

**Exploring the role of principal leadership in Grade 12  
learner performance**

by

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## Declaration

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I, Mojabeng Eva Moleko, declare that the topic: “**Exploring the role of principal leadership in grade 12 learner performance**” is my own dissertation.

This research project has not been submitted in part or whole to any other university. All the sources that have been used or cited have been completely and accurately referenced by means of detailed referencing.

Signature: 

Date: 12 January 2021

## **Abstract**

Many of South Africa's former disadvantaged schools are now known as no-fee schools. These schools were prioritised as no-fee schools post-1994 in terms of funding because they have the same context and service the poor communities that surround them. Despite similarities of their funding and contextual challenges, these no-fee schools produce varying overall results in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations, which is what triggered this study. The explanation for this poor performance in Grade 12 is still unverified (DBE, 2016:46).

It appears as if the learner performance in some of the no-fee schools, which are all located in townships, can be ascribed to the leadership practices of the principals. This study therefore intended to explore principals' leadership practices at no-fee secondary schools, where good performance is a necessity for survival in future for the learner. The study also intended to investigate the impact the principal's leadership practices may have on Grade 12 learner performance, specifically in gateway subjects such as mathematics, physical sciences, economics and accounting.

Embedded in constructivism, a qualitative research approach with a multiple-case-study research design was employed for this study guided by instructional leadership theory as its theoretical framework and integrated it with other learning theories. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with principals and focus group interviews with teachers, all purposefully selected, and some document analysis and observation. The research sites were four township no-fee secondary schools from Emfuleni municipality in Gauteng province. The gathered data were then transcribed, coded into themes and analysed. The findings of the study reflected that no-fee schools have inexperienced principals who are unable to deal effectively with contextual challenges, and minimal parental support, and these factors affect learner commitment and finally compromise good learner performance. The study will be useful and add to the existing body of knowledge on the understanding of the complex leadership roles of principals of no-fee schools. It also revealed the best practices which can be employed by poor-performing principals in order to lead and manage no-fee schools effectively and efficiently and to improve Grade 12 learner performance.

**Key words:** contextual challenges; leadership practices; leadership styles; learner performance; management style; parental support; professional development.

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## List of Acronyms

CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
FET	Further Education and Training
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
HoD	Head of Department
IQMS	Improving Quality Management Systems
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NDP	National Development Plan
NEEDU	National Education Evaluation Development Unit
NNSSF	National Norms and Standards for Funding
NSC	National Senior Certificate
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAM	Personnel Administrative Measures
RCL	Representative Councils of Learners
SGB	School Governing Body
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SMT	School Management Team
SSA	Sub-Saharan African
STEM	Science, Mathematics, Engineering and Technology
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

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# CHAPTER 1: THE STUDY'S INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

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## 1.1 Introduction

Erstwhile to 1994, the South African former Department of Education and Training and the Department of Homelands serviced schools for the disadvantaged 'black' African learners (Christie, Butler & Pattering, 2011:9). The authors further pointed out that these former disadvantaged schools, in terms of funding, curriculum and infrastructure facilities, are now categorised as no-fee schools, or quintiles 1 to 3, with no exceptions for the Indian and Coloured ethnic groups (Christie *et al.*, 2011:9). Naicker and Mestry (2011:99) pointed out that prior to 1994, which they regarded as the heroic era, principals of former disadvantaged school were perpetuating activities such as instructing, traditionally commanding and controlling teachers. South African schooling has been experiencing transmutation ever since 1994; however, there is still significant reflections of poor quality of education produced by no-fee schools, particularly in National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations (Christie, 2010:183; Bantwini, 2012:401).

Christie *et al.* (2011:9) further opined that with transmutation in education, the expectation of the (DBE) was being supportive of the needs of the no-fee schools for academic performance to improve and be at least similar to that of former advantaged schools (also referred to as fee-paying schools), which service more affluent white communities, in order to bring about equality in terms of quality of education in schools (Christie *et al.*, 2011:9). The underlying fact is that resources (physical or material) are limited in most no-fee schools, but the need for good performance is very crucial for these schools to change the status of the communities around them (Jacobson, Orr & Young, 2008:1). Despite similarities pertaining to their funding and contextual challenges, the no-fee schools persisted to produce poor results in Grade 12, especially in gateway subjects, which include mathematics, physical sciences, economics and accounting, and the explanation for this is still unverified (Christie *et al.*, 2011:9; DBE, 2016:46). These findings were also true for no-fee schools in Emfuleni Municipality.

Prinsloo (2016:2) therefore claimed that principals were accountable for their staff, administrative and school community matters, the curriculum and infrastructure, for the schools to improve learner performance (Frontier & Rickanbaugh, 2014, cited in Banach, 2015:1). In an educational context, leadership is viewed as the ability to anticipate a better future, especially for learners who have impoverished backgrounds due to apartheid (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015:11). Educational management, on the other hand, involves the process where the principal focuses on supervising and monitoring staff, infrastructure and financial resources and also delegates curriculum management responsibilities to teachers, with the teachers accepting these responsibilities (Ahmad, 2017:8; Naidoo, 2019:1) but the study focused more on the principal's leadership roles. The role of the principal in the enhancement of learner performance was undisputed, as quality of education of a school was the principal's responsibility (Heystek, 2014:889). Jones and Rudd (2008:521) highlighted that principals cannot increase learner attainment alone, but need to include employees, peers or even superiors in all decision-making involving learner-performance improvement strategies. Ylimaki, Jacobson and Drysdale (2008, as cited in Jacobson *et al.*, 2008:1) claimed that school leadership of well-performing no-fee schools focuses on teaching and learning by creating a positive school culture, limitless professional growth, active paternal involvement and external support and material goods. Some principals at no-fee schools experienced contextual challenges, ill-discipline and unacceptable behaviour among learners and educators, and experienced difficulty in dealing with these (DBE, 2013:10). This exploration intended to seal the breach in the existing research by focusing on how principals' leadership and management practices, despite the daunting circumstances at no-fee secondary schools, may contribute to either well or poor learner performance.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

This section briefly discusses the problem statement of the study.

In the pedagogical setting of today, with demands for responsibility that increases on a daily bases, school principals often look for quick solutions that will better grade 12 learners' results and improve learner performance in NSC final examinations, especially in gateway subjects. To conduct this study, the researcher was triggered by how principals struggle to maintain well performance and discipline in no-fee schools

because free education has resulted in a rapid increase in learner enrolment in these schools (Branson *et al.*, 2015:4). Also by the fact that these schools are not adequately resourced and experience shortage of teachers which might have created some disappointment in some learners to continue attending school (DBE, 2011:6; Branson *et al.*, 2015:4).

Notwithstanding the fact that learners in these schools receive free education up to the last year of schooling (which is Grade 12). Presently, nearly 30% of the 25,000 South African schools are performing well across the board and approximately 60% are still poorly performing or rather underperforming (Heystek, 2014:889) in NSC examinations. No-fee schools can be located in both these categories. Underperforming or rather failing schools acquired this label allocated to schools annually per province when their pass rate in the Grade12 NSC final examinations is below 60%, particularly in Gauteng province. It is not clear as to what role is played by principal leadership practices in no-fee school context and the impact it has on learner performance and there is lack of accountability in this regard (Heystek & Terhoven, 2014:2).

In 2007, Donald Grant (former minister of education for the Western Cape province-2009-2014) appointed a ministerial committee to investigate some variables that affect overall school performance (Christie *et al.*, 2011:9). Their results point at learners' socio-economic status (SES), claiming that the poorer the school, the lower the pass rate and vice versa (Christie *et al.*, 2011:9). Irrespective of this factor, some of the no-fee schools perform outstandingly well, regardless of their SES, as compared to their counterparts (Christie *et al.*, 2011:3). It is not clear what day-to-day activities principals perform in well-performing no-fee schools which make a difference to their practices as compared to their colleagues while these schools receive same funds.

For years, there has been a systemic problem in the labour market, where poor schools have difficulty to attract high-quality teachers and principals (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor & Wheeler, 2007:1373); yet, there are no-fee schools with good leadership and management practices that ultimately produce the desired learner performance. Horng and Loeb (2010:66) remarked in relation to the teachers that principals recommend to be employed, that the way the principals allocate duties to these teachers can better

their instruction and have an impact on learners' learning in the classrooms. Furthermore, there is a dearth of literature on the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance in no-fee school in order to highlight such practices (Christie *et al.*, 2011:7; Muijs, Harries, Chapman, Stoll & Russ, 2004, Spillace Halverson & Diamond, 2004, cited in Naicker, Grant & Pillay, 2016:2).

Naicker and Mestry (2011:103) opined that in the educational environment of South Africa, the fear of sabotage made some principals resort to the traditional leadership model, such as the autocratic leadership style, with principals ending up running school finances without their school governing bodies (SGBs) involved. SGB members of most no-fee schools were parents unacquainted with financial matters who come from poor communities and this created more disintegration in relations with stakeholders. In all these instances, the role of principals to motivate, collaborate with and support teachers in improving their instruction remained undisputed. The assumption of the researcher was that principals opted for these styles when they felt threatened and depowered in their positions, though these styles lead to a tense school atmosphere and poor human relations which finally resulted in varying Grade 12 learner performance (Naicker & Mestry, 2011:103).

According to Heystek (2014:890), in 2010, the national Department of Basic Education (DBE) tried to develop accountability measures for principals and their deputies of the poor learner performance in their schools. As outlined in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 and the National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996, DBE, under the minister of basic education, has a national mandatory role to publicize education policies that govern the schooling system (Juan, Reddy & Arends, 2019:1). The rationale for these measures was to address poor learner performance from a national level and motivated principals to elicit the quality results as expected for a person in such a post; however, the measures were rejected (Heystek, 2014:890). The rejection was based on negative perceptions of principals and their deputies being backed by their unions, perceiving it as being a demoralising tool and a weapon to discharge principals and deputies from their positions. It was therefore evident that there were no strict measures that held principals' leadership accountable for poor Grade 12 learner performance in no-fee schools were well performance is a necessity to break loose the shackles of poverty in communities around those schools.

In 1996, the DBE designed a document called *South African standards for principalship to enhance practices and capabilities of school leaders (The Standard)* (DBE, 2015:13). *The Standard* had up to date made no impact on some poor-performing no-fee schools. The document clearly stipulated eight key interdependent areas of principalship which enhanced professionalism and effectiveness of principals (DBE, 2015:13). This was deliberated in detail in Chapter 3 (*cf.* 3.3.1) of this study, which is the literature review chapter of this study. Ignorance of this document by principals can negatively affect effective professional principal leadership and management in schools, with no fruit being borne in relation to improvement in Grade 12 learner performance. The study also explored the knowledge and application of this document by principals of no-fee secondary schools, where the ignorance thereof is assumed to be the source of poor Grade 12 learner performance among these schools. The DBE has made these guidelines available on all its websites but needed principals who were open-minded and lifelong learners to acquire such behaviours as stipulated in this document.

### **1.3 Rationale**

This section briefly discusses the rationale of the study which reflects the researcher's intentions to conduct this research.

The no-fee schools service poor communities mostly situated in township and rural areas and receive more financial support from the DBE compared to the more affluent schools. The poorest and major schools receive preferences in funding (South Africa, 1996:B-52). The researcher has been in the teaching fraternity for 23 years and the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance at no-fee secondary township schools has been an under-investigated concept. According to Printy (2008:1), this argument attributed to the competencies and attitudes of the principals towards their roles, while accountability policies suggested that to better their situations, the principals and teachers needed to work collaboratively and improve the achievement of learners in Grade 12 (Banach, 2015:20). Principals need to have an understanding of modern matters and possible future trends which directly or indirectly have an effect on schooling (DBE, 2015:3). This will keep principals as frontrunners in

the entire world, as outlined in *The Standard* (DBE, 2015:3). An effective principal had to portray characteristics such as contemporary knowledge, capability and ability to inspire others (Bryman, 2007, Scott *et al.*, 2008, Parrish, 2013, cited in Hofmeyer, Sheingold, Klopper & Warland, 2015:182). Mestry (2006:38) illuminated that principals who do not keep up with the times were unable to reflect back to their leadership styles and behaviours with reference to the latest guidelines to check their relevance to the present. This is a challenge because they cannot switch to modern and effective ways to lead and professionally manage schools and improve learner performance, especially in Grade 12.

Other scholars (Cruz, 1995, Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998, Murphy, 1998) argued that there was no clear comprehension of the way principals' leadership practices may have an impact on learner performance within the no-fee-school context which influences school leadership, such as grade level, ethnic group and SES of learners (cited in Ovando & Cavazos, 2004:12). It was anticipated that aligning themselves with guidelines such as *The Standard*, principals might be able to perform their core duties better (Mestry, 2004:38). These guidelines also formed pedestals of assessment on effectiveness and accountability of principals in their roles, which was be discussed in the next chapters of the study and served as reference in data generation for this study.

## **1.4 Research questions**

This section briefly discusses the research questions and research objectives of the study which the researcher's formulated in order to conduct this research.

The study has formulated its primary research question as:

- What is the role of the principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance?

The subsidiary questions of the study are:

(a) What are the contextual challenges that principals must deal with?

(b) What are the curriculum delivery challenges for Grade 12 learners that principals must deal with?

(c) How do principals address contextual and curriculum challenges?

(d) Which leadership styles and practices are required to improve Grade 12 learner performance?

(e) Which management styles and approaches improve Grade 12 learner performance?

## **1.5 Research objectives**

This section briefly discusses the research objectives of the study which reflects the researcher's intentions to conduct this research.

The researcher formulated the aim of this research as follows:

- To explore the role of the principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance.

The objectives of this research were:

(a) To investigate the contextual challenges that principals must deal with.

(b) To investigate the curriculum delivery challenges for Grade 12 learners that principals must deal with.

(c) To establish how principals address contextual and curriculum challenges.

(d) To explore the leadership styles and practices required to improve Grade 12 learner performance.

(e) To explore the management styles and approaches required to improve Grade 12 learner performance.

Table 1.1 summarises the objectives used to further explain the subsidiary research questions, which finally answered the primary research question of this study.

**Table 1.1: Research plan using research objectives**

<b>Subsidiary research question</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Chapter/s</b>
(a) What are the contextual challenges that principals must deal with?	To investigate the contextual challenges that principals must deal with.	Literature review	3
(b) What are the curriculum delivery challenges for Grade 12 learners that principals must deal with?	To investigate the curriculum delivery challenges for Grade 12 learners that principals must deal with.	Literature review	3
(c) How do principals address contextual and curriculum challenges?	To establish how principals address contextual and curriculum challenges.	Individual interviews with four principals of no-fee secondary schools. Document analysis.	4
(d) Which leadership styles and practices are required to improve Grade 12 learner performance?	To explore the leadership styles and practices required to improve Grade 12 learner performance.	Literature review. Discussion and analysis of findings.	3 & 5
(e) Which management styles and approaches improve Grade 12 learner performance?	To explore the management styles and approaches required to improve Grade 12 learner performance.	Literature review. Discussion and analysis of findings	3 & 5

Table 1.1 reflects the subsidiary research questions of the study related to its objectives and the method through which data were collected to answer these research questions of the study.

## **1.6 Theoretical Framework of the Study**

In this segment, the researcher provided a theoretical background and discussed the theoretical perspectives and leadership styles related to leadership practices of principals that were related to the theoretical framework of this research.

### **1.6.1 Theoretical background**

Grant and Osanloo (2014:13) highlighted the significance of utilising a theoretical framework in the study which form the base of all knowledge created (metaphorically and literally). Similarly, Sarter (2005:494) indicated that when the study is not warranted by a theoretical framework, the findings and conclusions were useful only to a certain extent (cited in Grant & Osanloo, 2014:13).

The theories, concepts and variables underpinned in this study were intended to provide knowledge and understanding of the role of principal leadership practices in

the no-fee-paying-school context and the impact it had on learner performance (Mokoqo, 2013:3). By focusing on township areas in their study, Louis and Miles (1990, cited in Ovando & Cavazos, 2004:9) revealed that principal and teacher engagement in effective problem-solving was an important indicator of school improvement. In addition, the highest ranked principal behaviour to enhance learner performance were the following practices: improving discipline and security in the school and creating high expectations of learner performance. Pulido (1991) recommended that having interpersonal relationships with all stakeholders was essential for the principal to create a positive school setting that foster improved learner performance (cited in Ovando & Cavazos, 2004:9).

### **1.6.2 Theoretical perspectives**

Current leadership theories recognise the significance of directing development efforts to limited selected matters (Banach, 2015:40). Reviewing literature on leadership revealed that no theory was entirely inappropriate since applicability depended on the context in which it was efficient (Khan, Nawaz & Khan, 2016:1). Charry (2012) identified eight major types of leadership theories, inclusive of new emerging ones, but this study was approached from the following: instructional leadership as its main theoretical framework intergrated in distributed leadership and transformational or relationship theory or style supporting it (cited in Amanchukwu *et al.*, 2015:10).

### **1.6.3 Leadership theories and styles**

#### **1.6.3.1 *Instructional leadership as integrated in distributed leadership***

Hallinger (1992:37) described instructional leadership as the new set of beliefs in the 1980s. The latter was perceived to accentuate the significance of constructing clear pedagogical objectives, planning the curriculum and evaluating teachers and instruction (Day & Sammons, 2016:52). Day and Sammons (2016:52) also highlighted that the more the instructional principals focus their influence on education and their relationships with teachers on the primary business of instruction, the more they influence well learner performance. They further pointed out that the instructional principals know what transpire in classrooms and have the ability to build on strengths and reduce the flaws in their staff members through purposive teacher development programmes. Instructional principals can therefore set high expactations, have logical programmes of supervising and evaluating the effectiveness of learning outcomes and

that ultimately influence teachers to bring out the best in themselves and learners to be more eager to learn independently and be committed to life-long learning (Day & Sammons, 2016:15). In the 1980s, there was a lot of criticism around the instructional leadership and that concept was under-researched during that time. One of the limitations that fascinated the researcher was that in instructional leadership, principals can lack the instructional abilities required for significant improvement in learner performance, especially in secondary schools where skilled subject knowledge was a requirement to underpin instructional efficiency (Hallinger, 1992:38, cited in Bush, 2015:487). In addition, not much was known about why, when and how principals monitor teachers' work in the classroom (Bush, 2015:487). Bush (2015:487) further pointed out that due to this gap, instructional leadership had to be modified for leadership for learning; hence, it was employed by and essential to this study. The revived model of this theory stressed the need for a distributed leadership approach (Hallinger, 2000, cited in Bush 2015:487), which was at times used interchangeably with shared instructional leadership (Louis *et al.*, 2010:318). Instructional leadership which was shared or rather distributed leadership had the advantage of reducing the workload of principals since it involved the principal and heads of department and is argued to be a lasting strategy for structuration and collaborations (Leithwood & Mascal, 2008:557; Bush, 2015:488). Day and Sammons (2015:52) highlighted that learner performance was more likely to improve when leadership sources were distributed among staff and teachers were empowered in areas of importance to them.

### **1.6.3.2 *Transformational or relationship theory or style***

Burns (1978) described the transformational theory as activating higher needs in the leader's followers by raising their "better selves" over their "daily selves" (cited in Jamal, 2014:1270). Day and Sammons (2016:16) outlined its leadership practices as: forming collaborative cultures, forming relations with the most crucial component of the school, which was parents, and connecting the school to its community. They also outlined its management practices as: managing clashes, providing opportunities for teamwork, and allocating duties to the staff (Day & Sammons, 2016:16). Jamal (2014:1274) emphasised the importance of the principal as pedagogical leader who has to lead evaluation processes, reflections, feedbacks and measures of all related teaching in a school through transformational leadership, professional skills and appropriate leadership tools. To adhere to the nature of the study, this theory will be located within

a constructivist paradigm. Transformational principals were perceived to be more effective, higher performers and interpersonally sensitive (Judge & Bono, 2000; Rubin *et al.*, 2005, cited in Odumeru & Ifeanyi, 2013:356). Researchers perceived this leadership style as strongly correlated with higher levels of productivity and staff creativity, fulfilment and goal attainment and staff wellbeing (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006; Garcí'a-Morales *et al.*, 2008; Keller, 1992; Eisenbeiß & Boerner, 2013, cited in Odumeru & Ifeanyi, 2013:356) particularly in no-fee school where there was shortage of resources. This view makes transformational theory to be relevant for this study. For this study, the way in which transformational leadership may assist principals of no-fee schools to cope with the complex situation of their context was thus integrated with the instructional leadership approach in this study.

Literature suggests that well learner performance was subjected to sound instructional leadership practices or rather effective leadership integrated into other leadership styles, for example shared leadership practices, a positive school culture, visibility and trust, support from the district, and professional communities. A detailed literature review of these two leadership styles will be provided in Chapters 2 and 3 of this study.

## **1.7 Research Methodology**

Researchers call knowledge claims paradigms or research methodologies (Meterns, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Neuman, 2000, cited in Creswell, 2003:7). A plan of action was to be followed by the researcher and this plan informed the procedures taken, and method of data gathering and analysis for the study. Three elements of inquiry (methodology, strategy and method) as outlined by Creswell (2003:7) were discussed and they assisted the research to achieve its aim. The subsection below explicitly gives a background of these elements.

### **1.7.1 The nature of the research and its research paradigm**

Mwasi and Mondele (2010:16) acknowledged that it was a technique in a qualitative research approach to clarify one's beliefs in research before one designed the study. The researcher intended to examine social life from multiple point of views and qualitative research helped to explain how individuals construct identities (Bryman, 2012:439). Therefore, the qualitative approach was adopted for this research. The researcher was also attracted to the qualitative approach because of the idea of

purposeful selection of the research sites and the participants to form part of the study (Creswell, 2014:189). The qualitative research approach was discussed in detail below.

The researcher views the role of principal leadership as genuine in schools and the activities or behaviours of a principal will determine whether he or she is effective. The researcher also believed that such behaviours or practices were not only subjective (Mwasi & Mondele, 2010:17). This study therefore adopted interpretivist epistemology (Crotty, 2005, cited in Mwasi & Mondele, 2010:18). Mouton and Maris (1996) signified epistemology as the theory of knowledge (cited in Mwasi & Mondele, 2010:16). Creswell (2014:8) saw the interpretivist paradigm as an approach to qualitative research. Within this context, the researcher believed that realities lived day by day by participants could be created by their experiences (Mwasi & Mondele, 2010:18). In adopting interpretivism as a paradigm, the researcher was in a position to obtain detailed perceptions constructed by the participants on the role of principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance.

### **1.7.2 Research design and methodology of the study**

This segment provides the research design and methodology of this study.

The the research design was perceived as an outline of how the researcher intends to do a study (Mouton, 2001:55, cited in Mwasi & Mondele, 2010:25). Multiple case studies framed within the qualitative approach were employed for this research. A qualitative approach was best for investigating human behaviour (such as the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance) and allowed the researcher to use multiple research techniques such as interviews, observations or document analysis to generate data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011:15; Creswell, 2014:191). With regard to this study, employing multiple cases was relevant because the researcher intended to examine the social life of principals from multiple points of view (such as multiple sources of data) and qualitative research helped to explain how participants (principals and teachers) construct identities (Bryman, 2012:439). Multiple-case studies can sometimes be costly and a timewasting process (Braxter & Jack, 2008, cited in Gustafsson, 2017:9). What educators experience at no-fee schools was imperative to learner performance and might be based on the role of principal

leadership practices, which makes the multiple-case studies relevant in responding to the research questions of this research study.

### **1.7.3 Research approach**

This study employed a qualitative research approach in order to explore the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance at no-fee secondary schools. Jackson and Verberg (2007:8) illuminate that participants in qualitative research should possess first-hand experience with the research topic and be able to talk about it. Researchers perceive qualitative studies to be full of in-depth evidence about the social worlds being investigated (Geertz, 1973a, cited in Bryman, 2012:401; Denzin, 1989, cited in Rahman, 2017:103). The researcher of this research explored the role of principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance and, as such, the research focused on principals' lived experiences, emotions and opinions faced in fulfilling this role in a school context. This made a qualitative research approach relevant to this study even though this approach had issues of generalisation, especially when a small number of individuals are used for interviews (Bryman, 2012:406; Thompson, 2011, Harry & Lipsky, 2014, cited in Rahman, 2017:104). And again, data analysis in a qualitative approach was perceived to be a process that took a considerable amount of time due to many data sources utilised (Flick, 2011, cited in Rahman, 2017:105). However, qualitative research was designed for a small number of research sites, small groups or numbers of individuals, depending on the research design used as there is no need for generalisations to be drawn (Mwasi & Mondele, 2010:30; Kubicek, 2015:13; Creswell, 2014:189).

### **1.7.4 Population of the study**

The research sites and participants of this study were purposefully selected. Purposeful selection implied that the researcher selects individuals who would best assist the researcher to understand the research problem and answer the research question (Creswell, 2014:189). The researcher wanted to explore the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance from principals and teachers' perspectives. To achieve this, the researcher decided to purposively select four principals and fourteen teachers, a total of eighteen participants, as the study sample. The participants were purposefully selected from four research sites (no-fee secondary schools in the lower quintiles (quintiles 1 to 3) and receiving more monetary funds than

other affluent quintiles (quintiles 4 and 5) from Sedibeng West (SW) district of Emfuleni Municipality. Sedibeng West district was persistently among the bottom districts of Gauteng province in grade 12 learner performance for the past three consecutive years (from 2017 to 2019). The researcher was triggered to investigate the role of principal leadership practices in grade 12 learner performance in these no-fee school in townships of this municipality because she completed her formal schooling in one of these selected schools 29 years ago, erstwhile 1994. It was therefore imperative for her to investigate role of principal in Grade 12 learner performance of the schools of this kind during the new dispensation, post 1994., in grade 12 results

### **1.7.5 Selection of participants for the study**

With regard to the research sites, four no-fee secondary schools in townships of Emfuleni municipality were purposively selected (Creswell, 2014:189) due to the SES of the communities around the schools (Louis *et al.*, 2010:321). Qualitative research approach is designed for a small sample as indicated in the sub-section 1.7.4, above hence four schools were selected. The selection of schools was also based on the fact that secondary schools is where the FET band is located, which caters for grades 10 up to 12 and grade 12 is significant to explore the role of principal leadership practices because the results of this grade determines selection for academic and employment projections for learners (Van der Berg & Shepherd, 2009:3).

Selection of the permanently employed principals to participate in individual interviews was informed by the fact that they were the accounting officers of their school's results (Bush, 2007, cited in Khumalo, 2015:42). In addition, these principals were members of the staff of the selected no-fee secondary schools employed by DBE. With regard to the other participants, 14 teachers were also purposefully selected to take part in focus groups interviews and were grouped into three to four members per group. The participating teachers taught either one or two of the following gateway subjects: mathematics, physical sciences, economics and accounting, in Grade 12 at no-fee secondary schools and were also permanently employed in these schools. The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) report (2016:61) reflected that gateway subjects have drawn so much public attention because they had many Grade 12 learner enrolments nationally. If learners show weaknesses towards performance in these subjects at school level, the entire school's pass rate was going to be negatively affected. The participating principals and teachers were interviewed at their respective

schools, which was a normal setting for them to confidently and openly speak their minds (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010:70-71; Dilshad & Latif, 2013:192; Heystek, 2014:895). It was assumed that the teachers knew how their principals guide and support their work. In addition, it was assumed that the principals knew how their leadership and management roles affect teacher instruction and learner performance at Grade 12 level.

## **1.8 Data gathering procedures of the study**

This section provides the data gathering methods utilised by the study. Yin (2011:130) defines data gathering as the gathering of organised information, usually the result of experience, observation and experimentation. Data were generated in this qualitative research through multiple sources, which include individual interviews, focus group interviews, document analysis and qualitative observations onsite (Creswell, 2014:190). Data from document analysis and observations were retrospectively collected during interviews (Elliott & Timulak, 2017:151). Generating data onsite advantaged the researcher of this study in that she had to build patterns, categories and themes and clearly learn the meaning held by participants about the role of principal leadership practices in learner performance at no-fee secondary schools and not solely from literature reviewed (Mestry, 2004:1). A triangulation strategy was adopted and served as a cross-validation method since multiple methods were adopted to collect data (Creswell, 2014:201). A triangulation strategy was regarded as when the researcher applied more than one data gathering method in studying the same aspect (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:114). Data gathering for this qualitative approach was done through the following methods: semi-structured interviews with the principals (Appendix A), focus group interviews with the teachers (Appendix B), document analysis of important and relevant documents (Appendix C) and some observation of the settings of the research sites (Appendix D) (Creswell, 2014:189). These methods are briefly discussed below.

### **1.8.1 Individual interviews with school principals**

Generally, an individual interview was perceived as a data gathering procedure in which the investigator (mostly the researcher) asks questions to a participant, and these interviews were conducted face to face or telephonically (Babbie, 2010:274).

Individual interviewing in qualitative research can encapsulate two types, namely unstructured and semi-structured interviewing (Bryman, 2012:477). Interviews (semi-structured) were conducted with the four principal participants of the four selected no-fee schools.. The semi-structured interviews were flexible and interactive and allowed the researcher to probe further questions during the discussions in order to understand the role of principal leadership practices from participants' experiences, and have a greater exploration of their behaviours (Merriam, 2009, cited in Banach, 2015:58; Terhoven & Fataar, 2018:3). The limitation of this method was that it provided information filtered through the views of participants and the researcher's presence may illicit biased replies (Creswell, 2014:191) since she occupied a post level 2 at a nearby no-fee school. In addition, the researcher of this qualitative approach, who was also the interviewer, wanted rich and detailed responses from participants. Therefore, she could depart significantly from the schedule or guideline to ask further questions to follow up on participants' responses up and could also vary the order and even the wording of questions (Bryman, 2012:470). All interviews for this study were audio-taped and transcribed word by word and interview sessions took approximately 60 to 75 minutes each (Creswell, 2014:189). The principals were relevant as participants for the researcher to obtain an overview of the role of their leadership practices which is influenced by their context.

Informed consent was received from the principals (Appendix E) prior to their participation in the study (Naicker & Mestry, 2011:102). Saturation was reached because the researcher purposively sampled four principals to discuss the specific topic. During the semi-structured interviews, the interviewer (who was the researcher) had an interview guide for fairly specific topics to be covered, although not to be followed exactly, which therefore allowed the participants to be flexible in how to respond to questions (Bryman, 2012:471).

### **1.8.2 Focus group interviews with teachers**

This section discussed the focus group interview as the method for data generation for this research. Babbie (2010:322) described this method as a group of participants (as subjects) being interviewed together stimulating a discussion. There were 14 teachers from the selected schools who participated in four focus group interviews. A single group consisted of three or four teachers teaching one or two of the following subjects: mathematics, physical sciences, accounting and economics. The focus group interview

was a relevant technique for this qualitative study because the researcher was able to obtain the teachers' understanding and experiences of the role of principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance and the teachers' reasoning pattern (Dilshad & Latif, 2013:192). Also, the focus groups served the purpose of verifying the responses provided by the principals (Terhoven & Fataar, 2018:31). A limitation of this method is that not all participants were equally articulate and participative during the discussions (Creswell, 2014:191). The researcher received informed consent provided by teachers before their participation in the study (Appendix E) (Naicker & Mestry, 2011:102). The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim (Creswell, 2014:46). Interview sessions took about 30 to 60 minutes per session (Creswell, 2014:189).

### **1.8.3 Document analysis**

Document analysis was adopted by this research in order to reveal evidence or sub-surface information during the interviews about the interaction of the principals and their staff members and also the effect their leadership practices have on learner performance, which was reflected in some of the documents which were analysed (Creswell, 2014:191). The past three years' (2017 to 2019) Grade 12 results for the selected schools were analysed (Louis *et al.*, 2010:32; Creswell, 2014:190). In addition, minutes of meetings convened by the principals with their staff, registers to capture late coming of teachers and learners, vision and mission statements of the schools, school improvement plans and principals' monitoring tools were also analysed. The purpose was to ascertain any interaction between the principals and the teachers or evidence of any activities of support for the teachers (especially those teaching the mentioned gateway subjects). The study therefore analysed documents as the written evidence which verified the findings of the role of principal leadership and management approaches in comparison to the cited roles of principals by the participating teachers and principals themselves (Creswell, 2014:192). Creswell (2014:192) opined that qualitative analysis of data could be involved to analyse data and seek for data with similar themes to the principals' perspectives. Document analysis proceeded immediately after the individual interviews with principals. An advantage of document analysis to the researcher was that it avoided the problem of unreliable data and complemented the findings from the interviews. A limitation of document analysis was that some documents may not be authentic, accurate or complete (Creswell, 2014:192).

#### **1.8.4 Observations**

Generally, all techniques for gathering qualitative data from human beings can be categorised as either observing them or asking them questions (Tenopir, 2003, cited in Wildermuth, 2009:189). Yin (2011:144) opines that observations were a form of primary data, to be highly cherished because of its invaluable way of data generation. This was because what the researcher saw with her own eyes was not filtered by what others might have self-reported to her (Yin, 2011:144).

The researcher employed observations as a complete observer, which meant that during the observation, the researcher did not form part of the participants (Creswell, 2014:191). During observations, unusual aspects can be noticed and the researcher acquires first-hand information; hence, the study employed this method (Creswell, 2014:191). Observations were employed for the researcher to improve the reliability of the generated data (Denscombe, 2003, cited in Wildermuth, 2009:191). Another advantage was that observations could be joined with other qualitative data generating methods such as interviews (Wildermuth, 2009:191). The researcher of this study was aware, as highlighted by Wildermuth (2009:190), that she could not observe everything in a particular site for any duration. She thus decided to observe the selected no-fee schools' physical appearances or arrangement (infrastructure) of the setting only because observing many things could create unpredictable context (Gray, 2004; Neuman, 2006, cited in Wildermuth, 2009:191). The observations were done a few minutes before the interview sessions proceeded in order to ascertain the reasons behind the principals' behaviours in relation to their perceptions, and the researcher also retained the naturalness of the settings as much as possible (Descombe, 2003, cited in Wildermuth, 2009:193). This method also had limitations such as that the researcher may be seen as disturbing or intrusive and the researcher may not have sound observing and perception skills (Creswell, 2014:191). The observation schedule or a checklist pre-developed by the researcher (Appendix D) was then utilised to record the only needed observation data in order to minimise the researcher's potential for bias during observation (Wildermuth, 2009:191).

### **1.9 Data Analysis of the Study**

This segment discusses how data in this qualitative study were analysed.

Neuman (2014:448) opined that during qualitative data analysis, the researcher should explore data and identify multiple processes, inspecting similarities, patterns and differences, aspects that were alike or unlike. As advised by Creswell (2014:195) in qualitative research, data analysis, data collection and writing-up of findings happen at the same time, the same happened in this study. The researcher applied data gathering and data analysis procedures according to what Strauss and Corbin (1990) denote as zig-zagging throughout the interviews (cited in Kubicek, 2015:51).

The researcher started by preparing data. This involved the process where all gathered audio-recorded data were reviewed and transcribed into text by typing it (Creswell, 2014:186). Then, the researcher tried to make sense of the texts and organised them into themes and subthemes by cutting through all of the data sources (coding). Bryman (2012:13) refers to coding as a procedure where data are fragmented into their elements and those fragments were then given tags. Coding of this study's data began immediately after the first observations, document analysis and interviews at the first school had been done because interviews took place alongside observations of participants' settings and document analysis. To speed up the coding of data, texts were entered into a computer programme (Atlas.ti), which helped the researcher to identify common words and phrases. The researcher was the only one who could access the data saved on a computer since the computer requires a password known to the researcher alone (Kubicek, 2015:47). This was done because computers are so efficient to store and locate qualitative data. After coding of data, the researcher then presented and analysed the data qualitatively into broad themes and subthemes to highlight how participants understood and perceived principal leadership and management roles in Grade 12 learner performance in no-fee secondary schools (Cohen *et al.*, 2011:467).

The researcher later interpreted what was found in the themes by using a triangulation strategy since multiple data collection methods were used (Elliott & Timulak, 2017:151; Creswell, 2014:201). In the final stage, the researcher analysed data inductively and deductively until she had established a full comprehension of the data (Creswell, 2014:186). Creswell (2014:189) refers to inductive analysis as organising the data into increasingly more abstract units, and deductive analysis as the process where the researcher refers to the data from the created themes to determine if more proof can

support each theme or whether they need to gather additional data (Creswell, 2014:186).

## **1.10 Approval to Access the Research Sites**

The researcher purposively selected secondary schools in townships of Emfuleni Municipality as the research sites of the study after receiving permission from the personnel responsible for the sites (Creswell, 2012:46). The researcher applied for ethical clearance to conduct the research from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State (ethical clearance number: UFS-HSD2018/1263/1263) prior to proceeding with the study (Appendix F) as per regulations. In addition, consent was required from gatekeepers such as Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) (Appendix G) and Sedibeng West District Office (Appendix H). The researcher also asked for consent from individuals responsible for the sites, such as the school principals, and explained the following to them: why the sites were chosen, activities to occur during the research and what the individuals will gain from the study; and finally gave them the assurance that the study would not be disruptive of day-to-day activities of the sites.

## **1.11 Demarcation of the Study**

### **1.11.1 Scientific demarcation**

This study was set in the educational leadership and management field where education was a major discipline and leadership and management were just sub-disciplines of this field. Effective principal leadership was assumed to be one of the concepts which ascribes to learners' academic performance. An effective instructional leadership approach integrated with other leadership theories is believed to be an efficient tool of which the goal of improving learner performance may be attained if it is strategically utilised by principals of poor-performing no-fee schools. The principals therefore can ultimately eradicate poor learner performance from reoccurring in their schools and improve the education quality in poor communities of South Africa.

### **1.11.2 Geographical demarcation**

Sedibeng West (D8) was one of the 17 district offices of the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), located in Emfuleni Municipality of Gauteng province. Gauteng together with Western Cape provinces were considered to be rich provinces of the 9 provinces of South Africa and have majority of no-fee schools in townships than in rural areas as compared to Limpopo, Kwazulu Natal and the Eastern Cape (which were regarded as poor provinces) (Gardiner, 2017:9). This district was the focus area for this study, having four major circuits (four point one up to four point four). The district had primary and secondary schools distributed among quintile 1 to 5 categories, as outlined previously. The study purposively sampled four township secondary schools categorised in quintiles 1 and 2 from circuits four point two and four point three of this district. This selection was based on the research approach of this study, the SES of the communities around the schools (Louis *et al.*, 2010:321).

The terms township, urban centers and rural areas can sometimes be complex to define because to the upliftment of racial policy of the apartheid regime (Gardiner, 2017:8). Gardiner (2017:8) perceived townships as areas which were historically occupied on temporal bases by former diasadvantaged racial groups, mostly black workers, near urban centers because black people belonged to rural areas or rather homelands of their respective cultures very far from urban centres and were neglected in terms of resources. And urban centers were places consisting of towns and cities which were predominantly occupied by white people because they owned 87% of South African land during apartheid regime (Gardiner, 2017:8) and highly resourced. This was how racial policy of apartheid was regulating the movement and the monetary development of black people (Gardiner, 2017:8) hence these areas were regarded as poor communities. The researcher opted for no-fee township schools of Emfuleni municipality because of their better communication facilities and easily accessibility for her to reschedule appointments if the need arised. Pressis and Mestry (2019:S1 ,S2) highlighted that rural schools were experiencing many challenges including poor communication technology due to lack of resources and teachers there teaching multiple grades and or subjects which ultimately influenced absenteeism in teachers. Due to such challenges, the researcher anticipated the delay in the complete of the study due to rescheduling appointments because it was going to be difficulty to converge teachers for focus groups and set appointments with principals.

Also three-year trajectory of the overall schools' grade12 pass rate in the NSC examinations was assumed by the researcher to reflect sufficient evidence to explore the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance (Louis *et al.*, 2010:321) (2017–2019). In 2019, two of the four schools had a pass rates of less than 85% while the other two got a pass rates ranging between 85% and 100% (National Senior Certificate School Performance Report, 2019:54). The researcher considered all four schools to be well performing because their performance was above a target of 60% set by Gauteng Education Department, notwithstanding the fact that they were from the lower quintiles and poorly resourced (National Senior Certificate School Performance Report, 2019:54).

## **1.12 Quality Assurance of the Research**

This section of the study provides discussions around the qualitative validity and qualitative reliability of the study.

### **1.12.1 Qualitative validity**

Validity within this qualitative approach, as perceived by Cho and Trent (2006:319), ensures that the claims made by the researcher about knowledge correspond to the participants' construction of reality being studied (cited in Banach, 2015:61). To emphasise qualitative validity, the primary strategy for this study was rich, thick and detailed descriptions of the findings, which is when a researcher offers many perspectives about a theme (Merriam, 1998, cited in Creswell, 2014:201). A triangulation strategy was another strategy employed to add validity to this study, which Creswell (2014:201) explained as happening when the researcher establishes themes based on joining different data gathering sources or perceptions of participants. The following procedures discussed below assisted the researcher to verify the findings (Creswell, 2014:201).

### **1.12.2 Triangulation**

Aurini, Hearth and Howells (2016:52) highlighted that qualitative studies allow researchers to collect data by using multiple methods, which is regarded as triangulation. The researcher preferred the definition of triangulation as the application

of more than one data gathering method (Cohen *et al.*, 2007:114). Document analysis was used together with other data gathering methods to broaden the range of data gathering and to reduce the deficiencies of a single-method approach (Aurini *et al.*, 2016:52). The gathered data were then triangulated.

### **1.12.3 Trustworthiness**

According to Guba (1981), if research is conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, validity and reliability of positivist criteria should be replaced with trustworthiness criteria (cited in Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017:34) and authenticity criteria (Bryman 2012:390). This was done in this study by providing a brief discussion of each of the four trustworthiness criteria. These include credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

#### **1.12.3.1 Credibility**

The researcher guaranteed that data gathering and analysis methods of this qualitative research approach were believable, trustworthy and authentic by following all relevant ethical procedures, which were to be discussed later in this chapter (Guba, 1981, cited in Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017:34).

#### **1.12.3.2 Dependability**

To ensure dependability, the researcher made sure that the outcomes of this research truly came from the data which were gathered and scrutinized (Guba, 1981, cited in Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017:34). In addition, the researcher ensured that complete records of all levels of the research process are kept in an accessible manner (Bryman, 2012:390).

#### **1.12.3.3 Confirmability**

Bryman (2012:390) referred to this technique as respondent validation. In this study, the researcher made sure that the research was conducted according to the ethics of good practice. The results of this research were submitted to the participants to confirm that their social world had been properly understood (Bryman, 2012:392).

#### **1.12.3.4 *Transferability***

The researcher tried to produce what Ceetz (1973a) calls thick description (cited in Bryman, 2012:393). Producing a thick description was to provide others with a database for giving verdicts about the possible transferability of the results to other milieus (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Bryman, 2012:392).

#### **1.12.4 *Qualitative reliability***

Besides trustworthiness criteria for validity, there were also authenticity criteria for reliability, as outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1985, cited in Bryman, 2012:393). A brief discussion of the authenticity criteria for qualitative reliability was provided below.

#### **1.12.5 *Authenticity***

Authenticity was defined by Bryman (2012:390) as measuring whether the research document or the study was what it purported to be. Some of the criteria of authenticity applicable to this qualitative study were briefly discussed below, such as: fairness, educative authenticity, ontological authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity (Bryman, 2012:390).

##### **1.12.5.1 *Fairness***

This criterion meant to measure whether the study truthfully symbolises different perspectives among participants of the social surroundings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Bryman, 2012:393).

##### **1.12.5.2 *Educative authenticity***

This was to measure whether the research helped members of the social setting to better appreciate the perceptions of other participants of the social surroundings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Bryman, 2012:393).

##### **1.12.5.3 *Ontological authenticity***

This involved measuring whether the research helps members of the social setting to attain a better understanding of their social environment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Bryman, 2012:393).

#### **1.12.5.4 *Catalytic authenticity***

This meant to measure whether the research acted as an impetus to the members of the social setting to engage in action to transform their settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Bryman, 2012:393).

#### **1.12.5.5 *Tactical authenticity***

This last criterion involved measuring whether the research empowered members of the social setting to employ the phases necessary for engaging in the act (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Bryman, 2012:393).

### **1.13 Value of the Research Study**

This study had the possibility to provide principals with rich and detailed evidence that made them understand their complex leadership roles and best leadership practices that can be employed to lead no-fee secondary schools effectively and efficiently. The study furthermore intended to highlight how principals of no-fee secondary schools could manage the contextual challenges of these schools and achieve good results, despite impediments they or their teachers may experience.

The study would be useful to policymakers to design policies that were manageable, to curriculum developers to enhance principal or teacher development programmes, to parents to support the education of their children and to academia to encourage future research.

### **1.14 Study Delimitations**

The research sampled only four no-fee schools in Sedibeng Emfuleni Municipality in Gauteng province as its research sites. This poses a problem with generalisation, as Bryman (2012:406) points out that a qualitative research approach has a problem with generalisation due to a small number of research sites. Also, there were no-fee schools in rural areas or at primary school level which were not part of the study. The research participants (18 in total) were also few; therefore, the range of the findings was restricted for this research.

The focus groups were supposed to have four teachers in each group and a total of 16 participants. However, only 14 teachers participated, with two of the groups having

only three members each, which was not anticipated. The perspectives about how the role of principals' leadership practices affects learner performance were therefore limited. In addition, learners (from the representative council of learners [RCL]) and parents (from the SGB) were not included as participants in this study, although they also interact with the principals. All these limitations pose a problem with generalisation due to a small number of research participants.

## **1.15 Ethical Considerations Applied in the Study**

Ethics referred to the moral research procedures involved in a study (Neuman, 2014:145). The researcher was ethical in conducting this study. She had to protect and develop trust with the participants, guide them, guard them against misconduct and impropriety that might have reflected on the schools, and also had to oversee that the interests of the population she was studying were protected, as highlighted by Neuman (2014:155) and Israel and Hay (2006, cited in Creswell, 2014:92). The researcher was very professional so as not to disturb any formal classes and scheduled the interview appointments outside the normal teaching and learning hours, with room for postponement where necessary. The value of document analysis and observations of the research settings as data sources was also explained to the participants and professionally handled (Mwasi & Mondele, 2010:32). The following ethical issues were addressed which were anticipated to arise during the study.

### **1.15.1 Informed consent**

Prior to conducting all interviews, all respondents were given an information sheet that explained the nature, purpose and consequences of the research (Appendix E) regarding the data gathering process. The researcher required all willing participants to sign a consent form compiled by the researcher and her supervisor (Banach, 2015:63) before the proceedings, should they decide to be part of the interviews (Appendix E). Again, respondents were informed that no data gathering procedure would take place without their consent, whether it be observations or audio-taping of any interviews.

### **1.15.2 Voluntary participation**

Participants were informed prior to interviews that participation was voluntary and non-remunerable and were assured that there would be no forfeiture of benefit for non-

participation. Participants were also informed that they would not be compelled to participate and were free to recall their consent to participate as they felt without providing any reasons. However, the information provided up to the point of termination of interviews would still be used in the study. In addition, the participants were guaranteed that participation in the study would be kept private, but that information about participants would be shared with the study's sponsors if and only if permission was granted by participants.

### **1.15.3 Confidentiality and anonymity**

Anonymity meant that people (or entities such as organisations) remain nameless or anonymous (Neuman, 2014:154). Banach (2015:65) highlights the importance of confidentiality during interviews. The participants were guaranteed that their responses would remain confidential and no personal recognising evidence would be obtainable from the research and also that their privacy would be respected. No real person's name/s or the names of the schools would be recorded anywhere in the study and no person will be in a position to link any participant to their descriptions. Participants and schools were each assigned a fictitious code number or alias or pseudonym. For example, schools are referred to as NF1, NF2, NF3 and NF4 in the discussion of data. All raw data records will be stored in a private lockable case at the researcher's home. Participants' responses may only be reviewed by individuals responsible for making sure that the research was conducted properly. These include the transcriber (who was the researcher), the editor and members of the Research Ethics Committee, who must all remain discreet.

During focus groups, participants (such as teachers) may sometimes feel uncomfortable to participate because of fear of intimidation by other parties (e.g. school principals) and the fact that the researcher is a physical science head of department (HOD) herself. To avoid this, the researcher emphasised anonymity and confidentiality, the significance of the study and her position as a researcher and not that of an HOD, to them. The researcher had to: guide the discussions in such a way that everyone was given a fair chance; foster respect among participants for the speaker on the platform; and avoid intimidation. All interviews were conducted in a welcoming and respectful manner and in a room of the participants' choice on their school's premises, where participants felt comfortable. Participants were advised not to reveal any delicate personal information during the interviews.

## **1.16 Layout of the Study**

In order to attain its main aim: to explore the role of the principal in Grade 12 learner performance, the overall arrangement of the study took the form of six chapters, including this introductory and background chapter which is Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 was based on the dynamics of no-fee schools in the South African context, as the literature review of the study.

Chapter 3 continued the literature review based on the leadership requirements and leadership practices for principals in South African schools. The basic arguments were based on the role of leadership practices of principals and the impact thereof on Grade 12 learner performance, with reference to leadership roles outlined in the legislative framework, such as *The Standard* (DBE, 2015), as a guideline, and other leadership styles excepted in *The Standard*.

Chapter 4 detailed the research design and methodology that were used to address the main research question of the study.

Chapter 5 presented the data gathered from participants (principals and teachers) and research sites.

Chapter 6 presented the conclusion, the summary, and critiques of the outcomes and discussions based on the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance in no-fee secondary schools. Finally, recommendations for further research were made.

## **1.17 Summary of Chapter 1**

The role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance in no-fee secondary schools which have the same limited resources, infrastructure challenges and monetary allocations from the DBE, was explored. The researcher assumed that effective leadership is one of the crucial concepts which ascribed to learners' poor academic performance recently in no-fee schools and high unemployment rates among the youth of South Africa. Some principals of no-fee schools lead and managed effectively and ultimately produced well learner performance, as if they had resources like more affluent schools, while their counterparts were continually dazed by

multifaceted problems facing no-fee schools because of their present SES. Subsequently, Chapter 2 provided the literature review on the dynamics of the no-fee-school context.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW DYNAMICS OF NO-FEE SCHOOLS

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### 2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 offered the synopsis of this dissertation. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature on the dynamics of the no-fee-school context with the intention to provide an argument aground on the existing literature and to address the main research question. Reviewing literature permitted the researcher to identify flaws in the research and to indicate whether the research fits in the research discourse (Nkosi, 2011:32). Context played a big role with respect to learner performance, especially in schools located in areas where poverty was evident. These schools were often categorised as no-fee or former disadvantaged schools. In this dissertation, the term no-fee is preferred for reference to these schools servicing areas swamped with poverty.

The chapter begins by addressing how South African public schools were categorised as no-fee, with reference to legislations such as the international law so as to describe the context of the no-fee schools. Secondly, literature was reviewed on the following concepts: an outline of how learners perform nationally and internationally in gateway subjects; contextual challenges experienced by no-fee township secondary schools; good practices at well-performing no-fee schools; and teachers' professional development.

The dissertation focused on the role of principals' leadership and management behaviours and not on learner performance because principals' leadership practices and their behaviours at no-fee secondary schools were significant to Grade 12 learner performance, specifically in gateway subjects or rather science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education. Bush and Glover (2016:212) also highlight that South Africa persisted to be left behind globally and failed to significantly improve learner performance, predominantly in no-fee schools. This poor performance reflected badly on principals' leadership.

## **2.2 Contextual Challenges: Prioritisation of Schools as No-Fee Schools**

This section discussed the contextual challenges at no-fee schools to outline the challenges that the principals of these schools faced with regard to their leadership and management role. As part of this section, the researcher provided the following subtopics: the background of the bantu education system; the South African schooling system prior to 1994; the South African schooling system post-1994; impediments to quality of education post-1994; the background and characteristics of no-fee schools; policy implementation; and allocations per learner in no-fee schools.

### **2.2.1 The background of the bantu education system**

Census 1960 revealed that out of a population of approximately 16 022 797, the black people or native-born Africans or bantu were the majority when compared with other racial groups and formed 68.3% of the whole South African population (Boddy-Evans, 2019:1). Other racial groups constituted the following percentages: white people (also referred to as European-descended) formed 19.3%; mixed-raced people (or coloured people), 9.4%; and Asian people (or Indian people), 3%. Apartheid was a system of strictly enforced racial segregation of these groups in South Africa (Branson, Hofmeyr & Lam, 2015:6).

Bantu education was firstly practised by the Nationalist Government of South Africa in 1953 (Webb, 2017:1). In accordance to the latter, a black education department called the Department of Native Affairs was established to format a syllabus that was suited to the natives (also referred to as blacks) and the requirements of black people (Boddy-Evans, 2019:1), with exception of white ethnic groups. Christie and Collins (2012:66) pointed out that prior to the act, 90% of black schools were state-aided mission organisations, but bantu education removed the powers of African education from houses of worship and provincial authorities and gave wide supremacies to the then education minister. These powers included control over the entire Department of Native Affairs, including maintenance and management of schools, with less consideration of principals. During the apartheid regime, education was therefore viewed as a tool of oppression and black people were to receive teaching and learning that was tailormade to serve their own people or to work in labouring careers preparing

them to be subordinates of white people (Badat & Sayed, 2014:143; Boddy-Evans, 2019:1).

### **2.2.2 The South African schooling system prior to 1994**

Earlier than 1994, education for black learners was not compulsory (Hirson, 1979:13) and free. The South African Schools Act no. 87 of 1996 refer to a learner as any person receiving or obliged to receive education (South Africa, 1996:4). During bantu education, promotion was automatic for lower primary school (Grades 1 to 4) learners, which resulted in a series of post-primary schools for higher primary schools (Grades 5 to 8) (Christie & Collins, 2012:70; Webb, 2017:1). 70% of all black learners who found a place in schools would drop out within four years of attendance and almost 4% would reach high school, with a few of these completing the five-year course (Hirson, 1979:13). Dropout rate by grade was very high and untracked. Dropout rate by grade was referred to the segment of learners from a cohort enrolled in a given grade at a given school year who are no longer enrolled in the following school year (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2009 cited in DBE, 2019:2). Chapter one of the South Africa Schools Act (no.87 of 1996) referred to a grade as that part of education programme which a learner may complete (South Africa, 1996:4). The boys (not girls) would stay in school until 14, 16 and 18 years of age, respectively (Hirson, 1979:13). This resulted in the present shortage of black South Africans, especially women, in STEM-related careers such as engineering and medicine and also in teaching. In contrast, education for white people was compulsory and most white children could complete primary school and a quarter of them could complete secondary school (Hirson, 1979:13).

Instructionally, the medium of instruction often included additional or foreign languages (such as English and Afrikaans) for teachers together with learners of the black population and the choice to learn in these languages was politically inclined and politics always played a significant role in education and educational research (Webb, 2017:1). Language was used as a means of authority and segregation (Setati, 2005, cited in Webb, 2017:2). The syllabus included subjects such as social sciences (history and geography); gardening and agriculture in higher primary schools; languages of employers (English or Afrikaans); and spiritual and ethical training, with values such as hygiene, promptness, trustworthiness, admiration and politeness openly articulated as aims of the system (Christie & Collins, 2012:63). The concurrent declaration of English and Afrikaans as official languages from Grade 8 upwards in the schooling

system became the dominant subject in the struggle against the repressive regime by most disadvantaged South Africans since they were also excluded from doggy politics (Hartshorne, 1992, cited in Webb, 2017:2). The ideology of fundamental pedagogy was promoted, which had a detrimental effect on teachers' thinking (Hartshorne, 1992, cited in Webb, 2017:1). The traditional teaching methods in bantu education included chorus teaching, repetition, memorisation and recalling (Alidon, Bolyt, Brock-Utne, Diallo, Heugh & Wolff, 2006, cited in Webb, 2017:1), which impacted negatively on the understanding of subjects such as mathematics.

Furthermore, it was noted that most black South African learners as second language speakers of English or Afrikaans lacked communication competencies from early years of schooling due to eight years of mother tongue education (MTE) in lower and higher primary school (Christie & Collins, 2012:79). Communication helps with the development of advanced cognitive skills such as critical reflection, communicating attitudes of curiosity, and respect of evidence (Macdonald, 1991, cited in Webb, 2017:2), which are fundamental skills of STEM subjects. Due to poor communication competencies, black South African learners from their early years of schooling lacked listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Hence, their teachers employed teaching methods such as rote learning (Macdonald, 1991, cited in Webb, 2017:2). It was also found that due to poor language competencies in black schools, learners were incapable to read the learning materials in their possession in preparation for tests and examinations to come (Webb, 2017:2). In addition, the tasks or exercises provided for assessment were abstractly thought-provoking and beyond their competencies; hence, they depended on their poorly educated teachers for anything they learnt (Langham, 1993, cited in Webb, 2017:2). All these factors resulted in the educational culture in almost all no-fee schools to date.

With regard to infrastructure and resources, Branson *et al.* (2015:5) point out that the apartheid regime resulted in resources at white schools being ten times more than those assigned to black schools. White schools were lavishly equipped as compared to school buildings for black learners (Branson *et al.*, 2015:5). In most cases, the black schools consisted of tin shanties or wattle or daub huts, overcrowded with two or three times the quantity of learners a room can accommodate (80 to 100 pupils of two or three standards all in the same room taught by one teacher) (Hirson, 1979:40). This happened due to the phasing out of white teachers from black schools by the state

policy of bantu education as part of the hegemonic, separate-cultures strategy. Black schools thus became ill-staffed (Hirson, 1979:40). This led to the overcrowding of classes (with a national pupil-teacher ratio ranging between 58:1 in 1967 to 70:1 in 1993, while white schools remained at 20:1) (Christie & Collins, 2012:71). In addition, to save funds, the policy allowed for the replacement of male teachers with female teachers because women's salaries were one third less than that of men. The policy also advocated changing lower primary schools to double-session schools with a platoon system to use school facilities by two sets of classes a day, which shortened the school day by approximately one third (Christie & Collins, 2012:71).

In order to boost lower numbers of primary school teachers, post-form 1 certificates and post-form 3 certificates, obtainable in one year and three years, respectively, were offered (Christie & Collins, 2012:79). In 1961, it was highlighted that only 10% of black educators held a matriculation certificate. Therefore, black learners experienced a shortage of teachers, especially in gateway subjects like mathematics and natural sciences, or had teachers who were not qualified at all or even underqualified (Christie & Collins, 2012:79). In addition, there was a shortage of furniture and books due to overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of funds, and buildings were usually rudimentary, with a shortage of teaching equipment (Christie & Collins, 2012:79). White teachers were therefore better qualified and earned much higher salaries than their black counterparts, which had an effect on the quality of education that black children received and promoted the supremacy and subordination interactions among these ethnic groups (Christie & Collins, 2012:79; Boddy-Evans, 2019:1).

It has been highlighted also that learners attending former disadvantaged schools remain intractable and continue to perform poorly because of their circumstances (Sithole, 2017:12). Similarly, it has been flagged in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) results that schools' infrastructure has an effect on how well learners perform (for example schools with a library, on average, have learners who score 16% higher than those with no library) (Reddy, Visser, Winnaar, Arends Juan & Prinsloo, 2015:2). This is a worrying factor because 60% of no-fee schools are still without libraries (Roodt *et al.*, 2018:2). According to Draga (2016:238), the DBE national policy on school infrastructure of 2013 titled *The National Policy for an Equitable Provision of an Enabling School Physical Teaching and Learning Environment (NPEP)* emphasised the negative effect of a poor schooling environment

on teachers and learners in black schools. The negative effects included, for example, irregular attendance by learners, high dropout rates among learners, and high absenteeism by teachers due to working in discouraging, unhealthy and often insecure settings.

With regard to the funding of schools, Hirson (1979:13) indicated that in 1969, there were 2,400,000 black children as opposed to 490,000 white children in schools. For that year, funding distributed to black learners was as little as R13.55 per learner per month in primary school and R55.00 per learner per month in secondary school. In contrast, allocations for white learners were R175.00 per learner per month in primary school and R234.00 per learner per month in secondary school (Hirson, 1979:13). In 1975, South Africa entered a period of commercial despondency (Branson *et al.*, 2015:5). The result was that the distribution of funding weighted even more disproportionately in favour of the more affluent learners, with the most disadvantaged learners receiving the smallest subsidy among the other races. Per month, the government spent R644.00 on a former advantaged learner's education and as little as R42.00 on a former disadvantaged learner before 1969. During the recession of 1975, these numbers dropped to R605.00 for a former advantaged learner per month and R40.00 for a former disadvantaged learner per month (Branson *et al.*, 2015:5; Boddy-Evans, 2019:1). This resulted in top-performing white schools with the most resources to continue to serve the richest white South African learners, while school fees continued to be used as a preventative mechanism against the poorest of the poor South African learners to obtain quality education (Branson *et al.*, 2015:5). Apartheid officially ended with the multi-racial democratic elections in 1994 (Branson *et al.*, 2015:5).

Table 2.1 provides interesting information about the infrastructure of black South African schools together with their allocations per learner per month, as opposed to the white schools during the apartheid regime. The status of the black schools in South Africa was very bad and still is even after 26 years of democracy.

**Table 2.1: An outline of the infrastructure and subsidy per child prior to 1994**

Year/period	White child (on average)	Black child (on average)	Infrastructure of former disadvantaged schools
1969–1975	R605–R644	R40–R42	Classrooms had bare shells. Bantu city areas like rural Limpopo had schools with no electricity, unreliable water banks and no toilets; 94% had no libraries and laboratories. There were also no sports and recreation facilities. Eastern Cape had about seven mud schools with no fencing.
1982	R1211	R146	Sixty percent of schools did not have access to electricity and telephones, 35% were without portable water and 12% did not have access to toilets. Of all schools, 44% to 47% had pit latrines.

Source: Hirson (1979:220); Badat and Sayed (2014:130); National Norms and Standards for Funding (NSSF) Policy; and Draga (2016:238)

The above table indicates the type of schools which were reserved for former disadvantaged South African children as a result of segregation. The schools were underdeveloped and the subsidy reflects the reasons why the black children were denied equal education opportunities and dignity and why they were disadvantaged as compared to other ethnic groups.

### **2.2.3 The South African schooling system post-1994**

Education is critical in redressing the injustices of apartheid colonialism which created an inequitable and fragmented education system. However, the quality of education remains a challenge in South Africa (DBE, 2008:14; Gumede & Biyase, 2016:69,73), Since the first democratic government came into place in 1994 to date, the South African government has made attempts to find new solutions for education (Hartshorne, 1992, cited in Webb, 2017:2) or emphasised educational processes (Gumede & Biyase, 2016:70). The South African education system, with schools making its largest part, is presently made up of 7% of independent schools (or private schools) and 93% public schools under which fee and no-fee schools can be located (Reddy *et al.*, 2015:7). In their study, *Educational reforms and curriculum transformation in post-apartheid South Africa*, Gumede and Biyase (2016:70) highlighted that 19 departments of education became only one National Department of Basic Education (DBE) and 9 provincial department with the minister being responsible for national standards and norms for education planning, educational

provision, governance, monitoring (Juan, *et al.*, 2019:1). Also, there are three categorized bands in the system, that is, the General Education and Training (GET) band which is considered to be compulsory for all learners, the Further Education and Training (FET) band where we will find the Grade 10 to 12 with grade 12 being significant to this study and the Higher Education band, which caters for all post-schooling education (Juan, Reddy & Arends, 2019:1). Juan *et al.* (2019:1) further pointed out that GET is subdivided into three phases, namely, the Foundation phase (which caters for grade 1 to 3), the Intermediate phase (which caters for grade 4 to 6), and the Senior phase (which caters for grade 8 to 9). Grades 1 to 6 can be located in primary schools and grade 8 and 9 in secondary schools while in pre schools, early childhood development (ECD) which caters for grade R is independently run or also found in public schools. Grade 9 marks the transition into the FET band (Juan, *et al.*, 2019:1). At the end of grade 12 learners write the school leaving external examination called the National Senior Certificate (NSC) which prepares learners for placement into the workforce or institutions of higher learning (Juan, *et al.*, 2019:1) for qualifications such as under- and post-graduate degrees, diplomas, higher education certificates, technical and vocational certificates (Juan, *et al.*, 2019:1). These institutions include universities, technical or community colleges and non-formal and post-general education (Juan, *et al.*, 2019:1).

Other changes in the education system included language matters in instruction (Hartshorne, 1992, cited in Webb, 2017:2). The Curricula changed with the employment of Curriculum 2005 in 1997, or rather outcomes-based education (OBE) or simply results-orientated thinking (Gumede and Biyase, 2016:70). It was revised in 2002, but still did not work and was finally replaced by the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) in 2006 (Gumede & Biyase, 2016:73). NCS was further revised in 2008 to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), which ended that year with candidates writing their National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination for the first time (Gumede & Biyase, 2016:73). Finally, RNCS was replaced with the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), to date (Gumede & Biyase, 2016:73). 124 subjects were reduced to only 29 subjects in Further Education and Training (FET) band with intellectual requests being higher than those of the prior democracy examination called the Senior Certificate Examination (SCE) (Gumede and Biyase, 2016:73). Learners in General Education and Training (GET) band are offered a minimum of 9 subjects while in FET band learners are to choose and a minimum of

seven subjects per learner from that list of 29 subjects, which included two official languages, mathematics, mathematical literacy, life orientation and two other subjects (Gumede & Biyase, 2016:73). FET is where gateway subjects or STEM subjects are found but these will further be discussed in section 2.3 below.

#### **2.2.4 Impediments to quality education post-1994**

According to data from the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS), over 90% of white learners attend quintile 5 schools, which have the best resources and educational results in the country, and a negligible proportion of them attend no-fee schools with poor resources (human and material), which the majority of black learners will attend (Roodt, 2018:4). This was a reflection that black learners were at the worst receiving end of education as opposed to white learners (Roodt, 2018:5) and still are to date.

The National Population Education Project (NPEP)'s policy statement was introduced to address these inequalities (Draga, 2016:240), but up to date, there are still schools with water supply challenges, no functional laboratories and no library space. In addition, safekeeping of the school property remained a challenge, with schools with school break-ins, no fencing or fencing in a poor state and no appropriate toilet facilities since the update of 2000 (DBE, 2008:15).

Hettie (2003, cited in Sithole, 2017:12), in the 2017 report by the National Education Evaluation Development Unit (NEEDU), highlights that 5% of the variation in learner performance in schools was attributed to school environment, as one of the factors, together with principals' leadership practices, teacher practice and home environment, as others. There has been a shortage of teachers from 2005, and this was related to specific subjects, such as natural sciences, mathematics and languages, due to the few students in universities studying in these fields of schooling (DoE, 2005a, cited in Sithole, 2017:12). This was irrespective of the system recruitment of teacher trainees, such as through the Funza Lushaka (translated as Educating the Nation) programme for those subjects (Sithole, 2017:12). The programme covers the study and living expenses of students who choose education and students must serve in schools for the number of years equivalent to the received subsidy's years (Sithole, 2017:12). It was evident that leadership in no-fee schools are challenged by these circumstances.

### **2.2.5 The background of no-fee schools**

Post-1994, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) was contracted by the South African government, which requested for school-fee payments to be scrapped, mostly for former disadvantaged learners (Dass & Rinqest, 2017:143). The needs for free education, the charging of school fees or even the exception thereof were recognised and guided by the international laws. This resulted in the Constitutional Court's decision that the right to basic education was instantaneously feasible in South Africa (Dass & Rinqest, 2017:143). School fees were viewed as being prohibitive for learners of low socio-economic status to acquire quality education and reinforcing inequalities in educational quality. Therefore, payment of school fees by black learners had to be reviewed (Branson *et al.*, 2015:3). The democratic government, after realising that the right to basic schooling was independent of the accessibility of state resources, had to make basic education for children living in South Africa free or at least affordable (Dass & Rinqest, 2017:143). This right meant free education for all learners, due to an irregular dissemination of funding along racial lines due to the apartheid era, as indicated in Table 2.1 above. This made poorer the schools of black learners and other ethnic groups other than white (Dass & Rinqest, 2017:144), which was the reason for the black schools to be presently regarded as the most disadvantaged schools.

The government, after recognising that to benefit many learners from black communities schooling in more affluent schools, a funding model called cross-subsidisation together with an admissions policy had to be developed (Dass & Rinqest, 2017:146). Cross-subsidisation is when the government allocates less money to more affluent schools that can raise money for themselves through school fees or other fundraising mechanisms (Dass & Rinqest, 2017:146). Admissions policy, on the other hand, meant that if parents cannot pay school fees, principals were prohibited from withholding learners' report cards or matriculation certificates; denying learners access to a school feeding scheme, or participation of learners' in sports, cultural or social activities; or even committing verbal or nonverbal abuse towards learners.

The minister of education (from the DBE) was to classify or rank schools using the quintile system (Badat & Sayed, 2014:146) in accordance to Section 39(7) of the South African Schools Act (no. 84 of 1996) (South Africa, 1996). In the beginning, no-fee

schools were only classified as quintile 1 and 2 schools, which were ordinary public schools not to levy compulsory school fees from all their learners (RSA, 2006:42, cited in Brown, 2016:7). Later, quintile 3 schools were also included (National Report on the Development of Education, 2008:8). All no-fee schools are schools mostly for former disadvantaged learners and are subsidised wholly by the government because they service the poor communities around them (Badat & Sayed, 2014:146). In contrast, schools which were fee-paying ordinary public schools were only partially subsidised by the government because they serviced more affluent communities and were therefore categorised as quintile 4 and 5 schools (Badat & Sayed, 2014:137). Quintile 1 schools were subsidised the most because they were mostly located in the poorest areas, whereas quintile 5 schools were the least subsidised because they were situated mostly in the wealthiest areas of South Africa (Badat & Sayed, 2014:137). To date, the more affluent public schools remain better resourced because they charge school fees and because of the funding they accumulated from the large subsidies prior to 1994 as compared to no-fee schools, as reflected in Table 2.1 above.

Table 2.2 provides evidence that the majority of ordinary public schools in 2017 were no-fee schools, nationally and also in Gauteng province, which was the geographic demarcation of this study. This was a reflection that imbalances in South African education is continuing, despite the funding system.

**Table 2.2: No-fee schools and learners in Gauteng province and in South Africa, in numbers and in percentage**

2017	No. of quintile 1–3 schools	% of quintile 1–3 schools	No. of learners (not paying fees)	% of learners (not paying fees)
<b>Gauteng province</b>	1396	67.02	1 463 721	71.45
<b>Nationally</b>	20 478	86.34	9 784 411	79.28

Source: Select Committee on Education and Recreation (2017)

According to Table 2.2, approximately 67% of all ordinary public schools in Gauteng province for 2017 were declared no-fee schools and categorised under quintiles 1 to 3 out of 86% public schools nationally (DBE, 2018:23). The research has interest in the role of principals' leadership practices in no-fee schools in Gauteng province in order to explore how it affects Grade 12 learner performance at that level of schooling and at these schools which are a majority in Gauteng Province.

### **2.2.6 Characteristics of no-fee schools**

There was a high disparity in the physical conditions of ordinary public schools of South Africa and the contexts in which they were located and this was captured by the poverty index of schools (Reddy *et al.*, 2015:7). The Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) were responsible to assign poverty scores to schools based on the relative poverty of the community surrounding the school (DBE, 2017:12). The following were the determinants for declaring a school as a no-fee school, ever since 2007 or to be allocated a subsidy: infrastructure, income levels of households, unemployment rate and levels of education (literacy rate) (Dass & Rinqest, 2017:146). In considering the infrastructure, the committee assigned looked at the materials used to build the houses of communities around the schools (such as iron sheeting, wood or bricks) (Dass & Rinqest, 2017:146). The school had to fall within quintiles 1, 2 or 3 and had to be surrounded by a poor community (DBE, 2017:12). By the end of 2007, the minister of education had declared 80% of public schools in SA as no-fee schools (Branson *et al.*, 2015:4) and the number is still growing. The policy guidelines stipulate that former disadvantaged schools should not charge school fees for learners in the compulsory grades (1 to 9), but, in practice, the programme has been applied to all grades at no-fee schools (Branson *et al.*, 2014:4). With this policy, the government has not only intended to redress the funding inequality in public schools, but has also attempted to advance the value of schooling for all South Africans and to keep learners at school until post-secondary schooling (or post grade 12) (Branson *et al.*, 2015:3). The details of this policy are briefly discussed in the next section.

### **2.2.7 No-fee-school policy implementation**

In 2006, the DBE established the National Norms and Standards for Funding (NNSSF) policy to redress inequality in the distribution of materials for learning across provinces (Branson *et al.*, 2014:4). This fee-elimination policy (or rather no-fee policy) exonerates quintile 1 to 3 schools from school fee payments and compulsory donations, but allows them to do fundraising for the furtherance of the school (Badat & Sayed, 2014:146). Branson *et al.* (2014:4) also highlight that one of the goals of the NNSSF policy was to encourage former disadvantaged learners to stay in school until they have achieved post-compulsory education.

In certain instances, as seen in Section 103(c) of the NNSSF policy of 2006, the government encourages poor parents who have children in more affluent schools (quintiles 4 and 5) and who are overly burdened by school fees to apply for fee exemption (Branson *et al.*, 2015:5; Dass & Rinquist, 2017:146). Even though the NNSSF policy has been prioritised, inequality could not be addressed through pro-poor non-personnel funding alone. The NNSSF was accompanied by large increases in and improvements to per-learner allocation of funding and resources, school safety, classroom construction and school support. However, this did not result in improvement in additional outcomes, backlogs or policy-implementation problems by principals, which may have hindered immediate improved learner performance (Branson *et al.*, 2015:3).

### 2.2.8 Allocations per learner in no-fee schools

Free education was an exquisite political goal in modern society (Nkosi, 2011:20). Table 2.3 indicates the school funding subsidy for the formal desegregation of schools in education in the democratic era for some past years and projected into the future. The table also indicates the revised and expected infrastructure for these years.

**Table 2.3: Subsidy per child per month nationally and the revised infrastructure**

Year	Poorest quintiles (1 to 3)	Wealthier quintiles (4 and 5, respectively)	Expected infrastructure status of lower quintile schools
2009	R809	R404 & R134	All public schools must have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some form of power supply, for example solar power or generators.</li> <li>• Sufficient water supply.</li> <li>• Sufficient number of sanitation stations, including ventilated, improved pit latrines (plain pit or bucket latrines are not permitted).</li> <li>• Electronic connectivity, library laboratories for sciences.</li> </ul>
2010	R855	R428 & R147	
2011	R919	R459 & R158	
2016	R1177	R590 & R204	
2017	R1243	R623 & R215	
2018	R1316	R660 & R228	
2019	R1390	R697 & R241	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electronic connectivity in some no-fee schools.</li> </ul>
2020	R1468	R736 & R254	All no-fee schools must have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic infrastructure.</li> <li>• Electronic connectivity.</li> <li>• Electricity, water and sanitation.</li> <li>• Classrooms, perimeter security, libraries and laboratories.</li> <li>• Sports and recreation facilities.</li> </ul>
2021	R1547	R776 & R268	

Source: Government Notice No. 1080; South African Schools Act (no. 84 of 1996) (South Africa, 1996); Government Gazette No. 4245 and No. 40818; DBE (2017)

Table 2.3 shows that lower quintile schools receive a higher per-learner subsidy than the affluent schools, although this was still not enough for schools in the poorer provinces to redress the inequalities in financing schools compared to schools in the richer provinces (Sub-National Budget Brief on Funding, 2019:8). Funding was evidently high in no-fee schools, but not equivalent to improvement in quality of education because some of the expectations were still not met.

Poorly equipped and insufficiently funded schools have an effect on school leadership and cost them well learner performance if not addressed. Weinstein (1979, cited in Draga, 2016:238) points out that there is a link between good learner performance and context (such as the infrastructure and conditions of school facilities such as sporting fields, and so forth). The background of gateway subjects will be briefly discussed in the next section.

## **2.3 Understanding Gateway or STEM Subjects**

This section discusses learner performance in STEM subjects, specifically mathematics and science, as reflected in the TIMSS results of 2015. The section also discusses some of the contributing factors to well or poor performance in these subjects.

### **2.3.1 The importance of gateway or STEM subjects**

The national vision with STEM education was to promote industrialisation and diversification and to achieve middle-income status (Tikly, Joubert, Barrett, Bainton, Cameron & Doyle, 2018:9). The term STEM was created in the early 2000s by the National Science Foundation and refers to educational learning areas or subjects (Dugger, 2012:2, cited in Worsham, Clevenger & Whealan-George, 2016:1). In accordance with the study *Supporting secondary school STEM education for sustainable development in Africa*, conducted by Tikly *et al.* (2018:11), the STEM working definition at secondary school includes subjects such as natural sciences (including physics, chemistry and biology); mathematics; technology-related subjects (including information and communications technology [ICT]) and engineering.

In South Africa, some of the STEM subjects form part of the designated list or were referred to as gateway subjects (including, for example, mathematics and physical sciences). The DBE identified eleven subjects as gateway academic subjects, where learners in public schools must select subjects to be placed in Grades 10 up to 12 when they finish their ninth Grade. These subjects include: mathematics, life sciences, mathematical literacy, business studies, geography, physical sciences, accounting, economics, history, first additional languages (with the exception of home languages) and life orientation and were regarded as compulsory for all learners (Blom, 2014:9, 14). Secondly, it was highlighted that gateway subjects were most popular in secondary schools because they had the most enrolments in the NSC examination (more than 100,000 candidates per year nationally) (National Senior Certificate Examination Report, 2016:30).

Again, gateway subjects could provide sustainable work opportunities because teaching learners these subjects prepare them for becoming STEM professionals (for example, in engineering and mining or environmental protection or even human development) and improve self-employment and entrepreneurship skills and problem-solving skills (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:4). Researchers perceived STEM subjects as predictors of learners' success or a prerequisite for their entry in both vocation and post-vocation studies in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and commerce because these subjects enhance the cognitive development of learners (Blom, 2014:14; Sithole, 2017:46). These subjects were used as a displaying tool for entitlement for admission into tertiary learning for most South African learners after Grade 12. Learners were required to obtain a pass rate of 40% to 59% in any four of the chosen subjects in the NSC examinations to gain access to the universities (Hains, 2017:2). Blom (2014:39) further pointed out that learners who sit for these subjects at Grade 12 were mostly able to finish their tertiary education studies effectively.

### **2.3.2 Learner performance in gateway subjects: An international perspective**

This section offers a view into learner performance in gateway subjects at international level.

### **2.3.2.1 Singapore**

Singapore saw impressive academic performance in STEM subjects within a short span of 50 years after gaining independence in 1965 from being a British colony (Tan, Koh & Choy, 2016:3). The results of one of the international assessments of mathematics and science knowledge around the world, TIMSS, pointed out that Singapore, with 597 points in science and 621 points in mathematics in Grade 9 performance in 2015, was a leading international country from East Asia (Reddy *et al.*, 2015:2). For the country to be at the top-performing mark, nearly all students were to score above the TIMSS benchmark of 400 points, with almost all learners in Singapore having achieved this (Reddy *et al.*, 2015:2). Besides these 2015 results, Singapore obtained supreme learner performance in other international assessments in STEM education (Tan *et al.*, 2016:3).

Singapore's school system was divided into various levels (Idris, Daud, Meng, Eu & Ariffin, 2013:12; Tan *et al.*, 2016:5). Pre-schools were composed of childcare centres for children from two months old and kindergarten for children from four to six years old. Primary education (which was free and compulsory) started from seven years old and lasts for a six-year period (Tan *et al.*, 2016:6). Secondary education lasts for a period of four years. Lastly, post-secondary levels were composed of university, polytechnic, vocational and technical levels. The majority of schools are state schools or rather national schools, but learners in Singapore were expected to pay school fees at all levels (Worsham *et al.*, 2016:1).

With regard to teaching and learning in Singapore, mathematics and science were two compulsory core subjects taught at the primary level and taken by all learners even through to the secondary level. To inculcate a love for STEM subjects, Singaporean learners were made to learn mathematics at Grade 1 and science at Grade 3, but as early as kindergarten (from 4 years), children learn basic number skills, and creative and problem-solving skills (Tan *et al.*, 2016:4). In addition, primary school learners were inspired to partake in co-curricular activities because their government believed in learners' all-inclusive growth of capabilities in skills such as communication and novelty (Idris *et al.*, 2013:8). Teachers in Singapore were trained specialists, having had the opportunity to visit international schools to improve their teaching methods (Idris *et al.*, 2013:13). This made it easier for secondary school principals in Singapore

to lead and manage schools because the learners and teachers were focused, with very few content barriers at secondary school level.

Regarding parental involvement, Worsham *et al.* (2016:1) pointed out that parental involvement in learners' STEM education aids learners to be more skilled in those regions because of their positive attitude towards STEM. A parent support group (PSG) was set up in each school, which played an active role in facilitating STEM education through organising extra tutoring classes for learners after school hours, including events to appreciate teachers in their respective schools (Idris *et al.*, 2013:7). In comparison to other international countries, Singapore had 30% parental involvement in mathematics help, where parents hired private tutors to help their children with mathematics, compared to 16% of parents in the US and UK (Idris *et al.*, 2013:5).

In summary, the success of the education system of Singapore was due to three factors. Firstly, the education system provided a diversity of school types and platforms. Secondly, they revised their syllabus to endorse inter-disciplinary education. And, finally, teachers shifted from just being specialists and distributors of content knowledge to be the resource persons to assist learners' education through inventive and learner-centred events (Tan *et al.*, 2016:12). These factors finally improved learner performance and might be lacking in other countries.

### **2.3.2.2 Japan**

Japan achieved the second-best performance in mathematics, with 587 points, but fifth best in science, with 586 points, in TIMSS 2015 for Grade 9 learners. This placed Japan among the top five ranked countries in mathematics performance in TIMSS 2015 (Reddy *et al.*, 2015:2). Education in Japan was free and compulsory from the first grade and through to the ninth grade, ages six to fifteen. There was no grade repetition at Grade 1 level in Japan and schooling was more expensive after 15 years of age than in most European countries (Wieczorek, 2008:1; Miki, Pont, Figueroa, Peterka & Fraccola, 2015:4, 6; Gunnarsdóttir & Essay, 2016:2,4). Pre-primary education (which was regarded as kindergarten in Singapore) usually started at age three, with an enrolment of about 81% to 95% of four-year olds mostly at private institutions (Miki *et al.*, 2015:4). This was an indication that education in Japan started at a very tender age. The registration speed in upper secondary school (which was referred to as

secondary or high school in the US) was high in Japan and the dropout rate is low (Miki *et al.*, 2015:8).

With regard to teaching and learning, Japan provides even-handed learning opportunities to 15-year-old learners, with private out-of-school tutoring delivered privately after hours, as in Singapore. Resultantly, 16- to 65-year olds perform best in mathematics and science, as reported by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Miki *et al.*, 2015:8). In a survey on adult skills, Japanese women were ranked top worldwide in both literacy and numeracy expertise (Miki *et al.*, 2015:8). Recent statistics indicated that Japan has a 93% graduation rate, following Denmark with 96%, whereas the US has a graduation rate of 72% (Wieczorek, 2008:1; Gunnarsdóttir & Essay, 2016:3). Access to the teaching profession was well regulated in Japan (Miki *et al.*, 2015:4) and teachers were well remunerated (Wieczorek, 2008:1).

### **2.3.2.3 The United States**

Schooling in the US with its 50 states was mainly supplied by the state, with control and funding coming from three levels: federal, state and local (Wieczorek, 2008:1; Nuffic, 2018:5). Schooling lasts for 12 years with an academic year that started from the ninth month to the fifth or sixth month of the next year, but exactly how these 12 years (or grades) are divided depended on the state or school district (Nuffic, 2018:5).

The US was ranked number ten in mathematics scores (518 points) and eleventh in science (530 points) in Grade 9 performance in TIMSS 2015 (Reddy *et al.*, 2015:2). 15-year olds in the USA therefore scored lower in the international average in mathematics skills and slightly above the average in science skills, according to the indicators, being outpaced by India and China (Wieczorek, 2008:1).

### **2.3.3 Learner performance in gateway subjects: An African perspective**

According to Tikly *et al.* (2018:1), the African continent continued to struggle to match STEM learner performance globally. This ultimately increased their dependency on foreign expertise due to scarcity of professionals in STEM areas of engineering fields (African Union, 2014; United Nations [UN], 2016, cited in Tikly *et al.*, 2018:9), which results in the continent's decline in the quality of STEM education (United Nations Report, 2007, cited in Sikolia & Sikolia, 2016:61). Tikly *et al.* (2018:9) opined that to

seal the crack between sub-Sahara African (SSA) countries and the rest of the world in STEM areas of engineering fields, it was imperative to improve the quality of STEM education in SSA.

### **2.3.3.1 Ghana**

Ghana and other SSA countries have made higher excellence of instruction and STEM subjects, at all stages, a priority (Prempeh, 2018:8). Education in some SSA countries, including Ghana, was free and compulsory up to ages 18 or 19 (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:11). The schooling system in most SSA countries was divided into stages. These included the lower primary level, which is for six years of age up to eight years, upper primary level for ages nine up to twelve, lower secondary level for ages 12 up to 16 and upper secondary level for ages 17 up to 19 (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:11). The highest level is higher education, which is also post-compulsory education in most SAA countries, which was for ages 18 plus (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:11). In 2015, the OECD released a report that Ghana had the worst education system in the world because it came stone last in STEM-subject performance of Grade 9 as compared to Singapore, which had the best education system in the world because it was at the top of the list of all 76 countries which participated (Roodt, 2018:1).

### **2.3.3.2 Malawi**

Similar to Ghana, Malawi's formal education system comprised of primary education, which was free (for eight years), secondary education (for four years) (forms 1 and 2 – junior secondary level and forms 3 and 4 – senior secondary level) and four years of tertiary education also for teacher training (Milner, Chimombo, Banda & Mchikoma, 2001:2). Poor performance in STEM in SSA countries has been persisting even prior to 2015 (Reddy *et al.*, 2015:2), with Malawi not being immune to this.

### **2.3.3.3 Botswana**

TIMMS was first administered in 1995 and every four years thereafter, which included 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015. In 2015, Botswana and South Africa were among the 76 countries which participated with Grades 8 and 9 learners (Reddy *et al.*, 2015:1). Poor performance in STEM subjects in SSA countries were reflected in TIMMS results even before 2015, which drew the attention of the researcher of this study and continues to be a worrying factor (Reddy *et al.*, 2015:2). Only three countries from SSA

participated in TIMSS in 2015 for Grade 9, namely Botswana, South Africa and Ghana (Reddy *et al.*, 2015:2). The 2015 TIMSS results showed that Botswana obtained 391 points for mathematics and 392 points for science, thus performing better than South Africa, with 372 points for mathematics and 358 points for science (Reddy *et al.*, 2015:2). These SSA countries performed poorly because between half and two thirds of the learners scored below 400 points (they did not achieve the minimum competency), which was the lowest of the TIMSS benchmark categories. Except the fact that only few SSA countries took part in the STEM assessment in 2011, Botswana was still at the bottom of the list in performance of both mathematics and science, with Ghana and South Africa following (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:4).

#### **2.3.3.4 Kenya**

In their study, *Influence of strengthening of mathematics and science in secondary education (SMASSE) project: Performance and trend in the mean score of biology in Kakamega North sub country, Kenya*, Sikolia and Sikolia (2016:61) pointed out that the performance of Kenyan learners in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (K.C.S.E) was generally low, including performance in STEM subjects. This affirmed that learner performance in STEM subjects in SSA needs serious attention.

#### **2.3.4 Learner performance in gateway subjects: A South African perspective**

The South African end of schooling system governed by DBE is a twelve year journey for all learners. Bill of Rights legislation regards DBE in the general education and training (GET) band as compulsory for all learners to be free only for former disadvantaged South African learners or learners in no-fee schools (National Report on the Development of Education, 2008:1).

Domestic and international surveys of educational achievement have revealed that learners from South Africa perform poorly in gateway or STEM subjects such as mathematics and science (Taylor, Van der Berg & Burger, 2011:4), especially in secondary schools. Four international studies all confirmed that learner performance in schools was unacceptably poor (National Report on the Development of Education, 2008:12). These studies were the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) project, TIMSS, the South African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ)

study, and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). This study, however, concentrated more on the report by TIMSS because the study was based on STEM subjects which formed the basis of the study.

The TIMSS 2015 report revealed that nationally, former disadvantaged schools achieved the lowest in both mathematics, with 341 points, and science, with 317 points. Provincially, Gauteng province performed the highest in the country in comparison to other provinces (Reddy *et al.*, 2015:4), yet still not reaching the required benchmark. Again, in 2015, the OECD released a report after examining how well learners performed in mathematics and science and concluded that the country had the second last (seventy fifth) worst education system out of the 76 countries (Roodt, 2018:1). Some of the learners who participated in TIMSS 2015 formed part of the 2019 cohort of learners who wrote their Grade 12 examinations in 2019. It is clear that lower quintile schools (quintile 1 to 3) need the most intervention not only in Grade 12 but also in lower grades in order to improve the performance of learners in STEM subjects (Reddy *et al.*, 2015:5). This was because in Grade 9, the basic content forms the basic for learner performance in Grade 12 (Reddy *et al.*, 2015:5). Table 2.4 reflects the number of learners who wrote NSC examinations in the years 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 nationally and their national pass rates, in percentages, in four gateway subjects selected for this study. The minimum pass rate is 30% in all public schools.

**Table 2.4: Learner performance in gateway subjects from 2016 to 2019**

Year	2016	Pass %	2017	Pass %	2018	Pass %	2019	Pass %
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Number of learners and percentage achieved at 30% and above</b>							
<b>Mathematics</b>	265 810	51.1	245 103	51.9	135 438	52.0	35 412	53.1
<b>Physical sciences</b>	192 618	62.0	179 661	65.1	172 315	74.2	39 499	74.8
<b>Accounting</b>	128 853	69.5	103 427	66.1	65 481	72.5	13 931	85.5
<b>Economics</b>	155 908	65.3	128 796	71.0	84 354	73.3	21 188	75.4

Source: National Senior Certificate Schools Subject Report (2019)

Table 2.4 reflects the popularity of gateway subjects in terms of high enrolments and learner performance, nationally, for a trajectory of four years (National Senior Certificate Schools Subject Report, 2019:5).

Learner performance in no-fee schools was important because approximately 86% of all ordinary public schools were categorised as no-fee schools (Select Committee on Education and Recreation, 2017:9). A learner fails a grade if he or she obtains less than 30% in home language and another subject (from six chosen subjects) and this can prevent the learner from passing and obtaining their Grade 12 National Senior Certificate. The minister of basic education pointed out that the NSC serves as a gateway to a job, with commercial projections or further studies in skills such as medicine and engineering being scarce (National Senior Certificate Schools Subjects Report, 2019:3). Table 2.4 also reflects that only 50% of learners pass mathematics nationally, which was the lowest of all the selected gateway subjects. Besides this, none of the selected subjects recorded pass rates of 90% or 100% for all four these years. Poor performance in gateway subjects was not only picked up at matric level. Weaknesses in mathematics and sciences were indicated by some of the learners who formed the 2019 cohort way back when they were in Grade 9 in the 2015 TIMSS report, as indicated above. South African learner performance in STEM subjects was thus generally poor and effective leaders were needed in no-fee schools to come up with effective intervention strategies.

### **2.3.5 Gaps in South African STEM subjects**

Poor performance in STEM subjects has bad repercussions for any country. One out of three young people in their lower ages are unemployed in South Africa (Shan, 2018:1). A solid STEM foundation can combat this through improving learner performance in mathematics and science which can stimulate skills in youth which were essential in adaptability (namely creative-thinking, problem-solving and critical-thinking skills)(Shan, 2018:1). Again, transforming STEM education was vital for the country in keeping up with the fast-paced times of radical change in the country. To improve learner performance in no-fee schools, Shan (2018:1) suggests that South Africa needed to address deficiencies in current STEM education. The following concepts which create gaps in STEM education has been identified: (i) teacher development; (ii) parental involvement; and (iii) transformation. These concepts were briefly discussed below together with suggestions to bridge these gaps in principal leadership.

### **2.3.5.1 *Teacher development***

Shan (2018:1) highlighted that South Africa need to instil confidence in mathematics and science content and teaching methodologies. This was because with underdeveloped mathematics and science methodology, teachers can communicate effectively with learners. To achieve this, there should be a law that enforces teachers to complete programmes developed to help them achieve set standards of competency. In addition, STEM teachers need to be paid sufficient salaries to incentivise continuous learning and excellence. Lastly, there is need for a continuous appraisal system to intervene when early incompetency is evidenced (Shan, 2018:1). Continuing professional teacher development (CPTD) was perceived to be significant in ensuring continuing professional development for teachers, including principals, and inspiring the higher professional philosophy in the teaching profession, designed, implemented and managed under the South African Council of Teachers (SACE) (National Report on Development of Education, 2008:17). CPTD attempts to encourage professional developmental activities that have a positive influence on capability, level of commitment, and competence of principals and their teachers (National Report on Development of Education, 2008:17). Principals need to encourage and motivate their staff members by taking the lead and participating in such programmes so that they can follow in their footsteps and improve professionalism in their schools and ultimately improve Grade 12 learner performance, especially in STEM subjects at no-fee schools.

### **2.3.5.2 *Parental involvement***

In many cases, pupils in no-fee schools do not have contact with parents or guardians who are actively involved in their school lives. Shan (2018:1) pointed out that there was a huge gap in South Africa from a parental perspective. She further pointed out that children's understanding of 'who I am' and 'where can I go with my life' starts at home. Children needed parents or guardians who would encourage them to read, complete homework, debate and take part in stimulating interactions and dialogues (Shan, 2018:1). Unfortunately, communities surrounding no-fee schools mostly do not have parents with good education backgrounds; less involvement in children's lives thus makes things worse. The study conducted by TIMSS reflected that learners with literate parents achieved mathematics scores 11% higher than learners whose parents are illiterate, and 17% higher than those with parents who had only had some primary

school education (Roodt, 2018:1). Shan (2018:1) highlights that parents with formal education needed to be supported and empowered by principals to be in a position to assist their children with mathematics for children to succeed at school, and also to be assisted to engage positively with teachers at school.

### **2.3.5.3 Transformation**

Shan (2018:1) posits that South African schools lack transformational ethos reinforced by the right principals as leaders. Learners at no-fee schools are faced with various challenges. They are underfed and face teacher absenteeism, unsafe environments and substance abuse. In addition, girl learners, in particular, face sexual abuse. These challenges somehow contribute to high dropout rates in no-fee schools (Shan, 2018:1). It has been reflected that less than half the learners who enrol in Grade 1 are able to complete matric. It is believed that this situation can only change through high-powered and effective school leadership where the principal possesses traits such as commitment, incorrigibility, strength and decisiveness and can champion positive change (Shan, 2018:1).

### **2.3.6 Challenges and their anticipated solutions in STEM subjects**

Tikly *et al.* (2018:4) pointed out some challenges related to low performance in the STEM teaching of SSA countries which were systematic. These include recruiting teachers for STEM subjects and teacher retention, class size, and resources (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:4). These challenges were briefly discussed with suggested solutions to this effect.

#### **2.3.6.1 Recruiting teachers for STEM subjects and teacher retention**

Due to a current rapid increase in enrolment of learners in mathematics and science subjects across SSA countries, there was a massive increased demand for qualified STEM teachers, which has led to the employment of unqualified teachers (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:4). This increase in enrolment was attributed to free and compulsory basic education for learners up to age 18. Similarly, Sikolia and Sikolia (2016:61) highlighted that development of STEM in SSA countries was hindered by inadequate levels of literacy among teachers and a scarcity of women in science. The latter was because girls drop out of school at primary level due to various factors, including teenage pregnancy, *et cetera*. The quality of STEM subjects was therefore compromised and

these subjects are thus misconceived and misunderstood by learners due to a shortage of teachers with sufficient knowledge (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:4).

The Inkanyezi Project was an educational project which was assigned to no-fee schools that succeeded to improve achievement in mathematics and science for former disadvantaged learners to gain university entrance (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:6). The project paid teachers for teaching these subjects at educational camps held at lower quintile secondary schools in South Africa (from 2009 to 2013), where learners were put in a particular school and taught (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:6).

In 1996, Malawi introduced a program called the Malawi Integrated In-service Teacher Education Programme (MIITEP) with an aim to train as many primary education teachers as possible for a duration of three months per trainee to reduce the shortage of teachers in the country (Milner *et al.*, 2001:49). However, the shortage of STEM teachers is still unresolved.

Another problem in STEM education is the lack of teacher retention (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:6). In order to retain well-qualified teachers in STEM subjects, higher salaries or rather differentiated salaries for teachers have been proposed (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:6), although this is still not the case in most SSA countries.

#### **2.3.6.2 Class size**

Tikly *et al.* (2018:5) explain that a high teacher-learner ratio in STEM subjects in a single classroom is a problem across SSA countries and is a cause of incompatibility between educator expectation and learner abilities. To reinforce knowledge in STEM subjects such as science and technology requires hands-on activities and/or experiments with scientific equipment, but large classes make this difficult (Nzomo, Kariuki & Guantai, 2001:4). Overcrowded classes can also lead to an uncomfortable learning space where teachers and learners feel uncomfortable (Nzomo *et al.*, 2001:4). When uncomfortable, teachers and learners resort to absenteeism which eventually compromised instruction and causes more learners to repeat classes or drop out of school. This was because examinable topics were undertreated or missed, limiting opportunities for learners to access secondary education with STEM subjects. Due to overcrowded classes, learners enter the Grade 12 class being underprepared and, therefore, their performance in that level would be negatively affected, STEM subjects not being an exception.

For example, in Malawi, the actual teacher-learner ratio is 1:119 instead of the approved ratio of 1:60. This high teacher-learner ratio is due to the rapid increase in enrolment after the 1994 declaration that primary education is free (Milner *et al.*, 2001:2). Also, shortages of teachers in STEM subjects in Kenya which led to overcrowded classes was due to the government closing the public training colleges and stopping training of teachers in 1997 (Nzomo *et al.*, 2001:4). Principals were deprived of very well-qualified STEM-subject teachers and are recommended underqualified teachers for these subjects, costing them good learner performance (Chisholm, 2010:16). To address the shortage of teachers, SSA countries should encourage many learners to study STEM subjects at tertiary level (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:6), which is still a problem.

### **2.3.6.3 Resources**

Science and technology as STEM subjects, in particular, had needs that were higher than that of other subjects. For example, in SSA countries, these subjects had a high demand of consumable materials, textbooks and equipment, which were always in short supply and needed to be of good quality (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:5). In South Africa, well-received workbooks in mathematics were used by only 80% of teachers. Again, in Malawi, 700 science kits from the government of Malawi were expected to be delivered to schools for practical lessons of science subjects, but only 200 were delivered (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:5). Terhoven and Fataar (2018:5) highlighted that due to poor infrastructure in no-fee schools, some schools do not have laboratories or tools and chemicals to do the approved experiments in physical sciences or life sciences. In addition, some learners due to social ills such as theft and also poverty cannot possess tools like calculators or mathematical instruments to practise mathematics and accounting, even though some no-fee schools do well in gateway subjects, yet it was just a drop in the ocean.

To address the challenges of resources, there was a successful programme in South Africa called the Dinaledi Schools Project with an initial aim to raise learner performance in secondary school mathematics preferably in former diasadvantaged schools (or no-fee schools). Five hundred well-managed schools with willing educators were assigned to the plan and were supported with textbooks, scientific calculators and geometry sets, and, where needed, with additional educators (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:6). To strengthen the Dinaledi Schools Project, a new conditional grant called the

Mathematics, Science and Technology (MST) Strategy was introduced by the GDE (GDE-MST Improvement Strategy 2009-2014). The strategy has the aim to improve the success rates in STEM subjects and to improve teachers' capacities at selected no-fee schools in Gauteng province.

In Kenya, school buildings were in poor conditions (Nzomo *et al.*, 2001:45). The Strengthening of Mathematics and Science in Secondary Education (SMASSE) Project was launched in Kenya in 1998 with the aim of developing the capability of Kenyan youth in STEM subjects (Sikolia & Sikolia, 2016:61). Parents in Kenya were responsible for financing capital investment and recurrent expenditure in schools. Alternatively, the government's major support is towards the salaries of teachers only (Nzomo *et al.*, 2001:4).

In Malawi, parents pay school fees at all secondary school levels as a contribution towards the construction of new classrooms (Milner *et al.*, 2001:5). In general, 64% of built schools in Malawi require major repairs even though the government was claimed to only contribute towards the maintenance of school buildings and provision of educational resources (Milner *et al.*, 2001:5, 48). Furthermore, there is a shortage of classrooms and those that are there have insufficient furniture and unusable chalkboards; there is a shortage of libraries, piped water and electricity; toilets are scarce and mostly temporal; and, in most schools, very few learners have textbooks (Milner *et al.*, 2001:48). Milner *et al.* (2001:48) also point out that insufficient tables and chairs could result in learners not paying attention to the teacher and this will finally lead to high repetition, absenteeism and dropouts from schools.

Similarly, school buildings in Nigeria in very poor condition and need major repairs and rebuilding because they are dilapidated, have leaking roofs, and availability of toilet facilities is problematic. In addition, most schools were poorly resourced in terms resource materials, modern technological equipment were almost non-existent and very few schools have libraries (Nzomo *et al.*, 2001:45, 47; Ahmadi & Lukman, 2015:34). The physical environment or facilities such as classrooms, furniture and class equipment affect teachers negatively in their performance (Overbaugh, 2010, cited in Ahmadi & Lukman, 2015:34). Similarly, availability of resources is an important variable in student learning (Agusiobo, 2004, cited in Ahmadi & Lukman, 2015:34). Clearly, the education systems in SSA countries are in crisis (Milner *et al.*, 2001:48). The current study has an interest in exploring the strategies applied by principals of

some no-fee schools in sustaining good learner performance regardless of contextual challenges such as large class sizes, poor infrastructure or shortage of resources.

## **2.4 Quality School Performance in South Africa**

In his article, *South Africa's deficient education system*, Morris (2018:1) mentioned that there was no doubt that poor STEM education replicated trends in joblessness among youth in the black society. To track well performance and to promote excellence in the NSC examinations in Grade 12, three key targets were introduced in terms of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 of the DBE. This plan was developed in 2011 and directly linked to scarce skills. The three targets are as follows:

- increase the number of Grade 12 learners who become eligible for a bachelor's programme;
- increase the number of Grade 12 learners who pass mathematics; and
- increase the number of Grade 12 learners who pass physical sciences (DBE: EFA, 2014:8; NSC Examination Report, 2017:13).

Admission requirements to a bachelor's degree or programme (previously known as matric exception or an endorsement) (DBE: NSC Examination Report, 2017:6) for learners to be able to study in any university in South Africa, included an achievement rating of four (40% up to 59%) or more in four designated subjects, adding to the NSC. The subjects were chosen from the following recognised 20-credit-bearing subjects: accounting, information technology, agricultural sciences, languages, business studies, life sciences, consumer studies, mathematics, dramatic arts, mathematical literacy, economics, music, engineering graphics and design, physical sciences, geography, religious studies, history, and visual arts (NSC Examination Report, 2017:7).

The four designated subjects could also be chosen from 12 new subjects included in the NSC in 2018. These were South African Sign Language as home language, technical mathematics, technical science, civil technology (construction), civil technology (civil services), civil technology (woodworking), electrical technology (digital systems), electrical technology (electronics), electrical technology (power systems), mechanical technology (automotive), mechanical technology (fitting and

machining), and mechanical technology (welding and metal works) (NSC Examination Report, 2018:11).

Many learners from no-fee schools perform poorly in the Grade 12 NSC examination and only a small number of those who pass did so well and obtained a bachelor's degree. South Africa has approximately 20 478 or rather 86% no-fee schools out of a possible 23 762 public schools (NSC Examination Report, 2018:14). Morris (2018:1) highlighted that only 6.9% of all learners pass mathematics with 70% to 100%, learners from no-fee schools included. He also pointed out that one out of 100 learners of no-fee schools achieved a distinction in mathematics. Even though there has been an increase in terms of bachelor's degree registrations, there were still fewer no-fee-school learners who obtained bachelor's passes to be able to study courses like engineering or medicine in universities in proportion to the number of no-fee schools nationally (Morris, 2018:1). This was a persisting worrying factor for no-fee schools.

## **2.5 Challenges Experienced by Poor-performing No-fee Schools**

The schools that annually perform below 60% in the NSC final examinations were labelled as poor performing, a label assigned to some South African schools (Report on National Senior Certificate Examination Results, 2011, cited in Heystek & Terhoven, 2014:2). Fataar and Paterson (2002:31, cited in Terhoven & Fataar, 2018:2) perceived poor-performing schools as being unsystematic, with a chaotic environment with recurrent interruptions in the school's daily activities, with no necessary structures and effective principal leadership in place.

The auditor-general of the DBE in the document *Strategies to improve school management and governance in schools (The Strategy, 2013)* showed that due to contextual challenges, some poor-performing schools cannot reach the departmental benchmarks for achievement. These contextual challenges related to the capacity, competence and nature of the leadership and management practices of the principals. These contextual challenges included poor principal leadership and management, lack of curriculum planning and management, insufficient contact time, wrong appointments, and lack of support by school governing bodies (Chisholm, 2010:16; DBE, 2013:1). Each was briefly discussed below.

### **2.5.1.1 *Poor principal leadership and management***

It was highlighted that the main contributor to poor learner performance in some schools is a lack of principal leadership practices, especially at no-fee schools where the schools lack systems on how to deal with ill-disciplined learners and educators (DBE, 2013:5). Poor-performing schools lack systems on how to deal with absenteeism by both teachers and learners, late coming of staff and learners, teachers not teaching while they were present at work and ill-discipline. In addition, these schools struggled with poor financial management and the school management's inability to implement policy where schools were conflict-ridden (DBE, 2013:5). Learner performance was definitely affected in a negative way in such schools.

### **2.5.1.2 *Lack of curriculum planning and management***

It was the expectation of the DBE in Section 16A of the Education Laws Amendment Act (no. 31 of 2007) (South Africa, 2007:9) that school principals should draw up a school academic plan on the academic performance of the school, based on collected data, and submit it to the head of department (HoD) of education. The DBE considered planning as a crucial process of leadership since it articulated a mutual footpath towards good learner attainment. Some poor-performing principals do, however, draw up plans in isolation, yet they do not follow them and that disturbed the smooth running of the institution.

### **2.5.1.3 *Insufficient contact time and accountability***

The DBE discovered that poor learner performance has been attributed to non-completion of learning programmes. The main contributor here was ill-disciplined behaviours of teachers. These include teachers coming late in the mornings and attending periods late after lunch where learners arrive in classes before teachers; leaving early for home or absenteeism of teachers; and conducting or attending activities such as meetings, memorial services or workshops during school hours. Principals were unable to manage these situations or to take action against the offenders. Accountability was perceived to be the job of someone in a higher position. Time, resources and morals were wasted in the long run. Similarly, it has been highlighted that poor-performing schools' principals have challenges regarding their qualifications (where teachers were more qualified than their principals) or their schools normally attracted poor-performing teachers, especially for STEM subjects.

These teachers usually did not complete the syllabus, skip examinable topics during tuition, are absent from classes or do not use school time effectively (Jones & Rudd, 2008:1; Horng & Loeb, 2010:68; Walker, 2017:3). This negatively affects learner performance, especially in Grade 12. Bush and Glover (2016:215-216) claimed that principals of poor-performing schools saw monitoring as the responsibility of the district officials rather than themselves together with their school management team (SMT).

#### **2.5.1.4 Lack of support by school governance**

The Education Laws Amendment Act (no. 31 of 2007) (South Africa, 2007:9) stipulated that the principal was accountable to make a non-functional SGB functional by providing them with a list of compulsory topics on which they must be trained on. This would make the SGB well informed and enable them to govern the school effectively. Most no-fee schools were governed by SGB committees, which increasef unsuccessful principal leadership practices (Xaba, 2011:210, cited in Bush and Glover, 2016:217) and this affects parental involvement and makes it even worse. This was attributed to the SGB's illiteracy and lack of confidence, knowledge of legislation, and proper training. It is also attributed to their mutual mistrust and weak relationships created by tension between them and the principal or between the SGB and district or provincial specialists in education, instead of all school stakeholders working together as a team (Bush & Glover, 2016:217). This created a fragmented school environment. The DBE, in *The Strategy* document, revealed that SGBs of poor-performing no-fee schools rarely hold meetings and have no knowledge of their duties. Instead, they accept the decision of the principal as is or cause chaos in schools (DBE, 2013:4).

Badenhorst and Koalepe (2014:244) highlight that poor performing no-fee schools also have parents who often have an intense distrust or even hostility towards the school. This may be due to their own negative school recollections as children, single parents or caregivers; therefore, parental involvement in these schools is very minimal. Due to lack of trust in these schools, parents tend to neglect their children's schoolwork, not caring whether they pass or not (Little & Rolleston, 2014:4, cited in Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014:244). Children therefore become demoralised to work hard, causing them to neglect their schoolwork and to bring home low marks anyway.

### **2.5.1.5 Contextual factors affecting no-fee schools**

Heystek and Terhoven (2014:3) highlight contextual challenges for lower quintile high schools, which are associated with impoverish communities surrounding the schools. These factors, if not addressed accordingly and adequately by principals, directly and indirectly affect learner performance and teacher motivation. On a daily basis, principals face contextual challenges associated with societal problems or social ills related to poverty and some of which are inherited from the apartheid regime and still persisting. These include, among other challenges, inadequate infrastructure; conflict with teacher unions; teacher and learner discipline; crime; vandalism; gangsterism; violence; drug abuse; overcrowded classes because of poor infrastructure and lack of resources; underqualified teachers and fragmented relationships with staff members; unsupportive parents; teenage pregnancy; learner absenteeism; and one-parent households (Fataar & Paterson, 2002:7, Christie *et al.*, 2007:65,89, Pashiardis & Heystek, 2007:44, Moloi, 2010:622, Mampane & Bower, 2011:144, cited in Heystek & Terhoven, 2014:5).

This was affirmed by Bush and Glover (2016:3), who explain that some no-fee schools continue to provide insufficient schooling quality for their learners as they experience a range of contextual challenges such as undertrained, underdeveloped and demotivated teachers; and low expectation and poor post-school employment prospects by learners. This was assumed to be attributing to the ineffective leadership role of principals to motivate their staff members. What is prescribed in *The Standard* policy does not necessarily outline how leadership should be exercised practically since each school has its own culture. Banach (2015:202) refers to culture as the beliefs, values and norms, and symbols, rituals and customs which, together with structures, evoke particular leadership practices in schools. By building a school culture where relationships with staff members and with learners and their families are healthy, principals create explicit expectations of a thoughtful, friendly school setting (Banach, 2015:202). Such an environment guarantees well performance.

## **2.6 Examples of Good Practices at Well-performing No-fee Schools**

Ogden and Germinari (1995, cited in Ovando & Cavazos, 2004:9) conducted a study by analysing what 'best schools' are. Their results showed that well-performing schools have a logical plan and develop a mission that served as the focus for school practices

and improvements. In addition, principals of well performing schools rationally include educators, learners and parents in meaningful educational decisions related to the improvement of learner performance. In June 2007, the Ministerial Committee of South Africa was assigned by the minister of education of 2007, Naledi Pandor, to conduct a study titled *Schools that work study* to examine the characteristics of well-performing schools, with findings pointing at their poverty. The poorer the school, the poorer it performs in the NSC final examination.

Ten years later, in April 2017, minister of education, Angie Motshekga, commissioned NEEDU to replicate a similar study, *Schools That Work II* (Sithole, 2017:17). The 2017 study sampled schools in the lowest quintiles (no-fee schools) which were performing well against all odds in comparison to quintile 5 schools (wealthier schools) (Sithole, 2017:17). The findings revealed best practices in these schools that can be used by any poor-performing school, especially no-fee schools, in the education system. The good performance of these schools was based on the following criteria: pass rate of 95% and above for five years (2012–2016); inclusive basket pass percentages in mathematics and physical sciences; bachelor's passes; attainment of distinctions; mathematics participation rate (and throughput rate); and 100 or more candidates presented in the 2016 NSC examination (Sithole, 2017:17).

In the following sections, this study reviewed literature on the common best practices which were interrelated, from the 2017 study, because they were relevant and may stimulate poor-performing no-fee schools to do likewise. Aspects looked at include time on task; school improvement plan (SIP); setting the stage for quality teaching and learning or an enabling environment; principal leadership and management; learner-centred environment; professional development and teamwork; and quality of instruction (Sithole, 2017:53). These best practices relate to leadership practices (specifically of principals) and were briefly discussed below.

### **2.6.1 Time on task**

Well-performing schools, were also comprising of some no-fee schools, used allocated school time efficiently and effectively (200 days per year) because they have realised that managing teaching time tightly was an ultimate practice (Sithole, 2018:1). Some factors that wasted teaching time and needed to be managed were learner and teacher poor attendance; late coming for both teachers and learners, either by returning to

class late after a break or downtime between lessons; poor time management for the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP); and early departure by teachers for reasons including attending union meetings, memorial services, sporting or cultural events, or even personal reasons (Sithole, 2018:1). To curb these challenges, well-performing schools do not use weekends or holidays or extend school hours, but they have systems and tools that they implement. These included allocating adequate time to each subject, as outlined in the curriculum statement (CAPS document); developing and using different registers on a weekly basis with the help of their learners and the SMT; and analysing collected information from registers, which they used to hold reprobates accountable within the confines of the Employment Educators Act (no. 76 of 1998) (Sithole, 2018:2). If teachers can, they should use additional time to give more time to struggling and lagging learners, to reinforce what has been taught in class, to do remedial work or even to create opportunities for teacher development and collaboration (Sithole, 2018:2). Principals of well-performing schools visibly walk the hallways, attend departmental or grade meetings and hold spontaneous conversations with staff and learners (instructional behaviour), which, according to international literature and good standards, contributed to improvement in Grade 12 learner performance (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014:247).

### **2.6.2 School improvement plan, goal and target-setting**

Schools must produce an annual SIP as required by national policy on whole school evaluation (WSE), but literature pointed to a shortfall in plans at about two thirds of no-fee schools (Sithole, 2018:1). Most plans in these schools are not specific, detailed and result orientated and lack monitoring (Sithole, 2018:1). Well-performing no-fee schools follow four steps when drawing up their SIP. Firstly, they establish problem areas (by conducting needs assessment through analysing and prioritising their needs). Secondly, they set goal and performance indicators (by defining challenging but feasible or achievable goals and set goals and performance targets). Thirdly, they develop and implement strategies or a plan of action. They do this by developing strategies or actions; identifying effective strategies; prioritising or limiting strategies; establishing timelines; communicating the plan and expectations; and implementing improved strategies. Lastly, they monitor progress in achieving set goals (by gathering information regularly while determining checkpoints to check progress and acting on the needed changes) (Sithole, 2018:2). These four steps were recommended by the

NEEDU unit as best practices that could be used by poor-performing no-fee schools to increase learner performance (Sithole, 2018:5).

Well-performing schools follow the same procedure in their SIP to set their goals and targets, in which all four stakeholders (learner, teacher, SMT and parent) were involved and held accountable for any failure, respectively (Sithole, 2018:4). When setting goals and targets, well-performing schools align their target with the NDP and the sector plan. The NDP outlines the government intentions to improve learner performance at all stages in the schooling system, and the sector plan translates the goals encapsulated in the NDP into an actionable plan. The section plan was a surety that every learner in the country, regardless of their economic background, receives quality education (Sithole, 2018:1). Set goals and targets that go hand in hand with an action plan of how targets will be met were imperative because they gave the school focus and direction and acted as a benchmark for determining whether the school is actually succeeding or not (Sithole, 2018:3). Schools that achieve national targets begin with meeting individual learner targets (for example the chronological set of targets at different levels starts like this: learner targets → subject target → school target → district target → provincial target → national target) (Sithole, 2018:15).

### **2.6.3 Setting the stage for quality teaching and learning or an enabling environment**

Principals of well-performing no-fee schools have found that the best strategy to deal with the contextual factors of their schools (such as lack of resources, overcrowding or hunger) was to capitalise on five enabling conditions to improve the quality of curriculum delivery. These conditions were: a capable teaching force, flexibility and autonomy, being an NSC exam marker, teacher commitment and dedication, and a focused curriculum (Sithole, 2018:2).

#### **2.6.3.1 Recruiting and appointing the most qualified teachers**

Well-performing schools target skilled teachers with academic training and who were qualified with university majors in the subjects they are teaching and who were former learners of the school (Sithole, 2018:3). These schools have a quest to provide learners of different backgrounds with quality education by making sure that the learners were taught by properly qualified and effective teachers (Sithole, 2017:17). Once teachers were appointed, well-performing schools have ways of retaining them.

They do so by assigning them a mentor who is a senior teacher; motivating them and raising funds to incentivise them for a job well done; and providing school-based development. These schools also grant teachers teacher-out sessions, where staff were allowed an outing to connect away from school and work pressures (Sithole, 2018:3).

#### **2.6.3.2    *Flexibility and autonomy***

With the belief that the HoD and teachers know the learners better, the principals of well performing no-fee school allow flexibility or autonomy, where teachers decided how to teach in class. In addition, the HOD was allowed to tailor teaching strategies with their teachers, though they will be held accountable for their results (Sithole, 2018:3).

#### **2.6.3.3    *Being an NSC exam marker***

Principals of well performing schools encouraged teachers to apply to become NSC exam markers to allow teachers to see common errors learners make in the exam. This also allowed teachers to develop exam-style questions and to create model answers more easily (Sithole, 2018:3).

#### **2.6.3.4    *Teacher commitment***

Principals of well performing no-fee schools also provided a platform for teachers to hold themselves accountable for helping learners to improve, with the understanding that the NSC examination might be their learners' last opportunity to escape poverty because of the environment where they come from. To display commitment and dedication, teachers in well-performing no-fee schools perceive themselves as second parents to their learners, and principals accept the some teachers' own children as learners where their parents are personally teaching (Sithole, 2018:4).

#### **2.6.3.5    *A focused curriculum***

Principals of well performing no-fee schools find it necessary to specialise in a few subjects or streams because they find it hard to recruit well-qualified teachers for those subjects if the curriculum is too broad (Sithole, 2018:5).

## **2.6.4 Principal leadership and management**

### **2.6.4.1 *Strategic or school improvement planning***

In well-performing schools, the SIP is developed, implemented and reviewed regularly and includes priorities for action. These schools have strategic planning that molds short- and long-term planning models and contemplates external variables and school resources. Strategic planning offers a structure for responsibility in school change Well performing no-fee schools initiate SIPs with a comprehensive needs assessment to determine high-need areas systematically.

### **2.6.4.2 *Instructional leadership***

Supervising curriculum implementation involves various aspects. Teachers' work should be reviewed regularly (weekly) with regard to the scheme of work and annual teaching plans (ATPs) and lesson plans and/or observing of lessons (Sithole, 2017:19). The HoD can walk into classes to collect and monitor learners' work. In addition, assessment results can be collected and analysed. Lastly, staff should be checked in fulfilling their responsibilities. Sithole (2017:17) pointed out that in schools where teamwork is practised, an open-door policy prevails, where teachers were allowed to enter their colleagues' classrooms at any time. Teamwork ensures progress and helps teachers to have enough time to monitor learners' work while the other teacher is presenting a lesson.

Instructional leadership can be observed through the leadership and management practices displayed by the principal, such as: the amount of time the principal spends on educational matters compared to administrative and other tasks, whether or not the principal appraises the performance of teachers, and the amount of time he or she dedicates to instructional issues (e.g. school has a purpose for monitoring teachers and learners' work). Instructional leadership was imperative to this study and was therefore be further discussed in Chapter 3.

### **2.6.4.3 *Facilitative leadership***

The NEEDU findings (Sithole, 2017:20) also revealed that the principal of a well performing school leads without controlling and employs the facilitative or rather distributed leadership style. Principals who employ a distributed leadership style speak in one voice that shared leadership does not mean the abdication of responsibility on

their part. On the contrary, their schools effectively monitor, evaluate and review planning, analyse learner work and perform lesson observations, with evaluative feedback to hold staff members accountable (Sithole, 2017:19). In addition, they have outstanding and well-distributed leadership practices, where the HoDs have more control over their departments. These principals feel strongly that empowering all staff members to assume leadership responsibilities begins with the principal setting the tone, forging and advocating a vision for school improvement.

## **2.6.5 Systems support and partnership**

### **2.6.5.1 Parental or family involvement**

Well-performing schools map out ways to broaden parental/family involvement by creating a welcoming school climate, for example taking concrete steps to eliminate the barriers which may keep certain families from participating in the school (Sithole, 2017:14).

### **2.6.5.2 Community support or partnerships**

Well-performing schools develop relationships with different agencies to provide a co-ordinated set of key social and educational services to learners because schools are situated in communities. To expand opportunities for learners, these schools therefore bring together diverse individuals and groups, including other community-based organisations, youth development organisations, health and human services agencies, parents and other community leaders (Sithole, 2017:14).

### **2.6.5.3 District or provincial support**

Well performing schools prioritise their learners' wellbeing. Teachers take initiatives to understand learners' diverse learning challenges and always strive to meet learners' needs. Well performing schools co-ordinate with other social services to help resolve the socio-economic inequalities that contribute to poor learner performance. The teachers make an effort to recognise each individual learner. This included doing simple things like addressing learners by name, thereby making them feel personally known and cared for (e.g. making an effort to understand their experiences in a schools-chosen approach because different schools share different approaches to support learners with the greatest needs). Principals of well performing no-fee schools establish a rapport with learners through several strategies. This includes having an

open-door policy for learners and staff, demanding respect from learners and teachers toward each other, and making teachers available to help learners before and after school, where necessary (Sithole, 2017:14).

## **2.6.6 Learner-centred climate**

### **2.6.6.1 *Safety, order and discipline***

Principals of well performing no-fee schools strongly believe that “there is no best teacher in the world who can be effective in an environment where there is no order and discipline” (Sithole, 2017:15). Well performing schools therefore provide an orderly and secure environment that ensures a supportive context for learning because discipline and respect are necessary prerequisites to any and all school improvement efforts. These principals believe that the learners need to be in an orderly and secure environment that promotes their personal wellbeing and ensures a supportive context for learning. These principals together with their school community members spell out standards for learners in the school’s code of conduct and make sure that all learners adhere to them (Sithole, 2017:15). Schools uphold agreed-upon standards of inappropriate behaviour in a fair and human manner that focuses on developing learners’ sense of responsibility and wellbeing. Furthermore, the principals of well performing no-fee schools praise and recognise positive and improved behaviour and do not tolerate disrespectful language and behaviour (Sithole, 2017:15).

### **2.6.6.2 *Academic press***

Well performing schools send strong messages about the importance and value of schoolwork to learners of all ages and abilities that is what Sithole, (2017:15) referred to as academic press. Principals in these schools ensured that there was a reduction of non-teaching demands that draw teachers away from their classes and their learners. To do this, the principal sets and meets high expectations for all learners and sets and meets achievement targets (Sithole, 2017:15).

### **2.6.6.3 *Reward and incentive***

Well performing schools create a strong culture of academic achievement by celebrating their successes. All schools have two segments of learners. The first was composed of the good and committed learners. These are in contrast to the “just getting by” learners who struggle in class, are unmotivated and have an “IDC attitude”

(i.e. I don't care attitude) (Sithole, 2017:16). To address this challenge, well-performing schools created a strong culture of academic achievement by celebrating their success and commiserating over their failures in different ways (Sithole, 2017:16).

#### **2.6.6.4 Positive teacher and learner attitude**

Teachers at well performing no-fee schools sustain a collective focus on learning. These teachers believe that all learners can study and that they can help them in spite of desperate conditions and obstacles that are present, such as the SES of learners (Sithole, 2017:16). The principal developed within the school a culture that supports learner successes. The principal's leadership plays a vital role in cultivating an optimistic attitude among teachers and an "I can do it attitude" despite tough challenges (Sithole, 2017:16).

#### **2.6.6.5 Culture and values**

Each well-performing no-fee school has a very unique culture and values, which underpin everything it stands for and nurture the school constantly. A new staff member joining a well-performing no-fee school was assimilated into the culture of that specific school. The principal of a well-performing no-fee school also inculcates a strong work ethic where everybody (from the cleaner to the principal) has a minimum set of standards to live by (Sithole, 2017:16).

#### **2.6.7 Professional development**

Even though it was argued that professional development was valuable to poor performing no-fee schools, teachers were reluctant to participate in professional development. In fact, they needed this process more than well performing no-fee schools (Heystek & Terhoven, 2014:2), as well-performing schools participate in this process. Negative teacher attitudes, low morale, fragmented relationships, and scheduling development hardly prevail in well performing no-fee schools. Furthermore, teachers of well performing no-fee schools attend development activities. These usually take place over weekends, on term brakes or after school day when teachers were emotionally and physically exhausted, yet these teachers do not complain (Heystek & Terhoven, 2014:2).

The professional development of principals and teachers was significant for this study; hence, these elements were discussed further in the next sections.

### **2.6.7.1 School-based programmes**

Principals of well performing no-fee school provide time for meaningful staff development to occur and development activities were scheduled and paced. Well performing schools highlight staff development in areas of most need as identified through Improving Quality Management Systems (IQMS) processes, analysis of NSC results, and the findings of development support group (DSG) (composed of the immediate supervisor and the mentor) observations during class visits (Sithole, 2017:21). Well performing no-fee schools devote time for departmental and whole staff meetings (Sithole, 2017:21). Again, principals of well performing schools direct their teachers to do common planning, facilitate conversations on curriculum issues and empower teachers to deal with issues that affect learners beyond the classroom at school, such as bullying, racism and HIV/AIDS (Sithole, 2017:21). Most of these meetings do not interfere with instructional time. Departmental meetings were also used as forums where teachers were given space and time to discuss problems that they experience in their respective classes and to share possible solutions and to analyse and discuss learners' work observation (Sithole, 2017:21).

### **2.6.7.2 Teachers' own development**

The minister of education in Ghana, in the National Pre-tertiary Education Curriculum framework, Prempeh (2018:89), defines professional development as an activity that develops an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics. Teachers of well performing schools take responsibility for their own development and empowerment. Their principals as leaders in schools motivate and create space for teacher development activities to take place. During these activities, teachers analyse and interpret learners' data in order to evaluate and review their teaching strategies (Sithole, 2017:21).

### **2.6.7.3 Teacher collaboration**

The well performing school explores different scheduling and grouping practices to reduce teacher isolation and to provided teachers with collaborative settings for planning, problem-solving and peer support. Teachers in these schools were committed to working together in a culture of continuous improvement, not only to develop a shared understanding of learners, curriculum and practice, but also to design and produce materials and activities to improve them (Sithole, 2017:21).These

teachers learn with and from each other in different ways. For example, they observe colleagues conducting lessons, and provide feedback; mentor, coach, model and do team-teaching; help colleagues identify development needs; and lead staff meetings, workshops etc. (Sithole, 2017:21).

#### **2.6.7.4    *Networking***

The well performing school networks with other schools to develop instructional and leadership skills as an approach for providing quality professional development activities. Teacher collaboration in well-performing schools extends beyond their individual schools to network in a broader education community involving other schools. Networking strategies include linking with or setting up links with other top-performing schools. It also included setting up links with primary feeder schools; sharing practices, lesson plans and other materials in cluster or partnership networks; and taking part in teacher exchanges (Sithole, 2017:22).

#### **2.6.8        *The quality of teaching***

##### **2.6.8.1     *Higher learning time***

All well performing schools have one thing in common – they use time effectively. The SMTs with the support of principals monitor to ensure that teachers use the time within the day. Well performing schools do not have more teaching time than other schools, but because they guard time jealously, by the end of the year, learners in their schools will have been exposed to more learning opportunities, owing to minimal time losses (Sithole, 2017:23).

To minimise disruptions, well performing schools were able to adhere to schedules, improve teacher and learner attendance and build skills for effective classroom management (Sithole, 2017:23). Extra time in these schools is not used to compensate for lost time, but used or extended for a clear purpose. This can be to provide many opportunities for teaching and learning or to provide academic support to struggling learners or even to teacher collaboration and development (Sithole, 2017:23).

##### **2.6.8.2     *Teaching strategies***

Sithole (2017:25) mentioned about five examples of teacher collaborations as best practices at well-performing no-fee schools. The first was to join planning. Here,

teachers plan together as departments within the school, led by their HODs, who schedule times outside the instructional time for such meetings. The second, team teaching, can be implemented. This was where teachers of the same subject work together and share the workload, such as splitting the subject, instead of doubling the efforts as individuals. The third, teacher collaboration, can be done through teacher peer observation. Here, teachers of well-performing no-fee schools deprivatise their practice by opening their classroom doors, that is, teachers go in and out of each other's classrooms, sharing, observing and discussing their teaching practices. The fourth example was to share ideas and good practices, where well performing schools develop a culture of professional dialogue in which teachers were willing to share, support and explore together. The last one, teacher collaboration, can be achieved through cross-curricula collaboration (or interdisciplinary collaboration), where teachers of gateway subjects such as mathematics and physical sciences collaborate to teach certain topics (Sithole, 2017:25).

#### **2.6.8.3 Homework**

Teachers at well performing schools give homework to learners strategically by applying some common strategies. They assign the work that learners already know as homework; review homework before learners go home; devise homework that applies skills taught in the classroom and to real-life solutions; and differentiate homework. In addition, they hold learners accountable when not completing work and provide immediate feedback; and co-ordinate homework so that teachers of various departments do not all give homework on the same day (Sithole, 2017:29).

#### **2.6.8.4 Assessment and feedback**

Teachers at well performing no-fee schools use three different types of assessment. Firstly, they used a diagnostic assessment (sometimes referred to as pre-knowledge), which they used to pre-test learners' prior content knowledge for different objectives. Secondly, they used summative assessment (also referred to as assessment of learning), which they used to assign marks and summarise learning and use as a baseline to set future goals. The third type can be both formal and informal and helps teachers to focus on continual checks for learner understanding. This was done by compiling teacher reports which provide specific feedback for the purpose of guiding teaching to improve learning and also to gain more information about learner

proficiency to adjust or modify their teaching or remediate the learning process (Sithole, 2017:32).

#### **2.6.8.5 Exam preparation**

The Grade 12 teachers of well performing schools used an integrated approach to examinations. This means that exam preparation was integrated into the ongoing class teaching throughout the year, as part of the curriculum. Teachers preferred to draw questions from NSC past examination papers, which helped learners to do well in the exams (Sithole, 2017:33) because they will be used to the style of questions asked for the examination.

## **2.7 Learning Outcomes and Social Skills**

Most no-fee schools were located in rural areas and townships, but the study focused on those in townships. Well-performing no-fee schools spend more time supporting learners because they are driven by the quest to change their conditions, where learners come with academic skills that are substantially below grade level. These schools have a large proportion of learners who come from poor and troubled backgrounds, where support for schooling is low (Sithole, 2017:34). These learners were subject to emotional and mental tensions because of their circumstances. The communities where these learners live were poor and characterised by severe urban ills, such as drugs and alcohol abuse together with gangsterism, which destruct learners (Sithole, 2017:34).

Well performing no-fee schools out-perform their peers, clarifying to the casual observer that academic performance was highly valued in these schools (Sithole, 2017:34). Sithole (2017:34) revealed that only 29% of no-fee schools were able to participate in extra-curricular programmes in comparison to 100% of affluent schools. Feltosa *et al.* (2012, cited in Sithole: 2017:35) present evidence that school improvement efforts that attend only to academic programmes miss important elements addressed in extra-mural programmes (such as non-cognitive and socio-emotional needs) which lay the foundation for ultimate improve learner performance or make schools successful.

## **2.8 Summary of Chapter 2**

The chapter discussed in detail the background of prioritisation of former disadvantaged schools in South African as no-fee schools. It also discussed good principal leadership and management practices at well-performing no-fee schools and contextual challenges experienced by such schools. The discussion also included learning outcomes and social skills. The next chapter continues to discuss leadership requirements and behaviours of principals for the South African schooling system.

## **CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW LEADERSHIP REQUIREMENTS AND PRINCIPALS' BEHAVIOURS**

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### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapter 1 was based on the introduction to this research. Chapter 2 discussed the dynamics of no-fee schools.

Researchers have reported that leadership style has a significant relation to learner performance (MacGrath & MacMillan, 2000, cited in Ojokuku, Odetayo & Sajuyigbe, 2012:204). Chapter 3 provides approaches of principals and their impact not only on the school community but also on Grade 12 learner performance. Leadership approaches and practices will be reviewed with reference to legislative frameworks such as: Government Gazette No. 39864 of 2016 and *The Standard*. Implementation of these policy guidelines shapes the education profession by providing principals with their expected duties, such as leading and managing no-fee schools professionally.

A discussion will be done on principals' leadership styles as outlined in *The Standard* and in the field of education. Further discussions were based on the nature of school leadership practices (internationally and locally) and contextual challenges in no-fee schools and how principals deal with such challenges. Principal leadership practices in South Africa include the leading and managing of schools. It was therefore imperative to start by providing the reader with the distinct difference between leadership and management by conceptualising these concepts.

### **3.2 Conceptualising Leadership and Management**

With reference to a Yin-Yang metaphor, Schley and Schratz (2011:276) say regarding leadership and management that there is no "either or" but rather "as well as", but that the features of these concepts are quite distinct (cited in Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2015:3). Schley and Schratz (2011:277, cited in Chikoko *et al.*, 2015:4) also highlighted that leadership was very useful for the understanding of these concepts. But it has also been opined that merging management and leadership roles can result in effective leadership (Schley & Schratz, 2011:277, cited in Chikoko *et al.*, 2015:4). The study

therefore provides the reader with brief contextual variations of these concepts, but will continue to use them concurrently, with emphasis on principal leadership and management roles or practices, in some instances, to stress some important points (Khan, Nawaz & Khan, 2016:1; Naidoo, 2019:1).

### **3.2.1 Leadership**

Leadership was viewed as taking responsibility in order to attain the expected goals by applying the materials that were available and guaranteeing an interconnected school where the principal inspired their staff to attain mutual goals (Amachukwu, *et al.*, 2015:6, cited in Kamur 2018:16). This study therefore perceived the concept leadership as generally about the principal being capable to inspire their staff and them reciprocally being inspired by their staff in directing the school to attain anticipated goals (Ahmad, 2017:3).

### **3.2.2 Principal leadership in an educational context**

In a school context, principal leadership means identifying educational duties and possible limits on them, establishing priorities and setting goals to be attained (Ahmad, 2017:3). Schley and Schratz (2011:277, cited in Chikoko *et al.*, 2015:4) with reference to Hinterhuber's model claimed that leadership at a school is about: creating a new model; covering new opportunities with the capacity to realise them or make them realised; inviting and allowing staff to improve their instruction; and showing dignity for human beings (trust). Leadership also has to do with working on the system and was an approach of serving. Naidoo (2019:1) perceived the principal as a leader who pushes the vision of the school and focuses on staff professional growth and school improvement plans. Similarly, (Day & Sammons, 2016:12) perceived the role of principal leadership as to lead teaching and learning by creating opportunities, monitoring and evaluating learner performance. In essence, the principal had to know what is going on in classrooms and know how to reduce the flaws of their staff members in order to improve learners performance in grade 12 (Day & Sammons, 2016:12). Key practices in principal leadership therefore include goal setting, visioning and motivating (Jwan & Ongo'ondo, 2011, cited in Naicker *et al.*, 2016:2).

### **3.2.3 Management**

Management was about principals working with paradigms; inspiring problem-solving skills to their staff; making opportunities achievable; managing human beings and working within a certain system (Schley & Schratz, 2011:277, cited in Chikoko *et al.*, 2015:4). Management was perceived as a concept that relates to buildings and procedures by which schools meet their desired goals (Buchanan & Huczynski, 1997, cited in Christie, 2010:696). Researchers highlight that sound management indicators involved the ways in which principals provided support that guarantees that all staff members were developed to operate in and build a professional learning community (Harris & Muijs, 2005, Ololube, Dudafa, Uriah & Agbor, 2013, cited in Amanchukwu *et al.*, 2015:13).

### **3.2.4 Principal Management in an educational context**

Sapree (2002:102, cited in Ghasemy & Hussin, 2014:1) viewed management as a series of activities applicable to the highly well-organised and effective use of resources within the school in order to attain school objectives. The core business and the central resolution of the school were teaching and learning and if that business was not properly managed, then the whole school was likely to suffer and perform poorly (Christie, 2010:696). Ahmad (2017:8) highlighted that the appropriate method for managing and controlling the syllabus was where the principal delegates syllabus duties to the teachers, with the teachers accepting those responsibilities. Key practices in principal management involve planning, organising, controlling and coordinating (Jwan & Ongo'ondo, 2011, cited in Naicker *et al.*, 2016:2). Educational management, in accordance with Amachukwu *et al.* (2015:12), was a process that involved the planning and development of structures that ensured the application of educational guidelines and strategic plans in order to achieve educational expectations.

On the other hand, headship-like management was an organisational concept that defines structural position which carries with it responsibility and accountability (Christie, 2010:696). Furthermore, Christie (2010:696) explained that those who were in structural positions within a school either as managers, heads or principals are bounded by goals and the core business of the school. Their failures or successes were judged in terms of these goals and tasks. The principal deals with daily

functioning issues of the school and continuously shifts between leadership and management functions (Kowalski, 2010:23, cited in Naidoo, 2019:1).

Principalship was often defined in terms of joint responsibility, where the principal and the SMT or administrative team collaborate in decision-making (Ahmad, 2017:7). The principal's roles there was in a constant state of growth, moving from being an instructional leader (Abdulla & Kassim, 2011, DeMatthews, 2014, Mestry, 2017, cited in Naidoo, 2019:1) to a transactional leader who sometimes embraces the notion of transformational leadership (Fullan, 1991, cited in Wondimu 2014; Balyer, 2012, Tingle, Corrales & Peters, 2019, cited in Naidoo, 2019:1). Christie (2010:696) therefore suggested that these terms must come together in schools and that principals should incorporate these roles of leadership and management and possess skills in both in order to lead the schools effectively. It appeared that post-1994, some principals, mainly of no-fee schools, have been ignoring principles of the new education system and want to continue with their old and unprofessional ways of leading and managing schools rather than integrating the roles (Grant, 2009, cited in Naicker *et al.*, 2016:2).

### **3.3 Legislative Framework Guiding the Leadership and Management Roles of Principals in South African Schools**

Naidoo (2019:1) remarks that principals can frequently change roles as managers, as leaders and as administrators in a day. The study will only concentrate on their leadership roles as informed by the following legislative guidelines:

- Policy on the South African Standard for Principals – Enhancing the Professional Image of School Principals (*The Standard*)
- Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document

*The Standard* and the PAM document were guidelines provided by the DBE to ensure that South African ordinary public school principals execute their duties or roles of leadership and management effectively and professionally (DBE, 2016:5). In addition to these the study will also look at the following legislation:

- South African Schools Act (no. 84 of 1996)
- Employment Educators Act (no. 138 of 1994)

The above policies hold teachers accountable for non-compliance to their obligations and duties as personnel of the DBE and thereby inform principals of the disciplinary measures to follow in case they come across ill-disciplined teachers. It was outlined in Chapter 3, Section 16, and paragraph 3 of the South African Schools Act (no. 84 of 1996) that the professional management of a public school must be undertaken by the principal under the authority of the head of the department in the education sector.

### **3.3.1 Policy on the South African Standard for Principalship**

This document was introduced as Government Notice No. 323 and published in Government Gazette No. 32827 dated 1 March 2016 with an aim to maintain and improve the professional image, qualities and competences of principals. This document was applicable to all school principals in the country, with an aim to promote the core values underpinned by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (no. 108 of 1996) (DBE, 2016:5). It was also published as a legislative framework that guides leadership and management practices of principals in schools in order to improve learner performance (DBE, 2016:13). *The Standard* mentions leadership styles that are essential for principals' execution of the role to lead and manage their schools effectively and efficiently (DBE, 2016:5). The effective leadership provided by principals was viewed as significant to the attainment of the transformational goals of the South African education system (Department of Education, 2005:4, cited in Christie, 2010:699). In *The Standard*, the school principal was identified as the leading and managing professional person whose clear role is outlined as follows:

... the principals working with the School Management Teams (SMTs), School Government Bodies (SGBs), Representative Councils of Learners (RCLs), wider communities must effectively manage, support and promote the best quality of teaching and learning (DBE, 2016:3).

The purpose of this role was thus to allow grade 12 learners to attain the highest levels of performance for their own good, the good of their community and the good of the country as a whole (DBE, 2016:3).

The South African school context faces a wide diversity, which include socio-economic, cultural and language diversities (DBE, 2016:5). Context shapes policy as context was the constituent of various factors that impact on the execution of policy (Heystek & Terhoven, 2014:3). *The Standard* was therefore supposed to provide guidelines on

poor-performing no-fee schools and to transform them into well-performing schools as it outlines specifically what the principal must do to improve learner performance.

This study therefore makes the assumption that the principals of poor performing no-fee schools were either unable to professionally mediate the educational policies or that they were perhaps unfamiliar with this document, or that it was not in their possession or they have shortcomings in dealing with contextual challenges in their schools. The legislative framework comprising all policies governing education that assist principals in their roles to lead and manage schools effectively, particularly *The Standard*, not only delineates in detail these roles of principals, but key aspects of competencies required of them. It also informs principals of what was expected of a person in such a post, especially with regard to enhancing Grade 12 learner performance. Principals' roles were drawn in line with the core purpose and responsibilities of principals, as set out in Sections 16 and 16A of the South African Schools Act (no. 84 of 1996), and paragraph 4.2 of Chapter A of the PAM document (DBE, 2016:3), discussed next.

### **3.3.2 The Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document**

This document was published as Government Notice No. 170 or Government Gazette No. 39684 dated 12 February 2016 or only the PAM document. Annexure A.7 of this document provided the aims to rank an educator to a principal post or post level four (DBE, 2016:41). With regard to instruction, the PAM document requires principals to ensure that the instruction to learners was promoted in a rightful manner and in accordance with approved policies. Furthermore, there was an expectation that good discipline of the school is being sustained at all times for learner performance to improve. The principal as a personnel member of the DBE was accountable for such roles. They must provide professional leadership and management within the school by ensuring that workloads are fairly disseminated among the teachers. They were responsible to lead and manage the staff's professional development, both school-based and those that were organised externally. Lastly, they must safeguard that all test and examinations conducted in the school were well organised and administered (DBE, 2016:42).

Again, the principal of an ordinary public school must be accountable for the professional management of the school as contemplated in Section 16A (3) of the

South African Schools Act (no. 84 of 1996). The principal has to carry out duties which included but not limited to: the supporting, managing and controlling of staff; the managing and controlling of the use of learning-support materials and other equipment; and the safekeeping of all school records (DBE, 2016:41). Similarly, the work of a principal in an ordinary public school was to create the conditions that support continuous professional teacher development that results in improved classroom practice to such an extent that learners engage and learn at high levels (Heystek & Terhoven, 2014:2). Horng and Loeb (2010:65) also highlight that principals as school leaders can have a tremendous effect on learners performance through the teachers they hire, how they assign those teachers to classrooms, how they retain teachers and how they create opportunities for teachers to improve learner performance.

### **3.3.2.1 Teaching**

According to the PAM document, the principal is expected to: engage in class teaching as per the workload of a relevant post level and the needs of the school in order to understand what is needed to improve learner performance; access and record the attainment of learners taught; and be a class educator if required (DBE, 2016:43). Involvement in teaching activities will enable the principal to possess a better understanding of what support he or she should give the teachers during curriculum delivery for them to improve learner performance.

### **3.3.2.2 Communication**

The principal of a school has the responsibility to co-operate with teachers and the SGB in maintaining an efficient and successful school. They also have to communicate with the district office, supply section, personnel section, finance section, *et cetera* concerning administration, staffing, accounting, purchase of equipment, research and updating of statistics in respect of educators and learners. Principals must also meet parents regularly concerning learners' progress and conduct (DBE, 2016:44). The principal is expected to liaise with the relevant structures regarding the school curriculum and curricular development, and also to participate in developmental and professional learning communities (PLCs), seminars and courses to contribute to and/or update professional views or standards (DBE, 2016:44). Participating in these structures lays the groundwork for sound discussions on teaching and learning and learner performance. Furthermore, in accordance with the auditor-general in *Strategies*

*to improve school management & governance in schools*, principals have to set clear and measurable goals for learning and academic progress of learners, with the responsibility to collect, analyse and interpret data and develop intervention strategies and submit analysed reports to the district office (DBE, 2013:1). When principals collect data of any form of assessment of Grade 12 learners in gateway subjects and interpret and analyse that data, they will be in a good position to set measurable goals for the subject educators. The subject educators together with their HoDs will then be able to set relevant intervention programmes that will fit learner performance and the principals will then be able to support these programmes and advise accordingly.

### **3.3.2.3    *Interaction with stakeholders***

The principal has to manage, advise and support the RCL (DBE, 2016:41) as leaders. The RCL is a crucial component of leadership of the public secondary school. The South African Schools Act (no. 84 of 1996) requires an RCL to be established in every public school (for example, schools with Grades 8–12) to represent their fellow learners. Since RCL members are still children under school governance, it is the duty of the principal and teacher liaison officer (TLO) to provide proper guidance to these children in executing their assigned duties. It appears that RCL members promote social cohesion, which will assist the principal in maintaining a disciplined school. It is evident that learners who participate in an RCL are associated with greater educational commitment, higher educational expectations, improved practical reasoning skills and the promotion of democratic values and procedures (Mncube, 2008, cited in Pendlebury, 2011:45). Regarding teaching and learning, the skills that learners acquire while on the RCL will assist them in tackling gateway subjects, which place a high demand on them, and enable them to improve.

## **3.4    The Effect of Principal Leadership on Learner Performance**

Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2008:29) opined that principal leadership serves as a process that speedily releases the possible abilities of the staff that were already in a school. This means that if the principals of poor performing schools can practise leadership in accordance with the guidelines stipulated in *The Standard*, or can apply the leadership styles interchangeably or assimilate them according to their situation, there was no doubt that overall learner performance in grade 12 will improve.

Learner performance referred to where learners succeed academically at the end of the schooling year (Mokoqo, 2013:63). If principals lack a common and acceptable understanding of what is stipulated in *The Standard* or PAM document or Gazette No. 39864 of 2016 and other appraisal systems, some will feel burned out and end up neglecting their professional roles and compromising the quality of education, as compared to their more effective counterparts.

Two of the eight interdependent key areas of skills and information in which a principal need to be reskilled in order to effectively fulfil the role of principal as outlined in *The Standard* are provided and briefly discussed below (Table 3.1). This was done to put across the argument that principals' school leadership in South Africa is supported by policy. What differs, however, was the leadership practices of principals in schools according to their school context.

**Table 3.1: Two of the eight key areas of an effective principal**

Key areas (1 and 6) of an effective principal	Knowledge needed by the principal	Action that should be taken by the principal
<b>1. Leading the teaching and learning in the school – five kinds of leadership</b>	Collection and analysis of data relevant to monitoring and evaluation of performance related to the National Curriculum.	Challenge underperformance, ensuring appropriate remedial action and support.
<b>6. Managing and advocating extramural activities</b>	Establishing of partnerships with professional sporting bodies and clubs.	Ensure the SGB provides a budget for all extramural activities.

Source: Gazette No. 39827 (2016:13-24)

The two selected key areas from *The Standard*, as seen in Table 3.1, outline the principal's leadership practices that relate to the central purpose of a person in such a post (DBE, 2016:3). Originally, the table indicated all eight knowledge areas that principals need and the day-to-day action required as per key area, which were derived from the National Education Policy Act (no. 27 of 1996), but some of these key areas have no direct link to this study and were thus removed. The research has more interest in key areas 1 and 6 as opposed to the others, as seen in Table 3.1, because they link directly to the key practices of an effective principal who can improve learner performance. To challenge underperformance in gateway subjects at Grade 12 level, it is assumed that the principal has to play an instructional-leadership role; hence, this key area relates to the study. The instructional leadership style will further be discussed below as it forms part of the five applicable leadership styles in the South African school

setting as outlined in *The Standard*. The research will also discuss other leadership styles with the intention to expand the view on leadership practices, but firstly a brief history of leadership practices was explored.

However, the researchers found that learners who were involved in extramural activities have healthy bodies and minds which may increase their teamwork and leadership abilities and class attendance and improve their test scores (Saqib, Raheen, Iqbal, Salman & Shahzad, 2018:2). The principal together with the SGB must support such activities by providing the necessary financial support and/or resources.

### **3.5 Brief History of Principal Leadership Practices**

Leadership practice was referred to as the outcome of the collaboration between principals, their staff and the school in which they find themselves working in (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001:27, cited in Terhoven, 2016:4). Bush (2010a, cited in Naicker *et al.*, 2016:1), in the same way, views principal leadership practice as a crucial part of educational leadership and management and so does this study.

#### **3.5.1 An international perspective on principal leadership practices**

##### **3.5.1.1 *The importance of a formal qualification and professional development of principal leadership***

The changing world requires effective educational leadership due to the mandate for schools to improve learner performance (De Durna, 2018:24). Many countries, such as Singapore, the United Kingdom (England), Scotland, New Zealand, Sweden and the United States (US), require principals to possess a formal qualification in school administration and/or school leadership (Naidoo, 2019:4). Aspiring Singaporean principals have to go through a one-year full-time programme called Diploma in Education Administration (DEA) before they can be appointed and the ministry of education was accountable for choosing the candidates (Naidoo, 2019:4). On the same sentiment, the UK came up with the National Professional Qualification for Headship in 1997 to address the professional development needs of potential and practicing principals (Bolam, 2003; Cladwell *et al.*, 2003:111; Ribbins, 2003:174, cited in Naidoo, 2019:4). These well performing countries as compared to South Africa have taken principal leadership development programmes seriously and made it a prerequisite for the appointment of school principals. Rowland (2017:11) believes that

a better principal was a vital lever to improve learner performance. It was assumed that well-qualified and prepared principals can understand and commendably apply modern educational guidelines and policies and quickly adapt to the ever-changing world for them to support their teachers accordingly. De Durna (2018:25) opined that the school principal was regarded as the significant component to be considered for well learner performance in a school. Even though teachers are involved in teaching and learning by being in front of learners every day, many aspects of learning in well performing schools were influenced by the quality of the principal (Rowland, 2017:1).

### **3.5.1.2 Challenges in poor performing schools with vacancies**

Scholars have pointed out that many principals, as with teachers, in the United States tend to leave poor-performing schools within the first three years in their positions (Clark, Martorell & Rockoff, 2009; Beteille, Kolagrides & Loeb, 2011, cited in Rowland, 2011:1). They further pointed out that often, those who depart from poor-performing schools occupy leadership posts in schools that have less challenging circumstances (for example schools with well-performing learners which have more resources and active parental involvement). The vacancies of principals which are created at the no-fee schools are usually occupied by inexpert principals (Beteille, *et al.*, 2011; Hull, 2012, cited in Rowland, 2017:1). Inexpert principals perpetuate the problem of low performance by the type of recruitments they make in the occupation of teacher posts in no-fee schools. The DBE through the districts pays attention to teachers' professional development in terms of making policy and on allocating funds and resources and forgets the principals' professional development (Rowland, 2017:1). The next section will provide the characteristics of successful principals.

### **3.5.1.3 Characteristics of successful principals**

Successful or well-performing schools often have principals who recruit and retain effective staff, support rigorous curriculum and instruction, hold high expectations for all students, foster a positive and caring culture and active involvement of parents and the public and provide resources to cater for the needs of learners (Rowland, 2017:4). Such principals will also refine their practices to match the requirements of a specific school at a time (Lui & Hallinger, 2017:298). In supporting effective teaching and learning, successful school principals have proposed trust, because when the culture of trust prevails in a school, the teachers will trust that the school improvement plan

drawn up by the principal will improve learner performance and the principal will trust and support them with the execution of the plan (Lui & Hallinger, 2017:282). Also, the learners will trust their teachers in guiding them during teaching and learning of gateway subjects in class.

Successful principals also work long hours in order to attend to the following: attending to office paperwork and emails; attending meetings and school events; evaluating teachers' work; taking parent calls; and handling disturbances and challenges that they face every day in the school premises (Rowland, 2017:4). Researchers opined that the principals of well-performing schools in countries such as China, the US and the UK, for example, were rated as learning-centred leaders because they perform practices which include shared vision and modelling (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986, Day, 2009, Hallinger & Heck, 2011, cited in Lui & Hallinger, 2017:298). Sharing the vision of the school and modelling (for example working long hours) will inspire teachers to go an extra mile in helping poor-performing learners in gateway subjects by remaining with them and offering them extended opportunities or even extra tuition after school hours, on weekends or on holidays. These teachers will be supported by their principal by assisting them with immediate discipline where it is due and informing parents of such classes in advance.

### **3.5.2 An African perspective on principal leadership practices**

In the following paragraphs, principal leadership practices in neighbouring countries to South Africa were explored.

#### **3.5.2.1 Botswana**

The Botswana education system has been encouraging and enforcing shared leadership practices in the majority of secondary schools since the commencement of the National Policy on Education of 1977 and in *The Strengthened Revised National Policy on Education of 1994* (Mphale, 2015:213). School principals were encouraged to work collaboratively with teachers and parents in the governing of schools, a model termed as the shared leadership model or as the partnership model (Mphale, 2015:213). The benefits of this approach included reduction in the misunderstandings among the staff members and increased levels of trust among staff members (Mphale, 2015:214) so that it should be easy for principals to distribute leadership among staff members without any form of intimidation. Despite the Botswana government's efforts

to make education an agent for national development and economic growth, there has been a public challenge with regard to a decline in learners' academic performance, which is the alarming rate of learner ill-discipline, misbehaviour of teachers, poor school authority and satanic practices in secondary schools (Keakabetse, 2012, Moen, 2014, Lekula, 2014, cited in Mphale, 2015:216). These unacceptable ills ultimately affect learners' concentration, school attendance, wellbeing and interaction with others and teachers, hence resulting in poor learner performance.

In terms of leadership, even though shared leadership is encouraged, the escalating social ills have a negative effect on schools, making schools in Botswana ungovernable and that made it difficult for principals and they end up suffering the managerial burden and cannot dedicate some of their time to address urgent matters (Mphale, 2015:220). Also, due to misconduct of teachers, it was difficult for principals to practise shared instructional leadership and assign other responsibilities to novice teachers and take decisions together as staff (Mphale, 2015:220). Some of the benefits of shared leadership include group cohesion and reduction of misunderstandings among staff members and this will make staff members feel valued and to be committed to instructional duties assigned to them (Keabetse, 2012, Moen, 2014, Lekula, 2014, cited in Mphale, 2015:216).

### **3.5.2.2 Zimbabwe**

With the Zimbabwean economy collapsing, the political and social challenges of Zimbabwe have been spilling over to the schools (Moyo & Perumal, 2019:86). The education of Zimbabwe is bureaucratic and teachers and principals are assigned posts by the ministry of education and schools depend on school fees and donor funds (Moyo & Perumal, 2019:91). Thus, many children drop out of school or even becoming illiterate if parents are unable to pay school fees. With regard to leadership, principals in Zimbabwe are so unpopular to parents for demanding school fees from parents of all learners and they are forbidden by policy to dismiss learners who cannot pay school fees (Zikhali, 2012, cited in Moyo & Perumal, 2019:92). Besides the difficulty for parents to pay school fees due to poverty, it has been highlighted that there were poor or no provision of resources and inadequate infrastructure for learners enrolled in schools by the government of Zimbabwe. For example, classrooms were insufficient; therefore, teaching was conducted outside for some classes, even during bad weather conditions. In addition, there were no furniture and stationery and teachers and

services were inadequate (Makura, 2009; Zikhali & Perumal, 2012, 2014, 2016, cited in Moyo & Perumal, 2019:93). Moyo and Perumal (2019:86) highlight that there were a lot of vacant positions for teachers and the government had to recruit unqualified teachers to fill up those posts. All these were challenges which impact negatively on principals' provision of a conducive environment for teaching and learning and ultimately result in poor learner performance.

Other challenges for Zimbabwean principals included a poor transport system and lack of information technology, adding negatively to principals' struggle to move around different regions as they were required to attend meetings and workshops and acquire the latest information on school leadership and management (Makura, 2009, cited in Moyo & Perumal, 2019:93). Zikhali (2013) discovered that principals in Zimbabwe were suffering emotionally and have frustrations because of these contextual challenges (cited in Moyo and Perumal, 2019:93). Hallinger (2016, cited in Moyo & Perumal, 2019:90) accentuated that leaders should adopt styles consistent with specific school contexts and the needs of the entire community.

### **3.5.3 A South African perspective on principal leadership practices: Challenges facing principals of no-fee schools**

#### **3.5.3.1 *Background of leadership challenges in no-fee schools***

During the apartheid era, the South African educational system, same as that of Zimbabwe, was bureaucratically operated (Christie, 2010:69). Principals, especially of the former disadvantaged schools, had no authority or influence over their schools (in terms of managing budget, materials and infrastructure) and had no powers to decide on the curriculum to be implemented (Fleisch & Christie, 2004, cited in Christie, 2010:699). The end product of this was that no-fee schools were led and managed by inexperienced principals with poor leadership and management skills and that decreased the quality of education for their learners in those schools. After apartheid, apart from the fact that the resources supplied by the government were insufficient, the Bill of Rights in Chapter 2 of the Constitution of South Africa (no. 108 of 1996) guaranteed that every citizen of South Africa will acquire the right to basic education (National Report on the Development of Education, 2008:1). This called for immediate transformation in education.

### **3.5.3.2 Challenges in no-fee schools**

Tees and Polse (2003, cited in Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2015:2) posit that on one end of the education system of South Africa, there were well-resourced schools with well-performing learners, which were compared with the best in the first world countries. On the other end, there were poor-performing schools, mostly no-fee schools, where a culture of teaching and learning was non-existent and learner performance was catastrophic (Tees & Polse, 2003, cited in Chikoko *et al.*, 2015:2). However, some no-fee schools have showed some resistance to poor learner performance and have performed at levels comparable to those of top-notch schools, notwithstanding insufficient resources and bad infrastructure. Leadership has been flagged as at least one of the reasons why these no-fee schools perform well as opposed to their counterparts (Chiome, 2011, cited in Chikoko *et al.*, 2015:2).

### **3.5.3.3 Challenges with principals' abilities to provide leadership**

Research has shown that the role of the school principal has an effect on learner performance and teacher effectiveness (Brundrett & Crawford, 2008; Murphy, 2008; Walker & Dimmock, 2008; Barber *et al.*, 2010; Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Naicker *et al.*, 2013, cited in Chikoko *et al.*, 2015:2). The systematic review of the literature on school leadership and management also revealed that many no-fee schools have principals who are underqualified and inexperienced when compared to the top-notch schools (Wills, 2015:3). To ensure that schools remain performing, such challenges call for sustainable development programmes for principals. In addition, teachers need sustainable support and motivation in the development process (Heytstek & Terhoven, 2014:2). Naidoo (2019:1) opined that the kind of leadership demonstrated by a number of principals in these schools attributed to a drop in learner performance (for example matric pass rates or performance in STEM subjects) in no-fee schools. Hompashe (2018:1) attributed poor learner performance also to the dysfunctional leadership in many ordinary public schools. Naidoo and Petersen (2015) believed that principals can become effective when applying instructional leadership practices, such as engaging teachers with more culturally relevant teaching strategies that will improve learner performance through professional developments, and by setting tone when controlling timewasters, for example late coming of both teachers and learners (cited in Naidoo, 2019:1).

#### **3.5.3.4 Contextual challenges in no-fee schools**

Principals of poor-performing no-fee schools were often blamed for not spending prime time on their school premises (Chikoko *et al.*, 2015:14). This was sometimes a mechanism for them to escape the challenges they experience on a daily basis in these schools. Hompashe (2019:6) reflected that if the principals try to practise instructional leadership, they were hit hard by contextual challenges in the no-fee schools. These challenges include vandalism and theft, persistent shortage of physical and human resources with very large classes, lack of professional training among teachers (Jansen, 2005), socio-economic problems, family-structure breakdown, poverty, and lack of respect for teachers by learners (Kamper, 2008; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010; Jacobs, 2014, cited in Naidoo, 2019:3). Chikoko *et al.* (2015:3) affirm this and extend the list to include: excessive alcohol abuse by both adults and learners as youth and the use of drugs, low parental involvement, and a weak or non-existent instructional culture. In some instances, school leaders have had to witness the use of scissors as weapons by boys in school and have had to confiscate other weapons such as knives from learners at school.

Societal misconducts spilling over to most no-fee schools are the main source of disciplinary problems and therefore affect the smooth running of the school. Such complex situations only require the principals to be armed with multi-faceted skills to face them (Vick, 2014:11, cited in Naidoo, 2019:3), which was not the case in most no-fee schools.

#### **3.5.3.5 Lack of qualifications for the position**

According to the GDE (2012), applicants for the principalship position in an ordinary public school must have a teacher's diploma or degree and have teaching experience of seven years (cited in Naidoo, 2019:2). Again, there was no required professional qualification for motivated teachers who want to become principals (Caldwell, Calnin & Cahill, 2003, cited in Naidoo, 2019:2), no mentors, principal preparation or certification programme like at well-performing schools in first world countries. Naidoo (2019:2) mentions that in 2012, the minister of education, Angie Motshekga, tried to come up with a competency test with the aim to ensure that accountable applicants with appropriate skills were appointed into the principalship position. The exercise was, however, annulled by teacher unions. No-fee schools were highly unionised in general,

and these unions have an influence on hiring principals. Chikoko *et al.* (2015:14) pointed out that if principals were not knowledgeable enough to know what the law allows or does not allow unions to do, then these unions have the power to make a school very ungovernable. Sound leadership by well-qualified candidates was therefore a necessity for the smooth running of no-fee schools for learner performance to improve. A brief discussion of sound instructional practices of principals was provided below.

### **3.6 The Nature of Sound Principal Leadership Practices**

South African schooling is undergoing educational transformation. The latter reflects on principal leadership since a highly effective principal can influence teachers and other personnel in a school to perform their duties outstandingly well, in order to improve learner performance (Heystek, 2005:2, Christie, 2008:183, cited in Hompashe, 2018:4). Wills (2015:2) concurs by saying that highly effective principals can improve learner performance and change their poor performing status within two to seven months. Principals can affect all learners in a school in contrast to teachers, who affect only the learners they instruct (Wills, 2015:2). The instructional leadership style is imperative to this study; therefore, the researcher will discuss the practices of this leadership style further in the next section.

### **3.7 The Principal as an Instructional Leader**

Hallinger (2005) pointed out that an instructional principal has to display the following practices: define the mission and vision of their school; set and communicate goals to their staff members; map the instructional programme, which contains the functions of supervising and evaluating instruction; co-ordinate the curriculum; and, together with their SMT, manage student progress (cited in Hompashe, 2018:4). Again, he or she has to promote a school environment where learning is prioritised and instructional time is protected, promote professional teacher development, maintain visibility, and provide resources for the school (Hompashe, 2018:4). In the following segments, the researcher will unpack some of the roles of the principal as an instructional leader which relate to this study.

### **3.7.1 Building vision and setting direction**

An effective principal must set and share a clear school vision with all the stakeholders of the school (Day & Sammons, 2016:25). The more specific practices in this vision include the principal cultivating the receipt of goals for the school and demonstrating high performance expectations (Leithwood *et al.*, 2008:29). When principals employ these practices, good learner performance can be expected because the teachers will know the principals' expectations (that is the principal was setting direction) and the principal will be supporting them towards improving learner performance.

### **3.7.2 Providing sound instructional guidance**

Day and Sammons (2016:25) highlight that remodelling and enhancing the curriculum were a way of extending learning engagement and improving achievement. Furthermore, the sound instructional principal has the ability to broaden learning opportunities by adjusting the curriculum. In addition, they can prioritising the provision of a variety of extra-curricular activities by the school, which can also improve access to learning for all learners, with an emphasis to build learners' self-confidence and developing important skills without neglecting the academic side of things (Day & Sammons, 2016:25; Saqib *et al.*, 2018:3). The learners who actively participate in these healthy activities acquire a lot of benefits, such as regular class attendance and good mental health and ultimately good results (Saqib *et al.*, 2018:3). In addition, these activities also decrease learners' use of toxic substances such as lean (which is a cough mixture mixed with cold drink) and improve disciplinary problems such as stealing and vandalising the school due to the use of toxic substances.

### **3.7.3 Building school staff capacities**

Day and Sammons (2016:26) outlined some of the practices displayed by an effective principal in building staff capacities. This entails providing a variety of rich professional development opportunities for staff as part of their drive to raise standards and retain good staff. Also, the principal was in a position to develop and sustain positive relationships with all members of the staff at all levels, making them feel valued and involved in decision-making processes, and to demonstrate concern for the professional and personal wellbeing of staff. The more specific leadership practices include providing support and respect, nurturing academic motivation, and demonstrating proper values and behaviours (Leithwood *et al.*, 2008:30).

#### **3.7.4 Providing professional development opportunities**

Teachers' professional development was referred as the learning opportunities that engage teachers' creative and reflective capacities to strengthen their practice (Bredeson, 1999:4, cited in Bredeson, 2000:387). Sometimes, teacher development was used interchangeably with staff development and in-service skills training, where teachers participate in a wide range of professional activities in and beyond their work (Bredeson, 2000:387). It was the responsibility of the principal to create the conditions that support continuous teacher professional learning which results in improved classroom practice (Heystek & Terhoven, 2014:2). Interestingly, teachers of poor-performing no-fee schools were reluctant to participate in teacher development programmes, although they need this more than teachers of well-performing no-fee schools (Heystek & Terhoven, 2014:2). This was attributed to their negative attitudes, low morale, fragmented relationships in their schools, money (frozen salaries) and because these activities usually happen over weekends, holidays or after the school day when teachers are emotionally and physically exhausted (Heystek & Terhoven, 2014:2). Principals of such teachers must act as motivators, space creators and participants who model the value of ongoing professional development (Heystek & Terhoven, 2014:2).

#### **3.7.5 Monitoring and evaluating staff performance**

Leithwood *et al.* (2008:30) referred to this category as managing the instructional programme, where the principal reinforces security and maintains the school's infrastructure and discipline. The specific practices in this category include staffing the school according to its needs and monitoring teacher and learner activities (Leithwood *et al.*, 2008:30). When the principal monitors school activities, they will be in a position to pick up poor-performing subjects earlier and provide the necessary support to the teachers and draw up the improvement plan that fits. Day and Sammons (2016:25) emphasise that successful principals constantly look for different ways to improve learner achievement.

#### **3.7.6 Promoting productive relationships with staff**

Effective principals were in a position to create conducive conditions for teachers to try new models of teaching by building collaborations among members of the staff (Leithwood, 2006; Day *et al.*, 2007, cited in Leithwood *et al.*, 2008:30). Committed

teachers can go an extra mile in terms of improving their instruction and finally learner performance. Leithwood *et al.* (2008:30) referred to this as redesigning the organisation. Principals were also in a position to create useful relations with parents and link the school to its wider environment in order to maintain safety around the school (Leithwood *et al.*, 2008:30). In the next section, the researcher briefly discusses other leadership styles outlined in *The Standard* to bring to the fore how they interact with the instructional leadership style.

### **3.8 Leadership Styles**

For this study, the researcher drew from Khajeh (2018:3), who perceives leadership style as influential to the way people behave in an institution, which will, in turn, influence the performance in that institution. The word performance was described as the functioning of skills, abilities and motivation directed towards a prescribed behaviour (Xu & Wang, 2010, cited in Khajeh, 2018:3).

#### **3.8.1 The need for integrating different leadership theories and styles**

Ritchie (2018:3) indicates that leadership often incorporates several styles to be successful since only one style may not be enough to obtain the required outcome from the staff, especially when adapting to new circumstances. The dynamics of no-fee schools were forever changing; therefore, the leadership styles of principals, in the same way, will have to change or adjust according to the school dynamics. The changing organisational dynamics must be commensurate to the relevant leadership style to achieve expected goals. In addition, principals should be aware of their own styles and make adjustments to create a more positive work environment because leadership style affects the wellbeing of staff (Chen *et al.*, 2013, cited in Khan *et al.*, 2016:27). It was imperative to know which leadership style impacts learner performance and how teachers can also be motivated to do their duties effectively (Basit, Sebastian & Hassan, 2017:113). The most effective leaders combine different styles of leadership depending on the situation, allowing them to act quickly in emergency situations and including the whole team in the process (Hamstra, Van Yperen, Wisse & Sassenberg, 2014, cited in Bill, 2018:25). There is currently a drop in learner performance and scholastic results in public schools, specifically in no-fee schools, which might be related to unethical leadership practices or poor leadership

displayed by many principals (Khajeh, 2018:1; Naidoo, 2019:1). It was deemed necessary to review literature on leadership styles and to briefly describe some leadership styles since the success or failure in no-fee schools directly links to the leadership and management roles of the principals of those schools (Mphale, 2016:214).

### **3.8.2 Integration of leadership styles as per the South African Standard for Principalship**

The first key area in *The Standard*, namely: Leading the teaching and learning in the school, has five styles of leadership. These are (1) strategic, (2) executive, (3) cultural, (4) organisational and (5) instructional leadership (DBE, 2015:8). Instructional leadership forms part of leadership styles outlined as effective by *The Standard*, but has been deliberated upon earlier in this study and will therefore not form part of the following discussions. These leadership styles were perceived as the most effective and efficient by the DBE and can also be adopted by South African principals to practise effective leadership (Gazette No. 39827, 2015:8). The principal was responsible for leading and managing syllabi completion for assessment to be authentic and by so doing, excellence in instruction will be guaranteed (DBE, 2015:8).

This dissertation focused on the role of the principal in the performance of Grade 12 learners. Performance of learners is directly linked to the quality of instruction. As such, only certain aspects of these theories which relate to instruction will be discussed. At each, the focus will be more strongly on the role of the principal as an instructional leader.

### **3.8.3 Strategic leadership style**

Lee and Chen (2007:1028) perceive strategic leadership as a person's ability to retain pliability, think tactically, and work with fellow humans to begin different things that will make a feasible and successful tomorrow for the school (cited in Alayoubi, Shobaki & Abu-Naser, 2020:16). With respect to improvement in instruction in *The Standard*, this leadership style requires the principal to create a school where all teachers know their obligations to plan how to pass and support each and every learner; construct a learning space that will prepare students for tomorrow; and be updated with new developments in domestic and international schooling issues. It is important to create

and support teamwork at school level, encourage unity and collaboration, and to encourage a holistic wellness among all school stakeholders (DBE, 2015:8-9).

Principals used the strategic leadership style for learning and development within the school and to boost learner performance as it improves dependence and competence among staff members to communicate openly to fulfil the goals of the school and for staff to be satisfied at work (Afshinpour, 2014, cited in Kamur, 2018:18). The principal should have the ability to make logical decisions about goals and actions in environments of uncertainty and clarify the vision of the school. This will make it possible for the staff to mobilise all available resources to contribute to achieving the vision to ensure sustainable learner performance (Alayoubi *et al.*, 2020:16).

#### **3.8.4 Executive leadership style**

Tropman and Wooten (2010:47) describe executive leadership in terms of a combination of two concepts, namely executiveship and leadership. Executiveship is the managerial elements in running an organisation or a school, whereas leadership referred to monitoring its strategic direction (Tropman & Wooten, 2010:47).

With respect to the improvement in instruction, leadership requires the principal to form structures that will create interaction and an environment that has a culture of trust and discipline and which was conducive to instruction and encourage individuals to express their opinion (DBE, 2015:9). This style can also contribute to improvement of learner performance for Grade 12 learners through the strong characteristics of effective executive leaders, such as fierce determination and humility (Tropman & Wooten, 2010:47). The role of the principal in maintaining visibility was to ensure that he or she sets a tone and maintains a disciplined school environment where teachers were in classes timeously to teach and where learners were in classes timeously to be taught.

#### **3.8.5 Cultural leadership style**

*The Standard* refers to culture as the way a specific group lives and as encompassing conduct, principles, customs, dress code and adornments (DBE, 2015:10). In addition, culture consists of spiritual and social designs of a particular group of people and was known as the vital core of behaviour (Bulley *et al.*, 2017, cited in Akaji, Mordi, Ituma, Adisa & Ajonbadi, 2019:2). Culture is therefore socially and generally transferred (Akaji *et al.*, 2019:2). Furthermore, *The Standard* points out that the school leader by the

importance of their position is expected to possess knowledge of various cultural backgrounds to endorse diversity of culture in the school setting. Most learners in South African no-fee schools were African, with different African languages, sexual orientations and traditions in each school, thus needing the effective principal to promote a harmonious school that produces good results.

With respect to improvement in instruction in *The Standard*, this style was therefore required for the principal to: embrace the different principles; support and defend the customs and morals of the teachers and learners; and understand how to connect with the different customs (DBE, 2015:10). In simple terms, the principal has to reflect no favouritism when it comes to a specific culture so that everyone in that institution should feel welcomed and protected. In that way, teachers and learners will feel at ease with who they were and will be present daily at school in order to improve instruction, and good performance will be possible.

### **3.8.6 Organisational leadership style**

According to Zaccaro and Klimoski (2001:6), this style involves procedures and outcomes (including staff commitment) that contribute to the development of organisational or school purpose. Zaccaro and Klimoski (2001:6) further discuss conceptualised organisational procedures as were directed at setting direction for the staff and facilitating or enabling the organisational procedures that should result in learner performance for this purpose. On the other hand, organisational purpose includes, among other factors, drawing up a mission, vision, strategy and plans and it was also operationalised as a direction for collective action (Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2001:7).

With regard to instruction, the school leader must set direction for their staff regarding the execution of a strategic plan they compiled to improve learner performance at Grade 12 level. Kargas and Varoutos (2015) also regard organisational leadership in the context of workplace or school as playing an integral role in the cultivation of organisational culture (cited in Akaji *et al.*, 2019:4). Akaji *et al.* (2019:4) observed organisational culture as the relationship between principals and their staff, as influenced by work standards and conducts. In that sense, the organisational leadership style is therefore linked to the cultural and transformational leadership styles.

Instructionally, in *The Standard*, the organisational expectations from the principal ensure that the school employs and keeps well-qualified teachers who meet the expectations of the learners; create procedures for resolving problems in a fair, consistent and professional manner; regularly and efficiently communicate with parents; and accept accountability for a safe, secure and disciplined school setting (DBE, 2015:10). Leadership styles which are not outlined in *The Standard* but are also important will be discussed in the next section of this study.

### **3.9 Other Important Leadership Styles and Approaches**

Akaji *et al.* (2019:2) perceive leadership style as the way in which leadership functions were supported, deriving from the ways that principals conduct themselves towards their staff. Besides the five leadership styles from *The Standard*, a brief integrated overview of other leadership styles was also provided. These styles were regarded as part of the new genre of leadership theories (Khajeh, 2018:1). These styles and approaches were important in supporting principals in their multifaceted role of leadership and management to improve learner performance, especially at Grade 12 level.

#### **3.9.1 Distributed leadership style**

##### **3.9.1.1 *The nature of distributed leadership***

Distributed leadership was in less instances referred to as distributive leadership (Brown & Gioia, 2002, cited in Bolden, 2011:252). It was at times used interchangeably with shared instructional leadership and defined as teachers' encouragement to participate in the whole school's decisions (Louis *et al.*, 2010:318).

##### **3.9.1.2 *Reasons for the principal's use of distributed leadership***

Distributive or rather distributed leadership practice implies a sharing of leadership where leadership was shared among teachers through the collaboration of several people (Day & Sammons, 2016:49). A professional learning community (PLC) is significant in this leadership practice, which entails the quality of learners' learning and teachers' adopting of instruction which enhances learners' learning opportunity, which was closely associated with organisational learning (Louis *et al.*, 2010:318). It was the role of an effective principal to provide a platform for PLCs to function in their schools.

### **3.9.1.3 *Broad categories and more specific practices of distributed leadership***

Distributed leadership was also related to other concepts, such as co-leadership. However, the rhetorical and discursive significance of the latter was recognised in (re)creating leader-follower characters, activating co-operative commitment and challenging or emphasising traditional practises of the school (Bolden, 2011:253).

### **3.9.1.4 *Advantages of distributed leadership***

Leithwood and Mascall (2008:557) reflected that distributed leadership can increase leadership growth while principals were working and decrease the load of work of the principals. It has been observed that through increased involvement in decision-making due to the distribution of leadership, there was a greater obligation to goals of the whole school and new strategies may develop (Bush & Glover, 2016:216). Shared instructional leadership or rather distributed leadership was also argued to be ideal to learner achievement in a sense that it reduces teacher isolation because of division of labour and increases commitment of all stakeholders to the common goal (Louis *et al.*, 2010:318).

### **3.9.1.5 *Disadvantages of distributed leadership***

Day and Sammons (2016:52) pointed out some of the drawbacks in the implementation of distributed leadership which make it difficult. These include distributed leadership being seen as intimidating to other people who are informally in authority and also because it puts principals in a doubtful situation by surrendering authority by distributing their roles. Another challenge was that schools may be led by tyrants (Grand, 2006:511, cited in Bush & Glover, 2016:216). Instructionally, the fact that in this leadership the principal was the only one who has the powers to decide on how things were done in helping poor-performing learners may badly challenge the confidence of teachers. This may ultimately affect teachers' work and finally learner performance in the classroom because teachers can end up not being creative enough to assist their poor-performing learners because of the oppression by the principal.

### **3.9.2 Transactional leadership style**

#### **3.9.2.1 *The nature of transactional leadership***

In simple terms, transactional behaviours, according to Burns (1978), were founded on an exchange process where the leaders provide compensations in return for the staffs' work that was completed (cited in Masood, Shahbah & Shabeen, 2012:317). Ojokuku *et al.* (2012) defined transactional leadership as the exchange of targets and rewards between principals and their staff or their subordinates (cited in Khajeh, 2018:4).

#### **3.9.2.2 *Reasons for the principal's use of transactional leadership***

The transactional leader's job was to form systems that clarify to the staff what was expected of them and the punishment or reward thereof (Lamb, 2013, cited in Amachukwu *et al.*, 2015:8). Roy (2018:12) also pointed out that this style also delineates the role of the person with the simplicity of following on the progress in his or her performance and tasks. With respect to instruction, this means that the principal was able through analysis of results to track well-performing gateway subjects and reward the respective teachers and also come up with good strategies that will assist poor-performing teachers and consequences for not performing.

#### **3.9.2.3 *The broad categories and more specific practices of transactional leadership***

Transactional leadership has four dimensions in which the transactional leader sets goals (which include goals which are measurable, attainable, realistic and timely, referred to as SMART by Bass (1990, cited in Roy, 2018:9). This research focuses only on the principal's having the goal to monitor the teachers' work and taking the appropriate measures to prevent mistakes that would inhibit the set goals from being attained and intervening only when there was unacceptable conduct from both teachers and learners' sides or when the performance was not up to the level of expectation. Transactional principals can resign errands and leave them to their staff members to finish in a manner the staff choose, without consulting policies or strict measures. These principals thus bend the decision-making process (Bass, 1990, cited in Roy, 2018:9) and this can affect learner performance negatively because some decisions by the followers might not benefit the learners. The leaders can therefore offer a number of things to the staff, which include performance reviews and new responsibilities (Khajeh, 2018:4) when they have outdone themselves.

#### **3.9.2.4 Advantages of transactional leadership**

Khajeh (2018:4) believes that this style assists in making and supporting the context in which the school's and teachers' performance was increased due to the fact that the teachers were always able to attain the important and unimportant prizes. MacCleskey (2014, cited in Roy, 2018:6) also points out that the exchanges were beneficial to principals because they allow them to accomplish multiple things. These include achieving their performance goals of improving learner performance, motivating teacher commitment through stated contracts, and focusing on improved school efficiency.

#### **3.9.2.5 Disadvantages of transactional leadership**

According to Burns (1978), transactional leadership practices lead staff members to temporal relations of exchange with their principals which tend to be brief and often produce hatred among staff members and their principals (McCleskey, 2014, cited in Roy, 2018:11). This style does not inspire uniqueness and originality among the staff members and therefore they might not succeed as projected by the school (Khajeh, 2018:4). Instructionally, the leader's positive reward can motivate teachers to work hard by offering their extra services and helping poor-performing learners, whereas punishment can create resentment and a hostile school environment.

Transactional leadership alone is not sufficient for leaders to achieve their expectations of having sustainable learner performance in gateway subjects or effectively leading professional staff at no-fee schools (Packard, 2008, cited in Roy, 2018:11). It was therefore augmented by transformational leadership, discussed below.

### **3.9.3 Transformational leadership style**

Bass (1985) perceived principals as creating a culture of helping others and influencing others towards improving learner performance through motivation (cited in Kersteller, 2018:26). The transformational leadership style was often called the charismatic leadership style (Amachukwu *et al.*, 201:5) because principals may be charming in terms of motivating employees to work harder and achieve the expected common goal. Transformational leadership was therefore defined by Bass (1985) as leaders who create a culture of helping others and influencing others towards achieving organisational goals (cited in Kersteller, 2018:28), or who focus on the interest of their

staff, promote employee acceptance of the group's mission and inspire employees to look beyond themselves and towards a common goal (Bass, 1985, cited in Khan *et al.*, 2016:9). The change in the staff's morals might raise learner attainment.

### **3.9.3.1 *Reasons for the principal's use of transformational leadership***

Transformational leaders encourage and inspire their teachers to achieve while surpassing self-interest for the improvement of learner performance (Kamur, 2018:19). The idealised and behavioural charisma of the principal encourages the teachers to identify with them (Tyoto & Bhau, 2015, cited in Khajeh, 2018:3). With respect to teaching and learning, this leadership style will improve learner performance because the teachers were motivated to be committed in their work by seeing their principal being actively involved and checking learners' work.

### **3.9.3.2 *The broad categories and more specific practices of transformational leadership***

Day and Sammons (2016:16) highlight that transformational leadership emphasises vision and inspiration. They further outline four key practices of this style: building vision; setting direction; developing staff and curriculum; and managing the instruction. With respect to the broad transformational practices of principals, the researcher provides a brief discussion of these practices below, with building vision and setting direction discussed together as they relate to each other.

- Building vision and setting direction

In this category, Day and Sammons (2016:16) provided the more specific leadership practices for building vision. These include shared vision and accepting the group goals and demonstrating good learner attainment expectations. Managerial practices involve motivating, clarifying goals, planning and organising. Day and Sammons (2016:16) also provided leadership practices under direction-setting as where principals knowingly influence teachers' anxiety, sense of efficiency and obligation; and also help in staff development and inspiring common goals, and finally, enhancing teachers' performance. Day and Sammons (2016:17) perceive this category as focusing on forming conditions for teachers to be committed in their work.

Furthermore, Day and Sammons (2016:16) compare leadership practices to managerial taxonomy in this category. The more specific leadership practices include

building collaborative cultures and relationships with parents and the community around the schools (Day & Sammons, 2016:16). Specific practices in management include handling conflicts, and team building (Day & Sammons, 2016:16). The school environment will not be hostile for teachers to collaborate. The principal will also be in a position to give some of the leadership roles to the teachers and capacitate them to become good future leaders too.

- Understanding and developing staff

In this category, principals inspire staff by giving care and attention and modelling suitable practices. Their management roles involve recognising and rewarding, supporting, developing and mentoring (Day & Sammons, 2016:16). To be more specific, under managerial taxonomy, Day and Sammons (2016:16) point out that the principal acknowledges and rewards good work, comments on teachers' work, provides conditions which were good for teachers to work in and supports the teachers' work. In addition, they provide space and distribute leadership throughout all staff members, model suitable behaviours and also promote regular access to a wide range of professional development programmes. Well-informed teachers will then be able to focus on their work and promote better learner achievement in gateway subjects.

- Managing the instruction

This category involves the following principal leadership practices: staffing the school, providing teacher development, monitoring school activities, and buffering teachers against instructional or contextual challenges of their work (Day & Sammons, 2016:17). Principals provide management practices such as monitoring and ordering highly valued conditions of work, where monitoring was a key part of successful leadership behaviour (Day & Sammons, 2016:17). This will keep teachers on their toes in terms of planning before going to class because they know that they will be monitored and supported.

### **3.9.3.3 *Advantages of transformational leadership***

Transformational leadership focused on improved performance by providing teachers with inspiration and job fulfilment and looking after their wellbeing (Odumeru & Ifanyi, 2013:356). Some scholars regard transformational leaders as succeeding to gain the commitment of educators by encouraging participation in school decision-making

processes by developing required structures (Leithwood, 1994; Bush, 2011; Steyn, 2013, cited in Ghasemy & Hussin, 2014:3 and in Bush, 2016:214). Instructionally, teachers will be in a position to improve learner performance because they will be motivated enough to help even the poorest learners in their classes because they will be given a platform to be creative and enjoy coming to work.

#### **3.9.3.4 *Disadvantages of transformational leadership***

This style places a large amount of confidence in principals rather than in teachers (Amachukwu *et al.*, 2015:5). Scholars opine that the transformational principal can exploit teachers even without realising it (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006; Garcí'a-Morales *et al.*, 2008; Keller, 1992; Yukl 1999; Eisenbeiß & Boerner, 2013, cited in Odumeru & Ifeanyi, 2013:356) because transformational leadership does not prevent the abuse of power by leaders (Khan *et al.*, 2016:26). This can cause educators in such schools to become strained and spent and increasingly unmotivated and frustrated, which will be reflected in learner attainment (Bush, 2016:216). Furthermore, the transformational leadership model can also be perceived negatively when schools collapse. This may happen when the principal who was a transformational leader leaves a school, because he or she was the only one who inspires eagerness in the teams and motivates the educators to go forward (Odumeru & Ifeanyi, 2013:356; Amachukwu *et al.*, 2015:5).

### **3.9.4 *Autocratic leadership style***

#### **3.9.4.1 *The nature of autocratic leadership***

This style was also known as the heroic leadership style (Ahmad, 2017:6). This style was applied in situations where the principal has all the control over decision-making and exercises supremacy and therefore becomes dictatorial and less creative (Chukwusa, 2018:3; Khajeh 2018:5). Amachukwu *et al.* (2015:10) pointed out that autocratic leaders have complete control over their staff and they have little or no contribution on decisions taken, even if these are in their interest or that of the school.

#### **3.9.4.2 *Reasons for the principal's use of autocratic leadership***

In autocratic leadership, the leaders or principals employ coercive tactics to reinforce rules and to control people (Cherry, 2015, cited in Chukwusa, 2018:4). In a school

situation, the principal applies this theory to reinforce the completion of programmes and motivates teachers to improve performance by rewarding good performance.

#### **3.9.4.3 *The broad categories and more specific practices of autocratic leadership***

Autocratic leadership was characterised by one-direction channels of communication (Chukwusa, 2018:5). It was the principal only who makes judgments and takes accountability for the results of the school (Chukwusa, 2018:5). Also, the principal expects the staff to exclusively follow and respect their orders, implement their decisions and communicate formally or in writing to them (Chukwusa, 2018:5).

#### **3.9.4.4 *The advantages of autocratic leadership***

Autocratic leadership can be helpful for quick decision-making procedures without the need of consulting all the staff members (Chukwusa, 2018:3). Furthermore, Chukwusa (2018:3) perceives this leadership style as allowing the staff to be focused on a specific task with no worries about making multifaceted judgements or to be better skilled at executing certain tasks benefiting the school (Chukwusa, 2018:3).

#### **3.9.4.5 *Disadvantages of autocratic leadership***

Autocratic leadership prevents the use of brilliant thoughts by teachers to problem-solving because the principal proclaims absolute power and influence over them. In addition, the principal's demand for attention results in their stress and burnout, where they end up neglecting their roles and, in turn, learner performance collapses (Ahmad, 2017:6; Kamur, 2018:17). Similarly, burnout was related to a hostile school environment where the principal shows signs of unhappiness and of low self-confidence in his or her leading and management practices, exhibits poor communication skills with their staff and were themselves absent constantly from school, all these ultimately resulting in poor learner performance (Webster & Hackett, 1999, Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001, cited in Kelly & Hearld, 2020:582). In this leadership style, the principal may use belittling verbal expressions, leading by threats and abusing their power (Chukwusa, 2018:5). With regard to teaching and learning, the decisions in this style were made speedily and can be implement instantly. Being dealt with in this way ultimately makes most staff resentful (Amachukwu *et al.*, 2015:10). In some instances, staff become hostile, tense, fearful or resentful; have low

staff morale and job dissatisfaction; and absenteeism, work stoppage and discontent increase (Ahmad, 2017:6; Chukwusa, 2018:6). All these factors therefore affect learner performance negatively.

### **3.9.5 Democratic leadership style**

#### **3.9.5.1 *The nature of democratic leadership***

Democratic leadership was related to distributed leadership (Bolden, 2011:252). Kamur (2018:17) opined that decision-making in this style is distributed, where the principal involved his or her staff in the process of planning and execution of decisions. Decision-making was about facing particular issues, concepts, contexts, challenges or situations in an organisation that require the leader to choose or make judgements on a task, where his or her staff members partake in the process (Ejimabo, 2015:6). Instructionally, the principal was in a position to involve their staff in terms of deciding which strategies can be used to improve learner performance, especially in gateway subjects at Grade 12 level.

#### **3.9.5.2 *Reasons for the principal's use of democratic leadership***

The principal shares roles with staff by involving them and their participation in the decision-making process, which impact their work directly. This is claimed to be one of the psychological motivational activities that can raise staff morale and efficiency (Brown, 2011; Wiesenthal *et al.*, 2015, cited in Akpoviroro, Bolarinwa & Owolutu, 2018:48).

#### **3.9.5.3 *The broad categories and more specific practices of democratic leadership***

Democratic leadership was characterised by group goal setting where the leader or principal gives suggestions, seeks staff input on various learner needs to improve performance, and identifies and seeks organisation-wide training and professional development for teachers who were having challenges with content (Ahmad, 2017:6). Schein (2010) outlines the specifics of what principals do to involve the following: they include their staff in setting accurate objectives, nurture staff abilities, set clear directions for staff, enable collaborations among staff, and fairly distribute resources by focusing on the process as well as task (cited in Akpoviroro *et al.*, 2018:50). In simple terms, Akpoviroro *et al.* (2018:50) perceived these principals as tapping into the

full potential of their staff since their role was to make certain that their staff take part in the decisions that affect their work.

#### **3.9.5.4 Advantages of democratic leadership**

Democratic leadership was perceived to be very effective in motivating staff and boosting their morale and therefore increase the outcomes because it provided teachers with a sense of fitting, receipt and dignity (Akpoviroro *et al.*, 2018:57). A school environment where the staff become involved in decision-making helps with a disciplined school setting, high job satisfaction for teachers and was productive in improving learner performance (Amachukwu *et al.*, 2015:10; Akpoviroro *et al.*, 2018:48).

#### **3.9.5.5 Disadvantages of democratic leadership**

Adams (2017) highlights that democratic leadership can be easily manipulated by the principal to their benefit and not to the benefit of their staff (cited in Akpoviroro *et al.*, 2018:53). Also, democratic leadership can be dangerous because team members can waste treasured time collecting ideas and when the staffs do not have capabilities to provide high-quality ideas (Amachukwu *et al.*, 2015:10). With respect to teaching and learning, learners might perform poorly due to the fact that the principal expects too much from their staff and because all stakeholders are involved in decisions even where a certain level of expertise is required (Ojokuku *et al.*, 2012:204).

### **3.9.6 Invitational leadership style**

#### **3.9.6.1 The nature of invitational leadership**

The word invitational, according to Novak and Purkey (2015:5), was derived from a Latin word *invitare*, which referred to offering something beneficial for consideration. Based on invitational theory, this model was discovered by William Purkey and Betty Siegel in 2002 (Burns & Martin, 2010:30) and aimed to invite all stakeholders to achieve the best results (Purkey & Siegel, 2003, cited in De Durna, 2018:19). Invitational leadership has five vital expectations, namely (1) people were capable and liable and should be treated accordingly, (2) schooling should be a collaborative and co-operative activity, (3) the process of the product in the making, (4) people possess untapped potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavour, and (5) this potential can be best realised by places, policies, programmes and processes specially

designed to invite development and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally (Novak & Purkey, 2015:5). This leadership style should be employed in disadvantaged contexts in particular to improve teaching and learning.

### **3.9.6.2 *Reasons for the principal's use of invitational leadership***

Principals used invitational leadership to intentionally create a safe environment and prepare guidelines that reflect their roles to lead to trust and respect among teachers (Stillion & Siegel, 2005:9, cited in Burns & Martin, 2010:32). Badenhorst and Koalepe (2014:248) affirmed that the principal must communicate invitational messages to the staff as a way of showing teachers that they are welcomed to participate in a range of school activities. These messages are communicated through records, guidelines and roles (Day *et al.*, 2001:34, cited in Burns & Martin, 2010:32). This leadership allows the principal to create a setting where teachers were able to attain their objectives through contributing to the shared vision and mission of the staff (Stillion & Siegel, 2005, cited in Burns & Martin, 2010:32), thereby promoting learner performance.

### **3.9.6.3 *The broad categories and more specific practices of invitational leadership***

Invitational leadership was based on four basic assumptions, namely: optimism (where there is certainty that teachers have intact abilities for growth and development); respect (which was demonstrated in the gentility and compassion of teachers); trust (which was the foundation of community within a school); and intentional care (which was the deliberate delivery of development chances) (Day *et al.*, 2001:34, cited in Burns & Martin, 2010:32; Stoll & Fink, cited in Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014:248). Even though the worth of trust was linked to that of respect, Purkey and Siegel (2003:12) described trust as having certainty in the abilities and responsibilities of principals and their teachers (cited in Burns & Martin, 2010:33). An effective principal has an integral role to play in uncovering these concepts and provides in their school the platform where they will be practiced to promote good learner performance.

In addition to the four assumptions underlying invitational leadership, Purkey and Siegel (2003) emphasised to leaders five areas that contribute to the success of a school (which they regard as the five P's of invitational theory) (cited in De Durna, 2018:21). These include people, places, policies, programmes and processes (De

Durna, 2018:21), which will be briefly discuss as advantages of invitational leadership below.

#### **3.9.6.4 *Advantages of invitational leadership***

It was essential in invitational leadership for the leader to understand and value people or their staff because the reward will be the potential harmony that the organisation or school can have, which will pave the way for good learner achievement (De Durna, 2018:21). De Durna (2018:21) also mentions that people have different needs as they have different social characteristics. Success in terms of learner performance is more likely to happen in a school where the principal addresses all stakeholders' needs with utmost care, and where people show courtesy to each other and talk in a well-mannered way and know that their role is appreciated.

Purkey (1997:7) claimed that place refers to the suitable setting in a school environment, which was the easiest to alter because place is the most noticeable part of a setting (cited in De Durna, 2018:22). For the school to be successful, the principal should therefore find ways to improve and provide a safe school environment to the school community because teachers should accept the place of work and feel at peace with the resources available there (De Durna, 2018:22).

The invitational leadership model emphasised policies as an area that assists the school to make all mechanisms work more smoothly (De Durna, 2018:22). Purkey (1997) referred to policies as measures and guidelines, printed or unprinted, utilised to control the ongoing activities of stakeholders and schools (cited in De Durna, 2018:22). Principals together with their stakeholders must develop policies that benefit both stakeholders and educational school reciprocally and all must seek to understand these policies that were applied to all people working in the school (De Durna, 2018:22). The advantage of having policies was that policies create a joint setting where the leaders were promoting cooperation and focusing on individual success (Burns, 2007, cited in De Durna, 2018:18). This creates more productive organisations in which people were not under the stress of being in a race (De Durna, 2018:22).

Purkey (1992, cited in De Durna, 2018:23) perceived programmes and monitoring programmes to be of significance in invitational leadership. This was because programmes often focus on the fine objectives while ignoring the wider level of their

need and ascertaining whether those programmes satisfy the objectives which they have been generated for.

Lastly, processes were perceived by Cleveland (2002) as the most important element of invitational leadership (cited in De Durna, 2018:23). In a school environment, all stakeholders were encouraged by an effective principal to participate actively in processes such as decision-making and presentation since participating in decision-making makes teachers more willing to achieve set goals (De Durna, 2018:23).

### **3.9.6.5 *Disadvantages of invitational leadership***

*Disinvitation* messages, whether planned or unplanned, involve cold, biased and depressing communications (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014:248). Hansen (1998:1, cited in Burns & Martin, 2010:34) opines that learners regularly feel *disinvited* in a school (referred to as caring disability) when they feel unnoticed and their physical being was not catered for. Examples of this were that no one was caring enough to encourage learners' participation in school activities such as sports, which will help with their physical and mental health, and to reduce learner absenteeism, which contributes to learners losing information that is vital for examination for them to pass. These learners will certainly perform poorly in such a school. Where the school environment was left unpleasant, unattractive and unhealthy, this was usually caused by lack of guidance and lack of consistency in setting direction and purpose by the principal together with lack of trust by followers. This serves as an obstacle to the development of cohesive collaboration and efforts by learners (Burns & Martin, 2010:33; Purkey & Novak, 2015:5).

### **3.9.7 Turnaround leadership style**

#### **3.9.7.1 *The nature of turnaround leadership***

Research has constantly shown that the decline in learner performance was caused by current principals and their incapacity to address contextual challenges (Schoeberg, Collier & Bowman, 2013, cited in Liu, 2018:8). Turnaround defines a situation in which a school has a decline in performance, for a certain period, and serious efforts to improve and revitalise performance must be implemented (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011, cited in Liu, 2018:4). Chapman and Mujis (2013) pointed out that this was a collective procedure (cited in Liu, 2018:12). Scholars opined that school principals and

their staff need to form school communities of practice and work as a team that provides a school setting for teamwork and common understanding (Muhammad, 2009; Jacobson, 2011; Neil, 2012, cited in Liu, 2018:12) to turn around their institution and perform better.

### **3.9.7.2 *Reasons for the principal's use of turnaround leadership***

According to research, the turnaround concept is to be used to seek for answers to poor-performing schools through certain strategies in order to improve low learner achievement on examinations and tests (Scalazar, 2015; Strunk, Marsh, Hashim *et al.*, 2016; Therriault, 2016, cited in Liu, 2018:4-5). Lawrence (2016) identifies the re-establishment of a reconstructed school requiring leadership and resources as one of the factors influencing school turnaround (cited in Liu, 2018:11). Similarly, Segler-Zender (2013) have found turnaround to be influenced by teachers' professional development and active parental involvement (cited in Liu, 2018:12). Public Impact (2016:4) explains that school turnarounds are possible, but they take a concerted effort with bold leadership and persistent, achievement-orientated collaboration among staff, where the principal deploys a schoolwide team of teacher-leaders to help turn the school around.

### **3.9.7.3 *The broad categories and more specific practices of turnaround leadership***

Researchers have identified that when schools were in a turnaround, they usually run short of resources and have high numbers of disadvantaged learners (Duke & Jacobson, 2011; Manwaring, 2011, Segler-Zender, 2013, cited in Liu, 2018:4), which badly affect learner performance in such schools (no-fee schools). Leithwood *et al.* (2010) agree by saying that schools in turnaround require extra resources (cited in Liu, 2018:5) and must employ principals who are willing and able to make essential changes, accordingly (Player, Hambrick, Hitt & Robinson, 2014, cited in Liu, 2018:5). Hassel and Hassel (2009) opined that in such schools, it was often vital to bring in a new principal to remedy the situation (cited in Liu, 2018:7). This change will encourage teachers to trust that they can change their instruction (Reyes-Guerra & Bogotch, 2011, cited in Liu, 2018:8) and, finally, pass their learners. Poor leadership can cause learner performance to drop (Public Impact, 2016:9; Liu, 2018:8).

#### **3.9.7.4 *Advantages of turnaround leadership***

Graham (2013) highlights that turnaround quickly improves learner performance in a long-term poor-performing school (cited in Liu, 2018:5). Successful turnaround principals never give up even when early efforts fail (Public Impact, 2016:9). Furthermore, it has been observed that speedy success during turnaround shows everyone that the changes in teaching and school culture result in better learning outcomes.

#### **3.9.7.5 *Disadvantages of turnaround leadership***

According to Rebecchi (2018:5), turnaround leaders are often faced with limited time and resources to implement necessary changes and align the organisation behind the process (cited in Liu, 2018:5).

### **3.9.8 *Postmodern leadership style***

#### **3.9.8.1 *The nature of postmodern leadership***

Usher and Edwards (1994:10) perceived postmodernity as a world of abrupt transformation, of incomprehensible unsteadiness, where information was forever changing and meaning 'floats' without its traditional teleological fixing in initial information and the belief in unavoidable social development (cited in Sookermany, 2017:312). In simple terms, Sookermany (2017:312) described postmodernity as a world where people have to make their way without fixed references and a traditional anchoring point. With regard to teaching, in postmodern societies, principals can be in any position, arise from some context, and be developed through any type of system, but were most effective when their skills and abilities were applied to the most relevant problems (Tabrizi & Rideout, 2016:1243). This implied that principals in this style were not the only ones who might have problem-solving skills, but with professional development organised by the principal, the teachers can also be in a position to lead certain school activities provided they have the required abilities and have developed relevant skills.

#### **3.9.8.2 *Disadvantages of postmodern leadership***

Limitations of this style include for the principal to figure out their own strengths and flaws and that of their staff, identify what was needed to solve particular challenges, and have the aspiration for individual development (Bergquist, 2008, cited in Tabrizi &

Rideout, 2016:1243). The reason why this leadership style was only briefly discussed was because it was not ideal for school leadership and there is a dearth of literature reviewing this style.

### **3.9.9 Contingency leadership style**

#### **3.9.9.1 *The nature of contingency leadership***

The contingency model of leadership was first introduced by an Australian psychologist, Fred Edward Fiedler (1964), who opined that leadership value is dependent on leadership character and the environment (Kamur, 2018:16; Milner, 2015:233-235, cited in Solomon, 2018:40). Contingency leadership was therefore contextual in that it couples the leadership theory with the correct context (Ritchie, 2018:26). Tse (2004:3) affirmed that contingency leadership was a mutually influencing process in which the leader influences others and the effectiveness of the leader responds to the changing needs of their context.

#### **3.9.9.2 *Reasons for the principal's use of contingency leadership***

Contingency theory explained why inconsistency occurs and identifies leader-context matches that result in effective learner performance and effectiveness of a principal depending on their behaviour and context (Kamur, 2018:16). McGrandle (2016) states that organisations were highly interdependent on the context and that context changes; therefore, one and the same leadership approach was not sufficient to address the individuality of an organisation (cited in Solomon, 2018:40).

#### **3.9.9.3 *The broad categories and more specific practices of contingency leadership***

Solomon (2018:41) perceived contingency leadership to be twofold: leadership behaviour, which focuses on accomplishing emphasised interpersonal relationships; and leadership favourableness, which attempts to match the leadership style with the context that will make them most effective. Furthermore, leadership favourableness has been identified with how the staff view the principal and how much power through rewards and punishment the principal holds over their staff (Mitchell, Biglan, Oncken & Fielder, 1970:254, cited in Solomon, 2018:42).

#### **3.9.9.4 *Advantages of contingency leadership***

This style has been described as predictive in determining the appropriate leadership style given the context (McGradle, 2017:528, cited in Solomon, 2018:43). Instructionally, the school leader was not confined to a single leadership style that might not fit their school context. Rather, they have an abundance of leadership styles at their disposal and can choose the one that is relevant for the school context in order to lead effectively and have good learner performance.

#### **3.9.9.5 *Disadvantages of contingency leadership***

Tse (2004:3) pointed out that change was not a normal procedure. Other scholars indicated that a changing school means a changing culture, and that the process requires tolerance and perseverance because it was slow and it becomes messy when pushed too fast (Stoll & Fink, 1994:174, cited in Tse, 2004:3). The new context might have its own contextual challenges that might be difficult for the principal to deal with because of being too rigid with a particular leadership style(s) (Solomon, 2018:44). This will make the principal ineffective and therefore impact negatively on learner performance because the principal was not accepted in that new context. Subsequently, they will end up with an unmanaged or ill-disciplined school where teachers neglect their learners.

### **3.10 Employment of Principals**

The defining feature in the employment of principals in South Africa was that principals were unevenly scattered across schools, with underqualified and inexperienced school leaders being excessively represented in no-fee schools. This is attributable to apartheid policies which linked principals to schools along ethnic groups and which continues even to date (Wills, 2015:1). Despite poor selection criteria of observing principals' credentials (in terms of qualifications and experience) in the payroll data, which have reflected signs of poor principal quality in no-fee schools in South Africa, some principals lead these schools effectively and efficiently (Wills, 2015:1).

The IQMS system was designed to assess principals' performance, but it does not adequately provide the goals against which to monitor the work of principals, and principals achieve high scores very easily (DBE, 2012, cited in Wills, 2015:4). Furthermore, it was reported in the principals' IQMS moderators' report (2011/2012)

that not all principals were appraised by their circuit managers as initially proposed by the agreement. This reflects the failure of the IQMS to encourage changes in principal behaviour in schools, especially in no-fee schools (Wills, 2015:4).

Nationally, there are processes (short-listing criteria and interviews) which govern teacher and principal appointments. These processes were stated fully in the PAM document (ELRC, 2014, cited in Wills, 2015:6). Shortlisting and interviews are conducted by a panel consisting of parents (SGB), the current principal, a departmental representative and a union representative whose role was only to observe that due processes were followed. The panel then submits recommendations of their choice to the HoD, who makes the final appointment decision (RSA DoE, 2003a:21, cited in Wills, 2015:6). Various reports have reflected that the principal-appointment process in no-fee schools has been identified as fraught with irregularities, where there was unjustified influence of unions in the selection process beyond their observation (Wills, 2015:6). The DBE also made its own investigation into wrong appointments and their results point to personnel with poor leadership and management which impact badly on discipline in schools and result in poor provision of valued education to those schools. A recommendation is that the principal as part of the SGB needs to capacitate SGB members on the selection and interview procedures for them to be able to recommend appropriate candidates for managerial posts. In addition, management programmes such as induction of school management, coaching and mentoring need to be established and learning networks need to be strengthened.

The credentials regarding qualifications and years of experience as expressed in the PAM document are key criteria guiding principal appointment. These criteria attract candidates with less years of experience and poorer qualifications as the required credentials do not vary much from that of a novice educator. The requirement is only a relative educational qualification value (REQV) 13 (which is equivalent to a NSC certificate and relevant qualification – a three-year teaching diploma) (Wills, 2015:6,18). The ranking on a scale of 10 is not considered by the REQV system, where 10 is mostly a matric qualification with no professional teachers' qualification and 17 is a matric qualification plus relevant professional teachers' qualification which includes a master's degree (RSA DoE, 2003a, cited in Wills, 2015:9).

Wills (2015:14) further illuminated that although racial controls on education were elevated in 1994, the incorporation of other ethnic groups into principal positions in no-

fee schools was limited. This act has had a persistent inequality effect even up to today, because 94% to 99% of principals at no-fee schools are black, with the majority of learners at these schools being black (Wills, 2015:14). Recently, hired principals in no-fee schools have even less qualifications than before. There is a necessity for all principals to undertake leadership development or even principal induction programmes since qualification and experience pose a point of major concern in underperformance of principals to execute their leadership and management roles and responsibilities in some no-fee schools (Jacobson *et al.*, 2008:1).

### **3.11 Summary of Chapter 3**

In this chapter, the review of literature was continued and the requirements and leadership practices for principals in South African education were briefly discussed. Firstly, the discussion included the conceptualisation of principal leadership and management. This was included because the understanding of principals' roles outlined in these concepts forms the basics to sound principal leadership and management practices at the school level and the effect they have on learner performance, especially in Grade 12. Furthermore, the discussion focused on the leadership styles outlined in *The Standard* as a legislative document that guides the leadership and management roles of principals, and also other leadership styles not covered in the document but most commonly practiced throughout the globe. Lastly, the discussion was around the employment of principals in South Africa. The following chapter will present the research design and methodology of this study.

## **CHAPTER 4: THE STUDY' RESEARCH DESIGN**

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### **4.1 Introduction**

The first chapter presented the introduction of this dissertation. Chapter 2 provided some review of literature on the dynamics of no-fee schools. In Chapter 3, the researcher continued to review literature on the requirements and leadership practices for principals in education.

Chapter 4 presented the specific procedures employed to conduct this research. These include the presentation of data gathering methods and procedures. An outline on the sampling procedures of the research population, research sites, and ethical issues was also provided.

### **4.2 Restating the Aim, Objectives and Research Questions of the Study**

The main aim of this study was to explore the role of the principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance.

**The study objectives include:**

- (a) to investigate the contextual challenges that principals must deal with;
- (b) to investigate the curriculum delivery challenges for Grade 12 learners that principals must deal with;
- (c) to establish how principals address contextual challenges;
- (d) to explore the leadership styles and practices required to improve Grade 12 learner performance; and
- (e) to explore the management styles and approaches required to improve Grade 12 learner performance.

The primary research question of this dissertation is: What is the role of the principal in Grade 12 learner performance?

**The study's subsidiary research questions are as follows:**

- (a) What are the contextual challenges that principals must deal with?
- (b) What are the curriculum delivery challenges for Grade 12 learners that principals must deal with?
- (c) How do principals address contextual and curriculum challenges?
- (d) Which leadership styles and practices are required to improve Grade 12 learner performance?
- (e) Which management styles and approaches are required to improve Grade 12 learner performance?

### **4.3 Research Paradigm**

#### **4.3.1 Conceptualising the research paradigm**

American philosopher Thomas Kuhn (1969) in *The structure of scientific revolutions* described a paradigm as a cluster of beliefs (Bryman, 2012:630; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:26). Paradigm originates from *paradeigma*, a Greek word for a model or patterns (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:26). In educational research, though, paradigm referred to a scholar's worldview informing the interpretation of the data of a study (Mackenzie & Knipi, 2006, cited in Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:26).

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:30) pointed out that many paradigms have been suggested, but Candy (1989) groups them into three main taxonomies (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:23), namely positivist, interpretivist and critical realism paradigms. Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2014:23) indicate that it was important for a researcher to ascribe to a particular paradigm because the paradigm determines the value of the research questions to be asked during the investigation and the processes required for the questions to be acceptable. The interpretivist paradigm was therefore employed for the purpose of this research.

#### **4.3.2 Description of the interpretivist paradigm**

Interpretivism came into the field of research as a reaction to the limitations of the positivist worldview, of which the assumptions were viewed as representing the

traditional form of research and which were more for quantitative research than for qualitative research (Creswell, 2014:7). The two traditions will therefore be contrasted in an attempt to justify the choice of the interpretivist tradition ascribed to this study.

The positivist worldview (also known as post-positivist or sometimes referred to doing science research) was publicised by writers such as Comte, Mill, Durkheim, Newton and Locke in the 19th century (Smith, 1983, cited in Creswell, 2014:7). More recent writers, including Phillips and Burbules (2000), have also come into the research field carrying assumptions about the uncertainty of knowledge (or, in simpler terms, truth never prevailing), but that data, evidence and rational considerations shape knowledge (cited in Creswell, 2014:7). Positivists, especially in the natural sciences, study human beings and objects in the same way, in laboratory settings (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:27), which is why positivism was not selected for this study.

In contrast, interpretivists believe that people and objects are basically different and cannot be studied in the same way, in laboratory settings (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:27). Interpretivism was influenced by veteran writers such as Mannheim, Berger and Leukmann (1967) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) and recent writers such as Crotty (1998) and Mertens (2010), often being combined with constructivism (also known as social constructivism) (Creswell, 2014:8). Interpretivists study reality subjectively; as a result, they use methods that are sensitive to the context and help them to gain an in-depth understanding or to describe meaningful social actions and experiences during their investigations (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:12). Furthermore, people are forever changing and the environment where they live constantly influences those changes. In simple terms, interpretivists merely want to understand the behaviour of humans (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:27); hence, it was employed in this dissertation.

The study intended to explore the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance. This made the interpretivist paradigm relevant as the research intended to understand the behaviour of principals in their school context. This behaviour is influenced by different contextual challenges encountered by principals in the no-fee-school context.

#### **4.3.3 Rationale for using the interpretivist paradigm in the study**

This study employed a qualitative research approach and that made the interpretivist paradigm relevant because it was perceived as a worldview for qualitative research

(Creswell, 2014:8). Interpretivists carry assumptions that people look for the understanding of the world in which they live and work. Crotty (1998, cited in Creswell, 2014:9) identifies assumptions to include the fact that people interpret and make sense as they are involved with the world and that meaning is always socially constructed and arise from their interactions with each other. Similarly, Neuman (2014:108) perceives interpretivists as having an interest to acquire an in-depth understanding of other people or how the world works in order to appreciate the broad variety of their lived experiences (Neuman, 2014:108).

The researcher of this study intended to gain a deeper understanding from the research participants (principals and teachers) as to how principals' leadership and management practices influence teaching and learning in no-fee secondary schools (context) which ultimately contribute positively or negatively to learner performance. In adopting interpretivism, the researcher intended to and acquired in-depth perceptions of the participants and the participants had enough opportunity to make known their opinions about principals' leadership practices. Interpretivism will be discussed further by looking at Lincoln and Guba's (1985, cited in Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017:26) four elements of paradigm (namely epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology) to justify how the interpretivist paradigm relates to this study.

#### **4.3.3.1 *Epistemology of the interpretivist paradigm***

Epistemology originates from the Greek words *episteme*, which means knowledge, and *logos* or *logia*, which means the study (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:23). Schwandt (1997) therefore refers to epistemology as the study of knowledge and justification (cited in Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017:27). Interpretivists therefore believe that facts are not objective and neutral, but context and people's interpretation of information are what is considered to be factual (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:28). Bryman (2012:380) highlights that understanding of the social world by its participants through an examination of the interpretation of the world relates to the interpretivist paradigm. For this study, the interpretation of principals' leadership and management practices was dependent totally on principals' and their teachers' interpretations in a no-fee-school context.

#### **4.3.3.2 *Ontology of the interpretivist paradigm***

Originating from Greece, the word *ontos* means being or which was; ontology therefore means the study of being or existence (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:28). Ontology carries an assumption that anything that happens in our world can be experienced or observed. The ontological position of this study is constructivism, which implies that social occurrences are not only produced through social collaboration but they are forever revised (Bryman, 2012:380; Neuman, 2014:33). Interpretivists embedded in constructivism believe that existence is a social construction and depends on the meaning that people ascribe to their own experiences and interaction with others (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:29). It was perceived that the principals and teachers were able to put into words their interactions, experiences or challenges at no-fee secondary schools.

#### **4.3.3.3 *Methodology of the interpretivist paradigm***

Methodology refers to research design (such as multiple case studies), research methods (including semi-structured interviews, focus groups and observations), research approaches (such as qualitative research) and procedures used to scrutinise the gathered information in an investigation in order to determine something (Keeves, 1997, cited in Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017:28). Methodology is a guiding system for solving a problem and not a synonym for method, but includes the research methods believed to be suitable for gathering and scrutinising data to generate knowledge about the phenomenon being studied (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:30).

This study employed a qualitative research approach within a multiple-case-study design and utilised semi-structured interviews with principals, focus groups with teachers, observations and document analysis as methods of data gathering in order to explore the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance. Interpretivists believe that the qualitative approach can be defined as a research approach that stresses words rather than numbers in gathering and scrutinising data (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:30).

#### **4.3.3.4 *Axiology of the interpretivist paradigm***

Axiology is the study of values and value judgement and has its origins in the Greek word *axios*, meaning worthy (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014:23). Kivunji and Kuyini

(2017:28) regard axiology as the ethical matters that must be taken into cognisance when planning a research proposal. Kivunji and Kuyini (2017:28) also outline four criteria of ethical conduct. Firstly, *teleology* refers to efforts made to ensure that the research has important results that will please a sufficient number of people. Secondly, *deontology* means the understanding that the act undertaken during the research will have its own consequences, intended to benefit participants, the scholastic community or the entire public. Thirdly, *morality* refers to the fundamental moral values maintained during the research, which includes the researchers being honest in their data analysis. Lastly, *fairness* draws the researcher's thoughtfulness to the necessity to be fair to all respondents and to make sure that respondents' rights are supported. All ethical issues prior to and during data gathering and analysis of data of this study were respected.

## **4.4 The Methodology of this Study**

### **4.4.1 Unpacking the research design or methodology**

Babbie (2010:117) defined research design as a process of focusing a viewpoint for the sake of a certain study. It is at times regarded as the strategy of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, cited in Creswell, 2014:12). Yin (2011:75) views it as *logical* plans in a sense that the logic in the plans contains the relationship between the research questions, the data to be gathered and the strategies for data analysis so that a study's results will address the intended research questions. Similarly, Bryman (2012:45) perceives research design as representing a structure that guides the execution of a research method and analysis of the succeeding data, and that provides a framework for data gathering and analysis.

This study employed a multiple-case-study design within a qualitative approach as its research design. The multiple-case study permitted the researcher to explore the phenomenon under study through the use of replication strategy (Zach, 2006:9). According to Yin (1994), this strategy has the literal replication stage and the theoretical replication stage, but this study employed the replication strategy, where cases are selected to obtain similar results (cited in Zach, 2006:9).

### **4.4.2 Description of a multiple-case study**

Yin (2003, cited in Gustafsson, 2017:8) highlights that a case study can either involve a single case or multiple cases. According to Stake (1995) and Baxter and Jack (2008),

if the study includes more than one case, it is considered to be a multiple-case study (both cited in Gustafsson, 2017:9). This makes it possible for the researcher to provide data indicating important influences from the differences and similarities between the cases (Vannon, 2014:2015, cited in Gustafsson, 2017:9). The multiple-case study as research design of qualitative research explores a real-life system through in-depth data gathering from multiple sources of data (Creswell, 2013:97, cited in Gustafsson, 2017:2). This study employed a multiple-case study since the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance was explored in four schools (cases) or more than one case. In addition to that, data were collected through individual interviews with principals, focus groups with teachers, observations of research settings and some document analysis, which are different methods of data gathering.

#### **4.4.3 Aim of a multiple-case study**

Yin (2003) highlighted that a multiple-case study allows the researcher to scrutinise the data within each site and through various sites (cited in Gustafsson, 2017:8). The researcher was in search of an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and the multiple-case study was a proven tool for eliciting information on the behaviour of a certain group (Zach, 2006:19). Similarly, the multiple-case study has the ability to uncover not only new and divergent themes but also to demonstrate consistent patterns of participant behaviours (Zach, 2005:19).

#### **4.4.4 Reasons for employing the multiple-case study**

Bryman (2012:68) pointed out that one of the components of a multiple-case-study design which often favours the qualitative research approach was semi-structured interviewing. This design is viewed as helpful in the generation of rich and reliable data from participants through interviews, observations and document analysis (Bryman, 2012:68; Gustafsson, 2017:8). Similarly, multiple case studies ask the *how* and *why* questions which centre an issue along thematic lines, rather than simple informational questions (Swain, 2017:174). This made the multiple-case study relevant and applicable to the research questions of this study to explore the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance.

#### **4.4.5 Advantages of the multiple-case study**

According to Gustafsson (2017:10), one of the benefits of the multiple-case study was the fact that the investigator was capable to scrutinise the data within one or across different situations. All multiple case studies have conclusions and the researcher can clarify if the findings from the results are valuable or not (Gustafsson, 2017:11). In this research, the researcher was able to scrutinise rich data generated from individual interviews with principals of no-fee schools and also from the focus groups with teachers in those schools as participants were in their own natural setting or school.

#### **4.4.6 Limitations of the multiple-case study**

This design can sometimes be an expensive and time-wasting process (Braxter & Jack, 2008, cited in Gustafsson, 2017:9). Even though it was not guaranteed that rich theoretical insight will be elicited during data analysis of a multiple-case study (Gustafsson, 2017:3), the researcher will be in a position to clarify whether the findings are valuable through rigorous data collection and analysis techniques (Zach, 2006:20). One ethical issue of the multiple-case study is that, when focusing on a specific school, providing pseudonyms might not in itself be sufficient to provide anonymity among participants who know each other and it was not possible to assume complete confidentiality (Swain, 2017:185).

### **4.5 Research Approach Adopted for the Study**

The research approach is the general orientation to conducting a study (Neuman, 2014:33). The process involved developing research questions and processes; data collection typically in the participants' setting; data analysis inductively, building from particular to general themes; and the investigator building understandings of the data (Creswell, 2014:4).

#### **4.5.1 Conceptualising qualitative research**

Bryman (2012:380) defined qualitative research as an approach that usually stresses words in the gathering and analysis of data. Rahman (2017:103) referred to this approach as investigating peoples' lived perceptions, emotions and organisational functioning and also social interactions between people. The researcher explored the role of principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance; as such, the study

focused on participants lived experiences, emotions and opinions about the role of principals in learner performance in no-fee schools.

#### **4.5.2 The aims of employing qualitative research**

Creswell (2014:29) pointed out that one of the main reasons for conducting a qualitative study was when the study was investigative in nature. Again, qualitative researchers often collect data using multiple methods; therefore, triangulation was employed to reduce the deficiencies of a one-method approach and also to strengthen the research design (Aurini *et al.*, 2016:52).

#### **4.5.3 Advantages of qualitative research**

Bryman (2012:401) perceived the qualitative approach as using different methods to data gathering. The same with this study which is using individual interviews with the principals and focus groups with the teachers from the same schools to seek an understanding of the roles of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance from the participants' experiences. The data of this study was also gathered through document analysis and observations. Neuman (2014:177) explains that qualitative researchers give data meaning, translate the data and make it understandable.

Besides triangulation being the incorporation of qualitative and quantitative approaches or strategies (like in mixed methods), Aurini *et al.* (2016:52) explained that triangulation in qualitative research might combine different sources of data (e.g. observations) and different methods of data gathering (e.g. focus group interviews). The aim with this was to cross-check the consistency of data across settings and participants and at different times. Finally, conducting qualitative research in more than one setting can be helpful in identifying the significance of context and the ways which influence the behaviour and ways of thinking (Bryman, 2012:401). Qualitative studies provide thick (detailed) descriptions of participants' natural settings and often interpret the meanings of their actions (Geertz, 1973a, cited in Bryman 2012:401; Denzin, 1989, cited in Rahman, 2017:103).

#### **4.5.4 Limitations of qualitative research**

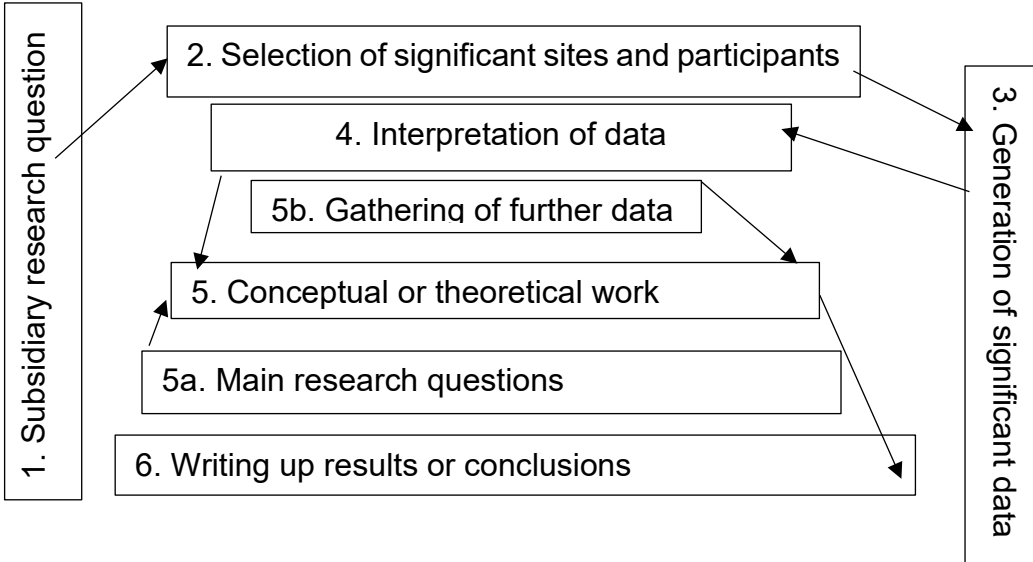
Bryman (2012:406), Thompson (2011) and Harry and Lipsky (2014, all cited in Rahman 2017:104) indicated that qualitative researchers have problems of

generalisation, especially where small numbers of individuals (small sample size) were used for interviews or observations. In addition, data analysis of multiple cases are time-consuming (Flick, 2011, cited in Rahman, 2017:105). Qualitative research also carries the limitation of what Lofland and Lofland (1995:164-165) call descriptive excess, where the researcher is too entangled in the descriptive factor and the amount of detail that it prevents data analysis (cited in Bryman, 2012:401).

**4.5.5 Flow diagram of qualitative research**

The flowchart in Figure 4.1 outlines the main steps of qualitative research adopted for this study.

**Figure 4.1: Flowchart outlining the main stages of qualitative research adopted for the study**



Source: Bryman (2012:380)

**4.6 Population of the Study**

Qualitative research is characterised by employing only a few sites and participants, according to a specific qualitative design used (Creswell, 2014:189). Eighteen participants were purposively selected as participants in this study from four no-fee secondary schools as the research sites. This composed of the four principals from the four selected schools, who were selected for individual interviews, and four focus groups with a maximum of four teachers per group, one group from each of the four selected schools. Documents for the current year of the four schools were also

reviewed. This included each school's mission and vision statements, late-coming registers for teachers and learners, school improvement plan, NSC examination academic results for the past three years, and minutes of meetings convened by the principals with their staff members.

#### **4.7 Selection of Participants for the Study**

The idea behind qualitative research being adopted for this study was to purposefully select participants or research sites or documents to analyse that could best help the researcher address the research problem or question (Creswell, 2014:189). Selection of the four schools was informed by the socio-economic background of the communities around the schools (schools in quintile 1 and 2) and overall pass rates in the NSC final examination (previous three years – 2017 to 2019). The schools were selected on the basis of being among well-performing no-fee secondary schools in the townships (with a final matric pass rate of less than 85% but more than 60%) and (between 85% to 100%) in a trajectory of three years.

Four permanently employed principals were purposively selected to participate in the study because they were principals of the selected no-fee secondary schools in Emfuleni Municipality. Selection was informed by the fact that the principals were the accounting officers for the learner performance at the schools and the key role players in managing contextual and curriculum challenges which finally impact teaching and learning in those secondary schools (Bush, 2007, cited in Khumalo, 2014:42). Fourteen teachers from the four schools were also purposively selected to participate in four focus group interviews consisting of three or four teachers per group. The teachers in the focus groups were teachers in the selected no-fee schools who had to teach either one of the following gateway subjects at Grade 12 level: mathematics, physical sciences, accounting or economics. In addition, they had to be permanently employed at the schools. Gateway subjects have the majority of Grade 12 learner enrolments nationally. If learners show performance weaknesses in these subjects, as highlighted in Chapter 2 of this study, this affects the overall pass rate of the entire school, against other districts and also nationally (NCS report, 2016:30). The focus group strategy was employed to explore unexpected and new teacher perspectives and experiences based on the influence that principal leadership practices and

behaviours have in Grade 12 learner performance. Therefore, exploratory data were gathered (Wagner *et al.*, 2014:135).

## **4.8 Data Collection Procedure for the Study**

Data were collected through individual interviews with principals, focus group interviews with teachers and document analysis of important and relevant documents.

### **4.8.1 Individual interviews with principal participants**

Interviewing was regarded as an extremely prominent data collection technique in qualitative researchers' armoury which can be used by students, researchers and public and private firms (Bryman, 2012:403; Aurini *et al.*, 2016:80). According to Blaxter *et al.* (2006:172), the interview was a natural way of interaction that takes place in various situations (cited in Alsheenqeeti, 2014:42). The study therefore employed individual interviews with four school principals to gather data.

#### **4.8.1.1 Definition of individual interviews**

An individual interview was generally defined as a data collection encounter in which one person (interviewer) asks questions to another (a respondent) and these interviews can be conducted face to face or telephonically (Babbie, 2010:274). Similarly, Bryman (2012:477) concurs that interviewing in qualitative research may be conducted face to face and can be regarded as qualitative interviewing, encapsulating two types, namely unstructured and semi-structured interviewing. Face-to-face semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to explore the role of principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance from principals' experiences and points of view, in their natural setting which was their offices at their schools.

#### **4.8.1.2 Rationale for using individual interviews**

Individual interviews offered the researcher the opportunity to uncover information that is probably not accessible using other techniques such as questionnaires and observations (Bryman, 2012:495). In qualitative interviewing, the interviewer wants rich and detailed responses and can therefore depart significantly from any schedule or guide to ask questions that follow up interviewees' responses and can vary the order and even the wording of questions (Bryman, 2012:470). This study employed semi-structured interviewing with four principals from no-fee secondary schools because the

principals carry rich and detailed information about the role of their leadership practices in the learner performance of Grade 12 learners of those schools. Their perceptions were thus required to answer the research questions of the study. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because of its unstructured nature and capacity to provide insight into how the research participants view the world (Bryman, 2012:472).

#### **4.8.1.3 Advantages of individual interviews**

Qualitative individual interviews were relatively flexible and can have a controlled answering order and a high return rate (Bryman, 2012:469; Alsheenqeeeti, 2014:42). Furthermore, Aurini *et al.* (2016:80) pointed out that interviews were empirically and intuitively appealing to qualitative researchers because they can provide the researcher with an instrument to probe more deeply into the thoughts, experiences or perceptions of their participants. They can be used as the main or complementary source of data and afford the researcher the flexibility to craft questions that can be reworked or expanded as the project develops (Aurini *et al.*, 2014:80). In this study, the researcher asked flexible semi-structured interview questions and was able to obtain responses from the principal participants on their thoughts and perceptions on the roles of their leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance.

#### **4.8.1.4 Limitations of individual interviews**

There were some limitations regarding individual interviews. Interviews were time-consuming with regard to both collection and analysis of data because they need to be transcribed, coded and possibly translated (Robson, 2002:94, cited in Alsheenqeeeti, 2014:42). Alsheenqeeeti (2014:42) also explained that interviews are never 100% anonymous, participants may have incomplete knowledge or even faulty memory, and there is potential for subconscious bias and for inconsistencies. Therefore, interviews alone were deemed an insufficient form of data collection, hence other techniques such as focus groups and document analysis and observations were also employed.

### **4.8.2 Observations**

#### **4.8.2.1 Definition of observations**

As a complete observer, the researcher employed observations in the gathering of data of this qualitative research study. A complete observer is when the researcher collects data but is not participating in the research process (Creswell, 2014:191).

#### **4.8.2.2 *Rationale for observations***

The researcher found it important to observe the research sites' natural settings. The literature review brought to the fore the fact that the role of principal leadership practices to improve learner performance is affected by contextual challenges, some of which were inherited from apartheid.

#### **4.8.2.3 *What to observe?***

Contextual challenges inherited from apartheid triggered the researcher to observe the following during her visits to the research sites to conduct interviews: the display of the mission and vision of the school at the school foyers; the fencing around the school for a secured environment; and whether the school has a science laboratory, library, enough furniture or windows and doors, and if the ICT devices installed at the school are still in working condition.

#### **4.8.2.4 *Advantages of observations***

An advantage of employing observations as a data gathering method was that the researcher can record information as it occurs (Creswell, 2014:191). Also, for this study, the researcher had first-hand experiences with participants in terms of the infrastructure challenges at their schools (Creswell, 2014:191).

#### **4.8.2.5 *Limitations of observations***

Observations, just like any other data gathering technique, has some limitations. These include that the observer could be seen as intrusive, and private information may be observed that the observer cannot report (Creswell, 2014:191).

#### **4.8.3 *Focus group interviews with teacher participants***

Babbie (2010:322) referred to focus groups as essentially a qualitative research method and sometimes as group interviewing which allows the researcher to question several individuals systematically and simultaneously. The composition of focus groups varies from study to study. Neuman (2014:471) says that focus groups should last for about 90 minutes and should be composed of at least four interviewees each, in addition to the moderator or facilitator who must be in the interview setting to discuss issues. In contrast, Bryman (2012:504) says the researcher should gather six to twelve interviewees, whereas Babbie (2010:322) points out that the researcher should gather

five to fifteen people together. These participants and interviewer will gather in a private, comfortable environment to engage in a guided discussion on the same topic, where subjects were selected on the basis of their relevance to the study. This study followed the guideline of Neuman (2014:471) and three or four interviewees per focus group were purposively selected in addition to the interviewer. The focus groups were held in a room of the teacher participants' choice at their school for 30 to 60 minutes per session. In terms of number of groups per study, Neuman (2014:472) dictates that a typical study uses four to six separate groups, where the topics might include public attitude, personal behaviours or a political candidate. This study used four separate groups. According to Bryman (2012:510), people in focus groups can be organised into separate groups in terms of stratifying criteria such as age, gender, education or occupation or having or not having a certain experience. The person who runs the group sessions is labelled the moderator or facilitator (in this study, the researcher herself). For this study, each session was guided as expected but were not too intrusive (Bryman, 2012:501). The members of the focus groups held the same occupation (teachers), although they were of different ages and post levels and had varying experiences in the teaching fraternity and post occupied at school. In addition, they held varying perceptions on the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance or how their principals impacted class instruction and finally learner performance, specifically in Grade 12.

#### **4.8.3.1 Definition of focus group interviews**

A focus group is referred to as a research technique where data are collected through interaction on a topic determined by the researcher (Morgan, 1996:130, cited in Cardno, Rosales-Anderson & McDonald, 2017:148). This study adhered to the definition by Barbour and Schostak (2005:46), who viewed a focus group as an interview technique in which participants are selected because they were a purposive, although not necessarily representative, sample of a specific population and the group was focused on a given topic (cited in Alsheenqeti, 2016:40). Four focus groups with teachers were conducted as four groups of subjects, interviewed together at a time per group, prompting a discussion (Babbie, 2010:322) around the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance. Focus groups can interchangeably be referred to as group interviews (Bryman, 2012:501).

#### **4.8.3.2 Rationale for using focus group interviews**

Bryman (2012:501) highlighted that most focus group researchers undertake their work within the traditions of qualitative research, as was the case in this study. The researcher was explicitly concerned with how group participants viewed the issues they were confronted with, in this case the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner performance. Focus groups can be either structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Babbie, 2010:322). This study employed semi-structured focus groups. Bryman (2012:503) explained that one of the major reasons for conducting focus group research is because it makes it possible to study the process whereby meaning is collectively constructed within each session. For this study, the interest was not only in what the teacher participants said but also in how they said it. When conducting the focus groups, the aim was to provide a fairly unstructured setting for the extraction of participants' views and perceptions (Bryman, 2012:501). It was important to conduct more than one session because one group would not have sufficed in meeting the needs of the research since there will always be the possibility that the responses will be particular to that group. On the other hand, having too many groups is also not good because it will increase the complexity of the data analysis and be a waste of time (Neuman, 2014:472). Therefore, four focus groups were arranged.

#### **4.8.3.3 Advantages of focus group interviews**

Focus groups were sometimes regarded as a quick data collection method that provides some sound-bite quotations to illustrate themes (Smithson, 2000:116, cited in Alzsheenqee, 2014:40). Aurini *et al.* (2016:118) perceived focus groups as particularly useful for exploring new topics, as an abundance of data can be gathered at one time while also allowing for collecting a wide range of viewpoints. Furthermore, Neuman (2014:472) provided other advantages of focus groups. Firstly, the natural setting for focus groups allows participants to express their opinions or ideas freely. Secondly, open expression among members of social groups who were marginalised can be encouraged. Thirdly, participants may query one another and explain their answers to one another. Lastly, focus groups, as also perceived by Kreuger (1988:48, cited in Babbie, 2010:323), have flexibility and produce speedy results. In this study, four focus groups with teachers teaching gateway subjects were conducted. The members of the focus groups were encouraged to express their opinions freely and openly about the role of principal leadership practices in Grade 12 learner

performance. Focus groups were conducted in the comfort of each participant's school, which was their natural setting.

#### **4.8.3.4 *Limitations of focus group interviews***

Kreuger (1988:48, cited in Babbie, 2010:323) provided some limitations of focus groups. Firstly, focus groups were difficult to assemble as they are regularly postponed. Secondly, data are difficult to analyse. Thirdly, the discussion must be conducted in a conducive environment that does not disturb the smooth running of the institution. Fourthly, differences within groups are troublesome. Newman (2014:472) points out that the moderator or rather facilitator in focus group interviewing may unknowingly limit open, free expression of group members. In this study, focus groups were a time-consuming and effortful process, as highlighted by Alsheenqeeti (2014:40).

#### **4.8.4 *Document analysis***

Cardno *et al.* (2017:148) define document analysis as a technique in locating, interpreting and analysing the documented evidence presented and drawing conclusions regarding it.

##### **4.8.4.1 *Rationale for using document analysis***

Qualitative interviews such as face-to-face individual interviewing or focus groups can be intimidating (Cohen *et al.*, 2007:97), the researcher may be biased and not all people are equally communicative and perceptive (Creswell, 2014:191). To mitigate all this, the study supplemented the interviews and focus groups with document analysis. Document analysis as another technique employed in this qualitative research to gather data and served as a holder of evidence for claims (Prior, 2003, cited in Wagner *et al.*, 2012:141).

##### **4.8.4.2 *Documents analysed***

In this study, public documents and official reports, as highlighted by Creswell (2014:190), were analysed. These include the minutes of staff meetings, Grade 12 NSC results (a trajectory of three years), teachers and learners' late-coming registers, vision and mission statements, school improvement plans and updated school policies.

#### **4.8.4.3 Advantages of document analysis**

Document analysis was advantageous because it is unobtrusive, which makes the information and the time convenient, and was passive and non-invasive in a natural setting (Creswell, 2014:192). Cardno *et al.* (2017:146) perceive document analysis to be non-reactive and this serves as an advantage in a sense that the researcher can work quietly, behind the scenes, without drawing attention to their presence or influencing the data in existence. Document analysis in this study provided written evidence and enabled the researcher to obtain the language and words of participants (Creswell, 2014:191).

#### **4.8.4.4 Limitations of document analysis**

Document analysis also has limitations. Firstly, it can be time-consuming to find, select and analyse the data (Cardno *et al.*, 2017:150). In addition, the number of documents to be analysed in one session can also pose a challenge to the researcher (Cardno *et al.*, 2017:146). Furthermore, documents to be analysed may not be authentic or accurate (Creswell, 2014:192) and can be protected information unavailable to public or private access (Creswell, 2014:191).

### **4.9 Data Analysis**

The data analysis of this study involved organising, accounting for and explaining the data or rather making sense of the data in terms of participants' definitions of the phenomenon under study as the researcher noted patterns, themes, categories and regularities (Cohen *et al.*, 2007:183). Data analysis in this qualitative research proceeded hand in hand with other aspects of developing the qualitative study, such as data collection and writing up of findings (Creswell, 2014:195). Data are firstly presented thematically school by school, followed by a cross-case analysis within themes (Creswell, 2014:195).

#### **4.9.1 Analysis of the individual and focus group interviews**

Should the need have arisen, and as highlighted by Creswell (2014:201), the researcher was prepared to conduct follow-up individual and focus group interviews with the participants to determine whether the participants felt that the major findings

or themes were accurate. Analysis of the data involved certain steps, which are discussed next.

#### **4.9.1.1    *Transcribing audio-recordings***

Cohen *et al.* (2007:471) referred to transcription as having the interview recording transcribed, noting not only the literal statements but also non-verbal or paralinguistic communication. Jupp (2006:304) also referred to transcription as rendering of the recorded talk (interview) into standard written form. In this study, this framework was applied in analysing the interviews and focus groups. Non-verbal shrugs of the participants were also observed.

#### **4.9.1.2    *Coding***

Coding or rather indexing was regarded as the starting point of qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2012:576). Coding was a process where data are broken down into their component parts and those parts were then given labels (Bryman, 2012:13). In this study, the researcher searched for recurrences of the coded text within and across cases and links between different codes (Bryman, 2012:13). Tags or labels were used as codes for assigning units of meaning to descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study (Neuman, 2014:480). Because using a computer is an efficient means to store and locate qualitative data, the researcher in this study used the computer programme called Atlas.ti to organise, sort and search for information in text or images (Creswell, 2014:195). Although hand coding only was difficult and time-consuming (Creswell, 2014:195), the researcher also had to do hand coding by going through the transcriptions and assigning codes. Codes were attached to chunks of varying words, phrases, sentences and whole paragraphs connected or not connected to a specific setting (Miles & Huberman, 1994:56, cited in Neuman, 2014:480).

According to Bryman (2012:599), thematic analysis of transcripts is applicable to data organised initially into core themes and displayed in terms of subthemes within an environment. The idea was to construct an index of central themes and subthemes to be represented in a matrix. This framework was adopted for this study. Themes and subthemes were the product of thorough reading and rereading of transcripts of the interviews. A theme referred to a category identified by the researcher through her data that builds on codes identified in transcripts and that provided the researcher with the basis for a theoretical understanding on her data that can make a theoretical

contribution to the literature relating to the research focus or that related to her research focus on transcripts or field notes (Bryman, 2012:599).

#### **4.9.1.3 Analysis of documents**

Content analysis is an important tool in document analysis and was used in the 1940s as a way of studying the content of newspapers (Jupp, 2006:41). It was a method of analysing the content of documents by using qualitative measures of the frequency of appearance of particular elements in a text (Jupp, 2006:40). In this study, the content of important documents was analysed to link the literature discussions in Chapters 2 and 3 with the developed themes of the interviews.

### **4.10 Quality Assurance of the Research**

#### **4.10.1 Triangulation**

Document analysis was used together with other data collection strategies such as individual interviews with principals and focus groups with teachers in order to broaden the range of data collected, to strengthen the research design and to reduce the deficiencies of a one-method approach (Aurini *et al.*, 2016:52). Aurini *et al.* (2016:52) highlight that qualitative studies allow researchers to collect data by using multiple methods. For this study, the gathered data were triangulated by making use of multiple methods of data collection (individual interviews with principals, focus groups with teachers and document analysis). These different data sources were examined and used to build a coherent justification for themes. Triangulation was defined by Cohen *et al.* (2007:114) as the use of two or more methods of data collection in studying the same aspects of human behaviour. Aurini *et al.* (2016:52) pointed out that triangulation was a technique also used in the social sciences to map out or explain fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by tying it from more than one standpoint. Triangulation was employed in this qualitative approach, which involved cross-checking the consistency of data across settings and participants and at different times (Aurini *et al.*, 2016:52).

#### **4.10.2 Trustworthiness**

Guba (1981, cited in Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017:34) suggests that if research was conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, the positivist criteria of internal and

external validity and reliability should be replaced with four criteria of trustworthiness. These are credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability and will be briefly discussed below.

#### **4.10.2.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the extent to which the data collection and data analysis were believable, trustworthy and authentic (Guba, 1981, cited in Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017:34). The researcher guaranteed that data collection and analysis of this study were believable, trustworthy and authentic by following all relevant ethical procedures, to be discussed later in this chapter.

#### **4.10.2.2 Dependability**

Dependability refers to the ability of observing the same outcomes or findings under similar circumstances (Guba, 1981, cited in Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017:34). To ensure dependability, the researcher ensured that the findings truly emerged from the data gathered and analysed for the research and not from making inferences influenced by the researcher's own construction of meaning (Guba, 1981, cited in Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017:34). In addition, the researcher ensured that complete records are kept in an accessible manner of all phases of the research process, such as selection of participants, interview transcription, data analysis decisions and so on (Bryman, 2012:390).

#### **4.10.2.3 Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings of the study can be confirmed by others in the field (Guba, 1981, cited in Kivunji & Kuyini, 2017:34). Bryman (2012:390) refers to this technique as member validation or respondent validation. In this study, the researcher ensured that the research is carried out according to the canons of good practice. The research findings were submitted to the participants for confirmation that their social world had been correctly understood (Bryman, 2012:392).

#### **4.10.2.4 Transferability**

Transferability represents the researcher's effort to ensure that they provide enough contextual data about their research so that readers of their findings can relate those findings to their own contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Kivunji & Kuyini,

2017:34). The researcher tried to produce what Ceetz (1973a) calls thick description (cited in Bryman, 2012:393). Doing a thick description was to provide others with a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other milieus (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Bryman, 2012:392).

### **4.10.3 Authenticity**

Besides trustworthiness criteria, there were also authenticity criteria, as outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1985, cited in Bryman, 2012:393). The latter refer to measuring whether the document or the study was what it purports to be (Bryman, 2012:390). Some of the criteria of authenticity applicable to this qualitative study were briefly discussed below.

#### **4.10.3.1 Fairness**

This means to measure whether the research fairly represents different viewpoints among members of the social setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Bryman, 2012:393).

#### **4.10.3.2 Educative authenticity**

This was to measure whether the research helped members of the social setting to better appreciate the perspectives of other members of the social setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Bryman, 2012:393).

#### **4.10.3.3 Ontological authenticity**

This involved measuring whether the research helped members of the social setting to arrive at a better understanding of their social milieu (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Bryman, 2012:393).

#### **4.10.3.4 Catalytic authenticity**

This means to measure whether the research acts as an impetus to the members of the social setting to engage in action to change their circumstances (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Bryman, 2012:393).

#### **4.10.3.5 Tactical authenticity**

This last criterion involves measuring whether the research empowers members of the social setting to take steps necessary for engaging in action (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Bryman, 2012:393).

### **4.11 Ethical Considerations Applied in the Study**

Neuman (2014:145) refers to ethical issues as the concerns, dilemmas and conflicts that arise over the proper way to conduct research. Ethics define what is or is not legitimate to do or what *moral* research procedures involve (Neuman, 2014:145). The researcher of this study was ethical and protected her research participants; developed trust with them; promoted the integrity of the research; guarded against misconduct and impropriety that might have reflected on participants' organisations or no-fee schools; and had to cope with new, challenging problems, as outlined by Israel and Hay (2006, cited in Creswell, 2014:92).

The following ethical issues were addressed which were anticipated to arise during the study. The researcher had to protect, guide and oversee the interests of the population she was studying, as highlighted by Neuman (2014:155). This involved guiding the discussions in such a way that everyone could get a fair chance; fostering respect among participants for the speaker on the platform and to avoid intimidation; conducting the interviews and focus groups at the participants' schools where they felt comfortable; and conducting all interviews in a friendly and polite manner. Participants were assured that there was no possibility of harm (professional, physical or emotional). The researcher was very professional so as not to disturb any formal classes and scheduled the appointments outside the normal teaching and learning hours with room for postponement where necessary.

#### **4.11.1 Permission to conduct the research study**

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher applied for ethical clearance (Appendix F) to conduct the research from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State (**ethical clearance number: UFS-HSD2018/1263/1263**). In addition, permission was sought from gatekeepers such as the GDE (Appendix G), the Sedibeng West District Office (Appendix H) and principals and teachers of the selected schools.

#### **4.11.2 Informed consent**

Prior to conducting individual interviews with principals and focus groups with teachers, all participants were given an information leaflet that outlined the nature, purpose and consequences of the study (Appendix E). The participants were asked to sign a written consent form should they decide to take part in the study (Appendix E). All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent.

#### **4.11.3 Voluntary participation**

Participants were informed prior to this study that participation was voluntary and non-remunerable and were assured that there would be no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation. Participants were also informed that they would be under no obligation to consent to participate. Participants were free to withdraw at any time or recall their consent to participate in the research project at any time or at any point of the study without providing a reason. However, the information provided up to the point of termination of interviews would still be used in the study. The researcher assured the participants that the final research report would be shared with them. In addition, the participants were guaranteed that participation in the study would be kept confidential, but that information about participants would be shared with the study's sponsors if and only if permission is granted by participants.

#### **4.11.4 Confidentiality and anonymity**

Anonymity means that people (or entities such as organisations) remain nameless or anonymous (Neuman, 2014:154). The privacy of all participants in this study was protected. No participants' real names or the names of their schools are recorded anywhere in the study and no one will be able to connect any participant to their responses. Participants and schools were each assigned a fictitious code number or alias or pseudonym. For example, schools are referred to as NF1, NF2, NF3 and NF4 in the study and will be referred to in this way in any publications or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. The researcher was the only person who has access to the raw data and all records are stored in a private lockable case in a lockable cupboard at the researcher's home.

Participants' responses may be reviewed by individuals responsible for making sure that the research was conducted properly. These include the transcriber (who was the

researcher), the editor and members of the Research Ethics Committee. These individuals will maintain confidentiality (for example, by signing a confidentiality agreement). Otherwise, records that identify participants will be available only to people working on the study, unless permission is granted by participants for other people to see the records. Also based on agreement, anonymous data may be used for other purposes, for example for research reports, journal articles, conference presentations etc. Furthermore, a report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

In focus groups, participants (e.g. teachers) sometimes feel uncomfortable to participate because of fear of intimidation by other parties (e.g. the school principals). To avoid this, the researcher emphasised anonymity and confidentiality and also provided participants with a detailed explanation of the significance of the study. Furthermore, a focus group or rather group interview is composed of a group of people, informally interviewed together in a discussion setting (Neuman, 2014:472). Participants were informed to remember that it was in some instance not possible for the researcher to guarantee total confidentiality and anonymity when using the focus group as data collection method. While every effort was made to ensure that participants were not connected to the information that they shared during the focus group, the researcher cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will treat information confidentially. All participants were, however, encouraged to do so. Therefore, the participants were advised not to disclose any sensitive personal data during the discussions.

#### **4.12 Limitations of the Research**

The study employed a qualitative approach, which limited the study in terms of generalisation of results and lack of transparency (Bryman, 2012:406). The study sampled only four no-fee secondary schools of Sedibeng West district in Gauteng province and thus covered only one province and one district out of nine provinces and fifteen districts in Gauteng to form a small sample. The interviews were conducted with four principals from township no-fee secondary schools and focus groups with fourteen teachers from the selected no-fee schools. Teacher participants taught only four gateway subjects at Grade 12 level, mathematics, physical sciences, accounting and economics. There are other gateway subjects besides these which can also be

affected by the principal's leadership practices. Furthermore, no-fee secondary schools in rural areas were not included in the study. The results of this study therefore cannot be generalised.

#### **4.13 Summary of Chapter 4**

This chapter discussed in depth the research design and methodology. Included in this discussion was a motivation for employing a qualitative approach, and a presentation of the data gathering techniques and sampling procedures utilised within this qualitative study. The discussion also included a look at the advantages and disadvantages of the study's different data gathering techniques. Lastly, ethical considerations of this study were reviewed.

In Chapter 5, a presentation was done on the research sites' settings, the background of the respondents, and the development of themes and subthemes. Finally, the results of the study was aligned to the subsidiary research questions to answer the main research question during the analysis of the raw data.

## CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION OF DATA

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### 5.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 discussed the introduction of the research. Chapter 2 provided the literature review on the dynamics of no-fee schools in order to explore the role of principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance. In Chapter 3, the literature review continued and the requirements and leadership practices for principals in the no-fee-school context were discussed in detail. Chapter 4 presented the research design and methodology, including the specific procedures used in conducting the study.

Chapter 5 provided a presentation of the data obtained from the data gathering techniques, namely observations, interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis. Participants' perspectives of the role of principal leadership and management practices in Grade 12 learner performance at lower quintile schools were looked at, for those that performed well. In addition, some documents are analysed. In this discussion, the researcher presents a summary of the findings to address the aim of this dissertation and to answer its main research question. The data are presented in the form of participant and research-site backgrounds and according to the interpretive dimensions of instructional leadership theory since it was employed as the main theoretical framework of this study.

Data are scrutinised thematically and systematically and to illustrate important findings, verbatim quotes extracted from the interviews are utilised during data analysis. The following sections represent the discussions and the presentation of the findings:

- research site settings;
- biographical data of the participants; and
- the theme categories based on the findings of the gathered data.

### 5.2 Research Site Settings

In line with the requirements of the multiple-case-study design, which highlight context as an important component, this section gives the reader an overview of the research sites of this study, which are four no-fee secondary schools situated in Emfuleni

Municipality in Gauteng province. This context in which principal leadership was practised relates the relationships principals have with teachers, parents and learners of these lower quintile secondary schools. During the discussion, the following aspects were highlighted: a brief summary of the infrastructure profile of the selected schools, poverty ranking of each schools, human resources, conduct of teachers and learners, and a reflection of each setting.

### 5.2.1 Summary of the infrastructure profiles of the research sites

The researcher discusses the profile of each school below to provide the context in which principal leadership is practised and the impact the infrastructure has on leadership, which might finally spill over to Grade 12 learner performance by affecting teachers and learners. Undie and Aneka (2017:106) point out that deferred maintenance and inadequate provision of resources affect the school environment negatively. The negative effects of the schooling environment on teachers and learners include irregular attendance by both teachers and learners and high dropout rates by learners due to demoralising, unhygienic and often unsafe environments. This section also looks at such contextual factors directly or indirectly affecting the participating principals in their school settings. Table 5.1 provides the backgrounds of the four research sites or schools. To respect ethical issues and observe anonymity, the researcher decided to represent the no-fee schools with labels such as NF1, NF2, NF3 and NF4 (where NF stands for no-fee).

**Table 5.1: Infrastructure profiles and contexts of the four research sites**

Site	School type	Race of learners & staff in the school (in majority)	Quintile ranking	Officially opened	Fee status of the school	Learner enrolment (2019)	Number of. post level 1 educators	Both laboratory & library availability yes/no
NF1	Secondary	Black	2	1964	No-fee	772	22	Yes
NF2	Secondary	Black	2	1995	No-fee	803	21	No
NF3	Secondary	Black	1	1959	No-fee	1152	29	Yes
NF4	Secondary	Black	2	1998	No-fee	919	31	Yes

Table 5.1 generally reflects that all four research sites are township secondary schools. In these schools, children are exposed to many social ills such as drug abuse, taverns, women and child abuse, family feuds and unemployed parents. The four selected secondary schools are surrounded by informal settlements and mixed-income households; hence, they are ranked in the lower quintiles (1 and 2) and offer services to former disadvantaged communities. The researchers observed that all four schools were built with concrete bricks and fenced with concrete palisades and had lockable gates with security personnel for all the schooling hours. Categorisation of schools into quintile levels is based on the SES of the school and was determined by three indicators of poverty, namely: income levels of households in the community around the school; unemployment rate in the community; and literacy rate of the community (Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019:106). The NNSF policy refers to lower quintile schools as no-fee schools, where compulsory school fees may not be levied for learners (DBE, 2006:43). According to Section 39 of the South African Schools Act (no. 84 of 1996) (South Africa. 1996), school fees include any form of contribution of a monetary nature made or paid by a person or body in relation to the attendance or participation by a learner in any programme of a public school. The majority of learners, teachers and principals in the four participating schools are black. The researcher found it imperative to outline the conditions of each school below as a reflection that the conditions of each school are unique and different from each other and to show the impact that such conditions may have on principal leadership practices.

#### **5.2.1.1     *The setting at NF1***

Table 5.1 shows that NF1 was a school that serves impoverished communities and was hence ranked as quintile 2. The school was officially opened in 1964. It is an old school with a newly built school hall. The school was next to a railway station and there used to be a lot of noise produced by the passing of trains, but due to lockdown level 5 because of Covid-19, the railways were vandalised and there are no more trains passing. The principal was a quiet and experienced middle-aged (over 35 years of age) male and has been in the post for the past five years and in the teaching fraternity for over ten years. It was clear that the principal was well organised and disciplined because when you enter the school's main office, the researcher came across the mission and the vision of the school displayed in the corridors together with the Grade 12 pass rate of the past three years (87.14% in 2017 and 100% in 2018 and 82.4% in

2019)(NSC School Performance, 2019:79). Teachers and learners respect arrival times in the mornings and there were learners who use scholar transport (bus) to come to school. The researcher observed that the reception area had a table under the reception window with teachers' attendance register. Other documents such as late-coming registers of teachers and learners, minutes of the staff meetings, school policies, notices to parents, and school improvement plan were filled and kept in a displayer in the principal's office and were availed to the researcher for verification after the interview session. There was a low level of noise during tuition time and no learners roaming around during lessons.

In terms of security, there is a concrete palisade fence around the school with lockable gates and two security personnel members at the gates. The GDE fenced the secondary schools in Emfuleni Municipality with palisades and deployed two community policing forum (CPF) members in each high school. The principal tries to manage safety for all as there was an evidence that the fence has been broken into numerous times and fixed because the palisade has some patches of other materials. The classrooms have steel doors, but there has been burglaries at the school because the ceilings in classes and the office have some holes up to the roofs. The researcher observed that most no-fee secondary schools in Emfuleni Municipality experience almost the same contextual challenges such as vandalism of their ceilings and holes in their fences by communities around them. The researcher assumed that the perpetrators of these vandalism acts were attracted to the SMART interactive boards installed in some classrooms of the schools. The principal mention that these burglaries mostly affected the electrical wiring of the classrooms and the newly installed technology in the schools, such as laptops, computers and the SMART interactive boards which were also tampered with. Therefore, these technological tools cannot be used by teachers to enhance teaching and learning of school subjects, especially gateway subjects.

In terms of material resources, the school had a science laboratory and a library and the learners in Grade 12 have textbooks for their gateway subjects even though there were still shortages in lower grades and were even lent scientific calculators. But the learners lose calculators due to a bad community culture of stealing which spilled to the school. Effective school libraries provide additional reading opportunities for learners, which, in turn, improve reading skills, comprehension and writing clarity of

expression, which, in turn, support learner performance in all other curriculum subjects (Siocha *et al.*, 2017:106). The books in the school library were looking old and updated a couple of years ago. The school also had a sports field. Table 5.2 outlines the staff establishment for the school in 2019.

**Table 5.2: Staff establishment for NF1**

School	Learner enrolment	No. of deputy principals	No. of HoDs	No. of post level (PL)1 educators	No. of admin clerks	General assistance staff
NF1	772	1	4	22	2	5

Table 5.2 reflects that NF1 has 22 post level 1 educators, four HoDs, one deputy principal and one principal, with 772 learners. A post level 1 educator is a person who complies with the prescribed requirements for employment in a full-time or part-time capacity and no experience is required for appointments at this level. The school has fewer learners as opposed to the rest of the participating schools. The teacher-learner ratio is approximately 1:35.

In terms of human resources, teachers form an integral part of educational facilities. According to Okokoyo, Nwaham and Ikpeba (2002), the term educational facilities means the entire scope of human, physical and social infrastructure provided in a school for the purpose of teaching and learning (cited in Adigeb *et al.*, 2017:613). The effective utilisation and implementation of educational facilities (which include buildings, libraries, furniture, textbooks, laboratories, and software such as computers, assisted instruction, internet and information and communication technology (ICT) depend on its availability and the competence of the teachers (Fayose, 2004, cited in Adigeb *et al.*, 2017:613).

### **5.2.1.2 The setting at NF2**

NF2 was a school that serves impoverished communities and is also categorised as a quintile 2 school because the school is surrounded by mixed-income households and informal settlements. It was officially opened in 1995 but used the old premises of the

former college of education and a school which was the only former black school with a white principal and teachers teaching at a township school prior to 1994. Bray, Clarke and Stephens (2002) discovered that quality education was fruitful when there were adequate quality and quantity of physical infrastructure and that unattractive school buildings, crowded classes, non-availability of playing grounds and surroundings that have no aesthetic beauty can contribute to poor academic performance (cited in Siocha *et al.*, 2017:99). The school building is still in a good condition, built with bricks and window panes still intact. The school principal was a well-disciplined and organised mature black woman aged 59. She displayed the mission and vision of the school on the wall above the reception window as well as the Grade 12 performance of the past three years (92.3% in 2017, 94.8% in 2018 and 85.1% in 2019) (NSC school performance, 2019:79). Under the reception window the researcher observed that there was a small table with the teachers' attendance register. Other documents such as late-coming registers of teachers, minutes of the staff meetings, school policies, notices to parents, and school improvement plan were neatly filled and kept in a display in the principal's office and she availed them to the researcher after their interview session for verification. The late-coming register of learners was kept at the security house that was at the main gate in order to record all late learners even after the school has started (after eight o'clock in the morning). The principal has been in the teaching profession for over 30 years and only five years in the current principal post. In the morning, she monitors arrival times (for teachers and learners), even though learners were not consistently monitored at the gate, as reflected in the late-arrival register for learners. There was a low level of noise during tuition time from learners' classes. In addition, no learners roam around during lessons unless when classes are changing, which is an indication of her rich experience to lead and manage discipline in the school. The school is next to the main road and there are taxis hooting all the time for passengers and this created a disturbing noise for the learners.

In terms of security, there is a concrete palisade fence around the school with lockable gates and two security personnel also at the gates. There is evidence that the fence has been broken into numerous times because the palisade also has some patches of other materials. The classrooms have doors and there are holes in the ceilings of some classrooms, indicating burglaries. During these burglaries, the new technology which was installed in the school (the SMART interactive boards) were tampered with.

In terms of material resources, even though the learners in Grade 12 have textbooks for their gateway subjects, NF2 has neither a laboratory nor a library and learners' rights to quality education are compromised by this situation. In addition, the school does not have sports grounds. The school results above do not reflect this challenge because the principal as an instructional leader supports her teachers, thus causing them to be innovative enough and to be motivated to impart science without a laboratory. Lack of laboratory facilities or a poorly equipped laboratory contributes to poor performance in some school examinations and is a predictor of quality education because learners cannot answer questions in practical science subjects such as physical sciences (Siocha *et al.*, 2017:106). A library occupies a central and primary place in any school setup and supports all functions of the school (Siocha *et al.*, 2017:98). The chief purpose of the library is to make available to the learner at his or her easy convenience all books, periodicals and other instructional materials which are of interest and value which are not provided as basic or supplementary textbooks. Table 5.3 outlines the staff establishment for NF2 for 2019.

**Table 5.3: Staff establishment for NF2**

School	Learner enrolment	No. of deputy principals	No. of HoDs	No. of post level 1 educators	No. of admin clerks	General assistance staff
NF2	803	1	4	21	2	2

In terms of human resources, Table 5.3 reflects that there are 803 learners and majority were from black ethnic group, 21 post level 1 educators, two admin clerks and two general assistance staff members. The school has one principal, one deputy principal and four departmental heads (HoDs).

**5.2.1.3 The setting at NF3**

Table 5.1 indicates that NF3 serves impoverished communities and was surrounded by mixed-income households, but the majority of the houses are shacks, which makes NF3 to be categorised as one of the poorest or a quintile 1 secondary school. Table 5.1 shows that the school was officially opened in 1959 as a former mission school, but was later taken over by the DoE and moved to newly built premises using bricks in

1990. The school principal is a male aged 52 years who has less than five years' experience in the principal post but over ten years in the teaching profession. Lack of experience and being disorganised were evident as the principal showed the researcher the mission and the vision of the school, typed on A4-sized cards on his table but not where everyone could see. He displayed the Grade 12 results of the past three years only on the walls above the reception window (93.9% in 2017, 86.5% in 2018 and 79.8% in 2019)( NSC school performance, 2019:78). There was a table under the reception window with teachers' attendance register. Other documents such as late-coming registers of teachers, minutes of the staff meetings, notices to parents, and school improvement plan were filled and kept in his office. After the interviews session the principal only availed late-coming registers of teachers and the school improvement plan. He could not be availed other documents such as late-coming register of learners claiming that he was not recording them and the school policies which were still at the district for final verification. Every morning, the principal is at the school gate, trying to control the late coming of learners, shouting to the top of his voice, which was difficult and seems to be a mammoth task to be done alone (less team work). There are high noise levels during tuition time and there were learners roaming around. There were a lot of cases of learners fighting and being referred to the principal's office because the researcher observed a queue of parents called to the school and the principal had to deal with the cases promptly irrespective of his schedule of that day.

In terms of security, there is a concrete palisade fence around the school with lockable gates and two security (CPF) personnel members at the gates during the day. There was evidence that the fence has been broken into numerous times because there are mended patches of other materials on the palisade also. The classrooms have steel doors and some broken window panes. There was a burglary in the principal's office the night before the researcher was there to seek for permission to conduct interviews. The ceiling was damaged and the roof had a big hole. This and previous burglaries also affected the new technology which was installed in the school because the wireless fidelity (Wi-Fi) router connected in the office and and some admin laptops were stolen.

In terms of resources, there was a science laboratory, a library with out-of-date books in the shelves and sport fields because the building is relatively new, and the learners

in Grade 12 have textbooks for their gateway subjects. Effective school libraries provide additional reading opportunities for learners, which, in turn, improve reading skills, comprehension and writing clarity of expression, which, in turn, support learner performance in all other curriculum subjects (Siocha *et al.*, 2017:106). Table 5.4 below outlines the staff establishment for NF3 for 2019.

**Table 5.4: Staff establishment for NF3**

School	Learner enrolment	No. of deputy principals	No. of HoDs	No. of post level 1 educators	No. of admin clerks	General assistance staff
NF3	1152	2	6	29	2	5

In terms of human resources, Table 5.2 indicates that NF3 has the largest learner enrolment in comparison with the other three research sites for this study, with 1152 learners. The school has 29 post level 1 educators, one principal and two deputy principals. There were two admin clerks and five general assistance staff members. Earthman (2004) considered overcrowding as the most deteriorating effect that affects academic performance of learners in schools because it exposes learners to chronic noises which hinder cognitive functioning and impair pre-reading and reading skills (cited in Adigeb *et al.*, 2017:616).

**5.2.1.4 The setting at NF4**

Finally, Table 5.1 reflects that NF4 is also categorised as a quintile 2 school because it serves impoverished communities. The school is surrounded by mixed-income households and was officially opened in 1998 on newly built premises post-1994. Even though the school building was still in good condition, the school was also experiencing community and social ills such as burglary and theft. The principal of the school was a male who was appointed less than five years ago but had been in the teaching profession for over 20 years. The principal was well disciplined in terms of his arrival time in the morning. He gave the researcher an appointment of 07h00 appointment for the interviews and claimed that he arrives at school daily at that time. The principal also showed the researcher two nicely covered 192 pages notebooks of late-coming registers of teachers and learners after the interview sessions but for learners it was

not regularly marked. There was a high level of noise during tuition time. He displayed the mission and vision of the school and the Grade 12 performance of the past three years (89.6% in 2017, 83.5% in 2018 and 90.8% in 2019) (NSC school performance report, 2019:79) on the wall above the reception window. This was observed when the researcher went to ask for permission to conduct interviews. Under the reception window there was a small table with the teachers' attendance register. Other documents such as school policies, minutes of the staff meetings, notices to parents, and school improvement plan were neatly filled and kept in a displayer in the principal's office and he availed them to the researcher after the interview session for verification.

In terms of security, there was a concrete palisade fence around the school with lockable gates and two security personnel members at the gates. There was evidence that the fence has been broken into numerous times because the palisade had some patches.

In terms of material resources, there was a science laboratory and a library and the learners in Grade 12 have textbooks for their gateway subjects. The school also has a shortage of furniture such as tables and chairs for learners, especially in lower grades because learners were . The learners were lent calculators by the school, some of which were stolen by other learners as stealing spilled from the townships and manifested as a habit among learners in the school. Table 5.5 outlines the staff establishment for NF4 in 2019.

**Table 5.5: Staff establishment for NF4**

School	Learner enrolment	No. of deputy principals	No. of HoDs	No. of post level 1 educators	No. of admin clerks	General assistance staff
NF4	919	2	5	31	2	3

In terms of human resources, NF4 has 919 learners, 31 post level 1 educators, one principal, two deputy principals and five departmental heads.

### **5.2.2 Research sites' poverty rankings**

Van Dyk and White (2019:51) point out that equitable funding of public schools became a priority for the post-apartheid government of South Africa in 1994 to reduce the disparities in education inherited from the apartheid government. In addressing the issues of SES and disparity in access to education, the South African government has categorised the public schools into five quintiles for the purpose of allocating financial resources (Graven, 2014; Dass & Rinqest, 2017, cited in Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019:106). The provincial education departments (PEDs) are responsible to assign poverty scores to schools and in 2018, 60% of public schools nationally were declared as quintiles 1 to 3 or no-fee schools. In terms of paragraph 110 of the NNSSF policy, new data have been made available to update the National Table of Targets which was Government Notice 75 published in Government Gazette No. 41420 dated 2 February 2018 which provide national poverty target amounts for 2020. Ogbonnaya and Awuah (2019:106) highlight that quintiles 1 to 3 are no-fee-paying schools and receive more funding per learner from the government and do not charge school fees. They also point out that quintiles 4 and 5 are fee-paying schools and receive less government support on the assumption that parents can afford to pay school fees (Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019:106). Quintile 1 represents the poorest schools because they serve the poorest communities, whereas quintile 5 represents the most affluent schools serving wealthier communities (Van Dyk & White, 2019:51). In line with the NNSSF policy, schools serving impoverished communities should receive more funding than affluent schools; hence, quintile 1 to 3 schools receive more funding than quintile 4 and 5 schools (Van Dyk & White, 2019:51). Table 5.6 is included to reflect the poverty rankings or quintiles of schools and allocations per learner as indicated in the NNSSF policy. This highlights the financial statuses of the participating schools and its impact on the leadership practices of principals at lower quintile schools.

**Table 5.6: Subsidy allocations per quintile in 2020**

National quintile ranking (poverty profile)	Fee status of the schools	National expenditure allocation	2019 allocations per learner in Gauteng province	National poverty distribution (from poorest to least poor) by %	Poverty distribution in Gauteng province by %
1	No-fee	35% of the resources	R1468	Poorest 20%	Poorest 14.1%
2	No-fee	25% of the resources	R1468	Next 20%	Next 14.7%
3	No-fee	20% of the resources	R1468	Next 20%	Next 17.9%
4	Fee paying	15% of the resources	R736	Next 20%	Next 21.9%
5	Fee paying	5% of the resources	R254	Least poor 20%	Least poor 31.4%

Source: DBE (2004); DBE (2019)

Table 5.6 indicates that for 2020, quintile 1 to 3 schools received R1468 per learner and as no-fee schools, they cannot charge school fees to supplement the government allocation. This is the category allocated to all four participating schools in this study. The national expenditure allocation of the quintile 1 to 3 schools ranges from 20% to 35%. The participating schools are in Gauteng province. Therefore, the poverty distribution of the lower three quintile schools in the province are 14.1% for quintile 1, the next 14.7% for quintile 2 and the next 17.9% for quintile 3, while nationally, poverty distribution remains at 20% for the poorest, quintile 1, with increments of 20% each for quintiles 2 and 3.

Table 5.6 also indicates that for 2020, quintile 4 schools received R736 and quintile 5 schools R254 per learner. Quintile 5 schools are the least poor, falling in the top 20% nationally and top 31.4% in Gauteng province, followed by quintile 4 schools, falling in the following 20% and 21.9% nationally and in Gauteng province, respectively. This is because these schools serve more affluent communities. To supplement the government's funding, quintile 4 and 5 schools can charge school fees.

### 5.3 Participants' Biographic Data

This section provides the reader with biographic data of the participants of this qualitative study. This data were gathered through individual interviews of the principal participants and focus groups with the teacher participants. The gathered data include the following participant information: post level, gender, age, highest qualification

obtained during their professional training, the number of years in the post occupied and their teaching experience. As mentioned above, to respect ethical issues and observe anonymity, the researcher decided to represent the selected no-fee schools with labels such as NF1, NF2, NF3 and NF4 (where NF stands for no-fee). Also, for ethical reasons, the names of the principals cannot be used in this study; therefore, the researcher used codes such as PT1, PK2, PJ3 and PM4 (where P represents the word principal and the second letter used represents the first letter of their school). The participating teachers are referred to as AET1, AK2, AJ3 and AM4; PHT1, PHK2, PHJ3 and PHM4; MT1, MK2, MJ3 and MM4 and, finally, EK2, EJ3 (did not participate) and EM4. The first letter represents the subject that they teach and the second letter the name of their schools. Table 5.7 provides the biographic data of the participants to reflect other factors which may impact the leadership and management practices of the principals and the curriculum delivery which will improve learner performance in Grade 12.

**Table 5.7: Biographic data of research participants**

Biographic data of participants																			
Participant	Post level	Gender	Age		Highest qualification obtained				Number of years in the post					Number of years in teaching fraternity					
			Below 35	35-65	M+4 / ACE	B.Ed./B.Com./B.Tech.	B.Ed. (honours)	Master' s	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-30	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-30	30+
NF1																			
PT1	4	M		X			X						X				X		
AET1	1	M	X			X				X				X					
PHT1	2	M		X		X					X					X			



Biographic data of participants																			
Participant	Post level	Gender		Age		Highest qualification obtained				Number of years in the post					Number of years in teaching fraternity				
		Male/Female		Below 35	35-65	M+4 / ACE	B.Ed./B.Com./B.Tech.	B.Ed. (honours)	Master' s	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-30	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-30
NF4																			
PM 4	4	M		X			X			X								X	
AM 4	1	F	X			X				X					X				
PH M4	2	F		X	X					X						X			
EM 4	3	F		X			X			X								X	
MM 4	2	M	X				X				X					X			

Table 5.7 reflects individual information on each of the participants. However, the researcher will discuss the profile of the teacher participants per school only as the principal participants have been discussed above when the settings of the participating schools were discussed.

### 5.3.1 Data presentation of the principal and teacher participants of NF1

With regard to age, most of the teacher participants at NF1 were over 35 years old including their principal (PT1) and only one participant was younger than 35 years of age (Table 5.7). This is an indication that the gateway subjects of this school were handled by matured, experienced teachers who can manage discipline in their classes

in completion of homeworks. Chapter 2 of this study discussed homework (*cf.* 2.6.8.3) as one of the instructional strategies that can improve learner performance. The majority of participating teachers were well experienced. Giving homework has to be done strategically and principals as instructional leaders need to support and assist teachers, where applicable, to plan it in such a way that various departments do not give homework on the same day (Sithole, 2017:29). Completing homework is crucial in keeping learners active mentally and this can improve their performance.

With regard to gender, the teacher participants handling the gateway subjects at NF1 are all males together with the principal of the school.

With regard to qualification, none of the teachers of NF1 had a postgraduate qualification with an exception of PT1 who attained a Bachelor's degree of education (Honours) and became the principal for the past 6 years after been in the teaching fraternity for almost 20 years. Even AET1, who was the youngest participant had undergraduate degree (bachelor' degree in education) and has been in the teaching fraternity for almost 5 years and is occupying a post level 1 position. This was an indication that the no-fee schools attract poorly qualified teachers. Both PHT1 and MT1 are more experienced than AET1, both with more than 5 years of teaching experience, but MT1 had been occupying a post level 1 position for almost 10 years of being in the teaching profession. PHT1, on the other hand, has been the HoD for less than 5 years, but has the same qualification as the post level 1 teachers..

### **5.3.2 Data presentation of the principal and teacher participants of NF2**

With regard to age, the gateway subjects of NF2 were handled by matured teachers of over 35 years of age, each with teaching experience of more than 10 years in the post (Table 5.7). The principal (PK2) was also matured with 59 years of age. The researcher assumed that older teachers can handle discipline of learners better than younger teachers. Performance in gateway subjects can improve if teachers assess learners regularly and learners are disciplined enough to do their homework.

With regard to gender, the majority of participating teachers from NF2 were females, including their principal, with the exception of PHK1, who was a male.

With regard to qualifications, the majority of teacher participants in the focus group of NF2 occupy a post level 1, except AK2, who is the HoD but had an undergraduate

qualification. However, AK2's teaching experience in the teaching fraternity is the same as EK2 and PHK2, although all occupy a post level 1 with only entry level of Grade 12 plus a senior teachers' diploma (STD) in education. Only MK2 had a postgraduate degree B.Ed. (honours), with teaching experience of over 16 years in the teaching profession. The school was lead by a principal who attained a master's degree, who was well experienced with over 30 years in the teaching fraternity and just under 10 years in the post.

### **5.3.3 Data presentation of the principal and teacher participants of NF3**

With regard to age, NF3 employed two young teachers, MJ3 and AJ3, who were less than 35 years of age, with PHJ2 being over 35 years of age. The principal of the school was also over 35 years of age.

In terms of gender, the gateway subjects of NF3 were taught by males and only accounting is taught by a female, the same applying to all other participating schools, where gateway subjects are taught mostly by males. These teachers were lead by a male principal (PJ3).

With regard to qualifications, both MJ3 and AJ3 have a Grade 12 certificate and a bachelor's degree in education, and so was the principal who occupied the post for over five years but AJ3 is the HoD with less than five years' experience in the post and almost ten years of experience in the teaching profession. MJ3 was still a novice post level 1 teacher with less than five years in the teaching profession. The deputy of the school (PHJ3) took it upon himself to teach a gateway subject in Grade 12 despite his office duties and has been in that position for the past five years. The participant has been in the teaching profession for over 20 years.

### **5.3.4 Data presentation of the principal and teacher participants of NF4**

With regard to age, the focus group of NF4 had two participating teachers under 35 years of age and two over 35 years of age with no exception of their principal.

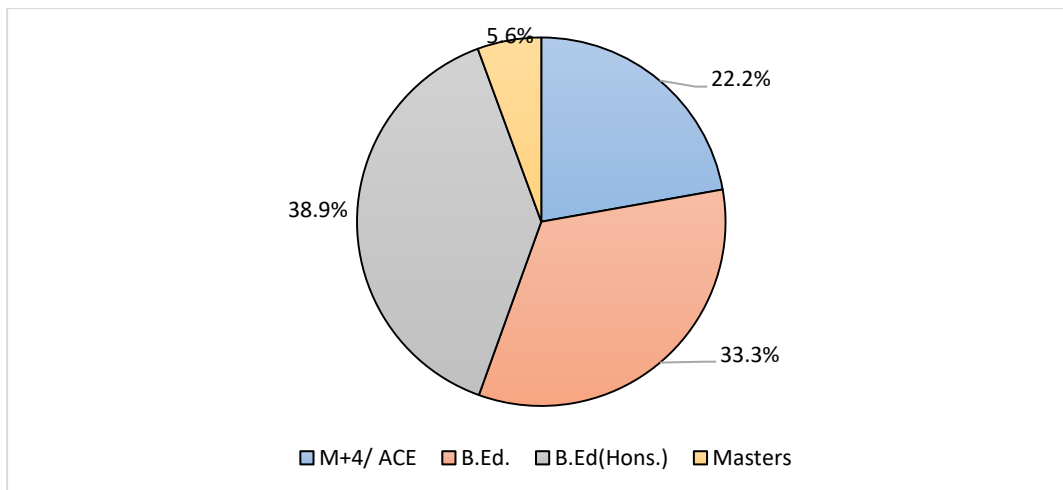
In terms of gender, there were three female teachers and one male teacher, who was a mathematics departmental head and a male principal.

Most teachers in the focus group of NF4 form part of the SMT, including one deputy principal (EM4), but in terms of qualifications, the deputy attained B.Ed.(Honours) had

been a deputy for the past 5 years and taught for over 15 years. The other two teacher participants were HODs who had been in the teaching profession for over 10 years and about 6 years in their HOD position. Finally, AM4 was the only post level 1 teacher in the focus group and taught for almost 10 years.

### **5.3.5 Summary of the findings and analysis of the qualifications of the participants**

In Chapter 2 (*cf.* 2.3.6), it was highlighted that no-fee schools attract underqualified educators and principals who compromise learner performance in gateway subjects. Table 5.7 above reflects the qualifications of all participants per school, but Figure 5.1 reflects generally in percentages the qualifications of all participants. Literature indicates that qualifications of educators are linked to the subject content knowledge of educators as well as the quality of the human resources at schools. Post-1994, education in South Africa was declared free for all former disadvantaged children from Grade 1 to Grade 12 (Tikly *et al.*, 2018:4). This led to learner enrolment rapidly increasing in no-fee schools and a high demand for qualified teachers in STEM subjects (Tickly *et al.*, 2018:4). Principals filled this demand with underqualified teachers who had insufficient content knowledge. Strong subject knowledge is a prerequisite for good teaching, which is vital for the improvement of learner performance in any school. If learners are taught by teachers with content challenges or insufficient levels of subject literacy, the learners misconceive and misunderstand that subject content (Sikolia & Sikolia, 2016:61; Tickly *et al.*, 2018:4). The role of the principal as an instructional leader should be to motivate gateway-subject educators to further their studies and engage in professional development activities in the subjects, as this would improve educators' subject knowledge, pedagogical content skills and general professionalism. The pie chart in Figure 5.1 illustrates the various qualification categories and how many participants fall in the respective categories. Participant qualifications are briefly discussed below.



**Figure 4.2: Highest qualifications of participants**

### **5.3.5.1 The qualifications of principal participants**

Of the four principal participants, only one participant has a master's degree and she is almost 60 years of age, whereas the other three principals obtained bachelor honours degrees in education or rather B.Ed.(Honours). All principal participants have been in the teaching fraternity for over ten years. In general, one out of the eighteen (5,6%) participants managed to obtain a master's degree. Appointments of principals in most no-fee schools has been identified as fraught with irregularities, with an unjustified influence of unions in the selection process beyond their observations (City Press, 2014, cited in Wills, 2015:6). In addition, the appointment criteria attract candidates who are inexperienced and who have lower qualifications because those who are eventually appointed do not differ much from that of an entry-level teacher (Wills, 2015:8). Well-qualified principals would be able to provide improved principal leadership, especially when the focus is on instructional leadership, which is vital in improving learner performance in gateway or STEM subjects. Well-qualified principals possess key characteristics which have been proven to be of momentous worth since management is immediate and real, and they employ effective leadership principles and styles (Amanchukwu *et al.*, 2015:14). They encourage broad participation of teachers and parents in decision-making, spend more time on educational matters than administrative and other tasks, appraise the work of teachers, motivate, and monitor teachers and learners' work (Sithole, 2017:19-20). The culture of trust and discipline will prevail in such schools because teachers will not be more qualified than their principals.

### **5.3.5.2    *The qualifications of teacher participants***

Figure 4.2 reflects that only three out of the 14 teacher participants have B.Ed.(Honours). The majority (72.2%) only have entry-level professional qualifications, those being a Grade 12 certificate and a diploma in education from the former colleges of education. Some of the teacher participants also have an advanced certificate in education (ACE) from universities or an M+4 and an undergraduate degree such as a bachelor of education from universities. This is a clear indication that these participants were underqualified. This finding is supported by Christie and Collins (2012:79), who claim that former disadvantaged schools or no-fee schools had underqualified teachers teaching gateway subjects during the apartheid era, yet this still continued even after 16 years into the new dispensation. According to them, this situation affects the quality of education in these schools, which are in majority in South Africa. This is particularly reflected at the end of schooling, where many learners perform poorly in gateway subjects such as mathematics, accounting and physical sciences due their circumstances (Sithole, 2017:12). Principals have also been unable to break the chain and have perpetuated the problem of poor performance in no-fee schools by the type of recruitments they have made in filling teachers' posts because they are either underqualified themselves or inexperienced or both (Rowland, 2017:1). Principals should understand the needs with respect to staff recruitment and purposefully identify weak areas that need to be addressed with sound appointments. Now that most no-fee schools have underqualified and inexperienced teachers, principals as an instructional leader can mitigate this by encouraging team teaching or collaborations and mentoring in their schools. Sithole (2017:19) perceives team teaching as an approach to alleviating teacher isolation and ensuring progress in content coverage. In addition, a senior teacher as mentor can motivate novice teachers and provide them with school-based development or encourage them to attend external teacher developments in the content of their subjects.

## **5.4    Presenting the Findings in Relation to the Themes and Subthemes from the Gathered Data**

In this section, the researcher discusses the themes and subthemes developed from the raw data by presenting, analysing and substantiating with literature the thoughts of the research participants with an aim to explore the role of principal leadership in Grade

12 learner performance. During the interviews and focus group discussions with the participants, the researcher took notes (non-verbal communication) while recording the deliberations and later transcribed the interview recordings while the information was still fresh in her memory. The researcher also made some observations of the schools' infrastructures and analysed some documents such as the late-coming register of learners and educators, minutes of the meetings related to teaching and learning and the vision and mission statements of the selected schools. Document analysis was also done on some policy, like the school's maintenance policy, after the interviews with the principals while the researcher was still on site. This approach was in line with what Neuman (2012:448) proposes, that during qualitative data analysis, the researcher should explore data and identify multiple processes, looking for patterns: similarities and differences, aspects that are alike or unlike.

While the data gathering process was proceeding, the researcher continued to search for patterns of similar and different themes that emerged during the discussions. Data analysis followed after adequate data had been attained, which Neuman (2012:448) refers to as when sufficient data have been collected or saturation has occurred. After gathering data through interviews, focus groups, observations and document analysis, with the main aim of this research forming the base, the researcher merged the common trends that were picked up from the raw data into themes and categories to be able to present the findings of the study during the discussion. These themes were further developed into subthemes, as reflected in Table 5.8.

**Table 5.8: Themes and subthemes of the study**

Theme	Subthemes
1. Leadership practices of principals and teacher development	(i) The principal's knowledge of their role in curriculum leadership (ii) The principal's role in promoting collaboration with other educators (iii) Leading the instructional programme
2. Addressing the contextual challenges	(i) The principal's role in managing contextual challenges (social). (ii) Dealing with infrastructure challenges
3. Management styles and approaches	(i) The principal's role in monitoring the teachers' work (ii) The principal's role to build staff capacity
4. The principal's role to support the parent component	(i) Communicating effectively with parents (ii) Active parental involvement

Below, the researcher presents and analyses the findings in relation to the research themes and subthemes informed by the main aim of the study. To analyse data, as opined by Neuman (2012:49), means to systematically organise, integrate and examine the data and as the researcher did that, she was searching for patterns and relationships among specific details.

#### **5.4.1 Leadership practices of principals and teacher development**

The literature review in Chapter 3 (*cf.* 3.5) provided the definition of leadership practices and also discussed the leadership practices of principals as these practices form the basis of an effective principal and are determinants of a well-performing school. When discussing the duties of the principal, as outlined in the PAM document and *The Standard* (Chapter 3 [*cf.* 3.3]), the researcher provides an integration of leadership practices which can be employed by principals to improve learner performance in no-fee schools. Again, in Chapter 2 (*cf.* 2.6), mention was made of some of the practices that principals of well-performing schools have employed to have successful schools or to improve the performance of their Grade 12 learners, such as to refine leadership styles to meet the needs of a particular school at a time and to manage the resources (Lui & Hallinger, 2017:298; Rowland, 2017:4).

Teacher development, which is sometimes regarded as staff development, is a process where teachers participate in a wide range of professional activities in and beyond their work (Bredeson, 2000:387). The principal's knowledge of their role in curriculum leadership in this regard is imperative because no-fee schools have teachers with poor qualifications offering gateway subjects.

During the individual interviews with the principal participants, the researcher was able to pick up that some participants are slightly conversant with some of their curriculum leadership roles. As part of their curriculum leadership role, as outlined in *The Standard*, the principal has to work with all stakeholders in order to manage, support and promote the best quality of teaching and learning (DBE, 2016:5). The majority of principal participants were able to mention their roles as curriculum leaders, but led curriculum discussions among themselves and their SMTs. This is evident in the response of one of the principal participants:

And of course, with me as a principal, I work closely with the deputies to get curriculum reports from them and where there are challenges, err, we sit down, we have our meetings, principal and deputies, we sit down and see how we can assist the deputies to make sure that those subjects that problematic, err, the performance can improve. **PJ4**

Good practices relating to the analysis of subjects and individual learner performance are evident, however. Another principal participant who affirmed this, said:

What I'm doing individually as, as the principal to take the performance and record it on my personal dashboard and it will give me the picture, err, about the performance of the individual learner just after the second or third informal test, it will give me colours and the sooner I see the red colours in a performance of the individual learner, that's when now, I will now, err, have one on one, err, meeting. Err, firstly I will call the learner and if, if I see this as continuing, it means I would also involve, err, the parent and by doing that at the end of the day, that's when now I start to achieve better performance in the gateway, the gateway subjects. **PT1**

The findings also display that some principals provide good support to learners. One of the gateway-subject teacher participants concurred:

Yes, I think the support is good, the support that he is rendering to the learners is good because normally, we engage with him in most of the time, eyaa, so whenever we have problems, particularly with those learners who do not do their work, sometimes you find that he is helping a lot. So, he also has a database for the learners whenever he is communicating with the learners most of the time, eyaa. **MT1**

The responses indicate some excellent practices about support for Grade 12 learners. Some principals, for example, have personal dashboards on which they record the performance of Grade 12 learners.

Analysis of the documents show that evidence is available with regard to the minutes of the meetings with staff, mission and vision statements of the schools and the intervention plans to improve Grade 12 learner performance. The principal participants were able to talk about the mission and vision statements of their schools. In some schools, these documents were displayed in the main entrance to the office, while in others, they were in the participants' drawers, as observed by the researcher during her visit to the schools.

As seen in Table 5.7, the majority of the principal participants are inexperienced in their management roles (have only a few years in their current posts). However, they are

well experienced as classroom teachers (with over ten years in the teaching profession), which would enable them to understand instructional practices needed for improvement in Grade 12 learner performance. Rowland (2017:11) opined that experienced and well-qualified principals can improve learner performance because they can understand and commendably apply modern educational guidelines and adapt in an ever-changing world. Sithole (2017:19) pointed out that it is imperative for principals together with their SMTs to monitor teachers and learner's work, to assess progress that the schools made towards delivering the curriculum and to analyse assessment results. This will place them in a position to provide the necessary support and draw up intervention programmes should shortcomings in curriculum delivery happen, at its early stage.

#### **5.4.1.1 *The principal's role in promoting collaboration with other educators***

The principal participants were very passionate about collaboration among teachers and this affirms that gateway-subject teachers have challenges with subject content. Educators who lack subject content knowledge compromise the quality of education in no-fee schools, especially in Grade 12. Consequently, principals have some contingency plans in place to address this problem. The utterances of the principal participants confirm this:

Uhm, coming back to my role as principal, my role is to ensure that whenever there is a gap in these gateway subjects, I, I outsource. My outsourcing, I'm, I'm doing it in the form of collaboration with, uhm, the other schools because my, my challenge with, with mathematics. What, what I've been doing all along, uhm, there is a good teacher who is very good in mathematics who has been working in School X (pseudonym) but now working at another school, uhm, I'm getting a help from the school and the physical science also, I've been getting help from a school around here which is School Z (pseudonym). **PT1**

Another principal participant said:

One, we got what we call collaboration with our schools, a teacher from other schools, let me give you an example of ... like we indicated the gateway subjects, physical sciences as well as mathematics as numbers one, we collaborate with School A (pseudonym), we collaborate with School B (pseudonym), using teachers who are performing from those subject, working with our teacher here so that or so that the learners can be able to hear a different voice and they can be able to understand other person better. **PM3**

These responses were affirmed by teacher participant responses below. Most participants of the focus groups of this study were teachers with experience, having been in the teaching fraternity for over ten years, yet still deeming it proper to be assisted in their subject during curriculum delivery:

Eer, I think the support he gives us is to invite the other educators to assist where there is a problem based on paper one or paper two or any topic. **PHM4**

The poor performance of learners in STEM subjects was discussed in Chapter 2 of this study (*cf.* 2.3.5). Shan (2018:1) alludes to the fact that teacher development is one of the solutions to improve learner performance and bridge the gap of poor learner performance in STEM subjects. Teachers should be in a position to communicate effectively with learners during curriculum delivery, especially in STEM subjects, if they want to impart knowledge and improve learner performance (Sithole, 2017:19). Teacher development programmes have been believed to instil confidence in teachers and reduce teacher isolation during curriculum delivery in class. This is because teachers build enough confidence with the content of their subjects learned from colleagues, coaches or mentors and the relevant teaching methodologies, especially in subjects such as mathematics (Sithole, 2017:21; Shan, 2018:1).

This study has indicated that the way in which the principal participants employ teacher collaboration is strange. What is strange about this is that highly experienced teachers still have other teachers assisting them (team-teaching) during curriculum delivery of the subjects of specialisation. Teacher development is one of the leadership practices where principals can foster collaborative planning, problem-solving and peer support and create the conditions that support professional learning that can result in improved classroom practice, which is a necessity for poor-performing schools (Heystek & Terhoven, 2014:2; Sithole, 2017:21).

#### **5.4.1.2 *Leading the instructional programme***

Chapters 2 (*cf.* 2.6.4.2) and 3 (*cf.* 3.8.1) of this study reviewed literature on the integration of leadership styles and the components of instructional leadership which can improve Grade 12 learner performance in no-fee schools. The main aim of this study was to explore the role of principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance. Therefore, an analysis of principals' roles in instructional leadership formed a crucial component of this study. Other leadership styles also matter, but only when integrated

into instructional leadership. Lui and Hallinger (2017:298) opined that principals of well-performing schools have refined their leadership style to meet the needs of their schools. The principals of the participating schools employ some sound instructional leadership practices by remaining visible and motivating teachers to improve Grade 12 learner performance. This was expressed by the principal participants:

In the morning, after lunch, as well as during period, we are using period register to check if everybody is attending classes. I even go, err, outside to control if learners are in class, teachers are in class, everybody... **PM4**

And then, in the morning, the educators come 30 minutes before so that when eight o'clock strikes, everyone is in class. **PK2**

This approach is in line with what Badenhorst and Koalepe (2014:247) recommend, that principals should remain visible at the gate in the morning to set the tone for the day, and walk around in the school hallways during the day to ensure good discipline. This is important as the role of the principal in this regard is to manage factors which can waste instructional time. Learner performance in Grade 12 can be improved if late coming of both teachers and learners in the morning, after break or between periods is minimised (Sithole, 2017:1). Another principal participant commented in this regard:

Yes, as the principal, I would be at the gate in the morning and, so, immediately after lunch when the bell rings; and management, we also assist the educators; educators, they move straight to classes. We ensure that at the ground and around the classes, all learners are quickly into those classes and we, we also do that randomly during the periods, the exchanging of the periods, such that we shouldn't see many learners or the teachers taking more time before they can attend to the next period ... **PT1**

It was proper for this participant to manage the movement of teachers (such as asking to leave early for a variety of reasons), as outlined in Chapter 2 of this study. Most principal participants highlighted that they use registers. The researcher saw these during document analysis, which were either nicely filed or a nicely covered book. The problem, though, is that there were no records of perpetrators of late coming or early departures. The principal participants thus fail to deal effectively with perpetrators, as seen in the next excerpt:

There is a normal time register, uhm, there's another register separate, so if the teacher arrives late, the late arrival, the teacher would get into both, err, registers to sign time of arrival in our normal time register and also, uhm, to sign

in other one only deals with arriving late or leaving earlier, so we do have a separate register in that kind of, err, incidence, yes. **PT1**

This finding was in line with the research of Sithole (2017:1), who points out that all factors that waste teaching time need to be managed. These include: poor attendance; late coming, either in the morning, after break or downtime during lessons, sporting or cultural events; and teachers' personal reasons to leave early, including attending union meetings. To curb this, different registers need to be analysed by principals on a weekly basis and reprobates need to be held accountable within the confines of the Employment Educators Act (no. 76 of 1998) (Sithole, 2018:2). Again, visibly walking in the hallways will assist the principal to maintain a disciplined school environment by calling any unseemly behaviour to order immediately. Extra time can therefore be used to reinforce what has been taught in class to help struggling and lagging learners instead of chasing the syllabus. Principals can also make themselves visible then.

The feedback of the teacher participants confirms that the principals of no-fee schools do employ supervision of instructional leadership by being visible. This is done only to some extent because the majority of principals of no-fee schools do not teach. When the principal does not teach any class, as mentioned in the PAM document, they will not fully understand the frustrations that teachers have inside the classroom in order to support them effectively. From the data, it is clear that principals keep educators on their toes by paying classroom visits:

Uhm, however, sometimes he moves around classes so, uhm, it may happen that during your class he comes in and check if your, how do you conduct you class. **MJ3**

In the morning, he is there or in the afternoon he is there. **PHT1**

From morning class, from the gate, it is visible; he supports and monitor and he would take turns in classes and talk to individual educators just to get the challenges that they experiences and see to it, he, how best he can assist, mm. **MM2**

## **5.4.2 Addressing the contextual challenges**

### **5.4.2.1 *The principal's role in managing contextual challenges (social)***

The literature review in Chapter 2 (*cf.* 2.2.7) highlighted that most township schools were allocated lower quintile categories (quintiles 1 to 3) or no-fee-school status and

learners in those schools do not pay school fees. These schools were mostly surrounded by mixed-income households and the majority were located in informal settlements. The social ills from such communities around the schools spill over into and affect the school environments, especially for secondary schools. These ills include: unemployed parents, child-headed families, gangsterism, theft, alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, child and women abuse, vandalism and poor ablution facilities; and now recently, politically motivated strikes, load shedding and water cuts. The expressions of participants confirmed such challenges in the sampled no-fee schools:

... we, we have majority of learners in our school which are child heads. ... err, gangsters, which it's not rife but one would say it's there in a sense that we don't experience the fighting inside the school yard, but sometimes you would see some of the group of boys waiting outside around the school yard, but sometimes, more especially on Fridays, waiting force to fight with somebody coming inside the school ... we don't have learners fighting within, we, we have people who are not part, who are not our learners waiting outside for somebody, that's the kind of cases that we, we normally deal with. **PT1**

Purr, one, it's that one of electricity ... we don't have water ... err, people outside the school they are coming stealing, err, they are breaking the school. **PM2**

... and she fell pregnant and then she became sick and dropped out ... **PJ3**

... err, in this township where we are staying, parents are not working. **PK4**

The principal participants highlighted some of the contextual challenges that they experience in no-fee schools that hindered the smooth running of their schools. These challenges do not affect only the principals, who are to ensure that teaching and learning take place daily for the entire day, but also teachers and learners specifically in Grade 12 to improve learner performance:

We have a problem with learners who are using drugs. **EM2**

I think, err, pregnancy is one of the major problems and, err, absent without reporting it's a big problem. **PHT1**

To add what, err, my colleagues have said, neh, I think the other one is pregnancy; err, we have a high level of pregnancy, like in my case, maybe I've the fourth learner who is pregnant, I'm talking of Grade 12. **PHJ3**

It is empirical for principals to be able to effectively deal with contextual challenges because they affect learner performance in a very negative way and eventually will be the source of the poor quality of education in the former disadvantaged schools of South Africa. Hallinger (2016) accentuated that leaders should adapt their strategies or styles to be consistent with specific school contexts and the needs of the community at large (cited in Moyo & Perumal, 2019:90). Violence in schools may hinder good concentration in class and lead to absenteeism and poor morale among educators, learners and the SMT and this may influence Grade 12 performance negatively. Principals in the ordinary public schooling system are unfortunately not trained or orientated to deal with such challenges, some of which were inherited from the apartheid regime, as outlined in Chapter 3 (*cf.* 3.5.3.4) of the study. Principals of no-fee schools inherited from the apartheid regime a shortage of physical and material resources and a lack of professional teachers (Christie & Collins, 2012:79), especially in gateway subjects. Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2015:14) highlight that South African principals were often accused of not spending prime time on site, not raising funds for their school and not motivating and maintaining discipline. Again, they rely more on the external help in dealing with their challenges, which hinders progress in their schools. These principals find it important to build healthy relationships with other stakeholders, such as the district officials, community leaders, South African Police Service (SAPS) and non-governmental organisations, in order to address the challenges of their school. Some of the social ills have found their way into the school premises and others are newly surfacing in no-fee schools. The social ills have a negative effect on both teachers and learners. They leave teachers demotivated and with ruined emotions and learners with low expectations (Bush & Glover, 2015:202). The following excerpts of participants confirm this:

- **Drugs, gangsterism**

We keep pushing but we cannot get rid. **PM4**

So, some of this children, because their vulnerability, they fall into the clashes of drugs, err, substance abuse, dagga. So, children, but those that escape, they become something, but it's a challenge we try to address. **PJ3**

And with regards to the substance abuse, the other day there was, err, the was community meeting where the station commander was here to address the problem. **MJ3**

Okay, uhm, the, the involvement of social development ... uhm, the involvement of SAPS. Involving the SAPS, we do, err, random search, we involve them, they come there once a month or once in two weeks, they come here and conduct the, the search and that will, will limit the fighting around the schoolyard ... **PT1**

... we are calling, we are working with, err, non-organisation, non-what-what organisations outside, we are inviting them so that they can be able to talk to the learners and to show them the importance; we invite outsiders. **PM4**

- **Teenage pregnancy**

He is inviting other stakeholders to address learners. **PHM4**

- **Load shedding**

Now with that one we check to the neighbouring schools ... err, primary schools they have generators, now we just make a relationship with them, that's collaboration once more. **PM4**

- **Burglary**

In terms of burglary, err, we used to have the patrollers; unfortunately, we do not have pa... patrollers again and even the patrollers, we can't rely to them because they don't have anything to defend themselves, they only report. **PM4**

- **Water cuts**

As a principal, SMT members, we are going out of the school to fetch water for learners so that they can be able to continue with the lesson. **PM4**

- **Politically motivated strikes which block roads for teachers**

Uhm, what, what, what we do, we've got the SGB, most of them are not working, they are around the school premises, we call them so that they come and help us. **PK2**

From these findings, it could be assumed that the main challenge is that the participating principals of the no-fee schools in this study are unable to deal with the contextual challenges, some of which are social ills (for example, substance abuse and gangsterism) from the communities around the schools. It appears that the principals instead pass the bug by inviting other people, as indicated in the excerpts above. To address these challenges, Saqib, Raheen, Iqbal, Salman and Shahzad (2018:2) suggest the involvement of learners in extramural activities (which keeps their body and mind healthy) and that principals should just provide financial support and the necessary resources for such activities. The researcher attributes this problem to the

inexperience of the principals who seek for temporal solutions. Due to this, there is high grade repetition, absenteeism or even dropouts even in this era of free education in no-fee schools. No-fee schools therefore will continue to compromise the quality of education in South Africa and it is required nowadays from principals to understand contexts, the challenges associated with it and to come up with tailormade strategies and have systems in place to address them. To be able to mitigate this, Naidoo (2019:4) opined that before the person was hired as a principal, he or she must obtain a formal qualification in school administration in South Africa, like in other countries such as Singapore, the United Kingdom, Scotland and the United States.

#### **5.4.2.2 Dealing with infrastructure challenges**

In his study, Weinstein (1979) pointed out that there is a link between improved educational outcomes and environmental conditions. These include, among other factors, infrastructure and conditions of school facilities such as lighting, ambient temperature and quality of air (cited in Draga, 2016:238). Chapter 3 (*cf.* 3.5.3.4) reflected the importance of infrastructure in school attendance of both teacher and learner and which can compromise the quality of education for learners. With the increased learner enrolment due to categorisation of schools as no-fee schools came large class sizes; shortage of teaching equipment and furniture; inadequacy of ablution facilities; and poor infrastructure. These factors have caused a variety of challenges with the management of infrastructure, as seen next:

It's overcrowded. **PHM2**

We are overcrowded, capacity is our problem, infrastructure. **EK4**

We don't have the facilities. **PHK2**

Eya, eya, damage to school furniture, damage to electricity appliances and so on, damage to things such as windowpanes, the doors and so; we always replace the windowpanes, we always replace the doors due to, due to this damages ... **PT1**

But at lower grade, furniture it's a problem ... other learners, especially in lower classes, they still running, looking for chairs. **EK4**

True, you will find that our learners are damaging properties, they don't care ... to be honest, we are having a serious problem with discipline. **MT1**

The negative, uncondusive physical environment of a lack of facilities such as classrooms, furniture and class equipment has a negative impact on teachers together with learners (Overbaugh, 2010, cited in Ahmadi & Lukeman, 2015:34). The excerpts above point out that such contextual challenges do not only result in teachers being physically uncomfortable but also so for learners. Overcrowded classes not only lead to injustice due to shortages in terms of a subject such as science which needs learners to be hands-on with scientific equipment (Nzomo, Kariuki & Guantai, 2001:4), but also compromise adequate ventilation. It also leads to the breaking of classroom furniture or to inadequate furniture, and there is high noise levels in such classes, as highlighted in Chapter 3 (*cf.* 3.5.3). Some no-fee schools in South Africa still do not have facilities such as science laboratories and also have disciplinary problems. Milner, Chimombo, Banda and Mchikoma (2001:48) opined that when learners are physically uncomfortable, they stop paying attention to their teachers during lessons, which is a prerequisite for good performance in difficult gateway subjects such as mathematics. This may lead to high grade repetition, absenteeism for both teachers and learners and dropouts from school by learners. No-fee schools are not an exception in this regard. The role of the principal should be to review their school's code of conduct with the school's stakeholders in order to discipline learners who vandalise the school. Furthermore, involvement of the school representative council was hardly mentioned by principal participants as part of the solution.

### **5.4.3 Management styles and approaches**

Chapter 3 (*cf.* 3.2) of the study outlined principals' practices related to leadership and management in the South African schooling system, with management practices forming the most important factor at any ordinary public school. The primary task and the central purpose of the school is teaching and learning and if that task is not properly managed, then the whole school is likely to suffer poor learner performance (Christie, 2010:696).

#### **5.4.3.1 *The principal's role in monitoring the teachers' work***

It is commanding for the principal to be informed with what the teachers are doing in classes in order to intervene timeously if curriculum delivery is compromised and not going according to plan. The principal as the supervisor is accountable for learner performance and will only be in a position to support the teachers and look for new

ways to improve teaching and learning if he or she has become aware of poor performance of learners in an early stage of the year. Monitoring is thus key. From the following comments can be seen that principals perform this important duty:

Yes, she does takes books every term, she takes about three, three learner books and she would control them and then she can come and motivate these learners and then if they have failed, she would motivate them again, mm. **AK2**

It's also my duty to ensure that teachers are allocated correctly according to the timetable and, and their classes, but coming back to the issue of controlling, I, I've got my own curriculum management, management tool as the principal, where, uhm, on a weekly basis, every Friday, I would ensure that I've got, err, books that I'm controlling, moving from Grade 8 to Grade, Grade 12. So, just after the utilisation of this curriculum management tool, I'll give the report back to the affected deputy principal, to the affected, err, HoD and also to the teacher to ensure that the findings that I got in the learners' books are rectified. **PT1**

... as the principal, coordinating or ensuring that teaching and learning activities in the gateway subjects, uhm, is to ensure that in the gateway subjects, learners are assessed more often ... supervising the, the subjects, the gateway subjects, it's the involvement of the line function ... I should get the HoD report to say how would they manage the subject and from their findings, what is that they have done, the deputy principal involvement in those, err, subject. Very critical it's, it's the issue of visits, if I get, when I get the visits from sometimes can be from the district or it's an external whole school evaluation or it any person from head office or any kind of a visit in relation to gateway subjects ... I always go through the report and make through, through analysis of the report and ensure that the findings are implemented. **PT1**

Through the use of timetable, is what is needed to control, to see it that the educators go to class on time and then as the principal, err, to make sure that the periods do not clash, as the principal I would control this teacher's work by sampling books, checking on them and putting a stamp as an evidence that I have supervised or I have controlled. **PK2**

Principal participants used management tools to control teachers' work, which the researcher saw during document analysis. However, in analysing the above utterances, the researcher realised that some principals have a challenge in terms of dealing with the negative reports that implicate some teachers in no-fee schools. It is assumed that these principals control learners' books for compliance, but they value relationships with their staff more than their results because they avoid confrontations. Instead, they find it easier to motivate learners to work harder. Other principal participants followed the correct line function, but again, there is no guarantee that distorted curriculum delivery has been fixed and that is reflected in the Grade 12 NSC

results at the end of the year. According to Day and Sammons (2016:25), the principals of well-performing schools manage to obtain good results by identifying the conditions that need attention and improvement in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning and finally learner performance. Other scholars concur with them by alluding to the fact that monitoring is a key part of leadership behaviour (Duken, 2004, cited in Leithwood & Mascall, 2008:30).

#### **5.4.3.2    *The principal's role to build staff capacity***

Sustained motivation, commitment, developed and sustained positive relationships with staff at all levels, and the provision of learning and development opportunities were outlined in Chapter 3 of this study (*cf.* 3.7.3) as the leadership practices of an effective principal which build staff capacity. The following excerpts reflect this aspect:

Yes, uhm, teamwork ... we, we have two different teachers where, now you'll find the, this teacher who is teaching physical science and the other one is teaching mathematics. Now, what we do, the teamwork or the team teaching, we have a teacher who is good in both maths and science, that teacher would assist in some topics or during the afternoon will also teach mathematics that the other educator sharing of, of the topics or sharing of the subjects. **PT1**

Like I was saying to you, collaboration and when we do collaboration, we expect that the very same teacher of the topic, the teacher, when the teacher from another school is here teaching learners, the teacher of that subject need to be here so that he can also learn. **PM4**

Chapter 3 (*cf.* 3.7.3) also reflected that no-fee schools attract teachers who are poorly qualified, and the same with principals. This was also reflected in Figure 5.1 of this study, showing that only 5,6% percent of the 18 participants have obtained a master's degree. The implication of this is that these individuals are not that resourceful in terms of content knowledge of gateway subjects for Grade 12 and that creates challenges in terms of curriculum delivery and compromises good learner attainment in these schools. According to Day and Sammons (2016:26), principals can enhance teacher quality by providing a variety of provisional learning and development opportunities for staff as part of their drive to raise standards and retain staff. Also, they can sustain and develop positive relationships at all levels through the provision of teamwork or collaboration opportunities (Day & Sammons, 2016:26). Building staff capacity can also be seen as understanding and developing people (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008:30). This therefore implies that staff capacity is a necessity in no-fee schools with the

provision of development. This not only builds knowledge and skills for staff, as outlined in Chapter 3 (*cf.* 3.7.3), but also helps principals to accomplish organisational goals such as improving learner performance, specifically in gateway subjects, and to increase the level of commitment and resilience of their staff (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008:30).

#### **5.4.4 The principal's role to support the parent component**

##### **5.4.4.1 *Communicating effectively with parents***

No-fee schools need the community around the school to support the activities of the school and to form a security base for school properties. Therefore, the principal needs to build productive relations with the parent component of the school, as outlined in Chapter 2 of the study (*cf.* 2.5.1.4). The data demonstrate that principals communicate on a term basis with parents and the community members about curriculum matters and teaching and learning in order to improve learner performance in Grade 12:

Ya, uhm, communication is key, communication through meetings, yes, ya ... and to the SGB, we always have meetings on monthly basis, that the regular part of it and we ensure that, in that meeting the important issues being what is happening in class, being curriculum or one of the critical, one of the critical issues. **PT1**

Err, according to our annual plan, err, I communicate with the SGB every month, once a month, and with parents once a quarter, especially after, err, giving the learners their reports then there will be a general meeting for parents where we outline in details, err, their performance and how to improve the performance of learners, especially in mathematics, really especially in mathematics and physical sciences, so, err ... **PK2**

Except for the SGB, it is important for the school to also develop partnerships with the communities around them. Sithole (2017:14) highlights that no-fee schools do not exist in isolation. The principals of such schools need to bring together youth development organisations, community-based organisations, health and human services agencies, community leaders and parents and form partnerships with them. This will assist the school in terms of security alert against vandalism of schools and become a coordinated set of key social and educational services to learners. These are vital prerequisites for improving a climate and environment for teaching and learning. It is the role of the principal to hold regular meetings with the SGB and regularly be

reminded of their duties since parental involvement is sometimes affected by fragmented relationships in the school (DBE, 2018:4).

#### **5.4.4.2 Active parental involvement**

Chapter 2 (*cf.* 2.3.5.2 and 2.6.5.1) reflected that parental involvement is minimal in no-fee schools. Learners who do gateway subjects at no-fee schools need parents who will be actively engaged in their school life by encouraging them to read, complete homework and take part in stimulating interactions and dialogues to improve their grades in these subjects (Shan, 2018:1). For parents of children at no-fee schools to motivate their children to do better at school is supposed to be a simple task because these schools are surrounded by parents of which the majority do not work and therefore have ample time to help their children to improve academically. The data demonstrate, however, that although there is some support from parents, it appears to be insufficient for Grade 12 learners:

Uhm, partially you will get support from parents, mmm; it's, it's, it's not satisfying, support from parents is not satisfying, uhm, the parents will, will only support the school when those learners are at Grade, Grade 12. **PT1**

Once in a quarter, it's not enough, only in Grade 12, that where you will see them, but even in Grade 12 I cannot give it 50% ...but with the Grade 12 he is communicating with parents most of the time through this WhatsApp. **MT1**

Principals should provide clear directions, especially in former disadvantaged school contexts, as to how parents should be involved in the education of their learners. According to Sithole (2017:14), principals with a welcoming school culture are capable to improve parental involvement and support families with information related to child development and create supportive learning environments.

Chapter 2 (*cf.* 2.3.5.2) also reflected that the challenges in this matter are the negative attitudes and distrust of parents towards the schools because they are mostly unschooled and have negative experiences as school children (Badenhorst & Koalepe, 2014:244). TIMSS has also shown that such parents are hardly involved in the education of their children due to their lack of trust and bad experiences in these schools and this is reflected in the performance of their children (Roodt, 2018:1). To address these negative attitudes, principals are to motivate parents to be part of the school. Principals should also create an inviting environment, especially in the

no-fee-school setup, where parents are respected, made to feel welcomed and can voice their opinions regarding curriculum issues freely. Active parental involvement could improve learner performance by encouraging learners to do well at school, complete homework and participate in debate or stimulating interaction. Learners will be encouraged to perform better because their parents are actively involved in their school life (Sithole, 2017:14; Shan, 2018:1).

SGBs should play a strong supportive role to create conditions conducive for teaching and learning, as this would impact also on the performance of Grade 12 learners. Poor-performing no-fee schools could in some instances contribute to a fragmented school environment where there is a culture of mistrust between parents and the principal instead of the school stakeholders working together (Bush & Clover, 2016:217).

#### **5.4.5 Challenges to provide principal leadership**

##### **5.4.5.1 Culture of trust and accountability**

Chapters 2 (*cf.* 2.5.1.3) and 3 (*cf.* 3.5.3.3) of this study reflected that some sources of poor performance in no-fee-schools are attributed to the leadership displayed by principals (Naidoo, 2019:1). One reason is the culture of absenteeism in some of these schools and late coming of both teachers and learners in the mornings and after breaks. No-fee schools have developed with years a culture of class non-attendance. This culture has resulted in poor learner performance because of non-completion of learning programmes by teachers. Since the principals are inexperienced, they are unable to inculcate in every staff member strong work ethics and a set of standards to live by (Sithole, 2017:16), as seen next:

I'm, I'm not sure these days, it is common in many schools, so you find that, err, teacher is absent, there is a lesson and the teacher will say, "No, my child is sick, no, further responsibility," yee, this and this. You can't, it is difficult to challenge a person and say, "No you should not"; you can only act where there's a pattern and these people are smart when they are absent themselves, they don't choose one day, one day, one day. It would be Wednesday, you know, Friday, Monday, you see, yes. **PJ3**

Analysis of this response shows that there is no mutual trust among the principal and the staff in some no-fee schools. Principals actually struggle to build a positive culture, accountability, mutual trust and respect between them and their staff. In addition,

teacher participants also displayed a sentiment of ill-discipline. It can be deduced from the above response that the principal participant thought the teachers are being truant and neglect their duty of class teaching and that will result in the teachers skipping examinable topics or being unable to complete the learning programmes (Jones & Rudd, 2008; Horng & Loeb, 2010:68; Walker, 2017:3). As seen in the following interview excerpts, the role of the principal is to maintain a disciplined environment where there is a positive culture of learning, where ill-discipline is dealt with effectively and learner performance is improved:

Accountability is there because when I talk to the teacher, one, one, one ... showing them performance to say “What are you going to do to improve the subject?”, the teacher is accounting. **PM4**

And meeting those you know, so to try to, I don't know, you know, in some instances, you know, it could be a good thing, but if a teacher is bad, there's nothing you can do. **PJ3**

Principals actually struggle to build a positive culture, accountability, mutual trust and respect between them and their staff. In addition, as seen below, finances in no-fee schools are also a problem:

Finances, yo, that one is a real problem. Finances, I will tell you why we are really struggling ... we constantly spending money of repairing. **PJ3**

The principal who, after monitoring, holds their teachers accountable for poor performance in a particular subject makes the teachers take charge of their work (accountability). If the teachers are habitual absentees, they, together with their HoD (with the principal also present to support), would have to come up with a catch-up plan to cover the syllabus. Learner performance will then improve in that subject because all examinable topics will have been dealt with and learning programmes will have been completed.

Sporting activities help learners to maintain healthy bodies and minds, as indicated in Chapter 2, but because most attention is given to maintaining infrastructure, principals give sport less attention. In addition, poor performance in some no-fee school is attributable to the principal's poor financial management and inability to deal with ill-disciplined teachers (DBE, 2018:5).

## 5.5 Summary of Chapter 5

Chapter 5 discussed the presentation of the findings of the interviews and document analysis. It included an outline of the research questions, and biographic details and qualifications of participants. The findings were presented according to the themes and subthemes of the research. Findings were analysed in conjunction with the literature discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. The focus throughout was to link discussions with the research questions and the objectives of the study.

Significant findings based on the data analysis were outlined as follows:

- No-fee schools have inexperienced and underqualified principals and therefore are unable to effectively address contextual challenges experienced.
- No-fee schools have contextual challenges such as big class sizes, substance abuse, water and electricity cuts, teenage pregnancy, absenteeism of both teachers and learners and minimal parental involvement.
- The infrastructure of no-fee schools cannot accommodate learners; therefore, class sizes are the source of some teachers' ill-discipline that the principals have to deal with on a daily basis.
- Principals of no-fee schools use collaboration and teacher development as leadership practices to improve Grade 12 learner performance.
- Principals of no-fee schools use outsourcing and staff-capacity building as solutions for the poor curriculum delivery of their underqualified educators, with content barriers to improve Grade 12 learner performance.

In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss the findings of the study as presented in Chapter 5 and also draw up conclusions and provide some recommendations on the role of principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance from the findings drawn from the gathered data.

## CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### 6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 summarised the findings of this qualitative inquiry in order to align it to its main research question, with the goal to draw conclusions and propose recommendations to respond to the main aim of the study: to explore the role of principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance. The chapter also aimed to respond to the subsidiary research questions of the study, stated again below:

- (a) What are the contextual challenges that principals must deal with?
- (b) What are the curriculum delivery challenges for Grade 12 learners that principals must deal with?
- (c) How do principals address contextual and curriculum challenges?
- (d) Which leadership styles and practices are required to improve Grade 12 learner performance?
- (e) Which management styles and approaches are required to improve Grade 12 learner performance?

In formulating the conclusion of this dissertation, Chapter 6 further discussed the recommendations of the study and recommendations for further study and the limitations. The researcher forestalled that the poor performance of Grade 12 learners in lower quintile schools in gateway subjects is attributed not only to the teachers during curriculum delivery shortfalls, or the poor context in which learners find themselves in; it is also attributed to the role of the leadership practices of the principal. The study therefore had an interest to determine what role is the principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance.

### 6.2 Synopsis of Other Chapters: An Overview

In responding to its aim, that is to explore the role of the principal in Grade 12 learner performance, a synopsis of each chapter is presented here. Chapter 1 (*cf.* 1.1)

discussed the background to the study. Learners' academic performance has recently been ascribed to effective principal leadership. Some principals at no-fee secondary schools display leadership and management approaches which are effective and yield well learner performance. On the other hand, their counterparts are continually dazed by multifaceted problems facing no-fee schools. With this background kept in consideration, the introduction and rationale of this study were provided with reasons why it was imperative to conduct this research.

Subsequently, Chapter 2 (*cf.* 2.6) provided the theoretical framework and literature review, which provided evidence grounded in the existing literature on the role of leadership and management practices of principals which contribute to learner performance. The exposition of this chapter dealt with the background of prioritisation of South African schools as former disadvantaged, with reference to legislations such as international law, the South African Constitution (no. 108 of 1996) and the South African Schools Act (no. 84 of 1996). This formed part of the discussion to outline how context impacts principal leadership and management practices and learner performance in STEM subjects (internationally and nationally). Furthermore, good practices at well-performing no-fee schools and challenges experienced by poor-performing no-fee schools were discussed. Finally, a discussion was presented around learning outcomes and social skills.

Next, in Chapter 3 (*cf.* 3.2), the literature review continued, where the requirements for and leadership and management practices of principals in South African education were discussed in detail. Firstly, the discussion included the conceptualisation of leadership and management. This was included because the understanding of principals' roles outlined in these concepts forms the basis to sound principal leadership and management practices at school level and has an effect on learner performance, especially in Grade 12. Furthermore, the discussion focused on the leadership styles outlined in the legislative framework, such as The South African Standard for principalship (*The Standard*), that supports and enhances the professional image and competencies of principals (DBE, 2016:5), together with other leadership styles not covered in *The Standard* but which are practiced throughout the globe. Lastly, the discussion focused on the employment of principals.

Chapter 4 (*cf.* 4.4) discussed in depth the research design and methodology implemented. Included in this discussion was a motivation for employing a qualitative

research approach. The data collection techniques and sample selection procedures were discussed. The discussion also included a look at the benefits and limitations of the study's various data collection methods. Lastly, the ethical issues were reviewed.

Chapter 5 discussed the settings of the research sites, the background of the participants, the development of themes and subthemes and the data analysis. The results of the study were also aligned to the subsidiary research questions to answer its main research question as outlined in Chapter 1 of this research.

Significant findings based on the data analysis were outlined as follows:

- No-fee schools have inexperienced and underqualified principals and therefore are unable to effectively address contextual challenges experienced.
- No-fee schools have contextual challenges such as big class sizes, substance abuse, water and electricity cuts, teenage pregnancy, absenteeism of both teachers and learners and minimal parental involvement.
- The infrastructure of no-fee schools cannot accommodate all learners; therefore, class sizes are the source of some teachers' ill-discipline that the principals have to deal with on a daily basis.
- Principals of no-fee schools use collaboration and teacher development as leadership practices to improve Grade 12 learner performance.
- Principals of no-fee schools use outsourcing and staff-capacity building as solutions for the poor curriculum delivery of their underqualified educators, with content barriers to improve Grade 12 learner performance.

### **6.3 Synopsis of the Results**

This section provides a synopsis of the results and conclusions aligned to the subsidiary research questions of the study. The ultimate goal is to align the findings with the study's main research question: What is the role of the principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance.

### **6.3.1 Findings and conclusions with respect to the first subsidiary research question of the study: What are the contextual challenges that principals must deal with?**

Chapter 5 (*cf.* 5.4.2) pointed out that principals of no-fee schools are dealing with big class sizes, drugs, vandalism, gangsterism, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, child-headed families, unemployment of parents, electricity and water cuts and shortages of furniture. These contextual challenges impacts on teacher and learner morale and perpetuate absenteeism. Consequently, the performance of Grade 12 learners is jeopardised.

### **6.3.2 Findings and conclusions with respect to the second subsidiary research question of the study: What are the curriculum delivery challenges for Grade 12 learners that principals must deal with?**

In Chapter 5 (*cf.* 5.4.2), it was reflected that due to infrastructure challenges, principals at no-fee schools experience absenteeism and minimal parental involvement in the schools. This leads to, for example, educators often teaching learning content to only half the class. In gateway subjects like mathematics, learners struggle to understand the work due to absenteeism. Parental involvement is a challenge at no-fee schools and therefore most learners do not have support in terms of commitment to their schoolwork and ultimately go home with low grades. Ultimately, learner performance in Grade 12 is compromised.

### **6.3.3 Findings and conclusions with respect to the third subsidiary research question of the study: How do principals address contextual and curriculum challenges?**

Chapter 5 (*cf.* 5.4.1) reflected that most of the participating principals knew their roles in curriculum leadership. To deal with curriculum challenges, they sample and monitor learners and teachers' work and analyse class tests and NSC examination results to determine the gaps in gateway-subject curriculum delivery challenges. Whenever they realise that learners are performing poorly in a particular gateway subject, they make provision for teamwork and teacher collaboration for internal teacher development. With regard to contextual challenges such as drugs, gangsterism or alcohol abuse, principals rely mostly on other stakeholders such as community leaders and the SAPS to motivate learners to quit the bad behaviour. To address contextual challenges such

as absenteeism, large class sizes and shortage of furniture, principals wait on the district office to come to their rescue without any timeframe set.

#### **6.3.4 Findings and conclusions with respect to the fourth subsidiary research question of the study: Which leadership styles and practices are required to improve Grade 12 learner performance?**

The principals of the four selected schools reflected the following leadership styles, as outlined in Chapters 3 (*cf.* 3.8) and 5 (*cf.* 5.4.1) of this study: executive leadership (by maintaining visibility throughout the school); transactional leadership (by monitoring the teachers' work. This style also allows exchanges; for example, principals give teachers taxi fares for attending extra classes during holidays and weekends); transformational leadership (for motivating staff and inspiring eagerness in them to work harder and improve learner performance); strategic leadership (for providing opportunities for collaboration and supportive teamwork); and invitational leadership (for working together with their stakeholders to develop policies which benefit both the school and stakeholders). In conclusion, principals of no-fee schools integrate these leadership styles to try and improve learner performance.

#### **6.3.5 Findings and conclusions with respect to the fifth subsidiary research question of the study: Which management styles and approaches are required to improve Grade 12 learner performance?**

Chapters 5 (*cf.* 5.4.3) reflected that the principals of the selected schools were battling to maintain an orderly, secure and safe school environment. They struggled managing infrastructure due to burglaries. They were forever trying to maintain the infrastructure by repairing the open holes in the school fence, ceilings and windows. Also, principals are left with teachers who have gaps in gateway-subject content knowledge due to pre-1994 laws. Principals also have financial management challenges. In summary, lack of experience in the post and lack of financial management skills could expose learners and teachers to an unsafe school environment and perpetuate absenteeism.

## **6.4 Recommendations**

In this segment, recommendations are made based on the results of the research.

**6.4.1 Recommendations with respect to the first subsidiary research question of the study: What are the contextual challenges that principals must deal with?**

To prevent principals from becoming overburdened, the study encourages them not to address contextual challenges in isolation but to collaborate with all other stakeholders and district officials, including community leaders, or to copy good practices from their peers in neighbouring schools. Furthermore, they should involve NGOs such as Save the Children, which focuses on helping children to learn in the safest environment possible in South Africa, and the SAPS and community leaders to address social ills that have spilled over into the school environment.

**6.4.2 Recommendations with respect to the second subsidiary research question of the study: What are the curriculum delivery challenges for Grade 12 learners that principals must deal with?**

The study recommends that principals should, on a monthly basis, have a meeting with habitually absent teachers and show them the negative effects of teacher absenteeism on Grade 12 learner performance, such as skipping of examinable topics and inability of teachers to complete the learning programmes. These ultimately perpetuate poor performance and absenteeism in learners. Principals should also communicate regularly with parents who do not attend school meetings and make them aware of the importance of their support to their children in order for them to improve in gateway subjects.

**6.4.3 Recommendations with respect to the third subsidiary research question of the study: How do principals address contextual and curriculum challenges?**

To prevent principals from becoming overburdened, the study encourages them not to address contextual challenges in isolation but to collaborate with other principals or form clusters where they will copy good practices from their peers or even involve district officials. Involvement of NGOs, the SAPS and community leaders is a temporal solution because once these organisations have saved the school, the same problem will resurface. To address the social ills that have spilled over into the school environment requires of principals and all stakeholders to review the school code of conduct reviewed.

#### **6.4.4 Recommendations with respect to the fourth subsidiary research question of the study: Which leadership styles and practices are required to improve Grade 12 learner performance?**

The study recommends that principals should also employ distributed leadership to reduce principal workload and reduce teacher isolation and democratic leadership, where the principal identifies and seeks professional development for teachers with content challenges. Principals should also integrate other leadership styles, such as strategic leadership, where principals can create an institution of learning in which teachers value their learners and prepare them for the future. The study also recommends that the district or head office of the DBE should offer external support and organise continuous teacher development since no-fee schools attract teachers with content deficiency, especially in gateway subjects. This will also help principals understand their school context and their leadership and management role in the performance of learners.

#### **6.4.5 Recommendations with respect to the fifth subsidiary research question of the study: Which management styles and approaches are required to improve Grade 12 learner performance?**

The study recommends that principals should be orientated on financial management in their first year in the post in order to utilise school finances sparingly. SGBs should also be orientated on this as the parent component of most no-fee schools is not that literate and easily overpowered by the principal. In addition, principals should receive continuous training and development on different management styles and approaches for them to effectively deal with social ills, ill-disciplined teachers and infrastructure challenges.

### **6.5 Recommendations for Further Study**

Based on the results of this research, further studies are needed for the following:

- An investigation into the support that circuit managers provide to principals of no-fee schools in dealing especially with infrastructure contextual factors.
- Exploring management and leadership strategies to curb the truancy of teachers.

- The role qualifications and/or experiences play in making effective principals of no-fee schools.
- Strategies to improve parental involvement in no-fee schools.
- Whether extended tuition offered in matric during holidays really serves its purpose of improving learner performance in STEM subjects of no-fee schools.

## **6.6 The Value of the Study**

The study will be useful for the comprehension of the complex role of principal's practices in no-fee schools. As such, it described the best practices that can be employed to improve learner attainment in STEM subjects. It also shed some light on the quality of education of schools in the lower level quintiles in South Africa. To this end, the results of this study are directed to inform the following populations.

### **6.6.1 Academia and policymakers**

The study has the potential to inform policymakers of the role of principals in Grade 12 learner performance to design policies that are applicable to address the challenges in order to improve performance.

### **6.6.2 Principals**

The study intended to provide principals with examples of best leadership and management practices which can be employed to effectively and efficiently improve learner performance in Grade 12 at no-fee schools. The study also has the potential to shed light to the district officials on how to support principals of poor-performing no-fee schools and how to overhaul contextual challenges pertaining to infrastructure that impact negatively on learner performance.

### **6.6.3 Teachers**

The study also intended to encourage good working relationships and trust between principals and their members of staff in order to improve learner performance in Grade 12, especially in gateway subjects. This study can provide an idea to educators about the challenges that principals experience with respect to the **contextual** challenges at no-fee schools. This will provide them with an understanding on how they need to support their principals in enhancing Grade 12 learner performance.

#### **6.6.4 Parents**

The study provided depth in and understanding about the challenges related to parental involvement. This should provide principals, educators and other stakeholders with the opportunity to improve aspects related to parental support for learners.

### **6.7 Limitations**

This segment of the study provides the limitations of the study. The qualitative research approach poses a problem with generalisation, which means that the scope of the findings of the study is limited (Bryman, 2012:406). The study sampled four no-fee secondary schools from Emfuleni Municipality in Gauteng province. Thus, only four schools in one township out of nine provinces of South Africa were sampled. No-fee-secondary schools from rural areas or **primary school level** were not included in the study. The individual interviews were conducted with the four principals of the four selected schools. In addition, four focus group interviews with three or four members per group were also conducted with a total of 14 teachers teaching gateway subjects such as mathematics, physical sciences, accounting and economics. The researcher expected 20 teachers to participate in focus group interviews, but not all expected teachers participated. One teacher participant taught two gateway subjects for Grade 12, hence that group had three members instead of four. Also, at the other school, one teacher participant had to attend to a matter that cropped up and left and the group ended up with three members also. Therefore, only 14 teachers participated in focus group interviews instead of 16. In a nutshell, the study had only 18 participants. This is a small sample for the country and therefore it is difficult to generalise the findings of this study to other settings (Bryman, 2012:406).

### **6.8 Researcher's Personal Growth and Contribution to the Research Field and Discourse**

First of all, I grew on a personal level immensely in this study. My computer skills and my ability to access information from the internet developed vastly. This includes to download information from various sources and scholarly sites. My interaction with my supervisor was another exciting journey, especially as I could draw from his experiences in the teaching profession and his research expertise.

Through this study, focusing on the role of principals in Grade 12 learner performance, I was able to gain a much deeper understanding of the important role of principals as leaders and managers of the instructional programmes in schools. Also, I gained a better perspective about the specific challenges related to no-fee schools. Through my comprehensive review of the literature on these topics, I gained some profound insights on these themes. To this end, my literature study provided a comprehensive contribution to this field of knowledge. In conjunction with my literature review, the findings also elicited new perspectives about the topic, which could be of great help to educationists dealing with this subject.

The study intended to shed light on principals dealing with contextual challenges, including infrastructure challenges, of which some were inherited from apartheid. These include big class sizes, appointment of underqualified principals, under-resourced schools, dilapidated buildings and inadequate ablution facilities for learners. The study also encourages principals to liaise with the district or head office and school stakeholders in dealing with contextual challenges and not to work in isolation to try and improve Grade 12 learner performance. Principals should be at schools with learners in the evenings, weekends and holidays in order to mitigate these challenges.

## **6.9 Summary of Chapter 6**

This chapter discussed the conclusion, limitations and recommendations with an intention to answer its main research question. Former disadvantaged schools or no-fee schools receive more funding than affluent schools from the DBE, but learner performance, especially in gateway subjects, is not that good (Christie *et al.*, 2011:12). This is attributed to the role of principal leadership and management approaches, qualifications and experiences since schools experience social ills and other contextual challenges and some principals are not in a position to deal with them (Sithole, 2017:20). Jones and Rudd (2007:521) pointed out that principals cannot increase learner performance in Grade 12 alone, but need to include employees, peers (in clusters) or even superiors in their decision-making. Instructional leadership integrated with other leadership theories was employed as the theoretical framework on which the discussions of this study were based. For data gathering and analysis, the study employed a qualitative research approach embedded in a multiple-case study and was guided by constructivism as its paradigm. The study will be helpful to the DoE for

reviewing the recruitment of principals for no-fee schools or for providing professional development for principals for them to lead and manage no-fee schools effectively and efficiently. The role of principal behaviour in lower quintiles is empirical for a better tomorrow of the **former** disadvantaged children. This research investigated the impact that the role of principal leadership practices has on Grade 12 learner performance.

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## **Appendix A: Semi-structured interview questions for principals**

- 1. What would you regard as your roles as the principal of a no-fee paying school and how to do you maintain those roles?*
- 2. What is your opinion about South African Standards for Principals document, in assisting principals in their leadership practices?*
- 3. Your school does not ask parents to pay school fees. What challenges of any nature do you encounter?*
- 4. How do you professionally and effectively deal with those challenges that you encounter?*
- 5. What do you do to protect teaching and learning time in your school?*
- 6. Do you perceive your work as a school leader imperative? Please share with us your opinion on this.*
- 7. Do you have a specific leadership style in mind that you think you can adopt? What are the reasons that made you prefer this specific leadership style?*
- 8. Describe how your present leadership style contributes to the performance of your school?*
- 9. Do you have any strategic plan that you use to influence the teachers teaching gateway subjects such as Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Accounting and Economics to execute their duties professionally and effectively? Will you please provide us with a description of such a plan if your answer is yes or If your answer is no, will you please provide some reasons why you do not have such a plan.*
- 10. As a principal, will you be able to adopt any good practices you observed from other schools? Provide one example in order to explain your answer.*

## Appendix B: Focus groups interview schedule with teachers

### SECTION A:

The teacher's code:.....

Code of the school:.....

Date of interview: .....

#### 1. Position of participant

Position	Grade/s	Office use

#### 2. Highest qualification

Qualification	Tick the relevant block/s	University where obtained	Office use
PDE			
JPS			
DE 111			
NEC			
FDE			
ACE			
HDE			
BA HDE			
BA HONS			
BEd			
BEdHons			
BTech			
Bcom/BSc			
Med/MTech			

PhD			
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### 3. Years of experience

Number of years	Tick the relevant block	Office use
1-5		
6-10		
11-15		
16-20		
20-30		
30+		

## SECTION B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### 1. LEADERSHIP STYLES OF PRINCIPALS

#### 1.1 Instructional leadership:

1. How would you describe the principal's approach to the curriculum and instruction of the gateway subjects?
2. How does the principal control, coordinate and supervise the teaching and learning activities in the gateway subjects?

#### 1.2 Contingency leadership:

1. What are the contextual challenges in your school?
2. Describe the ways in which your principal address contextual challenges in your school.

#### 1.3 Transactional leadership:

1. What goals are there to improve the gateway subjects?
2. How do the teachers and principals pursue this goal?

#### 1.4 Shared leadership:

1. In which ways are you as a teacher involved in the leadership of the gateway subjects?

2. How is the SMT involved in the leadership of the gateway subjects?

#### **1.5 Transformational leadership:**

1. How do your principal build and promote collective vision to enhance the performance in the gateway subjects?
2. Describe the ways in which your principal motivates teachers to be committed to the teaching of learners in the gateway subjects?

#### **1.6 Turnaround leadership:**

1. What are the strategies that principals implement to create a turnaround in the performance of learners in the gateway subjects?
2. Are there capacity building and enhancement of accountability in the gateway subjects?

#### **1.7 Postmodern leadership:**

1. Does your principal involve you in his or her decision-making? How does he do it?
2. Does your principal promote a culture of care amongst teachers? Explain please.

#### **1.8 Invitational leadership:**

1. Do you collaborate as teachers and share excellent skills or knowledge of your subjects amongst yourselves, please explain how the principal is making provision of that?
2. Are the grades or staff meetings occur at the appropriate times of the school day?

#### **1.9 Strategic Leadership**

1. Do you think the vision and mission of the school captures the imagination of the community, how so and were the SGB and stakeholders involved when created?
2. Do you have a plans in place that support and reward improved academic achievement in gateway subjects (such as Mathematics, Accounting Economics and Physical Sciences)?

### **1.10 Executive leadership**

1. Is the principal maintaining high visibility throughout the school, if, yes, when and how does he or she do it?
2. How frequently do you revisit and review the school policies with stakeholders?

### **1.11 Cultural leadership**

1. How does the principal embrace the diversity of cultures within the school?
2. Does the principal ensures that there is tolerance for the sexual orientation for every person at, or involved in the school, how?

### **1.12 Organizational leadership**

1. How regularly and efficiently does the principal communicate with the stakeholders of the school?
2. How does your principal display his or her responsibility to maintain safe, secure and disciplined school environment?

## **2. QUESTIONS RELATED TO NO-FEE SCHOOLS**

1. What are the challenges, of any nature, that you encounter in you work as a teacher in a no-fee school?
2. Do you think the principal is addressing the challenges professionally and effectively? Motivate your answer by sharing some examples please.
3. What are the levels of support that you get from your leaners' parents?
4. How do you contribute to the overall pass rate of you school?
5. Do you have any strategic plan that you use to influence the teachers teaching gateway subjects such as Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Accounting and Economics to execute their duties professionally and effectively? Will you please provide us with a description of such plan if your answer is yes? If your answer is no, will you provide some reasons as to why you do not have such a plan.

6. As a teacher, will you be able to adopt any good instructional practices you observed from other no-fee schools? Provide examples in order to explain your answer.

## Appendix C: Checklist for the evaluation of the documents with regard to gateway subjects

Name of school: .....

<b>Evaluation Item</b>	<b>Not available</b>	<b>Poorly done</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
Minutes of meetings					
Analysis of results in gateway subjects					
Attendance registers of teachers					
Attendance registers of learners					
Vision and mission statements					
School improvement plan					
Evidence of updated school policies					
Evidence of staff development					
Notices/brochures to parents					

## Appendix D: Protocol for infrastructure observations

NO	Research sites setting	Not available (0)	Poorly there (1)	Satisfactory (2)	Good (3)	Excellent (4)	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (7)
1	<b>Vision &amp; Mission</b> Is the vision and mission clearly at the foyer?						
2	<b>The fence and gates</b> Is the school having the fence around and lockable gates?						
3	<b>Windows</b> Are windows having window panes?						
4	<b>Lockable doors</b> Are classrooms having lockable doors?						
5	<b>Laboratory</b> Is the school having a well-equipped laboratory?						
6	<b>Library</b> Is the school having well equipped library?						
7	Furniture (chairs and tables)? Is furniture sufficient for the schools' enrollment?						
8	<b>Information and Communication Technology (ICT) devices installed</b> Are Smartboard and KAPP boards still mounted in the class rooms and working?						

## Appendix E: Participant information leaflet and consent form



### RESEARCH STUDY INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

#### DATE

18 May 2019

#### TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

*The role of principals' leadership practices in the variance of learner performances in no-fee secondary schools*

#### PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR / RESEARCHER(S) NAME(S) AND CONTACT NUMBER(S):

*Mojabeng Eva Moleko*

2015190248

0182815760

#### FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT:

*Education*

*Leadership and management*

#### STUDYLEADER(S) NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER:

*Dr Bernadictus Platjies*

*(051) 401-2955 / 0768116066*

#### WHAT IS THE AIM / PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

*The aim of the study is to determine the role of the principals' leadership practices in the variance of learner performance in no-fee secondary schools. The study is conducted towards achieving a master degree in education with the university of the Free State.*

#### WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

*I Mojabeng Eva Moleko, am doing the research towards achieving a master degree in Education (Leadership and Management). I am a student at the University of the Free State. I am working as teacher at Khutlo-Tharo secondary school in Sedibeng West District. The title of my dissertation is: the role of the principals' leadership practices in the variance of learner performance in no-fee schools.*

#### HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

This study has received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher.

Approval number: *Insert approval number*



## WHY ARE YOU INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

*In total at least twenty participants will be purposively selected as participants of the study from four sites (four principals for individual interviews and four focus groups interviews with teachers). You are one of the four permanently employed principals. You will be purposively selected to participate in the study because you are staff member from no-fee secondary schools of Sedibeng West District. The selection is informed by the fact that you as the principal, you are the accounting officer of a school and the key player in managing teaching and learning in a school (Bush, 2007 cited in Khumalo, 2014:42). The researcher obtained the contact numbers of your school or yourself as the principals from the school websites or Department of Basic Education's data base or other colleagues. Teachers from your school are also purposively selected to participate in a focus group interview which consists of four teachers per group. The teachers in the focus group should be teaching one of the following gateway subjects: Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Accounting and Economics, in grade twelve and be permanently employed in the school. Gateway subjects have majority of matric learner enrollments nationally and also if learners fail them at school level, they affects the overall pass rate of the entire school (NCS report, 2016:30). The researcher obtained the teachers' contact numbers from their principals or other colleagues. The intention of the researcher (or rather moderator) to employ the focus group strategy is to explore unexpected and new teachers' perspective and experiences based on the influence of principal's leadership practice and behaviors on their performance and therefore exploratory data will be gathered (Wagner et al., 2014:135). The interview process will only stop only when saturation is reached. Charmaz (2006) refers to saturation as the process where the researcher stop collecting data because fresh data no longer sparks new insight or reveals properties (cited in Creswell, 2014:189).*

## WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

*In total at least twenty participants will be purposively selected as participants of the study from four sites (four principals for individual interviews and four focus groups interviews with teachers). You are permanently employed by Department of Education (DBE) as the principal, and you are the accounting officer of a school and the key player in managing teaching and learning in a school (Bush, 2007 cited in Khumalo, 2014:42). The researcher obtained the contact numbers of your school or yourself as the principals from the school websites or Department of Basic Education's data base or other colleagues. Four of your teachers will also be purposively selected to participate in a focus group interviews which consists of four teachers per group. The teachers in the focus group should be teaching one of the following gateway subjects: Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Accounting and Economics, in grade twelve and be permanently employed in the school. Gateway subjects have majority of matric learner enrollments nationally and also if learners fail them at school level, they affects the overall pass rate of the entire school (NCS report, 2016:30). The researcher will obtain the teachers' contact numbers from their principals or other colleagues. The intention of the researcher (or rather moderator) to employ the focus group strategy is to explore unexpected and new teachers' perspective and experiences based on the influence of principal's leadership practice and behaviors on their performance and therefore exploratory data will be gathered (Wagner et al., 2014:135). Document analysis is the other technique employed in this qualitative research to gather data and will serve as receptacles of evidence for claims (Prior, 2003 cited in Wagner et al., 2012:141).*

#### CAN THE PARTICIPANT WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

*The participation in this study is voluntary and there is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation and also you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time or recall your consent to participate in the research project at any time or at any point of the study without giving a reason but the information given up to that point of termination of interviews may still be used in the study. Statement that participation is voluntary and that there is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation. Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. [Do not mislead your potential participants by stating that they can withdraw from a research project at any time if the project involves the submission of non-identifiable material such as questionnaires. Explain clearly to them that it will not be possible to withdraw once they have submitted the questionnaire.]*

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

*The participation in this study is voluntary and non-remunerable and there is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation and also you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time or recall your consent to participate in the research project at any time or at any point of the study without giving a reason but the information given up to that point of termination of interviews may still be used in the study. The researcher will share the final research report with the participants. Your participation in the study will be kept confidential, but information about you will be given to the study sponsor if your permission is granted.*

#### WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

*The setting of appointments for focus groups could be a challenge because the researcher should bring a group of people under the same roof, but the researcher will be flexible and will have to reschedule should the need arise. Some participants might expect some stipend to participate in the researcher but the study is voluntary and non-remunerable, the researcher will outline other benefits of the study, such as receiving the final research report.*

#### WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

*The researcher will protect the privacy of all participant. No Participants real names or the names of the school will not be recorded, anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you. Your answers will be given a fictitious code number or an alias or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. The researcher is the one who will have access to the data including transcriber or external coder and these individuals will maintain confidentiality (e.g. by signing a confidentiality agreement). Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study,*

unless you give permission for other people to see the records. Also based on agreement, your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, e.g. research report, journal articles, conference presentation, etc. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report. In focus group participants sometimes feel uncomfortable to participate because of fear of the intimidation by the school principals, the researcher will emphasize anonymity and confidentiality and also give detailed explanation of the significance of the study. A focus group or rather group interviewing is a group of people, informally interviewed together in a discussion setting. (Neuman, 2014:472). Please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity, when using a focus group as a data collection method. While every effort will be made by the researcher to ensure that you will not be connected to the information that you share during the focus group, I cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will treat information confidentially. I shall, however, encourage all participants to do so. For this reason, I advise you not to disclose personally sensitive information in the focus group.

#### HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further research ethics review and approval if applicable and not for other researchers who might misappropriate the data. The researcher will discard the data personally and make certain that it does not fall into wrong hands. The researcher will not disclose the information that infringes the rights of others or that should have been kept concealed in order to respect confidentiality of identity of participants.

#### WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

The participation in this study will not be remunerable. You are voluntarily participating and you are entitled to end your involvement or recall your consent to participate at any time you wish. In terms of financial and time constraints, the researcher will prioritize, set flexible appointments which will favor most participants and the researcher will do the travelling to the participants' sites. To avoid exploitation of participants, after the interviews, the researcher will provide bottled water to the participants as a small reward for participating and just to keep participants hydrated after the discussion. The researcher will also surely participants sharing the final research report.

#### HOW WILL THE PARTICIPANT BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS / RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Ms Mojabeng Eva Moleko on +27812815760 or fax (016) 593-1987 or email [eva.moleko@gmail.com](mailto:eva.moleko@gmail.com). The findings are accessible for the next five years. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Ms Mojabeng Eva Moleko on +27812815760 or fax (016) 593-1987 or email [eva.moleko@gmail.com](mailto:eva.moleko@gmail.com). Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr. Bernadictus Plaatjies on (051) 401-2955 or [PlaatjiesBO@ufs.ac.za](mailto:PlaatjiesBO@ufs.ac.za) or +27768116066. The researcher will not engage in duplicate or redundant publication in which other publish papers that present exactly the same data (Creswell, 2014:101).

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I agree to the recording of the *individual/focus group interviews as data collection method*.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): Mojabeng Eva Moleko

Signature of Researcher:  Date: 02 April 2019

## Appendix F: Ethical Clearance from the UFS



### GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

28-Jun-2019

Dear Ms Moleko, Mojabeng ME

#### Application Approved

Research Project Title:

**The role of principals' leadership practices in the variance of learner performances in no-fee secondary schools.**

Ethical Clearance number:

**UFS-HSD2018/1263/1263**

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

**Prof Derek Litthauer**

**Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee**

Digitally signed  
by Derek

Litthauer

Date: 2019.06.30

21:28:52 +02'00'

205 Nelson Mandela Drive/Ryalaan  
Park West/Parkwes  
Bloemfontein 9301  
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[www.ufs.ac.za](http://www.ufs.ac.za)



## Appendix G: Permission to conduct research from Gauteng Department of Education



**GAUTENG PROVINCE**

Department: Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

### GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	02 April 2019
Validity of Research Approval:	04 February 2019 – 30 September 2019 2018/447
Name of Researcher:	Moleko M. E
Address of Researcher:	No.6 Marisol Senator Marks Avenue Vereeniging 1939
Telephone Number:	016 422 8190 / 081 281 5760
Email address:	eva.moleko@gmail.com
Research Topic:	The role of the principal's leadership practice in the variance of learner performance in no- fee secondary schools
Type of qualification	Masters
Number and type of schools:	Four Secondary Schools
District/s/HO	Sedibeng West

**Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research**

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the

03/04/2019 1  
*Making education a societal priority*

**Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management**

7<sup>th</sup> Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.
3. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
4. A letter / document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.
5. The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.
6. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.
7. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.
8. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.
9. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.
10. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
11. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.
12. On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.
13. The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.
14. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards



Mr Gumani Mukatuni  
Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 03/04/2019

Making education a societal priority

2

**Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management**

7<sup>th</sup> Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

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## Appendix H: Permission to conduct research from the Sedibeng West District Office



**GAUTENG PROVINCE**  
EDUCATION  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Enquiries: Mrs. M.A Mosia  
Sub-Directorate: ISSP- Policy and Planning  
Tel: (016) 594 9281  
Cell: 066 487 2663  
Ref: ISSP

TO : M.E MOLEKO  
CC : PRINCIPALS OF SELECTED SCHOOLS  
DATE : 05 APRIL 2019  
RE : PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN FOUR  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SW DISTRICT


Dear Sir / Madam

The office of the District Director acknowledges receipt of your request to conduct research in four Secondary schools in SW District.

Therefore the permission is hereby granted for you to go to Secondary schools of your choice to conduct your research on the role of the principal's leadership practice in the variance of learner performance in no fee paying Secondary Schools.

However note that schools must be consulted prior for proper arrangements to avoid disruptions in schools.

Regards,

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mr B.V Theta  
District Director  
Date: 10/04/2019

Office of the District Director: Sedibeng West  
6 Samuel Street, Zone 18, Sebokeng | Private Bag X067, Vanderbijlpark, 1900  
Tel: 016 594 9120 | Fax: 016 594 9399  
Website: [www.education.gpg.gov.za](http://www.education.gpg.gov.za)

## Appendix I: Change of title



### GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

06-Aug-2020

Dear Ms Moleko, Mojabeng ME

#### Continuation Report Approved

Research Project Title:

Exploring the role of principal leadership in grade 12 learner performance

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2018/1263/1263

We are pleased to inform you that the application to extend your 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**

*Adri du Plessis*

Adri du  
Plessis  
2020.08.06  
15:10:38  
+02'00'

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## Appendix J: Turnitin report

### Turnitin Originality Report

Exploring the role of principal leadership in grade 12 learner performance  
Moleko

by Mojabeng  turnitin

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## Appendix K: Editor's letter



17 Fallopius Street, Bloemfontein

+(27) 076 081 0730

info@rephraseit.co.za



06 January 2021

Student:           Mojabeng Eva Moleko  
Student no.:       2015190248

I declare that I edited the master's dissertation titled, *Exploring the role of principal leadership in Grade 12 learner performance*

During the editing process, I looked for and corrected spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence and paragraph errors. Where I noticed inconsistencies or unclarity in the text, I made comments to draw the author's attention to the inconsistency or unclarity. I also made suggestions where changes could be made. I double-checked the references in-text and in the reference list to make sure that they are consistent throughout. Where sources or source information were missing, I indicated such to the author so that she could locate and add the missing information.

Yours sincerely

Johannes Pieter Odendaal

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Odendaal".