpretation based on the second secondary research question

What are the roles of the SMT as literacy leaders in literacy leadership at secondary schools? These findings are also aligned with category 4.3.2.

5.3.2.1 Role of the principal as instructional leader

Data for this study reflect that all three principals thought that they needed to act as instructional leaders of their respective schools. In addition, the findings showed that they were aware that they needed to act as literacy leaders of their respective secondary schools. This awareness will enable them to have some sort of understanding pertaining to what literacy is about and what is required (c.f. 2.5.1; 4.3.2). This will also enable them to comprehend literacy and how it is learnt, the resources required for reading and writing and the extent to which these reading and writing materials are mobilized in leading a comprehensible literacy program (c.f. 2.4.1). However, the findings indicate that principals lack a grounded understanding of the different key aspects related to literacy. The findings also indicate that principals' understanding of Instructional Leadership practices are not up to standard. Sufficient understanding of their roles as Instructional leaders will enable them to guide and lead the literacy program and to ensure the effective management of the literacy curriculum (c.f. 2.4.2; 2.4.3; 4.3.3.3).

5.3.2.2 Guidance and support to educators and learners

The data in this study revealed that principals do not provide sufficient guidance to support educators and learners. This is mainly due to their own deficiencies in terms of curriculum understanding, despite their obligations as described in the policy documents (Standard for principalship and PAM document). Furthermore, principals in particular have been identified as not fulfilling their roles as moderators of the literacy curriculum. Sound internal moderation practices are completely wanting and that creates poor literacy practices (c.f. 2.4.1; 4.3.2.2). This is especially the case as both pre-and post-moderation exercises may lead to rigorous discussions and reflection with the aim of the betterment of literacy practices (c.f. 2.4.2; 2.6.8; 4.3.3.1). This in turn will lead to improved performance in literacy. The researcher firmly believes that this will introduce educators to instructional routines and aligned teaching practice literacy activities in the

classroom (c.f. 2.4.2; 2.6.8; 4.3.3.1). Another finding that emerged from the data is that SMTs are unable to address issues pertaining to home language. Educators are left alone in dealing with learners whose home language is different from the medium of instruction at the school. A major finding that came to the fore is that teachers long for better classroom support. This suggests that the SMT should practise instructional leadership when supporting and guiding language educators in addressing the challenge of medium of instruction in the senior phase.

5.3.2.3 Leading the continuous improvement in the literacy curriculum

Data collected for this study saw that the participants highlighted different views on leading the continuous improvement in the literacy curriculum. This study's findings demonstrated that the SMT plays a very limited role in leading the continuous improvement in the literacy curriculum. Literature indicates that although challenging, improvement can be achieved through systematic implementation. Bocala and Holman et al. (2021) state that to lead the continuous improvement in the literacy curriculum successfully, internal coherence must be constructed around the instructional core. It is the responsibility of SMT members to develop the skills of educators and support them. However, the findings of this study showed that this is not the case. SMT members should build educators' capacity by themselves by engaging in improvement projects, demonstrating continuous improvement by leading or being active participating in improving the literacy curriculum (c.f. 4.3.2.3).

5.3.3 Findings and interpretation based on the third secondary research question

What are the challenges that the SMT encounter in performing their roles as literacy leaders in secondary schools?

These findings are also aligned with category 4.3.3.

5.3.3.1 Supervision of the literacy instructional program by the Departmental Heads of languages

It is important to reiterate that policy guidelines (Department of Education) indicate that Departmental Heads are considered as instructional leaders. A noteworthy finding in this study

revealed that Departmental Heads place emphasis on mentoring, communication, distributing and ensuring that educators are still on par with the pacesetters. This is in line with what Seobi and Wood (2016) and Maxwell (2006) raise as quality assurance procedures that must be adopted by school leaders to uphold the principals of trustworthiness and fairness when it comes to the literacy instructional program. Supervision of the literacy instructional program is therefore the foundation of quality assurance to ensure that the literacy program adheres to standards. Internal supervision of the literacy program at school level is the responsibility of the Departmental Head (DBE, 2015b:12). This implies that the Departmental Head acts as curriculum manager (c.f. 2.4.3; 4.3.3). Although the participants alluded to the close monitoring and moderation of literacy during the interviews, the findings from the documents painted a totally different picture. The analysis of the documents indicated that monitoring and moderation are not performed rigorously, which is in contrast with other studies done in South African schools (c.f. 2.6.8). The Departmental Head should focus on pre-moderation and post-moderation activities, which includes the moderation of the assessment of the literacy task prior to administering to the learners and to corroborate content, grammar and the distribution of different levels of questions posed to learners (c.f. 4.3.3; 4.3.3.1). This suggests that the supervision of the literacy instructional program should be indeed distributed to Departmental Heads who moderate 10% of the learners' skills (reading or writing) to ensure accuracy in the literacy instructional program (c.f. 4.3.3.1). Departmental Heads must ensure that high-quality supervision of the literacy program takes place (c.f. 4.3.3.1). Departmental Heads must have the opportunity to induct and form educators' abilities to grow and become literacy leaders and ultimately lead their own literacy instructional program in their classrooms.

5.3.3.2 Supervision of the literacy instructional program by Deputy principals

The data revealed clearly that the Deputy principals shared contradicting views when probed about supervising the literacy instructional program. They seemed to be unsure about their role as Deputy principals (c.f. 4.3.3.2). There are signs of collaboration between the SMTs, especially in terms of moderation. The findings revealed that supervision of the literacy instructional program has not really explored by the Deputy Principals and that is why it poses a challenge to them. This may affects the Departmental Heads because the Deputy Principal should execute the duties that are distributed by the principal. A striking finding is that literature on Departmental Heads and

principals is far more obtainable than that of a Deputy principal. In this study it was also the case (c.f. 4.3.3.2). Therefore, this presents a gap in current research, as there are very little guidelines as to which role Deputy principals should perform in supervising the literacy instructional program. According to the PAM document, the managerial areas of a Deputy principal consist of managing the staff, learners, curriculum, physical resources, financial resources, general duties, co-curricular duties and establishing healthy relationships with the whole school community (c.f. 2.4). More specifically, the management task-area model recognizes curricular affairs such as literacy as one of the management and leadership areas of Deputy principals (c.f. 2.4.2). In addition, Deputy principals are obliged to spend 60% of their time teaching and to assess learners according to the assessment standards and requirements (c.f. 2.4; 2.4.2). This suggests that staff management is a fundamental managerial area for Deputy principals and that they play an important role in the literacy instructional program. Furthermore, the existing practice concerning staff management duties of Deputy principals was of interest for the researcher and he feels strongly that an academic Deputy principal should manage school management team members such as Departmental Heads. It is expected of the Deputy principal to guide and supervise the work of Departmental Heads and the rest of the staff and to make recommendations and countersign reports (c.f. 2.4; 2.4.2; 4.3.3.1; 4.3.3.2; 4.3.3.4). It is also the belief of the researcher that the Deputy principal must communicate and interact with various role-players internally and externally on behalf of the principal to gain more insight into the literacy instructional program.

5.3.3.3 Role as instructional leader in the literacy program as Departmental Head

This theme focuses on the middle manager or Departmental Head. The argument here is that it is important that the Language Departmental Head is an instructional leader who values his/her role as an instructional leader in the literacy program as the primary task of his/her task (c.f. 2.4.3; 2.4.4). However, the data showed that HoDs could not specify exactly what their work allocation entails. This is very concerning, as literature indicates that it is the Departmental Head that can eventually tactically target the literacy program in the senior phase (Clarke, 2007; Du Plessis & Eberlein, 2018). This may be attributed to a lack of direction from the principal as overall Instructional leader of the school or a lack of expertise (c.f. 4.3.4.3; 4.3.3.3; 4.3.3.1). Literature highlights that Departmental Heads have a pivotal role in managing the literacy program and that

they must be supported by school management teams to develop leadership skills to lead the literacy program (c.f. 4.3.4.3; 4.3.4.4). However, the findings demonstrate that Departmental Heads could also not elaborate as to what their roles are in terms of guidance and support.

5.3.3.4 Role as instructional leader in the literacy program as Deputy Principal

A surprising finding was found in the responses from the Deputy principals, reason for this being that they are often not allocated as phase head. The data displayed that they provide far more clear specifics to educators. These include monitoring, guidance and the coordination of the literacy programme in the senior phase. This finding was confirmed by the analysis of the documents as well. A sound practice that came from the data was that Deputy principals requested quarterly and monthly reports from the educators. The findings revealed that they play an instrumental supportive role. The findings also showed that the Deputy principals assess and monitor the work of the Departmental Heads and finally co-ordinate Departmental Heads. Compelling evidence in the literature suggests that Deputy principals play a primary supportive instructional role to the principal and they are responsible for the improvement of the overall performance of secondary schools (Hattie, 2015). Further illuminating the role as instructional leader in the literacy program as Deputy principal, Hattie (2015) adds that the management of the literacy program as Deputy principal must be thoroughly studied and observed in order for it to achieve its effectively purposes. The data indicated that Deputy principals are not really involved in establishing committees that can attend to literacy practices. Research (c.f. 4.3.4.4; 4.3.4.3) shows that they need to establish literacy committees to promote the literacy program. The purpose of the literacy committee is to meet on a monthly basis and to discuss literacy challenges with the school management team and an independent literacy coach, who is also an educator at school (c.f. 2.4.4; 2.4). These discussions should chart learners' reading levels to identify learners who were unable to meet grade level reading expectations. Learners with low levels become a focal point and discussions regarding the implementation of literacy strategies and programs to support struggling learners (c.f. 2.6 1). Literature suggests that the Instructional leadership role of Deputy principals entail a wide variety of functions such as diagnostic assessment, whole school.

Instructional leadership, the recruitment of specialized language educators and steer a comprehensive literacy programme (c.f. 4.3.4.4; 4.3.4.3). However, the findings of this study indicated that this is not really done by them.

5.3.4 Findings and interpretation based on the fourth secondary research question

Which strategies could be implemented to address the literacy challenges in secondary schools? These findings are aligned with category 4.3.4 and 4.3.5.

5.3.4.1 Empowering language educators through professional development activities presented by SMT members

A significant finding this study revealed was that Departmental Heads from two secondary schools indicated that they believed in presenting literacy workshops or attending literacy workshops presented by other individuals to empower language educators (c.f. 4.3.4.2). Only one school's Departmental Heads indicated that they do not empower language educators through professional development activities, because the school is underperforming. Quint et al. (2007) and Plaatjies (2020) remark that enhanced involvement of principals as literacy leaders of schools in developmental sessions for educators, focusing on teaching practices, is in line with better execution in the literacy classroom and this will improve reading and writing abilities of learners (c.f. 4.3.4.2). In a similar way, Sheppard and Blasè (in Plaatjies, 2020:7) postulate that principals as instructional leaders must inspire presence at work-related discussions, meetings and assemblies to empower language educators and to build teamwork amongst SMT members and the language educators (c.f. 4.3.4.1).

A noteworthy finding that this study also revealed was that Deputy principals emphasized the importance of sharing information and implementing the Continuous Professional Development Program (CPTD) to empower language educators through professional development activities (c.f. 4.3.4.2; 4.3.4.4; 4.3.4.5). Establishing better-quality levels of educator cooperation is interrelated to better learner performance in both reading and writing (c.f. 2.5.2; 2.4.1), although professional development in-service training can be linked towards productive changes in approaches to literacy and language. Using a narrower explanation on activities presented by SMT members,

Pinello (2015:49) declares that principals as literacy leaders must establish a literacy coach, build capacity for literacy and provide time for professional development for language educators. The data revealed that two of the participating schools considered educators' professional development as an important approach to improve quality literacy education (c.f. 4.3.4.1). Coaching whereby educators support one another, peer coaching, peer feedback, partnerships on a shared aim or objective, lesson viewing/study, community of practice, peer assessment to learn from one another, formative or summative, are all examples of empowering language educators through professional development activities (c.f. 2.6.5; 4.3.2.3; 4.3.4.3; 4.3.4.5).

5.3.4.2 The role of the SMT in professional development activities

The data indicated that language educators want more active involvement in literacy instruction from their Departmental Heads and they specifically placed emphasis on support with classroom observations and inductions. This is a sign that they doubt their own practices. These findings are consistent with research (c.f. 4.3.4.3) that show that Departmental Heads can ensure that by participating in professional development activities such as observations and inductions, educators will learn to reflect on their own literacy instruction practices (c.f. 2.6.2; 2.7). This will allow for critical reflection to take place and assist educators in making their literacy instruction beliefs explicit and ultimately viewing diverse activities (c.f. 4.3.4.3; 2.6.2; 2.7). Nevertheless, the findings also showed that there seems to be no clear guidelines on how the SMT can go about in creating professional development activities (c.f. 2.4.3; 4.3.4.3; 4.3.4.1). Deni and Malakolunthu (2013) report that educators gain an understanding of themselves as an educator and their role in the literacy classroom when they observe their professional obligations from others' viewpoints. As a result, educators became more cognizant of the role they play in learners' development and the development of their colleagues. The findings showed some form of collaboration between departmental heads and deputy principals (c.f. 4.3.3.2). Researchers welcome such collaboration, especially as it seems to be applicable for the role of the SMT in professional development activities (c.f. 4.3.3.2). Furthermore, literature indicates various forms of collaborative activities such as induction, collaborative activities, reviewing one another's work and team teaching programs (c.f. 4.3.4.5).

5.3.4.3 Creating a conducive literacy environment

The study revealed that only one of the secondary schools' principals made a library available to support literacy instruction. The South African Curriculum and Policy Statement for languages (DBE, 2012) maintains that literature in the reading genres includes poetry, drama and short stories and that learners should be able to comprehend a text and its features. Therefore enough literature is very important. The findings proved that the SMTs of these secondary schools struggle to establish a positive literacy environment between school staff and learners. The reason for this situation appears to be that SMT members need time and additional support to acquire the necessary opportunities that are pivotal to success in literacy instruction (c.f. 4.3.5.2; 4.3.5.4). The findings of the study also showed that learners and educators are relaxed and it seems as if the literacy environment does not matter at all (c.f. 4.3.5; 4.3.5.1). This points fingers to the fact that the learners and the staff for that matter have begun to accept the status quo as is. The literature espouses the notion that a quality literacy environment provides opportunities and resources to promote literacy in the classroom that is linked to reading and writing. Consequently, it is the perception of the researcher that a literacy environment must provide opportunities for learners to learn and to practise their language skills simultaneously in an encouraging setting (c.f. 2.6.6; 4.3.2.1; 4.3.5.3).

In terms of the stance of SMT members towards the literacy environment, the findings indicated that they did not really know what the literacy environment entails, and what is requested. However, sound literacy environments can be created when professional learning and system learning are promoted within the school environment. This includes literacy-rich pedagogy that must be explored by SMT members to implement reading and writing instructional practices by utilizing print, non-print and digital platforms to support learners in secondary schools' literacy environment (c.f. 4.3.5.2). The findings indicated that although there is a lack of resources, visuals such as data projectors, videos and even audio visual classes are present. This is in line with literature that emphasizes the importance of reading through a print-rich environment to address literacy challenges, obtaining posters, newspapers, brochures to promote the literacy environment. Moreover, Bracefield and Woodgate (2020:15) add that learners must have access to a variety of literacy resources in the literacy environment to engage in meaningful literacy practices.

It was clear from the findings that the SMTs of all the participating schools struggled to design and implement intervention programmes for struggling learners. This is alluded to a lack of knowledge. Consequently learners – especially from poor contexts – are continued to be disadvantaged. Nevertheless, it is vital to screen the progress of learners through intervention programs for extra support in literacy by utilizing consistent literacy-based measures of achievement in reading and writing to establish whether literacy classroom discourse supports learners effectively to become skilled readers and writers in the senior phase to ease the pressure of presenting numerous extra classes in Grade 12 (c.f. 4.3.5.4; 2.6.2; 4.3.4.2). Another strategy worth looking at is that in order to enhance literacy proactively among all educators at secondary schools must attempt to employ educators who are knowledgeable with respect to the linguistic foundation of reading and writing instruction and continuously supporting them (c.f. 4.3.4). The findings also showed that the Deputy principals do not have any additional support program for educators for extra support in literacy (c.f. 4.3.5.4).

5.3.4.4 Promoting leadership capabilities

One of the most striking findings were that one of the schools (Secondary School three), make provision for extra support in literacy by ensuring that educators attend CPTD online courses on literacy. Researchers indicate that these intervention programs such as online literacy programs as support will improve literacy, literacy leadership will be viewed as an active program in the school, eliciting vital information to improve literacy in the school and it will acknowledge literacy leadership as a reciprocal process. This indicates that SMT members must be creative and constantly engage in collaboration with educators to support them in their daily literacy practices (c.f. 2.3.7; 4.3.5.4; 4.3.4.2). Literature indicates that instructional leaders have a persistent focus on learning through frequent meetings with educators, observations and professional dialogue between educators as support in literacy. The researcher firmly believes that intervention programs for extra support in literacy presented by principals can provide support to content, lesson planning and writing. Intervention programs may also include a strategy of teaching to the test, focusing on basic literacy skills and areas that are methodically tested and a dependence on commercial programs to deliver the content within original logic of enumeration (Hardy, 2015).

Finally, collaborative intervention programs between the SMT, educators and learners in the senior phase will contribute to the professional identity of school leaders and educators (c.f. 4.3.4.5).

5.3.4.5 Parental involvement in literacy

An important finding this study revealed, according to the Departmental Heads of languages, was that it is an impossible mission to get parents involved in the literacy program. This seems problematic for literacy instructional practices. Parental involvement in learners' education is a key success at school (c.f. 4.3.5.5). Strategies to get parents involved include contact meetings with educators, assisting with homework and participating in quarterly school meetings (c.f. 4.3.5.5). Finally, the researcher asserts that parental involvement in literacy programs involves educators, parents/guardians and secondary schools working collaboratively where there is a mutual understanding and mutual respect for each party's literacy vision, aims and objectives for the benefit of learners in the school.

5.3.4.6 Collective efficacy among staff to enhance literacy instruction

The findings of this study showed that collective efficacy among staff through control, monitoring and incorporating development programs was enhanced at Secondary Schools One and Three and that the SMTs seek to learn from one another to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of learners in literacy. The findings also proved that School-Based Support Teams (SBST) must support educators in teaching socio-economically and ethnically diverse learners in literacy and to enhance literacy instruction (c.f. 4.3.5.4). For this type of collective efficacy to realize, the SBSTs should work together to promote inclusive pedagogy at all schools and that they are not limited to supporting learners who are perceived to have learning disabilities but they can address strategies to enhance literacy instruction, individual differences, intellectual abilities and the social abilities of learners to enhance literacy instruction (c.f. 4.3.5.4; 4.3.5.6).

5.4 CONCLUSIONS BASED ON THE FINDINGS

The point of departure in this study was to explore literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools, with a focus on the senior phase. It is apparent that there are literacy leadership challenges in the senior phase in managing and leading the curriculum at secondary schools. The views and perspectives of SMT members and their eagerness to address these literacy leadership challenges will determine the success of eradicating these challenges and to promote literacy instruction at secondary schools. The findings suggest some SMT members do not have sound knowledge of the literacy curriculum and as a result cannot address literacy leadership challenges in the senior phase. Those who lack knowledge and skills will be unsuccessful in providing strong instructional leadership, which ultimately hampers educators in promoting literacy in their classrooms for the senior phase. Thus, adequate knowledge of the literacy curriculum may equip SMT members to support educators in the senior phase. SMT members should take up their role as leaders of the school and literacy curriculum and seek to practise effective curriculum practices in order to add value to the literacy curriculum. Principals, Deputy principals and Departmental Heads must take responsibility for the literacy curriculum, supporting and enhancing professional development, supervision of the literacy instructional program, establishing a positive literacy environment and monitoring educators. The instructional leader (principal) must establish a conducive literacy environment in order for all stakeholders to address literacy challenges in the senior phase. The study also revealed that parents do not fulfil their role when learners has literacy difficulties and do not cooperate with educators in addressing literacy challenges, which makes it difficult for SMT members to address literacy leadership challenges. On the other hand, in consonance with the findings of Anicama, Zhou and Ly (2018), parent-educator partnerships are imperative to learners' academic outcomes and overall wellbeing. The resultant effect is if there is collaboration between parents, educators and SMT members, literacy leadership challenges will be addressed as well as literacy challenges in the senior phase. Literacy leaders must not wait for the Department of Basic Education and District to present workshops, but must be innovative and lead by example in addressing literacy leadership challenges. The researcher is confident that although educators blame the DBE or their immediate SMT members for a lack of support, there is still hope for literacy challenges.

The study also revealed that the secondary schools lack a print-rich literacy environment, resources, support and its leaders lack knowledge on literacy leadership in secondary schools. Finally, the purpose of this study and the primary research questions were answered effectively.

5.5 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of this study, exploring literacy leadership challenges at secondary schools point out that there are pivotal changes to be implemented. (Academic) Deputy principals need to lead the continuous improvement in the literacy curriculum to guide and support Departmental Heads effectively in literacy instruction. This will enable Departmental Heads to provide better guidance to educators in the senior phase. Secondly, challenges with literacy education such as the inability to read and write, lack of frame of reference and challenges with the assessment of reading and writing has an impact on literacy instruction. It poses a great challenge to SMT members who need to lead the continuous improvement in the literacy curriculum and supervise the literacy curriculum. The DBE needs to give clear guidelines on this matter to promote literacy instruction in the senior phase. It is clear that educators and SMT members are unable to empower themselves professionally and SMT members are not eager to develop professional development activities for educators. Fourthly, the role of the principal in literacy leadership is very important. They need to fulfil their role as instructional leaders, give guidance and support to staff and learners, and supervise the literacy instructional program. The findings clearly state that SMT members and educators do not promote a print-rich literacy environment and intervention programs only focus on Grade 12 learners. This suggests that principals need to enhance their instructional management and leadership skills to lead the literacy environment. Furthermore, an implication of this finding signals that principals as literacy leaders must undergo further training and development in order to comprehend literacy leadership challenges and practices.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is consequently recommended that:

5.6.1 Recommendations for policy and practice

5.6.1.1 For policy

Languages should be prioritized within the policy frameworks of the senior phase. The PAM document and Standard for Principalship need to be amended as to what the role of the Principal, Deputy Principal and Departmental Head, respectively are when it comes to literacy leadership.

Departmental Heads' leadership role needs to be highlighted in the policy documents, because they need to give guidance to language educators who are confronted with literacy challenges in their respective classrooms.

Principals as literacy leaders must undergo continuous training on the subject of literacy leadership and it must be specifically addressed in the PAM document and Standard for Principalship. More emphasis must be placed on literacy and leadership approaches such as instructional leadership, distributed leadership and principal literacy leadership in the senior phase.

The role of subject advisors, curriculum advisors, and circuit managers with regard to the senior phase and literacy needs to be explored to provide better support to SMTs and educators.

5.6.1.2 For practice

The SMT as a whole must be informed on their role as Principal, Deputy principal and Departmental Head with regard to literacy in languages in the senior phase.

The SMT must receive induction and training on how to exercise instructional leadership and distributed leadership in languages in order to address literacy challenges in secondary schools.

Subject advisors, circuit managers, curriculum coordinators and school leadership and management faculties of education must procure more professional development sessions in literacy leadership to target this phenomena in education.

The findings emphasized the fact that literacy leadership challenges cannot be borne by educators in the senior phase alone.

Changes in literacy leadership must be put into practice to support, monitor, supervise, guide and develop educators in ways that will assist them to succeed in implementing change in literacy leadership practices to improve literacy learning in the senior phase.

Principals must first and foremost receive meaningful professional development training in leadership practices in order for him/her to develop his/her SMT professionally in distributing and delegating roles whilst they still lead the literacy program.

Further attention needs to be paid to the fact that Departmental Heads rely on their academic Deputy principals and that they must be guided by the Principal to improve literacy in the senior support. Support to both Principals and Deputy principals are vital in this regard, which signals the role of the Circuit Managers' active involvement in schools.

Finally, the study highlights how pivotal it is to secondary schools to be able to provide opportunities for SMTs and educators to participate in cooperative initiatives to help shape their understanding of leading the continuous literacy curriculum, supervision of the literacy instructional program, empowering the staff through professional development activities and establishing a positive literacy environment.

5.6.1.3 Recommendations for further research

There is an array of recommendations for future research that scholars who are interested in the topic of literacy leadership can embark on. Such recommendations may include the following.

It is advisable to conduct a study to investigate the role of parents to help address literacy challenges. The views regarding their involvement in learners' literacy development would add value to this research topic.

A comprehensive study on the role of the principal to plan, organize, lead and control the literacy program of secondary schools in a South African context must be explored.

A detailed study in education management and leadership must be investigated on what strategies can be utilized to promote literacy instruction from Grades 8 to 12. This will include the senior phase and the further education and training phase.

The role of the subject advisors, curriculum managers and circuit managers pertaining to literacy leadership support must also be explored.

The role of universities and the Department of Basic Education must be investigated in providing professional development activities to address literacy leadership challenges in South African schools.

5.7 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.7.1 Strengths

It is imperative to indicate that this study comprised of participants which include three Principals, three Deputy principals, six departmental heads and six senior phase educators of one Quintile 5 secondary school, one Quintile 4 secondary school and one Quintile 3 secondary school in the Motheo District in the Free State Province. This is a total of 18 participants, which is a large participant span for a Master's thesis. The research study also embraced observations, semi-structured individual interviews, notes and document analysis as methods to collect data. This study was cost efficient.

5.7.2 Limitations

As with any study, this study has its limitations. The number of the participants is quite high, but it still only represents the Motheo District and cannot be interpreted for all senior phase secondary schools. It was not possible to address all the facets of instructional leadership and distributed leadership, given the limited scope of the study. The findings of this study must not be generalized. The COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to the data collection being time-consuming, as schools opened and closed frequently. The transcription of interviews also took long, as there were 24 participants.

5.8 METHODS

The scholar opted for a qualitative research approach. Semi-structured individual interviews were

conducted with the participants due to Level 4 and 5 COVID-19 restrictions. All the semi-structured individual interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and placed on a memory stick that will be submitted to the University of the Free State.

5.9 ACCESS AND TIMING: COVID-19

Watermeyer, Courtois and Lauder (2020:1) remark that is important to observe all necessary protocols and guidelines during the data collection process, especially whilst we are still in a pandemic. All the participants adhered to COVID-19 regulations and protocols by maintaining a social distance of 1.5 to 2 m between the researcher and participants, wearing masks at all times and sanitizing every 15 minutes. The researcher can state that these protocols were followed promptly. I am grateful that the participants agreed to take part in this study during such challenging circumstances.

5.10 SELF-REFLECTION

5.10.1 Personal growth

This study assisted me as an upcoming researcher to plan and organize in advance, especially when collecting articles. This study also contributed towards me being able to compare, analyse and summarize important information from various sources. I also gained the necessary skills and knowledge on how to search for various articles on different sites/platforms. I was able to address individual strengths, weaknesses, and threats, and transform it into opportunities to develop personally. This study helped me to persevere and to have a passion for excellence. It taught me that one can make a success of one's studies regardless of the circumstances. For example, throughout the pandemic I still managed to complete my studies. The study obliged me to exercise effective time management as I am an educator and strive to become an academic scholar. It taught me to balance work and studies and to set targets when I wanted to complete a specific chapter. Throughout this research study I struggled to make concessions and to formulate a counter argument and I am still working on it. I do believe that no-one is perfect and that is why it was pivotal to me to realize that there is always room for improvement. The study taught me to be more

focused and to prioritize what is important. I also learned to set out long-term and short-term goals. I must state that I had a phenomenal supervisor who is indeed a master on this topic and he supported me tremendously and motivated me always to strive higher and strive for success.

5.10.2 Scholarly growth

This research really impacted my scholarly growth and it gave me an understanding of the literacy leadership challenges in the senior phase. I have obtained tremendous insight in themes such as leading the continuous improvement in the literacy curriculum, supervision of the literacy instructional program, empowering educators through professional development activities and establishing a positive literacy learning environment in the senior phase. This study also impacted on my scholarly growth by gaining the knowledge and skills to interpret policy documents such as the PAM document, Standard for Principalship and the CAPS document.

5.11 FINAL SUMMARY

This paper set out to explore literacy leadership challenges at secondary schools in the Motheo District (Free State Province). The focus was on literacy, leadership and challenges and how to overcome these challenges in the senior phase. This study focused on the Principal, Deputy principal, Departmental Heads and educators working in the senior phase and their views and knowledge on literacy instruction. The findings suggest that all these role-players (Principal as literacy leader, Deputy principal and Departmental Heads) are unsure of their role as literacy leaders). Common ground, purpose and consensus must be reached with the help of amended policy documents, because if literacy leadership challenges are not quickly addressed, this will lead to principals as literacy leaders to be unable to lead, support and guide the rest of the school in literacy instruction with the result impacting learners negatively and not reaching their full potential. Eventually this will impact learner performance.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FROM THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Enquiries: MZ Thango
Ref: Notification of research: HL May
Tel. 051 404 9257/ 9207/ 062 537 2654
Email: MZ.Thango@fseducation.gov.za



District Director
Motho District

Dear Mr. Moloi

NOTIFICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH PROJECT IN YOUR DISTRICT BY HL MAY

The above mentioned candidate was granted permission to conduct research in your district as follows:

Topic: Exploring the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools.

1. List of schools involved: Brebner, Petunia and Dr.Blok Secondary Schools.

Target Population: Three Principals, three Deputy Principals, six HODs and six language' educators at the selected Secondary Schools.

2. Period: From the date of signature of this letter until 30 September 2020. Please note the department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term (quarter) of the academic year nor during normal school hours. The researcher is expected to request permission from the school principals to conduct research at schools

3. Research benefits: This study aims to contribute to the current body of knowledge in the literacy leadership field. It will therefore be of great value for principals, and other members of the SMT in helping them to create environments in the school that stimulates literacy instruction and learning and to address literacy leadership challenges in the senior phase. As a result, this in turn will contribute to the professional development of language educators in literacy instruction and better student outcomes. The approach will enable an in-depth understanding of literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools.

4. Logistical procedures were met, in particular ethical considerations for conducting research in the Free State Department of Education.

5. Strategic Planning, Policy and Research Directorate will make the necessary arrangements for the researchers to present the findings and recommendations to the relevant officials in the district.

Yours sincerely


DR JEM SEKOLANYANE
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

DATE: 04/08/2020

RESEARCH NOTIFICATION. HL MAY 30 JULY 2020. MOTHEO DISTRICT
Strategic Planning, Research & Policy Directorate Private Bag X20565, Bloemfontein, 9300 - Old CNA Building, Room 318, 3rd Floor, Charlotte Mxheke Street, Bloemfontein
Tel: (051) 404 9283 / 9257 Fax: (086) 6678 678

www.fsdoe.fs.gov.za

Enquiries: MZ Thango
Ref: Research Permission: HL May
Tel. 051 404 9257 / 9207 / 082 537 2654
Email: MZ.Thango@fseducation.gov.za



39 Violet Street
Heidedal
Bloemfontein
9301

Dear Mr. HL May

APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

This letter serves as an acknowledgement of receipt of your request to conduct research in the Free State Department of Education.

Topic: Exploring the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools.

- 1. List of schools involved:** Brebner, Petunia and Dr.Blok Secondary Schools.

Target Population: Three Principals, three deputy Principals, six HODs and six language educators at the selected Secondary Schools.

- 2. Period of research:** From date of signature of this letter until 30 September 2020. Please note that the department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term (quarter) of the academic year. Should you fall behind your schedule by three months to complete your research project in the approved period, you will need to apply for an extension. The researcher is expected to request permission from the school principals to conduct research at schools.
- 3. The approval is subject to the following conditions:**
 - 4.1** The collection of data should not interfere with the normal tuition time or teaching process.
 - 4.2** A bound copy of the research document or a CD, should be submitted to the Free State Department of Education, Room 319, 3rd Floor, Old CNA Building, Charlotte Maxeke Street, Bloemfontein.
 - 4.3** You will be expected, on completion of your research study to make a presentation to the relevant stakeholders in the Department.
 - 4.4** The ethics documents must be adhered to in the discourse of your study in our department.
- 4.** Please note that costs relating to all the conditions mentioned above are your own responsibility.

Yours sincerely


DR JEM SEKOLANYANE
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

DATE: 04/08/2020

RESEARCH APPLICATION BY HL MAY, PERMISSION LETTER 30 JULY 2020. MOTHEO DISTRICT

Strategic Planning, Research & Policy Directorate Private Bag X20565, Bloemfontein, 9300 - Old CNA Building, Room 318, 3rd Floor, Charlotte Maxeke Street, Bloemfontein

Tel: (051) 404 9283 / 9257 Fax: (086) 6678 678

APPENDIX B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

09-Nov-2020

Dear Mr Houston May

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

Exploring the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2020/1041/2110

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Adri Du Plessis

Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

205 Nelson Mandela
Drive
Park West
Bloemfontein 9301
South Africa

P.O. Box 339
Bloemfontein 9300
Tel: +27 (0)51 401
9337
duplessisA@ufs.ac.za
www.ufs.ac.za



Adri Du Plessis

UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA



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I am doing research at your secondary school and would like to request your permission to obtain some information from you through the completion of a questionnaire.

1 February 2021-1 March 2021

Exploring the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools.

Houston May	2010008593	0785608625
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Faculty of Education
School of Education studies

Dr BO Plaatjies
051 401 2955

The aim of the study is to explore the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools.

Mr HL May, Language educator in the senior phase, at Bloemfontein High School. I want to conduct the research as part of my responsibilities as a language educator in the senior phase and to gain deeper understanding of the literacy leadership challenges.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

This study has not received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS. A copy of the approval letter once it has been finalized will be obtained from the researcher.

Approval number: *UFS-HSD2020/1041/2110*

WHY ARE YOUR INSTITUTION/ORGANISATION/COMPANY INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

The participants/language educators selected are the best suited to achieve the aim and objectives of the study. It is vital to note that in qualitative research the sample size must be large enough in order to produce rich and meaningful data. The contact details were obtained from a list of schools in all different quintiles schools that are available in the Motheo district. Participants were purposefully selected and the number of participants will be two educators at your school from the senior phase teaching two different languages. Two Departmental Heads(HODs) of each language will also be asked to partake in the study. Interviews will also be conducted with each of the principals at the participating schools. Interviews will also be conducted with a deputy principal of each secondary school.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves semi-structured interviews with two language educators from grade 8 to 9 at each school. Personal meetings will be held with the educators to explain their involvement in the study. It will take approximately 30 minutes for participants to complete the interview.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This study aims to contribute to the current body of knowledge in the literacy leadership field. It will therefore be of great value for principals, and other members of the SMT in helping them to create environments in the school that stimulates literacy instruction and learning and to address literacy leadership challenges in the senior phase. As a result, this in turn will contribute to the professional development of language educators in literacy instruction and better student outcomes. The approach will enable an in-depth understanding of literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools.

WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL RISKS TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no risks foreseen in participating in this study.

WILL THE INFORMATION BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

The names of the participants/educators will be kept confidential and this implies that their names will not be recorded anywhere. Participants'/educators' names and surnames will not be stipulated anywhere and their data will be coded for inventory purposes. Privacy will be protected and participants will be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. It is imperative to mention that only the transcriber will have access to the data. It is apparent that research ethics denote the moral beliefs guiding research. Confidentiality will be upheld by signing a confidentiality agreement. The thesis will be reviewed by several scholars in order to ensure that the research has been done appropriately. The thesis will be submitted, but individual participants will not be identifiable in the study.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

The scholar will safeguard all the hard copies of the answers provided for a period of five years in a locked cabinet at home and at school. It is important to indicate that for future research or academic purposes, electronic information will be stored on a password computer. Further use of the data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. If the data is not needed anymore, it will be papershreddered.

WILL THERE BE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

It is vital to indicate that there will be no payment or reward offered to the participants. This being said, it can be predicted that the potential level of inconvenience will be extremely low.

HOW WILL THE INSTITUTION / ORGANISATION / COMPANY BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS / RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

If the participants/educators would like to be informed of the final research findings, or should they require any further information or assistance they may contact Mr. HL May on 0785608625 or at his e-mail, 2010008593@ufs4life.ac.za

Yours sincerely

Mr. HL May

Houston May

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HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

This study has not received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS. A copy of the approval letter will be obtained from the researcher when it has been ethically approved.

Approval number: *UFS-HSD2020/1041/2110*

WHY ARE YOUR INSTITUTION/ORGANISATION/COMPANY INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

As the principal of the school you are the best suited to achieve the aim of the study. It is vital to note that in qualitative research the sample size must be large enough in order to produce rich and meaningful data. The contact details were obtained from a list of schools in all different quintiles schools that are available in the Motheo district. Participants were purposefully selected and the number of participants will be two educators at your school from the senior phase teaching two different languages. Two Departmental Heads (HODs) of each language will also be asked to partake in the study. Interviews will also be conducted with each of the principals at the participating schools. Interviews will also be conducted with a deputy principal of each secondary school. Participants were purposefully selected and the number of participants will range from 4-6.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves semi-structured interviews with two language educators from grade 8 to 9 at each school. Personal meeting will be held with the educators to explain their involvement in the study. It will take approximately 30 minutes for participants to complete the interview. The study involves individual interviews with educators and school management teams as well as the principal who acts as the head of the school management team.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This study aims to contribute to the current body of knowledge in the literacy leadership field. It will therefore be of great value for principals, and other members of the SMT in helping them to create environments in the school that stimulates literacy instruction and learning and to address literacy leadership challenges in the senior phase. As a result, this in turn will contribute to the professional development of language educators in literacy instruction and better student outcomes. The approach will enable an in-depth understanding of literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools. The study will provide explicit guidelines for language educators in the senior phase, SMT's and the principal in addressing literacy leadership challenges

WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL RISKS TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are no risk foreseen for participants in the study.

WILL THE INFORMATION BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

The names of the participants/educators/SMT's/principal will not be recorded anywhere in the study. The names of the participants will be kept confidential and this implies that their names will not be recorded anywhere. Code numbers or pseudonyms will be utilized to refer to the participants in the study. I will be the only one who has access to the data as well as my study leader. Privacy will be protected and participants may refuse to take part or may withdraw at any stage of the process. Participants'/educators'/smt's, principals' names and surnames will not be stipulated anywhere and their data will be coded for inventory purposes. Privacy will be protected and participants will be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. It is imperative to mention that only the transcriber will have access to the data. It is apparent that research ethics denote the moral beliefs guiding research. Confidentiality will be upheld by signing a confidentiality agreement. The thesis will be reviewed by several scholars in order to ensure that the research has been done appropriately. The thesis will be submitted, but individual participants will not be identifiable in the study.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

The scholar will safeguard all the hard copies of the answers provided for a period of five years in a locked cabinet at home, school and university. It is important to indicate that for future research or academic purposes, electronic information will be stored on a password computer. Further use of the data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. If the data is not needed anymore, it will be papershreddered.

WILL THERE BE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

It is vital to indicate that there will be no payment or reward offered to the participants. This being said, it can be predicted that the potential level of inconvenience will be extremely low.

HOW WILL THE INSTITUTION / ORGANISATION / COMPANY BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS / RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact me Mr HL May on 0785608625 or at e-mail, 2010008593@ufs4life.ac.za. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact the researcher at the details as mentioned or my study leader Dr. BO Plaatjies on 0514012955.

Yours sincerely

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

Mr HL May, Language educator in the senior phase, at Bloemfontein High School. I want to conduct the research as part of my responsibilities as a language educator in the senior phase and to gain deeper understanding of the literacy leadership challenges.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

This study has not yet received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS. A copy of the approval letter will be obtained from the researcher once ethical clearance certificate has been issued.

Approval number: *UFS-HSD2020/1041/2110*

WHY ARE YOUR INSTITUTION/ORGANISATION/COMPANY INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

The study aims to explore the literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools. The study will be carried out in the Motheo district secondary schools and will involve language educators, school management teams and principals. The participants/language educators selected are the best suited to achieve the aim and objectives of the study. It is vital to note that in qualitative research the sample size must be large enough in order to produce rich and meaningful data. The contact details were obtained from a list of schools in all different quintiles schools that are available in the Motheo district. Participants were purposefully selected and the number of participants will be two educators at your school from the senior phase teaching two different languages. Two Departmental Heads (HODs) of each language will also be asked to partake in the study. Interviews will also be conducted with each of the principals at the participating schools. Interviews will also be conducted with a deputy principal of each secondary school.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves semi-structured interviews with two language educators from grade 8 to 9 at each school. Personal meeting will be held with the educators to explain their involvement in the study. It will take approximately 30 minutes for participants to complete the interview. It is imperative to note that school management teams' input are indeed a vital source of information. That is why the study will involve HODs and deputy principals which are part of the school management team. Two Language HODs and the deputy principal will be interviewed. It is vital to pinpoint that the study will be carried out in two different phases where one week will be spent in each secondary school interviewing the leaders (school

management teams and principals) and this will be repeated again after three weeks for the second phase. Language educators in the senior phase will be involved in the interviews and some follow up sessions will take place if it is necessary. The desire to carry out this study was encouraged by the dearth of research on literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools (the senior phase). It is anticipated that the study may assist to shed light on the instructional leadership and distributed leadership practices that may assist in cultivating the teaching and learning of languages in the senior phase.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This study aims to contribute to the current body of knowledge in the literacy leadership field. It will therefore be of great value for principals, and other members of the SMT in helping them to create environments in the school that stimulates literacy instruction and learning and to address literacy leadership challenges in the senior phase. As a result, this in turn will contribute to the professional development of language educators in literacy instruction and better student outcomes. The approach will enable an in-depth understanding of literacy leadership challenges in secondary schools. The study seeks to observe collaboration interactions between principals, school management teams and language educators in the senior phase in addressing literacy leadership challenges. It is expected that this study may assist in addressing literacy leadership challenges and this may lead to improved teaching and learning of languages in the senior phase.

WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL RISKS TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The researcher can assure you that no disruptions will occur during normal school activities.

WILL THE INFORMATION BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

The names of the participants/educators will be kept confidential and this implies that their names will not be recorded anywhere. Participants'/educators' names and surnames will not be stipulated anywhere and their data will be coded for inventory purposes. Privacy will be protected and participants will be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. It is imperative to mention that only the transcriber will have access to the data. It is apparent that research ethics denote the moral beliefs guiding research. Confidentiality will be upheld by signing a confidentiality agreement. The thesis will be reviewed by several scholars in order to ensure that the research has been done appropriately. The thesis will be submitted, but individual participants will not be identifiable in the study. I want to mention that informed consent will be requested from each of the

school management team members. The researcher hereby apply for consent from the school management team.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

The scholar will safeguard all the hard copies of the answers provided for a period of five years in a locked cabinet at home and at school. It is important to indicate that for future research or academic purposes, electronic information will be stored on a password computer. Further use of the data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. If the data is not needed anymore, it will be papershreddered.

WILL THERE BE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

It is vital to indicate that there will be no payment or reward offered to the participants. This being said, it can be predicted that the potential level of inconvenience will be extremely low.

HOW WILL THE INSTITUTION / ORGANISATION / COMPANY BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS / RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

If the participants/educators would like to be informed of the final research findings, or should they require any further information or assistance they may contact Mr. HL May on 0785608625 or at his e-mail, 2010008593@ufs4life.ac.za

Yours sincerely

Mr. HL May

**APPENDIX E: SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR
PRINCIPALS, DEPUTY PRINCIPALS, DEPARTMENTAL HEADS AND LITERACY
EDUCATORS**

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO DEPUTY PRINCIPALS/HOD'S AND
SUBJECT HEADS/Educators

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF PARTICIPANTS

Sex			For office use
1.	Male		
2.	Female		
3.	Age		

SECTION B: HIGHEST QUALIFICATION

1.	DE 111 (Diploma in Education)		
2.	FDE (Further Diploma in Education)		
3.	ACE (Advanced Certificate in Education)		
4.	HDE (Higher Diploma in Education)		
5.	BEd		

6.	BEd Hons		
7.	MEd		
8.	DEd/PhD		
9.	Other		

SECTION C: YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE

1	1-5 years		
2	6-10 years		
3	11-15 years		
4	16-20 years		
5	20-30 years		
6	31+		

SECTION D: YEARS EXPERIENCE AS PRINCIPAL

1	1-5 years		
2	6-10 years		
3	11-15 years		
4	16-20 years		

5	20-30 years		
6	31+		

QUESTION 1: LEADING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN THE LITERACY CURRICULUM

1.1 Describe your understanding of the requirements related to teaching and learning of the literacy component (reading and viewing, thinking, reasoning and writing) of the CAPS curriculum?

1.2 Describe your understanding of the requirements related to the assessment of the literacy curriculum?

1.3 Share with us your understanding of the subject-specific methodology of the literacy curriculum.

1.4 What is your knowledge on literacy instructional practices that work for all learners (struggling readers, gifted readers and learners from diverse learning populations)

1.5 How do cater for the needs of these learners?

1.6 What would you regard as your most important role regarding instructional leadership in literacy?

QUESTION 2: SUPERVISION OF THE LITERACY INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMME

2.1 How do you supervise the taught literacy curriculum?

2.2 Do you have a system of mentoring and evaluating the literacy curriculum implementation?

2.3 Describe your internal moderation process relating to literacy (teacher planning files, work done by learners in workbooks, assessment tasks and rubrics).

2.4 How do you use data to diagnose challenges in literacy instruction, performance and decision-making?

2.5 Describe your role as member of the SMT in providing leadership in the Literacy Instructional programme.

QUESTION 3: EMPOWERING STAFF THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHERS

3.1 How do you promote opportunities for teachers to enhance their competencies in literacy instruction through skills development training?

3.2 Do you take the lead in developing exemplars and demonstration programmes of quality literacy learning?

3.3 Are there sufficient opportunities in your school for clustering groups, professional learning groups and study groups among teachers and the teachers from neighbouring schools that promote literacy instruction?

3.4 Share with us any ideas/programs etc. that your school do regarding the professional development of teachers.

3.5 What are the role(s) of other members of the SMT in professional development?

QUESTION 4: ESTABLISHING A POSITIVE LITERACY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

4.1 How would you describe the literacy environment in your school?

4.2 How do you address the academic, social and emotional needs of students in the literacy environment?

4.3 How do you promote a physical environment conducive for literacy instruction?

4.4 How do you promote a learning environment where rules, expectations, routines, procedures and schedules in classes are promoted?

4.5 What programmes/strategies are in place to promote the learning climate in classrooms?

QUESTION 5: ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF THE SOCIAL CONTEXT ON LITERACY INSTRUCTION

5.1 Do you have any additional intervention programmes, such as afternoon or weekend classes, to provide extra support in literacy to struggling/ socio economically and ethnically diverse learners?

5.2 Do you have any additional support programmes for teachers that will enable them to adapt their learning and teaching strategies to address the social and emotional needs of learners with literacy difficulties?

5.3 How do you, enhance the importance of literacy proactively among al educators?

5.4 In which ways do you get parents involved in the improvement of literacy programmes?

5.5 How do you promote collective efficacy among your staff to enhance literacy instruction?

5.6 What programmes do you have in place to support teachers in teaching socioeconomically and ethnically diverse learners in literacy?

APPENDIX F: CHECKLIST

Document	Secondary School 1(SS1)	Secondary School 2 (SS2)	Secondary School 3(SS3)	
Pre- and Post- moderation reports				
Lesson Plans				
Subject improvement plans/Error analysis				

Data collection with the document analysis were guided by the following predetermined questions:

- Pre- and Post-moderation reports

Is there a written monitoring plan for each term? Does Pre-moderation take place before a reading or written school based assignment is given to learners in the senior phase? Does Post-moderation take place after the assessment took place? Does the literacy leader monitor/moderate those tasks with a green pen as required by the Department of Basic Education? Does the moderator who is supposed to act as literacy leader comment on the post evaluation form? Does he/she give valuable inputs on paper? Which marking tool is utilized by the moderator, i.e. standardized rubric? Memorandum?

- Lesson plans

Are the lesson plans completed and up to date? How does the educator indicate on the lesson plan on how they go about in teaching reading instruction and writing instruction? Does the educator seek to address literacy challenges in the lesson plans?

1. Subject improvement plans and error analysis


Is there any subject improvement plans and error analysis in the educator portfolio? Are there any interventions on how to improve reading instruction and writing instruction? Is the educator portfolio up to standard? Intervention strategies by the SMT (Departmental Head, Deputy principal and Principal?

APPENDIX G: DATA COLLECTION: PHYSICAL OBSERVATION OF THE SCHOOL/LITERACY ENVIRONMENT/CONTEXT

The data collection with the Non-participant Observation focused inter alia on the context of the school including but not limited to:

1. Location of the school
2. Environment/neighbourhood
3. Quintile Status (Data collected through the interviews with principals)
4. Infrastructure:
5. General appearance in terms of neatness.
6. External and internal factors playing a role at the school

APPENDIX H: TURN IT IN RECEIPT AND REPORT




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