DISTRICT LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN ZIMBABWE

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DECLARATION

I, Michael Muswere, declare that the research thesis that I herewith submit for the degree qualification, PhD in Education at the University of the Free State, is my independent work and that I have not previously submitted it for a qualification at another institution of higher education.

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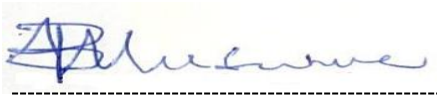

M MUSWERE 31 August 2021

DEDICATION

My loving wife, Edinah Muswere, you have been my invaluable source of inspiration. I have cherished your endurance, understanding, comfort and love.

My children, Helen Anna, Edwin Tatenda and Alex Michael, you are my pillars of strength.

My son-in-law, Pardon Muputa, I progressed with your encouragement.

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SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Research over the past two decades has firmly established the critical relevance of the district office of education in providing instructional leadership support to schools. Various policy initiatives in Africa (Zimbabwe included) called on district central offices to shift their work practices from the limited or managerial functions of the past to the direct support of student teaching and learning. In view of this implied performance gap between the district office structures and their practices, I developed an interest in investigating whether the districts actually provided instructional leadership support to schools.

This study closely examined Zimbabwean district office leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership. The study answered the research question: What are the district leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership in Zimbabwe? Guiding the study was the instructional leadership conceptual framework that outlined and described what instructional leaders (the district level leaders for the purposes of this study) were expected to do in order to effectively support teaching and learning in schools. A qualitative research methodology was used, with two case studies focusing on 22 officers drawn from two district offices in the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe constituting the research design. The individual interview protocol was used to collect data from the district office leadership while documents provided supportive data. The collected data were organised, transcribed, analysed and finally collapsed into themes and categories.

Five key findings were obtained. First, the study showed that the district instructional and support structures were aligned to support instructional leadership although there was work overload in two departments - Quality Control and Administration, Finance and Human Resources. Second, the study established four main district instructional leadership practices: the recruitment, selection, and appointment of teachers, heads and deputy heads; organising need-driven circuit-level and district-level professional development; carrying out effective supervision of schools; and spearheading school development efforts. The engagement of stakeholders and partners to foster transparency and teamwork in the district operations was the third key finding. The challenges that affected structure constituted the fourth key finding, with the major

obstacles being understaffing in two of the district office departments and non-compliance with the national Non-Formal Education policy that compromised effective school supervision. The fifth key finding focused on practice challenges. These included: inadequate support for learners with disabilities; parents' low response to pay school fees and levies; indiscipline among teachers and heads; and work inconsistency as a result of inadequate resources and materials to support the district office operations.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide a guiding framework for the provision of more effective instructional leadership support to schools by the district office.

Keywords: Structures, practices, instructional leadership, district office, heads

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

LIST OF ACRONYMS

Acronym	What it stands for
ADA	Assistant District Accountant
AGM	Annual General Meeting
AIO	Area Instructional Officer
“A” Level	Advanced Level
BEAM	Basic Education Assistance Module
BSPZ	Better Schools Programme of Zimbabwe
CBD	Central Business District
CDU	Curriculum Development Unit
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DPED	Deputy Provincial Education Director
DSI	District Schools Inspector
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ERI	Early Reading Initiative
HO	Head Office
HOD	Head of Department
ICDL	International Computer Driving Licence
ICT	Information Communication Technology
MoPSE	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
NAPH	National Association of Primary Heads
NASH	National Association of Secondary Heads
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
“O” Level	Ordinary Level
PED	Provincial Education Director
PIMRS	Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale
PLAP	Performance Lag Address Programme
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PSC	Public Service Commission
PTCEC	Part-time and Continuing Education Classes
SDC	School Development Committee
SI	Schools Inspector
SIG	School Improvement Grant
SSB	Salary Services Bureau
TIC	Teacher in Charge
TPS	Teacher Performance Standards
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Education Fund
ZABEC	Zimbabwe Adult Basic Education Course

ZESA	Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority
ZIMSEC	Zimbabwe School Examinations Council

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

A great deal of research over the past two decades has firmly established that "districts matter" as they provide invaluable support to school development and learner achievement. (Darfler & Riggan, 2013; Fink & Riggan, 2013; Mitgang, 2013; Park, 2019). Recent evidence, furthermore, suggests that districts are an increasingly important phenomenon in the instructional supervision and support of schools (Lewis, Rice & Rice, 2011; Honig & Rainey, 2019; Honig & Rainey, 2020; Sumintono, Hariri, Nugroho, Izzati & Sriyanto, 2019), as opposed to leaving schools on their own to serve students. Traditionally, districts have subscribed to limited or managerial functions and in response, various policy initiatives have called on district central offices to shift from such work practices, and replace them with full-scale instructional leadership support for all their schools (Sumintono *et al.,* 2019; Enfield & Spicciati, 2014). Whether the district leaders provide focused instructional leadership support for improved teacher practices and learner achievement remains questionable.

In many countries in Africa (Tinab, 2014), district offices are fast playing a prominent role in the instructional supervision and support of primary and secondary schools within their jurisdiction. In South Africa, for example, the district offices have the mandate of ensuring that central government-initiated policies are implemented through planned school development and training interventions (Boateng, 2014). The key function of the district officers in South Africa is to work closely with learning institutions to increase opportunities for learners to be enrolled and retained in professionally managed and performing schools (Van Der Voort & Wood, 2016). While these studies suggest that districts address some of the challenges that schools encounter in their efforts to provide quality education to learners, little is known about district leaders' perspectives on their instructional leadership structures and practices. In addition, not much research has been carried out, from the perspective of district leaders, about the effectiveness of district instructional leadership support to schools. This study seeks to add insights into the relevance of the district as an intervention for school improvement in Zimbabwe.

Although some studies show that district offices and schools plan and work collaboratively (Prew & Quaigrain, 2010; Walter, 2018), such studies have not dealt with what the district office leaders believe they do as they provide instructional leadership support for improved teaching and learning in schools. Indeed, Ovando and Huckestein (2003: 2) indicate that little research has tried to "document the daily work of district level supervisors" and that "their work schedules reflect fragmented activities (coupled with) freedom in initiating supervisory tasks". It is against this background that I became interested in examining the district office in Zimbabwe more closely to understand the district leaders' perspectives on their structures and practices of instructional leadership.

Goldring, Jason, Grissom, Rubin, Rogers, Vanderbilt, and Clark (2018) and Spillane (1999) hold the view that the district office should implement changes that are rooted in standards that make each school responsible for the quality of their teaching and learning. Although this is a signal that "districts matter" when it comes to instructional improvement in schools (Chenoworth, 2015; Spillane, 1998), it is important for the district office to be equipped with knowledgeable and skilled officers (Travers, 2018; Spillane, 1999). Indeed, districts play a pivotal role in influencing "key resources essential to turnaround … school leadership, instructional quality, personnel policies, budget, assessment, and curriculum", (Hitt, Robinson & Player, 2018: 4).

It is an acceptable opinion that school and district establishment and enforcement of specific routines, for example, may be a means of improving implementation fidelity of a specific reform (Van Lare & Brazer, 2013). If Trujillo's (2013) findings are anything to go by, then standards-aligned curricula, coherent organisational structures, strong instructional leadership, frequent monitoring, evaluation and focused professional learning are a platform for effective teaching and learning.

In the same vein, Burch and Spillane (2004) and Bloom and Wilson (2016) propose that the staff at the district should be knowledgeable about teaching and learning to boost heads and teachers' confidence in their leadership. Following revelations of the top-bottom, control-centred district office-school interactions, coupled with district offices' relatively limited capacity to provide assistance to schools, Honig (2008) and Bloom and Wilson (2016) — on the other hand — suggest that there should be more research to establish what the district office structures actually do every day that might

support teaching and learning improvements. This is what this study set out to investigate: how the district leaders understand their structures and practices, and how effective they believe these are as school improvement innovations.

1.2 Background

This study sought to examine how the leadership structures, at the district office in Zimbabwe, and practices relate to the instructional guidance and support that is provided to schools. This study is premised on Fullan's (2002: 2) assertion "that leaders who have deeper and more lasting impact provide more comprehensive leadership [than those who focus] just on higher standards", and that "… sustained improvement of schools is not possible unless the whole system is moving forward". These theoretical observations seem to point to practical and contextual gaps in the focus of the support that the district office has been designed to provide to schools over the years. Thus, this study examined the district office leaders' perceptions on whether the district structures in Zimbabwe, a developing country, had a coherent set of practices designed to support schools.

Although the public, which is in contact with principals and teachers, believes that teaching and learning are the exclusive responsibility of schools, the pivotal support that district leaders provide schools to improve instruction and the learners' welfare remains unnoticed (Leithwood, 2013). In North America, for example, districts were established to cater for the administration of the increasing student population, but learner achievement was not on their agenda. However, with the passage of time, Canadian districts evolved as their routine included the provision of assistance to ministries and departments of education in administering provincial policies, while their US counterparts provided provincial curriculum guidelines to schools as a link between the districts and the learners (Leithwood, 2013). To that end, in three urban districts of the United States, Atlanta, New York and Oakland, though district central offices were initially born out of the need to basically regulate and link schools with higher offices that controlled education nationwide (Honig, 2012), these functions excluded support for teaching and learning, let alone considerations for heads' instructional leadership.

However, with the adoption of learner accountability policies, districts in Canada and the US gradually became directly responsible for guiding, stimulating and accounting

for improving schools (Honig, 2012; Shakman, Bailey & Breslow, 2017). Today, education policies and private players demand districts to directly help all schools to continuously improve the quality of teaching and learning (Honig & Copland, 2008; Park, Hironaka, Carver & Nordstrum 2013; Garland, Layland & Corbett, 2018). The pivotal observation of these researchers is the shift of the district office's core business from a purely administrative one to one that directly supports continuous school improvement through instructional leadership. This resonates with my interest to study the district leaders' instructional leadership support to schools in Zimbabwe.

While the South African district education offices manage and administer schools, they also strategically link the schools with the provinces thereby enforcing the translation of central policy into strategies (Plowright & Plowright, 2011; Department of Basic Education, 2019). In addition, the district offices, with circuit office support, and through provincial plans, work closely with school principals and teachers for the purposes of improving learners' access to and retention in education, while professionally managing and supporting schools for excellent teaching and learning outcomes. "Supporting principals appropriately to facilitate effective teaching and learning in classrooms is a district office's role," confirms Sumintono *et al.* (2019: 592). I deduce that although district office leaders enforce the national education policy, they closely engage themselves with heads and teachers to support them for improved teaching and learning in schools.

In Zimbabwe, education officers at the national, provincial and district levels have functions that are delegated and devolved to them by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Quarshie & Oyedele, 2011). In this vein, the district office is expected to regularly engage schools to monitor financial management and administration, carry out quality assurance supervisory practices, and help schools in managing other issues related to teaching and learning from time to time (Zimbabwe Public Expenditure Review, 2017). This implies that district officers give complementary guidance to the school head whose core function is to supervise instruction in the school (Mapolisa & Tshabalala, 2013). The district office in Zimbabwe is, therefore, believed to be the provider of complementary support in the form of guidance to schools, giving them the task of instructional leadership support. Very little research has been conducted on the instructional leadership role of the district education office in Zimbabwe, a gap which my study is set to fill as it examines those

delegated and devolved functions, and the complementary guidance that the structures at the district office carry out in supporting school improvement.

It is against the background of having worked within seemingly inflexible district structures that were not very welcoming to external contributions by the beneficiaries of the guidance they provided that I began to wonder about the relationship between structure(s) and function(s) for instructional leadership at the district office level. Specifically, I was interested in understanding how the district is structured to provide effective instructional leadership to primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe and what practices are in place to pursue effective instructional leadership support to schools. Therefore, the study identified the perceived district office structures and practices for instructional leadership and established whether and how they were believed to be aligned with specific functions for instructional leadership.

1.3 Statement of the problem

In their recent research, Olivier and Huffman (2016) establish that recently, the district office has been subjected to increasing accountability for the quality of teaching and learning in the schools located in its district. The researchers further suggest that there is the need for an unwavering and continuous district office/school interaction that, in turn, gives rise to a supportive environment that is conducive to improving the learner. Having taken note of the implied performance gap between the district office structures, on the one hand, and their practices on the other, I developed an interest in exploring possible ways of understanding and helping to close that gap. This is why my study attempts to find out, through the district leaders' perspectives, the extent to which the district structures provide instructional leadership support to schools. Bearing in mind Olivier and Huffman's (2016) findings on the need for the district office leaders' requirement to be knowledgeable and competent in establishing concrete structures and practices, I sought to find out exactly whether the district office structures in Zimbabwe provide instructional leadership support to schools.

Having noted, from my personal interaction with various stakeholders such as learners' parents, and the local political and traditional leaders, the district office's relatively weak capacity for school-by-school support, I set out to understand whether the district office is suitably structured to provide effective instructional leadership to

primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe and what practices are in place to pursue effective instructional leadership support to schools. Since every district in Zimbabwe has a district office that is responsible for monitoring teaching and learning in its primary and secondary schools, the study further examined the extent to which the district office actually supported schools –to gain more insights into the significance of the district office. It has previously been shown that for effectiveness, district leaders employ an indirect but strong grip on school heads to enhance improved student performance (Lonyian & Kuranchie, 2018; Petrovic & Vracar, 2019). Further evidence (Farmer, 2017) suggests that the district office's mediatory role in professionally developing heads and teachers, usually through district head supervisors, thrives on full cognisance of the teaching and learning change process and commitment to its implementation.

With this focus, the present research examined the perspectives of district leaders on instructional leadership structures and practices at the district office level in Zimbabwe. Although extensive research has been carried out on the district office, there is not much research on district leaders' perspectives on instructional leadership structures and functions at the district level, especially in the context of a developing country like Zimbabwe.

1.4 Research questions

The study intended to examine the question: What are the district leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership in Zimbabwe? To answer the main research question, the following sub-questions were proposed:

1. What do the district leaders understand about the structures at the district level to support effective instructional leadership in the primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe?

2. What are the perspectives of the district leaders on the instructional leadership practices that are enacted by the districts in support of instructional improvement in the schools?

3. How effective are the instructional leadership practices enacted by the districts in support of instructional improvement in the schools?

4. How can the districts improve the effectiveness of their instructional leadership support to schools?

1.5 Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of the research was to develop, through the district leaders' perspectives, a better understanding of the relationship between structures and practices of instructional leadership at the district office in Zimbabwe.

The specific objectives the study addressed were to:

a) Identify how district leaders perceive the structures that exist at the district level to support effective instructional leadership in the primary and secondary schools;

b) Document the perceptions on the instructional leadership practices that are enacted by the districts in support of instructional improvement in the schools;

c) Examine the effectiveness of the instructional leadership practices enacted by the districts in support of instructional improvement in the schools; and

d) Suggest how the districts can improve the effectiveness of their instructional leadership support to schools in Zimbabwe.

1.6 Significance

This study provided an important opportunity for me to draw on my experiences, as a former Education Officer in one of the district offices in Zimbabwe, of having been directly involved in the supervision of teachers and schools for more than five years. In the course of my duties, I noticed, for instance, that the district office often prescribed to teachers such practices as teaching methodologies during school visits or at teacher professional development seminars and workshops. It was interesting to note that in many of these sessions, teachers were often accorded very little space to share their personal and practical experiences, especially in cases where such experiences might have been considered different from the prescribed ways of doing things. Printy (2010) and Bellamy, Crockett, and Nordengren (2014) confirm that in some cases, while district leaders try to help heads improve the quality of instruction in their teachers, it is disturbing to observe that more often than not, the district leaders themselves are ignorant of the principals' exact needs.

This study aims to contribute to this growing area of research by exploring the perceived relationships between the district structures and functions for instructional leadership during engagement in practices that relate to instructional leadership support to schools. Although research on educational leadership has identified district central offices as the key providers of instructional leadership support to principals, little has been said about what district and how central office staff do when they render such support (Honig, 2012; Williams, 2020). The African context in general, and the Zimbabwean environment in particular, have not been spared.

The conceptual framework of instructional leadership is likely to offer some guidance to the district leaders (and policymakers) as they take part in critical multi-level reform-related decision-making (Printy, 2010; Woulfin, 2018). Thus premised, the study will assist practitioners to understand further how the district office is structured to enact practices that provide effective instructional leadership support to schools in Zimbabwe.

With regards to policymakers, the study hopes to make suggestions for improving the district support to schools. It is worthwhile to note that while the district office provides support services that enhance the development of education and promote quality teaching and learning, questions have been raised in quite a number of district offices about their shortcomings in positively impacting schools accordingly (Tinab, 2014; Woulfin, 2018).

1.7 Conceptual framework

Research work on educational leadership and management, from as early as the 1960s, was fertile ground for the evolution of instructional leadership, a conceptual framework that highlighted its critical contribution to making people understand how educational leaders affect learners (Hallinger, 2011; Shaked, 2020).

In this study, instructional leadership was used as the conceptual framework. The term instructional leadership has come to be used to refer to several activities such as effective school leadership and sound teaching practices that are intended to impact on teaching and learning (Bouffard, 2019; Saphier & Durkin, 2011; Wyatt, 2017). Instructional leadership was critical for this study because it outlines and describes

what instructional leaders (the district level leaders in Zimbabwe for the purposes of this study) are expected to do to effectively support teaching and learning.

Research on instructional leadership by such scholars as Hallinger (2011), Johnston, Kaufman, Thompson, (2016), Louis (2015), and Rew (2013) for example, points to the conclusion that instructional leadership practices have a significant, albeit, indirect influence on student performance. In his study, Hallinger (2011: 275) observes that interest in instructional leadership among researchers and education practitioners has remained strong over the last thirty years, with “instructional leadership” and “leadership for learning” being “widely accepted by policymakers and practitioners as essential elements of management practice in schools”. In the same vein, Rew (2013) suggests that instructional leadership as a practice, positively, significantly, and indirectly affects learners, although a direct relation, when unearthed, cannot be disregarded. Likewise, Krug (1992) and Brolund (2016) place the effective instructional leader’s focus on the deliberate “acquisition” of knowledge, skills and experience that enhance the strategic direction of teachers and learners to productive outcomes. The researcher further stresses the relevance of context when instructional leaders direct the school and stakeholders to the desired outcomes. In the same way, Abele, Iver and Farley (2003: 1) show that the major district office instructional leadership roles that relate to instruction and learner achievement improvement include “decision-making about curriculum and instruction; supporting good instructional practice; and linking evaluation research to district policymaking”.

Prominent researchers, (Jaquith, Aiello, & Khachatryan, 2015; Leithwood, 2013) observe that district instructional leadership support is pivotal to improve schools with regards to teaching and learning, with district leaders carefully catering for the varying student, teacher, and principal learning needs through coordinated and interlinked activities of the district personnel whose focus is improving teaching and learning district-wide. To further concretise the idea of instructional leadership and its influence “on teaching and learning”, Hallinger used “the instructional leadership” framework to develop the “Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS)” which proposes “three” important “dimensions in the” principal’s “leadership role”: viz. Defining “the School’s Mission; Managing the Instructional” Programme; “and Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate” (Hallinger, 2011: 276). In the

framework, ten instructional leadership functions delineate the three dimensions and rating scale (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Shaked, 2020).

The instructional leadership framework, as articulated in the PIMRS, was useful for the study because it laid bare the major functions that are supposed to enhance the management and administration of schools (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Brolund, 2016). The framework was, therefore, critical for examining whether and how the practices of the district office aligned with these major functions of instructional leadership for the principals and schools that receive support from the district. Unlike other studies of instructional leadership that tend to focus on the schools, it was the intention of this study to explore the importance of the district level instructional leadership and how it added value to the programme of curriculum improvement in the schools, if at all (Klar, 2012; Waters & Marzano, 2006). I take note of Heck and Hallinger's (2009) and Brolund's (2016) assertion that leaders at various levels of the education system drive change in schools, particularly leaders who capacitate and develop others. However, this data must be interpreted with caution. According to Spillane, Diamond and Jita (2003: 534), for most of the " … teachers, much of the learning essential for [the] successful implementation of recent instructional reforms [is] initiated and supported at the school level"; it may be impossible for the district office personnel, saddled with resource limitations "and distance from classrooms" to effectively manage such "teacher learning on their own".

The study, therefore, sought to examine the district's role in providing instructional leadership more closely by investigating how the district structures and practices aligned to provide the required instructional guidance and support to schools. In other words, the study also attempted to investigate how the district office support (seen through the district office structures and practices of instructional leadership) operates to maintain the district office's focus on instruction in schools (Waters & Marzano, 2006; Hassan, Ahmad & Boon, 2019).

This research extends our knowledge of how districts are structured and how they function to provide instructional leadership to the schools. Chapter 2 of the thesis presents a more detailed discussion of the conceptual framework.

1.8 Research methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research methodology that employed the interpretive paradigm to investigate the structures and practices of instructional leadership at the district office. Specifically, the collective case study research design was used to investigate two district offices leading to a better understanding of how instructional leadership was perceived and enacted (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Creswell, 2012).

The collective case study focused on Gutu and Zaka districts in the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe. The target population for this study, therefore, were the leaders at these two district offices. I decided to use the operational construct purposive sampling technique to access that particular subset of district officers that fit the particular profile (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). Furthermore, operational construct purposive sampling ensured that the sampled participants were the most suitable for answering the research questions. Eleven district officers per district (bringing the total to 22 district officers) were purposively selected for the study based on their involvement in instructional leadership activities and their knowledge to provide deep descriptions of the phenomenon. This aligns with Creswell (2012) when he asserts that a qualitative study is characterised by the collection of data, in words, to generate participants' opinions on issues under investigation. Instructional leadership structures and practices at the district office, therefore, constituted the central phenomenon requiring exploration and understanding (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Creswell, 2012).

Hossain (2011) states that to increase credibility and trustworthiness, qualitative researchers often engage more than one strategy of data collection. Taking this into consideration, the researcher adopted the unstructured individual interviews and documents analyses. The unstructured individual interviews were mainly used to collect data from the 22 district office leaders to gain deep insights on the structure and function of district offices in providing instructional leadership to schools under their jurisdiction (Creswell, 2012; Cohen *et al.,* 2007). The interview questions were open ended allowing interviewees to give as much detail as possible (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). In addition, the unstructured individual interview protocol provided participants a greater opportunity for dialogue, and allowed the interviewer to directly interact with the participants as the interviews progressed (Fairbrother, 2007: 43).

Open-ended interviews allowed the interviewer and participants room for free expression, the interviewer could probe participants for full responses to the general, open-ended questions while recording the answers (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Creswell, 2012).

Also providing data were selected documents such as organisational charts, outlines of responsibilities and other policy and regulatory documents on structures and functions for instructional support and guidance to schools. After data collection, the researcher organised, transcribed, analysed and finally, collapsed the collected data into themes and categories to make sense of the data (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Creswell, 2012). Chapter 3 of the thesis presents a more detailed discussion of the research methodology.

1.9 Delimitations

The study focused on district office leaders in two districts in Zimbabwe. Eleven district officers were purposively sampled from each of the two district offices since they were engaged in providing instructional leadership support to all primary and secondary schools in the districts. Therefore, the total study sample was 22 district officers.

The qualitative collective case study approach allowed the researcher to provide an in-depth analysis of the district officers in their work place – the district offices. The analysis of the interview generated data provided the platform from which I explored, explained, compared and contrasted the perspectives of the district leaders regarding the structures and practices of instructional leadership. Furthermore, the document analyses assisted me to explain how district leaders made sense of instructional leadership as the leaders worked with schools.

1.10 Limitations

Although document analysis appears to be a marginalised data collection strategy (Ahmed, 2010), I managed to collect the key documents whose analyses supported my data from the interviews. This resonates with the observation that documents not only provide context but are also valuable supplement to what is generated from interviews (Bowen, 2009).

Another potential problem is that I, as the principal data collection instrument, might transfer my personal biases to the data collection and analysis processes and the resultant findings. Creswell (2014) asserts that factors such as the researcher's personal history, culture, and social class render qualitative research subjective since problem identification, investigation, analysis and interpretation are affected. To ensure that both the research instruments and the research findings remained credible and reliable respectively, I prolonged my stay in the field to check on suspicious data, and also triangulated the data from the interviews and the documents.

Although qualitative research is often criticised as devoid of statistical evidence (Ahmed, 2010), to increase the trustworthiness of my study, I provided detailed descriptions of issues. That closely aligned with qualitative researchers' engagement with rich, thick descriptions in their research findings as if to transport the reader to the actual setting (Creswell, 2014).

1.11 Definition of key terms

The key terms used in this study are "Structures", "practices", "instructional leadership", "district office" and "heads".

Structures

In this study, the term is understood to refer to the district office sub-constructs that organise leaders for interaction with schools in order to improve the quality of instruction in the schools (Honig, 2008; Gomendio, 2017).

Practices

The broad use of the term is sometimes equated with those activities that the leadership engages in to influence organisational and instructional improvement (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Gomendio, 2017).

Instructional leadership

Hallinger (2001), and Petrovic and Vracar (2019) consider "instructional leadership" to be a chain of behaviours designed to affect teaching and learning in the classroom, while Hallinger (2005) further conceptualises instructional leadership as the effective

leadership response to school reforms. In addition, Quinn (2002: 447-448) is convinced that the goal of instructional leadership is to “influence others” to link requisite “instructional practices with their best knowledge of subject matter, [and] provide teachers with resources and incentives to keep their focus on students”.

District office

Throughout this thesis, the term is used to refer to what Tinab (2014: 326) considers as the central office, in a district, that is “mandated by Departments of Education … to assist teachers in providing high quality instruction to public school students (through) effective supervision” to improve teaching and learning. Abele, Iver and Farley (2003: 2) give a further definition, describing the district office as the result of a combination of “…historical development [that] lies within a complex political environment influenced by numerous external forces”.

Head

While Day and Sammonds (2016) and Mufford (2003) define the head as the school leader, this study looks at that school head as one that may be interchangeably considered as a school principal. This is mainly the result of the use of the term “head” in the Zimbabwean school context instead of “principal” that is prevalent in, for example, some of the European, American and Australian school contexts. Both terms, however, are taken in this study to refer to an individual who is officially in charge of a learning institution.

1.12 Outline of the chapters

The overall structure of the study takes the form of five chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction and background to the study

The chapter includes the introduction, background, statement of the problem, research questions, aim and objectives, significance, conceptual framework, research methodology, delimitations and limitations, definition of key terms, ethical considerations and outline of the chapters.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter Two begins by laying out the literature related to the instructional leadership framework (comprising the three dimensions and their respective ten instructional leadership functions) and how this conceptual framework can guide the district level leadership in adding value to the education system. The chapter then reviews literature on the district level leadership and the nature of their support to enhance effective teaching and learning. Finally, the chapter presents a synopsis of the documents that were collected from the interview participants.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

The third chapter is concerned with the methodology used for this study. It presents the key issues of qualitative research that included the research paradigm and methodology, the research design, sampling procedure, data collection, data analysis, the study's trustworthiness and credibility and ethical considerations of the study in addition to the limitations and a summary of the chapter.

Chapter 4: Data presentation, analysis and discussion

The fourth chapter presents the findings of the research, in detail, and analyses of the collected data. It also discusses the detailed descriptions of the research findings. The study findings, organised according to the research objectives, are presented in tables and figures.

Chapter 5: Summary, conclusions and recommendations

Finally, the last chapter wraps up the study. The chapter first summarises the study findings and then presents conclusions that were drawn from the findings in relation to the existing literature. The chapter also outlines the limitations of the study, including the implications of the study on literature. Recommendations for instructional leadership practice and policy are also tabled.

1.13 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the introduction and the background to the study on the district leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership in

Zimbabwe. The chapter presented and described the conceptual framework of instructional leadership that was used, the identified gap in the literature and the methodology that was used. The delimitation helped clarify the research focus, while the limitations showed how the researcher attempted to minimise threats to the study's credibility and trustworthiness. The definitions of key terms provided their contextual meaning in the study, and finally, the outline of the chapters clarified the structure of the thesis. The next chapter presents a review of related literature on structures and practices of instructional leadership at the district office.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews a variety of literature that is relevant to this study. I begin by reflecting on instructional leadership as the conceptual framework underpinning and guiding my research study in examining perspectives of district leaders on the structures and practices of instructional leadership at the district offices. The instructional leadership framework should, therefore, help to provide insights into the district leaders' understanding of the structures that exist at the district level, and their instructional leadership support to the primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe.

Thereafter, I review literature that critically shapes and directs my research study through: (a) a brief history of the district office; (b) the district leaders' perspectives on the instructional leadership structures; (c) the district leaders' perspectives on their instructional leadership practices; and (d) the relationship between the perceived district office instructional leadership structures and practices.

2.2 Instructional leadership as the conceptual framework

Scholarly discourse on instructional leadership began as early as the 1950s and 1960s in the United States following inquiry into how heads play a part in teaching and learning (Lee, Hallinger, & Walker, 2012; Manaseh, 2016). Though the 1980s heralded the development of formidable forms of instructional leadership whose thrust was more on improving schools (Lee *et al.,* 2012), another notable development of that era was that in the United States of America, instructional leadership was largely considered a standard that principals were measured against if they were to be considered effective (Hallinger, 2005; Manaseh, 2016). It is considered that all these valuable developments focused on examining what and how heads at the school level were involved in teaching and learning but ignored the district office. In this study, I am convinced that applying the instructional leadership conceptual framework to the district office may contribute to the generation of new knowledge with regards to the district leaders' instructional leadership support to teaching and learning in schools. This is one gap that my study attempts to close by investigating what the district office leadership does and how it provides instructional leadership support to schools.

The instructional leadership conceptual framework can be looked at from the following perspectives. Recent literature suggests that generally, instructional leadership is viewed as a collection of those practices that leaders adopt for improved learner outcomes (Lochmiller, 2016). In addition, instructional leadership is relevant to the education context only and it is the result of the interplay of diverse situations and environments (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Huong, 2020). Yet, seen from a different angle, the uniqueness of instructional leadership manifests itself in the fact that it relates to learners, their teachers, the curriculum and the teaching — learning practices that are guided by intended goals and tasks (Sahin, 2011; Mestry, 2017). Instructional leadership, therefore, not only exclusively and narrowly focuses on classroom practices but also glances at the diverse institutional leadership and other goals that might not be aligned to learner performance (Rew, 2013; Mestry, 2017). In short, the argument is that while instructional leadership might represent a body of the actual practices that target the improvement of learning achievement, following the interplay of the learners, their teachers, the curriculum and instructional practices, deliberate goals and tasks are important. I am particularly drawn to the fact that instructional leadership is not only visible in the classroom but is also noticeable in other functions that might not be directly visible through learner achievement. In sync, it is my study's intention to examine what and how the district office leaders do to support the learners, the teachers, the heads and the teaching – learning practices in schools for school improvement.

Other scholars (for example Calik, Sezgin & Kilinç, 2012; Rigby, 2014) consider instructional leadership as what all accountable leaders in the field of education do in order to bring education related chances to learners through diverse leadership styles and the provision of environments that are conducive to learning. Therefore, the district office that my study focuses on is in context, as the district office leadership consists of those people that are held accountable for teaching and learning outcomes. They actually capacitate heads to emulate instructional leadership as it enables them to monitor, mentor, model, and improve their schools (Prytula, Noonan, & Hellsten, 2013; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Going by these researchers, the following characteristics of the instructional leadership model are identified. First, there is consideration of staff collaboration whose target is improving teaching and learning. Second, the leader attempts to direct and develop staff teamwork, and employ research data to determine

how effective teaching and learning are. Third, is a focus on the leader insisting on using research data in order to align the research data with resources. Fourth, the leader is seen closely assessing learner performance in order to be abreast with learner progress. It can be deduced that the focus of instructional leadership is school improvement based on the creation of learner friendly environments, capacitation of heads, and strategic resource management. In my study, I focus on how the district office leaders support improved teaching and learning, resource mobilisation and distribution, and improved learner performance in national public examinations.

As a result of increased research, the focus of instructional leadership has widened and has given birth to facets such as teacher collaboration and the availability of opportunities to grow professionally in professional learning communities (Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2014; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). It is important, therefore, to mention at this point that the instructional leadership conceptual framework that is employed in this research study only touches on professional learning communities, shared instructional leadership and distributed leadership. This is because they are not central to my analysis as they are understood to be different leadership theories in their own right.

The conceptual framework of instructional leadership was used not only to understand and put into operation my study's aim and objectives, but also to focus on a number of characteristics that deliberately influence teaching and learning and learner achievement (Petrovic & Vracar, 2019). My intention in this research is to investigate and understand how the district office's instructional leadership influence (or lack of it) occurs through the reshaping of teacher perceptions of instructional practices, beliefs, motivation, satisfaction, and commitment, thus contributing to literature in the area of instructional leadership. Figure 2.1 below shows the instructional leadership conceptual framework used in this study.

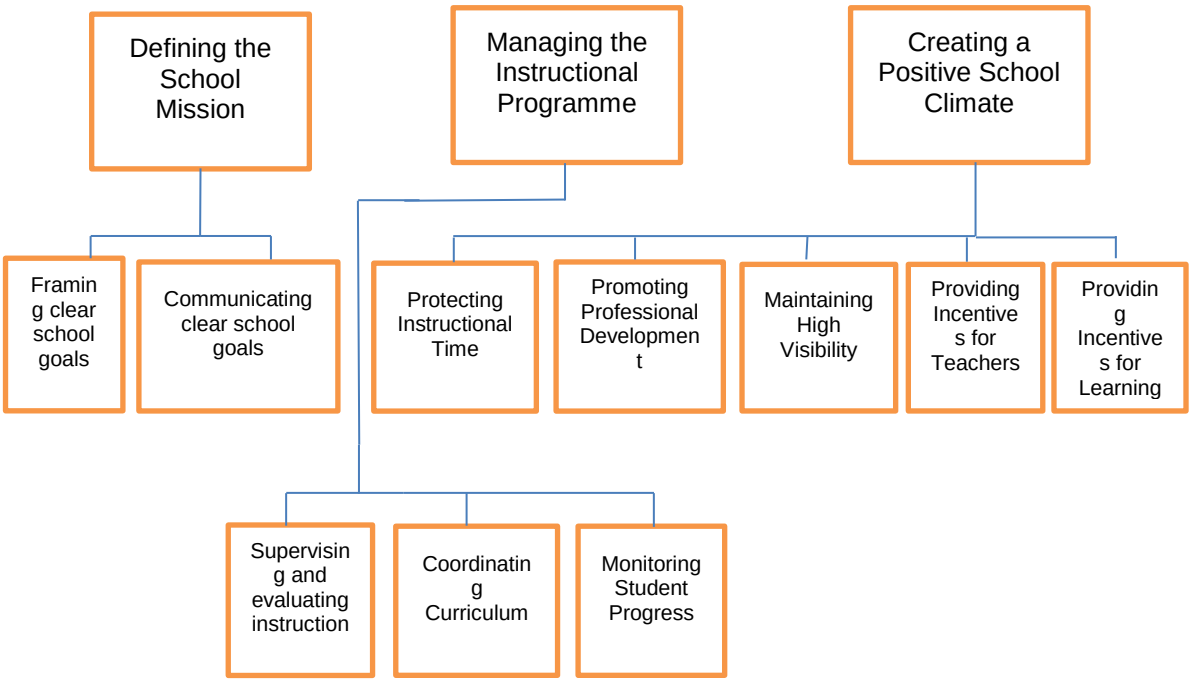

Figure 2.1: The Instructional Leadership Conceptual Framework (Hallinger, 2005).

To further concretise the idea of instructional leadership and its influence on teaching and learning, Hallinger used the instructional leadership framework to develop the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) which proposes three important dimensions in the principal's leadership role: viz. "Defining the School's Mission; Managing the Instructional Programme; and Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate" (Hallinger, 2011: 276). Ten instructional leadership functions delineate the three dimensions of the framework and rating scale (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Shaked, 2020). Two functions, "Framing the School's Goals" and "Communicating the School's Goals" make up the first dimension while three functions, "Supervising and Evaluating Instruction", "Coordinating the Curriculum", and "Monitoring Student Progress" constitute the second dimension. The last five functions, "Protecting Instructional Time", "Promoting Professional Development", "Maintaining High Visibility", "Providing Incentives for Teachers", and "Providing Incentives for Learning" are part of the third dimension (Hallinger, 2011: 276-7). I understand the central purpose of the PIMRS' dimensions and functions as a focused guide that enables schools to bring about successful teaching and learning outcomes. While this guide seems relevant at the school level, I am convinced that it might also

direct the district leaders to the core areas that they should target their instructional leadership support in their intervention in the schools.

The instructional leadership framework, as articulated in the PIMRS, is useful for my study because it lays bare the major functions that are supposed to enhance the effective management and administration of schools as seen in increased teaching and learning outcomes (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Herrmann, Clark, James-Burdumy, Tuttle, Kautz, Knechtel, Dotter, Wulsi & Deke, 2019). The framework was, therefore, useful in my examination of whether and how the practices of the district office align with these major functions of instructional leadership for the principals and schools that receive support from the district. Unlike other studies of instructional leadership that tend to focus on the schools, my study explored the importance of the district level instructional leadership and how it adds value to the programme of improvement in the schools, if at all (Waters & Marzano, 2006; Klar, 2012; Garland, Layland & Corbett, 2018).

I take note of Heck and Hallinger's (2009) and Naicker and Mestry's (2016) assertions that leadership at all levels of the system is the key lever for school reform, especially a leadership that not only builds capacity and develops other leaders, but also actively participates in efforts to improve both learner achievement and school development (Sabeena & Muthaiah, 2015). Spillane, Diamond and Jita (2003: 534), for example, caution that "… much of the learning [that is] essential for [the] successful implementation of recent instructional reforms [is] initiated and supported at the school level". Therefore, it may be impossible for the district office personnel, saddled with resource limitations and separation from the classroom to effectively manage what actually is going on in the schools (Spillane *et al.,* 2003). From the contribution of Heck and Hallinger (2009); Sabeena and Muthaiah (2015); and Spillane *et al.* (2003) it seems that leadership at all levels of the education system, including the district level leadership, is a critical driving force although inevitably, it encounters hurdles along the way.

This study, therefore, seeks to understand the role of the district in providing instructional leadership through the district leaders' perspectives on how the district structures and practices align to provide instructional guidance and support needed by schools. In other words, my study attempts to explore the district office support as

seen through the perspectives of the district office leaders. It is the purpose of this study to enhance the understanding of how districts are structured and how they function to provide instructional leadership to the schools.

2.3 District leaders' perspectives on the district office instructional leadership structures

Although district leaders are answerable to the upper level policymakers who happen to be their employers and performance assessors, they need not distance themselves from the classroom where the actual teaching and learning occurs (Przybytski, Chen & Hu, 2018). This is critical since the district officials are expected to actually feel the school environment and be able to make informed decisions with regards to the relevant instructional leadership support that each school may require. Therefore, district office structures are responsible for ensuring that all schools they lead improve in their response to current practices by linking heads' practices with quality instruction (Gedik & Bellibas, 2015). Flemming, Massengale and Auchstetter (2018: 7) maintain that such a link can be possible when:

> The district ensures organisational coherence in its structures and processes, [and] with organisational coherence, districts are able to effectively execute the strategic plan, coordinate services, and maintain equity across the schools in their system.

This quotation suggests that the district office leaders should be strategically organised to ensure their visibility in the schools more than anything else since the schools are the arena where quality teaching practices should take place.

This could be the reason why, to enhance effective instructional leadership, the district office has often been organised into the instructional and support services sections. The instructional unit provides supervisory support, and the support unit focuses on financial, curricula, human resources, research, "and special education" support to schools (Austin, Grossman, Schwartz, & Suesse, 2007: 269). For collaborated support to schools to be visible, these two units are aligned. It is desirable for a district leadership to include "district administrators, district coaches, curriculum and assessment leaders, professional development coordinators, teachers, building administrators, and other instructional leaders" that provide expertise in key areas such as "leadership, teaching practice, curriculum, assessment, technology, special

education, early childhood, elementary, middle, and high school" (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018: 5). In this regard, the districts have established a Coaching Support Team (CST), consisting of carefully selected professionals who are leadership experts in all areas of the school context, to support district-wide training and coaching (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018: 5). The implication is that with the passage of time, districts that provide feedback about the observed effectiveness of district, principal, and teacher practices drive professional development to levels that promote remarkable improvements in teaching and learning outcomes. Examined in this study are the structures at the district offices in Zimbabwe to establish whether these structures were also aligned to provide instructional leadership support to all schools.

A district could maintain two structures, one that sets aside specified time for principals to dialogue monthly on issues relating to improving instruction, and another that demands principals to monthly visit other schools to observe classroom teaching and learning (Jaquith *et al.,* 2015). In this way, the district may not only optimise the time for meeting principals, but also enhance capacity — building the principal's capacity in instructional leadership. In the United States, district leaders' central responsibility is to design and develop "formal structures and resources intended to support teachers' instructional practice and enable efforts to improve that practice" (Spillane, Hopkins & Sweet, 2017: 537). In my view, the two schools of thought seem to complement one another. While the former pays attention to heads' development, the latter insists on the improvement of teachers' instructional practice. When both approaches are adopted, there should be fertile ground for school improvement outcomes.

However, my casual observations are that people in instructional leadership positions at the district office may not always know or understand that they are instructional leaders. Therefore, the district office leaders should possess a common understanding of how to support teaching and learning in schools and, as one unit, throw their weight behind supporting schools (Mavuso & Moyo, 2014). Supervision that takes place at the district office and in schools, with everyone contributing to continuously improve teaching and learning, has been possible when the district office has ensured that the district office itself and the schools "have the right people in the right seats and that they are working to either change the seats or the people" (Austin *et al.,* 2007: 279).

These studies point to the fact that one way of preventing the district office structures from constraining school improvement is timeous structural innovation as it enhances effective district office support to schools. This is one of the central issues relating to the district office structures that my thesis set out to investigate.

A critical district office function is to decide the possible number of officers who do administrative work and those responsible for instructional work that leads to effective work in the classroom after adequately supporting schools, teachers and learners (Childress, Grossman & King, 2007; Hanover Research, 2013). That justifies why district principal supervisors, as instructional leaders, should be allocated manageable workloads "of between 8-12 principals per supervisor" to enhance "intensive and personalized" support for principals (Honig & Rainey, 2015: 10), or 12 – 15 principals (Saphier & Durkin, 2011). In addition, consideration has been made of the following major attributes of instructional leaders in the district structures: first, leading with direction and purpose; second, aligning the system and blending it with practice; third, focusing on major objectives and activities; fourth, accommodating teamwork; fifth, implementing instructional practice as a priority for the district; and, finally, maintaining "a delicate, but important balance between district and school autonomy" (Leon, 2008: 55). These scholars remind us that while the district level leaders' mandate is the supervision of instruction in schools, they should not be subjected to unmanageable workloads that can compromise their effectiveness. The size of the workload of the district leaders is an area of concern which my study sought to investigate. While the district leaders were called upon to respect school autonomy in their focused interaction with heads and teachers, this autonomy ought to be harnessed by responsibility and accountability on the part of the heads.

2.3.1 The Zimbabwean context in comparison

The following structures constitute the district office in Zimbabwe: The District Accounting Office and Quality Control comprise the supervisory unit. The following departments make up the support services unit: Finance, Administration and Human Resources; Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs Education; and Non-Formal Education. The Schools Inspector (SI) in the Quality Control department can be matched with the Area Instructional Officer (AIO) in the Chicago Public Schools district of the United States of America (Elmore, Grossman & King,

2007). These officers are part of the district office supervisory leadership in both countries respectively. The AIOs spend “70 per cent of their time working with principals to improve instructional leadership; (and) 30 per cent identifying, developing, and placing new principals” (Elmore *et al.,* 2007: 331). The AIOs are not involved in activities that are not related to instructional practice since such activities are left to the principals and their school administration. Interestingly, when the district office requests, for example, the AIO to carry out functions that have no bearing to instructional practice, the AIO is advised to pass on those functions to others, or to advise the district office leadership to reassign the functions to other people (Elmore *et al.,* 2007). All this is done to ensure that the AIO is focused on providing instructional leadership support to schools that Goldring *et al.,* (2018: 60), with particular focus on district principal supervisors, go on to explain:

> Supervisors often varied in how they approached and monitored the development of instructional leadership with their principals or did not explicitly focus on developing the principal’s own leadership. To address these issues, districts will have to continue to clarify, adopt, and specify standards for instructional leadership. They will also have to implement supervisor training that aligns with a clear definition of instructional leadership so that supervisors can support and develop principal leadership.

I understand that in Zimbabwe, the supervisory unit and the support services unit seem to constitute the district office. Going by Elmore *et al.,* (2007)’s advice, the supervisory unit may need to allocate 70 per cent of their time working with heads to improve instructional leadership, and 30 per cent identifying, developing, and placing new heads. Such practices might strengthen the district officials’ instructional leadership support to schools since the bulk of their time at work would be spent with heads.

More district level support has been evident in the creation of formal structures through which district leaders, heads and teachers can communicate and share information, ideas and expertise (Mania-Singer, 2017). This implies that a formalised district internal reporting structure spearheaded by a team or a person focusing on intensified support to schools, and with the principals directly reporting to them, may be both supportive and accountable for remarkable school improvement as principals would be kept focused. We can, therefore, appreciate why districts create “… structures … to prepare and provide on - going support to the principal supervisors so they can go deep into the instructional framework” (Bouffard, 2019: 49). Emphasised is the need

for district formal structures that accommodate communication and sharing of information, ideas and expertise among the district leaders, heads and teachers. Such a set-up, however, is believed to depend on specific district supervisory teams or individual supervisors to whom heads directly report, thereby enhancing significant school improvement. It is very important, therefore, for the district office to strengthen or realign future initiatives to improve instructional leadership support to schools, another area that my study paid attention to.

Finally, some district offices have a board of trustees in place that: engages the senior district staff to accommodate, after assessment, the community's values and interests in the school system. The board of trustees also consistently aligns most policies on learning improvement and the learners' welfare with the mission and vision; provides fertile ground for healthy relationships with senior district staff, schools, community stakeholders and provincial education officials; and insists on its individual members' accountability for supporting board decisions (Leithwood, 2013). It is implied that a district board of trustees should interact with the senior district staff to align the values and interests of the community with the school policies to improve both learning and the learners' welfare. However, senior district staff, schools, community stakeholders and provincial education officials are viewed as critical support for this district structure. The district leaders' stakeholder and partner engagement with regards to school improvement is another aspect that my study investigates.

The next section addresses district leaders' perspectives on the district office instructional leadership practices. For clarity, this will be done through a discussion of how the district leaders relate to district plans, school improvement, high quality teaching and learning, staffing, meetings, supervision, stakeholder and partner engagement, professional development, and the curriculum.

2.4 District leaders' perspectives on the district office instructional leadership practices

2.4.1 District plans

District plans play a central role in guiding the district leaders in their work. In the USA, while the district leaders maintain a district level/school level collaborative atmosphere as they coach, train, and rely on data to improve teaching and learning in schools, they

also support teachers and learners through reviews of district-level and school-level practice outcomes data while facilitating district wide efficient, consistent, and effective instruction that is aligned to standards (The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018). In San Francisco District, the following district office practices shape its effectiveness. First, is a thrust on all learners' academic performance, second is the need to allocate the district office resources equitably, and third is the focus on accounting for results (Childress & Peterkin, 2007). While the emphasis is on the need for, among others, strengthening quality teaching practices that lead to improvements in learner performance (Evans, 2008; Shakman, Bailey & Breslow, 2017), it has been proved that a district office that prioritises goal-setting and standards-establishment, staff selection, staff supervision and evaluation, and directing and monitoring instruction and curriculum is better poised for effectiveness (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Literature suggests that effective teaching and learning that is aligned to standards in schools is evident in a focused district plan. Such a plan seems to highly regard goals, improved learner performance in the wake of quality teachers and instruction, close supervision of heads and teachers, and regular monitoring of the curriculum.

Prioritising the schools that need the services of the district leaders most is critical. This could be the reason why district offices in South Africa engage in:

> … strengthening and supporting school leadership, stimulating and supporting school climate and learning environments, strengthening the quality of teachers, ensuring effective classroom learning strategies and linking schools with parents and the community. (Bantwini & Moorosi, 2017: 2)

This quotation indicates that the district office becomes accountable after firstly capacitating and developing heads. Secondly, the districts employ targeted institutional improvement, aligned to education law and policy, and enhanced through close supervision. Thirdly, the districts focus on improved teacher quality for improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Fourthly, through public engagement, the district office leaders openly and transparently communicate with the public to account for their schools' performance. In my study, the district leaders presented what they believed they did, and how they did that, as evidence of their instructional leadership support to teachers and heads in schools.

District plans may be varied. Very effective districts prioritise teaching and learning, are guided by clear targets, engage in professional development, display data-guided improvements, reform within policy guidelines, demand teachers and heads to be responsible for teaching and learning, effectively support schools, and provide regular supervision to teachers and heads (Walberg, 2010; Jalapang & Raman, 2020). In this regard, the district professional development efforts should not ignore the district leaders themselves since "delivering appropriate professional development to district staff at all levels ensures systems run smoothly, instruction is effective, and individual growth is supported," (Flemming *et al.,* 2018: 8). While the districts are expected to, among other responsibilities, cater for the professional development of teachers and heads, more effective support to schools may be attainable when the district leaders themselves receive on going professional development, too. Usually, **h**alf-baked district officials, in terms of their readiness to professionally develop teachers and heads, might subsequently be blamed for sub-standard intervention outcomes. My study, sought to establish the nature of professional development that the district office organised for the district leaders, teachers and heads.

Successful districts have a number of characteristics. Moorosi and Bantwini (2016) identify the specific attributes that exemplary districts in the Eastern Cape, South Africa have. First, they support heads' efforts to improve their schools. Second, the district staff works as a team with heads and teachers in implementing a district strategic plan while significant school autonomy is allowed to enhance heads some decision-making room. Third, the districts recruit and retain quality human resources. However, the district pivots educational change and improvement when it supports curriculum implementation and ensures "that all learners are afforded good-quality learning opportunities — the quality of which is evidenced by learner achievement" (Bantwini & Diko, 2011: 228). Therefore, the district office leaders and other stakeholders play an important role in supporting school improvement through the provision of curricular materials, learner assessments, and procedural practice analysis (Spillane *et al.,* 2017). An interview with Meredith Honig, Heller (2018) similarly unveils that central offices are expected to ensure every learner's access to very effective teachers, deeper learning opportunities, and instructional leadership of a very high quality. In a nutshell, when the district leaders work as a team with heads, teachers and other stakeholders in the implementation of the district strategic plan,

every learner's access to quality instructional leadership, teachers, and learning opportunities may be guaranteed. In Zimbabwe, equal access to quality learning opportunities seems to be a topical issue, for example, in the context of satellite schools that have mushroomed in remote resettlement areas. Therefore, the need for sprucing up the district leaders' support for those schools to close the quality opportunity gap cannot be emphasised.

As successful schools receive instructional, operational and organisational development support from the district office, by and large, district office reform initiatives could guide principals and teachers to a higher level by scrutinising sound instructional leadership practices, panel beating and polishing up less effective ones, and taking on board the identified latest ways of teaching and learning. However, Adamowski, Therriault and Cavanna (2007), Leithwood, (2010), and Jalapang and Raman (2020) argue that while these support initiatives are being implemented, every district superintendent should allow principals full exercise of their leadership authority and accountability while supporting them totally. The suggestion that the district should allow heads to be autonomous might raise eyebrows since it might be logical for the district leaders to tightly monitor underperforming and negligent heads as part of their package of instructional leadership support to improve such schools.

2.4.2 School improvement

Time management appears to be an important factor in school improvement. In this regard, it is argued that efforts to improve schools should measure and establish the schools' teaching and learning achievements in relation to time (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Mette, Fairman & Terzi 2017). Therefore, the district leaders should ensure that every school designs a yearly improvement plan that the district office approves and whose central target is learner achievement. This not only ensures that learners have equal opportunities to education of a high quality, but also the district leaders are accountable for school improvement (Moorosi & Bantwini, 2016). In this way, the district leadership ensures improvement in the quality of teaching and learning by connecting the district office work to principals' work (Larson, 2007; Moorosi & Bantwini, 2016). Therefore, to significantly improve teaching and learning, effective district leaders ensure that "their time is (not) consumed by matters unrelated to learning improvement" (Knapp, Copland & Talbert, 2003: 5), and also that their

instructional leadership buttresses progress in both school development and teaching and learning (Sabeena & Muthaiah, 2015). The researchers, (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Moorosi & Bantwini, 2016; Larson, 2007; Knapp *et al.,* 2003; Sabeena & Muthaiah, 2015) seem to concur that an annual school improvement plan that is approved by the district office should reflect a link between the district office and heads' work. The district office leaders' time should, therefore, largely be reserved for supporting improved teaching and learning in schools.

Several strategies contribute to noticeable school improvement. For teachers and heads to significantly improve their instructional practice, district office leaders have to vigorously support schools (Spillane *et al.,* 2017). To cement these developments, recently, "… there has been heightened attention on the role that effective school and district leaders play in a wide range of issues, including school improvement, quality classroom instruction and broader discussions of equity" (Scott, 2018: 1). Even earlier studies note that the district office support to every school promotes students' success, with the major stimulant of that being the facilitation of teachers' exposure to and implementation of effective instructional practices (Corbett & Wilson, 1991). Today, the district office as the central unit that organises instructional delivery, designs and develops formal structures and resources that support teacher instructional practice (Spillane *et al.,* 2017). In addition, it is acknowledged that district officers, as instructional leaders, are now gradually offering continuous, intensified, job-related support to principals to enhance quality teaching and learning (Honig, 2012; Mette *et al.,* 2017). Suggested here is the fact that the district office leadership are actively involving heads and teachers in improving teaching and learning. In their engagement of teachers and heads to improve their instructional practice, district office leaders are seen directly and frequently exposing teachers to effective instructional practices, and increasing continuous professional development to heads for quality teaching and learning outcomes. My study sought to establish the district office leaders' involvement of teachers, heads of department / teachers-in-charge, deputy heads and heads in instructional leadership development initiatives for school improvement. However, at the moment, this seems to demand frequent physical and/or ICT enhanced contact. Bearing in mind the new normal, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) environment, physical contact is impossible. Simultaneously, many schools might not have the financial capacity to engage in ICT enhanced contact with the district office.

These are some of the factors that the district officials might have to consider to chart the way forward.

Various instructional leadership practices of the district leaders influence the actual teaching and learning in schools. A body of literature on instructional leadership (Rew, 2013; Hallinger, 2011; Louis. Dretzke & Wahlstrom, 2010; and Krug, 1992) points to the conclusion that district leadership practices have a significant, albeit indirect influence on student performance. This suggests that district instructional leadership incorporates leadership practices that assist in teacher professional development for rationalising teaching and learning. However, such assistance should be underpinned by the creation of a high-performing organisation that is responsive to the increasing national and local pressure on the district office to produce tangible results. It may, therefore, be assumed that an effective district office leadership should engage the schools' individual differences, too. Effective district office leaders consider schools as unique entities whose treatment is different (Elmore *et al.,* 2007; Lasater, 2016). It could be logical, therefore, for the district office to prevent the fragmentation and isolation of schools that may result from, for example, discriminating schools based on their teaching approaches or level of learner achievement, or learner ethnicity and disability, an issue that some of the district leaders in my study raised. Therefore, all principals should be capacitated to spearhead reform and be supported by the district office according to their institutions' unique requirements. To that end, Smith (2003: 8) observes:

> . . . providing services to students with disabilities is a moral imperative, a federal equity mandate and one of the most troubled areas of . . . education. [Surprisingly], service providers and watchdog groups, too often [keep] central offices focused on process compliance rather than the achievement of educational outcomes.

The quotation seems to suggest that while the district leaders' instructional leadership practices factor in focused teacher professional development, they should consider the uniqueness of schools as the districts respond to the increasing national and local pressure for visible results. In Zimbabwe, the uniqueness of schools does not seem to be regarded when the education authorities rate school performance in public national examinations. All schools, primary and secondary respectively, are bunched. Therefore, this could be food for thought for the decision makers.

The district officers could consider more strategies to carry out their operations effectively. In that light, it is critical for the district leadership to ensure that all units of the central office work towards supporting school improvement by realigning tasks, functions and resources with school improvement (Heller, 2018). Accordingly, this would go a long way to assist the central office to provide support in designing and implementing school improvement plans and breathing meaning and life into the plans, a concern that the Non–Formal Education department raised in my thesis. District central offices not only change their structures but also innovate their daily tasks to prioritise instruction that increases school improvement capacity (Mania-Singer, 2017) as they focus on instructional leadership, organisational structures and policies to enhance quality teaching and learning that results in quality school performance (Marsh, Kerr, Ikemoto, Darilek, Suttorp, Zimmer, & Barney, 2005; Vogel, 2018). Even in developing countries such as South Africa, effective district office leaders lean on capacitation and motivation of heads to realise, among others, improvement in schools (Moorosi & Bantwini, 2016). My study investigates the issue of motivation of heads and teachers as one of the innovations that was desirable in the district.

The district leaders go a step further in their efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The pivotal role of a district to improving teachers' instructional practice (Mavuso & Moyo, 2014) rests on vision, values, and culture; leadership and governance; decision-making and accountability; curriculum and instruction; and professional development and staff quality, when supported by stakeholders, community groups, and school culture that brings about remarkable support to schools that need it most (Burmaster, 2006; Lasater, 2016). Furthermore, the researcher notes, sound district leadership and governance practices enhance effective policies that guide the district leadership team and schools to effect focused school improvement where it is actually needed. This is noticeable when the district assists schools to collect and analyse various disaggregated learner data for the purposes of effective resource allocation.

A district that facilitates learners' equitable access to educational opportunities through monitoring "curriculum, assessment, instructional practices, and programs" (Burmaster, 2006: 11), while at the same time strategically recruiting and effecting professional development initiatives establishes effective teaching in all schools in the district. Over and above, district office leaders can enhance effective instructional

leader preparation and development that is entrenched in and articulates the district office's clear vision, financial and human capacity, and drive to support every school in the district (Spence, 2002; Vogel, 2018). Articulated here is the need for the districts to be adequately capacitated to implement leadership and governance practices whose outcomes are focused school improvement through facilitating learner equitable access to educational opportunities, effective resource allocation and organised instructional leader preparation and development. Therefore, resources to facilitate the operations of the district office should not be in short supply throughout the year. Staff recruitment, professional development and effective resource allocation also emerged as issues in my research.

It is my conviction that the district office should facilitate the development and adoption of a school development plan that is linked to the national education development plan. This enables the heads, as instructional leaders, to be directly involved in team building, shaping a school vision whose outcome is learner success, grooming others for leadership, improving the quality of instruction, and using data to enhance school development (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013; Dangara, 2016). This also reflects why a school development plan is the critical driver of "professional development, as well as an on-going need to modify training to suit the district's specific needs" (Austin *et al.,* 2007: 280). In this regard, the district office should ensure that all schools design and implement development plans that mirror the district development objectives. It might be noted that for this school development strategy to result in more productive teaching and learning, it should indicate how it will improve learner achievement. However, district office leaders should adopt school development reviews with which heads identify the performance position of their schools measured by their school improvement plans (Prew & Quaigrain, 2010; Stevenson, 2019), the overall purpose of which is to ensure the schools' responsiveness to educational standards, bearing in mind that positive motivation drives heads to higher achievement. It becomes clear, therefore, that schools should be capacitated in relation to their performance. Constructive criticism seems to surface. This refers to the district officials providing valid, friendly, positive and negative comments about the heads' and teachers' work. The helpful, non-confrontational feedback that is synonymous with constructive criticism usually provides specific recommendations on how to improve, is clear and easy to implement.

Focusing on school performance, Elmore *et al.,* (2007) observe that setting district level and school level targets defines progress for the entire district. The researchers propose five components of a school development plan: (a) “instruction” — relating to the practice of teaching and learning; (b) “instructional leadership” — what the school leaders do to schedule, manage resources, and plan the teaching/learning content; (c) “professional capacity” — what the district office and school leaders do to improve classroom instructional practices; (d) “learning climate” — what the school adopts to promote effective teaching and learning; and (e) “family and community involvement” — how the school engages in resource mobilisation (Elmore *et al.,* 2007: 326-7). Although every school should set yearly achievement standards in a school development plan that contributes to the attainment of the district overall objectives, a school development plan that is “meant for compliance purposes only” and that gathers dust “on the shelf … [is] not an effective way to drive instruction or to improve instruction” (Farley-Ripple, 2012: 794). When a school development plan is banished to the school archives, then not only the head is to blame, but the district leaders that supervise that head as well. There seems to be much to read between the lines in such a scenario. It might also be necessary, in due course, to make several adjustments to the plans following annual evaluations that draw from district assessments to align current instructional developments with the following year’s plans.

With the hope that the teacher, the learner and the school may be able to account for attaining a universal and measurable degree of performance, district office leaders assert that the district office should rely on school development plans to decide on the nature of teacher professional development initiatives to adopt (Honig & Coburn, 2008; Escobar (2019). I, however, note that a district office’s universal plan of support to schools may not effectively bring about the desired outcomes since one school’s support needs may be different from the next school’s, thus reinforcing the call on district office leaders to transform their practices from regulatory ones to those that drive development (Honig, 2009; Stevenson, 2019). In my opinion, that could explain why the district office attempts to supervise every school thoroughly and regularly to ensure that the planned school development initiatives are effectively implemented. The nature of professional development initiatives and their impact on the district leaders themselves, heads and teachers was dealt with in my study.

2.4.3 High quality teaching and learning

Recognisable is the fact that one of the important considerations of the district office is ensuring that every student undergoes high quality teaching and learning. The Boston Public Schools strongly propose a standards-based accountability strategy supported by instruments that every school should use to measure and step up learner achievement (Johnson & Cheng, 2007: 216). It is my conviction that such measurement of, and expectation of learner achievement to increase should inform the district office to make the right decisions relating to school improvement. My thesis addressed issues regarding rewards for schools that were high achievers, and corrective measures that were applied to underperforming schools.

In addition, strategic planning is looked at as the focal point of all district school improvement processes whose success rests on the alignment of structures, people, material and financial resources. Inevitably, the district leadership have been significantly visible in schools focusing on improving teaching and learning through their implementation of school improvement plans (Leithwood, 2013). Although district senior finance leaders' knowledge is critical, aligning the district's resource allocation with improved instruction and learner achievement requires the collective effort of the other district senior personnel, operations and academic programmes leaders. While, generally, district superintendents devote much of their efforts to the internal operations of the district (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Stevenson, 2019) guided by a strategic plan that helps them decide whether they are on course, the absence of that plan makes it impossible for the district to assess progress and/or success (Ashby, 2008; Stevenson, 2019). Some of the participants in my study disclosed that a great deal of their time was spent on matters that were not related to supporting instructional leadership in schools. My position is that, instead, strategic plans should capacitate the district office personnel to spend some of their time producing school comparative analyses and evaluation programmes, thus allowing the district office leaders to staff develop personnel as soon as reforms are effected. In conformity, Seager, Madura, Cox, & Carey (2015) state that district office leaders should develop strategies that draw on data as benchmark targets that superintendents and schools should constantly refer to.

More can be discussed concerning strategic plans. Hornung and Yoder (2014) propose that district leaders are strategic managers when they: develop a proper district mission and vision; nurture collaboration and team work; emphasise the critical role of effective leading and teaching students; employ effective communication strategies with staff and stakeholders; establish a district-wide improvement plan; implement efficient data management for sound decision-making; and use strategic resource management that supports the instructional goals and mission of the district. Although a focus on achievement that cuts across the system is critical district support to schools, strategic planning should direct annual school improvement plans, monthly meetings with principals, and the mission, vision and goals that stimulate school improvement (Leithwood, 2013). The focus of the district leaders will not only be on the curriculum and instructional practices but also on professional development to achieve the districts' mission, vision and goals.

The response to a new demand for quality education that is forcing educational leaders and the society to expect the teacher and the school to improve learner achievement is quite varied. District offices in the United States of America confidently engage consultants to organise data analysis workshops in order to enhance sense-making of the learners' achievement data (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2005 ; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner 2017). To meet this challenge, other district office leaders have significantly affected the quality of instruction adopted and implemented throughout the district (Leithwood *et al.,* 2004; Pak, Polikoff, Desimone & García, 2020). By drawing on the concept of strategies, the district leadership have also been able to show the different strategies that they could adopt to achieve high-quality instructional leadership (Leithwood *et al.,* 2004; Darling-Hammond *et al.,* 2017). This has paved the way for the provision of effective internal and external staff development initiatives and ensuring organisational livelihood that ensure the school and district motivational system supports instructional practice (Leithwood *et al.,* 2004; Pak *et al.,* 2020). Relevantly, Berg (2015) observes that districts have introduced financial incentives to teachers to positively influence their instructional practice and learner outcomes. In alignment, the district motivational system is one of the issues that my study examined.

Hurdles to high quality teaching and learning have spread their tentacles to the district offices as well. Sometimes, the Ministry of Education derail districts from their school

improvement tracks when they demanded districts to execute “excessive numbers of new initiatives or initiatives unrelated to the district priorities” (Leithwood, 2013: 22). This holds true also in China where central government uses policy directives to enforce educational goal achievement leaving very little if any room for the district office to effect changes that are district specific (Przybytski *et al.,* 2018). Observed is the fact that such changes have prevented the district office staff from regularly interacting with their schools. Furthermore, the district office staff has been overwhelmed by tight meeting schedules and administration related routines, while many district office officials allocate most of their time to policy dissemination and leave insufficient time to personally interact with heads and attend to their diverse needs (Burch & Spillane, 2004; Kane & Rosenquist, 2019). It is my conclusion, therefore, that the district office leadership efficiency should be cradled in an environment that is flexible and accommodative to their instructional leadership efforts to improve teaching and learning. My study brings to light several matters that distracted the district office leaders from executing their core instructional leadership duties.

It is important to acknowledge the important practice in which the district office supports schools to subsequently become technologically responsive to demands for proper management of data relating to learner performance. The district office could, however, support school investment not only in modern information technology, but also in training teachers to become compliant. In that regard, I am drawn to the district offices that have supplied schools with the requisite information and technology tool kits that capacitate heads and teachers to examine and discuss learner examination results to make informed decisions on the appropriate teaching methods to adopt (Johnson & Cheng, 2007; Kamau, 2014). Furthermore, I note that some district office leaders have gone further to ensure that the district office and all schools have modern technological infrastructure that assist administrators and teachers to significantly improve teaching and learning (Mapp, Thomas & Clayton, 2007; Kamau, 2014). Coupled with that, other district offices have not only introduced user — friendly information management systems that are computerised for use by schools, but have also outsourced expert service to interpret data when necessary (Leithwood, 2013). Most importantly, it seems clear that the district offices would timeously present to schools data relating to their performance, while technology may also provide learner

performance history online, a development that benefits the learner when transferring from one school to other schools. ICT development was an issue for discussion in my thesis, with participants' views indicating the need for scaling up the initiative.

Przybytski *et al.* (2018) establish that the district office is held accountable for meeting the ever increasing learner achievement benchmarks in schools in their districts. For schools to subsequently receive a reward or a sanction relative to the achievement levels of their students, it is hoped that the district office could be supportive of the school heads by strengthening their capacity to employ data for the improvement of teaching and learning. In this regard, the district office has kept abreast with information technological development and innovatively used that knowledge to improve heads, teachers, the community and learners (Lewis *et al.,* 2011; Genlott, Grönlund & Viberg, 2019). As a precaution, it might be important for the district office leaders to maintain their physical contact with the head and teachers, a practice that remains critical in the integration of new information technology. Some of the Schools Inspectors in my study make such an observation.

The district office bears the responsibility of identifying and addressing variations in the performance of learners by school. Austin *et al.* (2007) and Kane and Rosenquist (2019) are of the opinion that the district office leadership provide support to schools to increase learner performance at the local, district, and state-level examinations. In that case, the variables that seem to contribute to these school performance variations include learners' socio-economic background, level of skills development, teachers' quality of instruction, and the principals' level of effective school administration and management. Such considerations should enable the district office to direct its support efforts relatively and appropriately. Participants in my study alluded to the bottom 10 schools in the annual public examination results at the Grade 7 and Ordinary Level and the strategies that the district office leaders implemented to put such low performers back on track.

2.4.4 Staffing

Schools rely on the district office to provide them with trained and experienced teachers. Taking this into consideration, the recruitment and selection of teachers requires proper planning if schools are to be not only adequately but appropriately

staffed (Moraa, Chepkoech & Simiyu, 2017). Recruiting, placing, developing, and retaining quality staff, therefore, constitutes the district focus, with a visibility strategy attracting high-performing teachers to the district (Bland, Church & Luo, 2014). It becomes critical for the district office to strategically deploy to schools teachers who are relevantly skilled and knowledgeable, a view that aligns to one of the critical components of the district office support to schools - the provision of leaders that manifest strength and stability (Fouts, 2003; Huat, Morris, Gorard & Soufi, 2020), and ensuring that the right people are employed (Otoo, Assuming & Agyei, 2018). Currently, the district office is developing school leadership talent by: strategically selecting principals; recruiting, placing, and retaining expert teachers; supervising and coaching schools strategically; effectively enabling professional development for principals and teachers; regularly monitoring district and school performance targets; and addressing teacher underperformance (Hitt *et al.,* 2018). The recruitment, selection, placement and retention of heads, deputy heads and teachers are among the practices of the district office leaders that my thesis addresses.

Sometimes, district offices do not find it easy to staff schools appropriately. Normore (2007) and Huat *et al.* (2020) indicates that district offices face challenges in effectively recruiting and selecting principals since principal positions are complex and desirable and district size has to be taken into consideration. Simultaneously, it should be noted that quality principals are not prepared to work in schools where: teacher turnover is high; resources are limited; salaries for principals are low; the geography is isolated; the economy is distressed; and learner achievement is low (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2010; Latterman & Steffes, 2017). Likewise, where suitable principals and teachers find no considerations for their own school-going children and spouses in different professions, districts find it difficult to recruit and retain the principals and teachers. In other words, while the district endeavours to improve the recruitment, development, and retention of talented teachers, it should not ignore considerations for the strategic appointment of high calibre principals, assistant principals, and teachers through lucrative incentives. Therefore, that partially explains why the district office leadership has adopted and implemented a clear staffing policy that attracts high calibre teachers; promotes the most hard-working teachers; particularises candidature for headship and encourages appointments to challenging schools; and moves to the district office structures people that are interested

(Childress *et al.,* 2007; Huat et al., 2020). While incentives play as bait for attracting quality teachers and heads for appointments to schools and promotion to the district office, more lucrative rewards might be introduced to lure quality and dedicated heads and teachers to challenging schools.

In pursuance of district office leaders' significance in teacher and principal recruitment, the absence of leadership continuity could be detrimental to schools. It is, therefore, advisable for districts to adopt efficient plans when recruiting, training, and continuously supporting teachers and principals (Alvoid & Black, 2014). Related evidence suggests that "leadership longevity, and stability in the system are important organisational conditions that support on going improvement and learning" (Park, 2019: 4-5). It, therefore, justifies why the human resources unit of the central office has become strategic in engaging the most suitable teachers and heads for the available positions (Heller, 2018). Extending the discussion, Turnbull, Riley and MacFarlane (2015) present three strategies that district office leaders could adopt. Firstly, they could systematically and deliberately assess and select interested principal applicants for merit prior to appointment. Secondly, they could successfully, with assistance from universities, other programmes, and district initiatives, prepare the newly appointed principals for their instructional leadership responsibilities. Thirdly, they could train principal supervisors and mentors/coaches to boost their evaluation and support capacity. Some of the participants in my study criticised the engagement of officers from other government ministries by the education ministry in the selection and induction training of heads and deputy heads as part of preparation for their new instructional leadership roles.

It is the district officers' critical responsibility to strengthen the effectiveness of heads in schools. Mendels and Mitgang (2013) are convinced that school leadership can be strengthened by engaging new principals to lead the least performing schools and providing these principals maximum support in their years of probation. Furthermore, districts have carefully designed and implemented effective procedures for the identification, recruitment, selection and appraisal of principals and transfer of principals for purposes of value addition to school improvement (Leithwood, 2013). That suggests district performance management efforts that match the most skilled principals and school needs with pre-service and in-service training for principals. In cognisance of the fact that effective performance appraisal systems that focus on

improving instruction culminate in significant school improvement, the district principal supervisors should not only be relevant, knowledgeable and skilled but should also be ready to partner with principals and regularly advise them on how to improve their work. My study participants do indicate the significance of the Results-Based Personnel Performance System as an evaluation tool that measures and strengthens heads' performance.

When recruiting heads and teachers, a number of critical factors should be considered. Abele, Iver and Farley (2003) first state that restrictive and discouraging selection and recruitment practices should not be pursued; second, bureaucratic tendencies should be avoided as they might create unnecessary delays that might finally drive potential and suitable teachers away; and third, the applicant's qualifications rather than peripheral issues should be considered as these might compromise the quality of instruction. In addition, assigning newly-appointed heads and teachers "to the most challenging classrooms and schools" might undermine the district office's attraction and retention of good teachers" (Abele *et al.,* 2003: 15). Travers (2018: 14) agreeably states:

> … too often districts have difficulty attracting and retaining their best teachers in high-need schools … [as a result of] poor facilities [that] are associated with increased teacher turnover … supporting the notion that the quality of facilities may contribute to the value proposition for teachers.

Furthermore, it is a reality that the district office is not the heads' and teachers' sole job opportunity in this competitive environment, and the district office has tried to engage head and teacher recruitment and selection strategies that attract rather than detract competent, experienced and qualified heads and teachers (Otoo, Assuming & Agyei, 2018). It is important for districts to shun selection and recruitment practices that restrict and discourage teachers, bureaucratic practices, considerations for irrelevant issues instead of the teacher applicant's qualifications, and appointing newly-appointed heads and teachers to those schools that present deep challenges. However, while this is the case, the fate of the schools that are considered the most challenging seems doubtful because learners would still be eagerly waiting for the services of high calibre teachers there. The district leaders in my study identified several ways in which the district office might discourage heads, deputy heads and teachers from staying in the district.

This leads the discussion to how the district might retain teachers. Chikwiri and Musiyiwa (2017) recommend, for example, that the district office recruit qualified ECD teachers and capacity build the qualified teachers that are already in the education system. Arguably, leadership standards are noticeable when district offices apply them in their selection, hiring, training, and evaluation of principals (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013). Such standards point to the fact that a district that insists on the development of more effective principal assessment, mentoring and professional development strategies could guarantee the growth and success of newly-engaged principals (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013). My study does dwell on teacher and head retention. Metz and Socol (2017) argue that while the district leadership is accountable for much of the teacher recruitment, appointment, placement, and retention decisions, for effective support to districts, state-level officials should take note of those particular districts that have the most inexperienced or ineffective teachers. When district leaders analyse data on student placement and the quality of instruction, they develop ways of addressing both inter-school and intra-school discrepancies and utilise state funds for improved staffing in schools. The same approach could apply when addressing the calibre of school heads as stronger heads are more capable of attracting, developing, and retaining quality teachers (Metz & Socol, 2017).

It is crucial to appreciate that in the same district, each school is unique. Owing to this uniqueness of schools, some central offices have effectively inducted the recently appointed teachers and principals in readiness for effective instructional practice (Sherman, 2014). This could explain why some district leaders have attempted to properly induct principals to progress from their classroom or other administrative function since these principals lacked the experience of "… being responsible for everything in their school … the volume of work, the diversity of tasks to be accomplished, and the unpredictable nature of the work … [together with] the challenges of serving as an instructional leader" (Lipke, 2019: 88). In addition, the district office leaders induct new heads and teachers to align them with the district's professional development plan, and consistently provide principals that are new to the position with supervisor, coach or mentor, and professional development support that is aligned to recent evaluation outcomes to improve teaching and learning (Anderson & Turnbull, 2016). An attractive and competitive remuneration package has enabled the district office to attract and retain high performing teachers to specified positions

and schools (Berg, 2015). Such a package has included, for example, extra payment for teaching in areas and institutions with unfavourable conditions.

Teachers and heads play a central role in school improvement. Johnson and Suesse (2007) and Grissom, Bartanen, and Mitani (2019) posit that school improvement heavily relies on teachers and principals that have skill, commitment, and are well-positioned. While "… the supervisors' report really influences the decision for the appointment of principals in schools", the task of preparing, recruiting and supporting school improvement appears to be more and more difficult (Sumintono *et al.,* 2019: 594). This is largely because of: transfers and retirements; stagnation in the recruitment of additional teachers due to stagnation in enrolments; and competition with other sectors of the economy for personnel with talent in critical shortage areas such as Mathematics and Science. A notable example relates to the transfer and replacement of teachers and principals that may present challenges to the district office. In such a situation, the district office human resources department sometimes has to contend with the difficult task of not only staffing, but also retaining staff in "low-performing" schools "because they [suffer] from poor leadership and inadequate working conditions at the school site" (Johnson & Suesse, 2007: 133). Further evidence indicates that "Workplace conditions have a large impact on the teacher turnover rate … [with] attrition linked to instructional leadership, school culture, collegial relationships … professional development resources, [and] facilities," (Moore, Rosenblatt & Badgett, 2018: 2 923). Therefore, the district office has put in place special awards targeting teachers that perform very well (Grossman, Beaulieu, Johnson, & Suesse, 2007; Munich & Rivkin, 2015). Johnson and Suesse (2007) and Grissom *et al.* (2019) seem to make it clear here that while skilled, committed, and well-positioned teachers and heads are pivotal to school improvement, the district leaders usually find it difficult to place and retain teachers and principals in underperforming and inadequately resourced schools. My thesis examines issues related to the district leaders' support for school improvement that attract and retain capable heads, deputy heads and teachers.

2.4.5 Meetings

Meetings are a critical communication practice for district leaders. Munich and Rivkin (2015) observe that while the district office leaders recruit and employ the best

teachers, they also implement the right curriculum, supervise the teachers and evaluate all programmes. Therefore, effective communication is one vehicle for keeping both the district office leaders and the schools informed about developments in that regard (Mavuso & Moyo, 2014).

Extending the discussion, Durand, Lawson, Wilcox, & Schiller, 2016 note that the district office leadership effectively communicates with heads to support reform efforts. There is need for clear, regular and consistent communication throughout the district to foster direction and purpose. In this regard, the district office leadership could prioritise organising and holding a meeting with principals every month. The focus of that meeting could be to analyse documents, set learning milestones, develop formative evaluation instruments, facilitate data use for instructional decision-making and enhance principal professional development Durand *et al.* (2015). It should also be noted that holding regular formal and/or informal meetings with heads to set goals, develop the curriculum and instruction, align vision, and develop them professionally is critical (Durand et al., 2015). Apart from that, at monthly meetings organised for the heads, district leaders appraise heads on the latest teacher professional development outcomes relating to instruction, thereby closely aligning the heads with the district expectations (Darfler & Riggan, 2013).

Childress *et al.,* (2007: 432) argue that since the district office leadership focus their monthly meetings with principals on matters relating to professional development, the focus of the meetings has to be more on instructional leadership than on administrative issues to allow more time for achievement data analysis, instructional strategy formulation and strategy implementation among other purposes. At the meetings, the principals could be given time to interact through dialogue on their own and reinforce the intended meeting outcomes. Relatedly, research has proved that districts allocate most of their meeting time with principals and teachers (traditionally used for largely day-to-day administrative issues) in targeted professional development that caters for the individual needs of schools, principals and teachers (Leithwood, 2013). Further evidence shows that while district leaders are now deliberately trying to spend more time on instruction improvement than on issues regarding operation and regulation as they supervise principals (Honig & Rainey, 2015), they are also providing both the requisite resources and training, while closely monitoring progress towards school improvement objectives and holding their staff and principals accountable for the

successful implementation outcomes of the professional development interventions. I have personally, during my tenure at the district office, attended cluster gatherings where heads and teachers shared their experiences as they implemented what they had earlier on agreed with their district leaders. Furthermore, the district office leaders in my study outlined the nature of, and the importance that they placed on, the District Schools Inspector's monthly meetings with heads, meetings in which all the district office leaders also participated.

2.4.6 Supervision

District office leaders employ visits to schools as one of many supervision strategies. While district leaders prioritise supervision of instruction to improve classroom teaching through observing and evaluating the performance of the teacher, leading to increased instruction quality (Childress, Elmore, Grossman & King, 2007; Mavuso & Moyo, 2014), generally, heads accept that district office visits to schools (scarce as they are) build a lasting bond between the district office and the schools (Burch & Spillane, 2004). In addition, Honig and Coburn, (2008) encourage district leaders to value their visits to schools since the visits allow them to measure the quality of teaching and learning for the purposes of determining the nature of district office assistance that each school requires. This will be possible as superintendents and other district office staff monitor the curriculum and teaching and learning at the schools by supervising and evaluating principals and teachers, and after such visits spare time to hold meetings with the principals and teachers (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Brown-Sims, 2010). Therefore, if the district office staff do not just visit every school in the district once every term, but increase their visits to those schools that require closer attention, more effective supervision outcomes would be realised (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018). Some districts go a step further to prescribe targets to school supervisors to enhance increased school time management although there are noticeable variations in how frequently each school is visited (Goldring *et al.,* 2018). The visits that the district office leaders pay to schools seem to cement the district office-school relationship since the district leaders and the schools mutually settle on the nature of support that each school needs, with specified schools receiving more frequent visits than the other schools for more effective supervision. My research investigates the significance of supervision visits to schools by the district officials.

It is important to look into what the district leaders actually do in their visits to schools. During the district office and circuit office visits to schools, the officials observe classroom work, consult with heads and teachers, hold and attend cluster meetings, produce feedback reports, provide a conducive environment for school staff professional development, and hold the district schools accountable for their improvement (Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018). Further evidence shows district leaders considerably visiting schools, having dialogue with principals, teachers, and the rest of the school staff, coupled with observing principals' work, and reviewing documents relating to school improvement and teacher professional development (Anderson &Turnbull, 2016; Nkambule & Amsterdam, 2018). This should be possible since (Bouffard, 2019: 49):

> … when a principal and principal supervisor walk into a classroom, they can assess whether instruction and learning are happening at the right cognitive level, have deep conversations about whether the students are doing work that is aligned to the framework, and talk about pedagogical strategies like whether the teacher grouped kids well to achieve the task.

The literature suggests that the district officials observe teachers teaching and observe the work of the head and the other school staff. They then measure whether teaching matches the learners' levels of understanding, discuss their observations with the entire school staff, and produce feedback reports. Subsequently, the district leaders review documents on school improvement and teacher professional development. We are also informed that the district officials organise cluster meetings in their endeavour to make the school environment conducive for professional development. My study examines the nature of supervision that district officials carry out in schools.

Another way of supervising heads relates to annual assessments. The district office staff conduct an annual assessment of every head to determine their effectiveness in managing, for example, teachers, stakeholders, and finances because such a practice helps the district leaders to achieve improved instructional leadership since evaluating heads boosts principal supervisors' capacity to support the heads (Childress & Suesse, 2007; Kimball, Arrigoni, Clifford, Yoder, & Milanowski, 2015). Indeed, district teacher and principal performance evaluation does not only positively impact on principal instructional leadership and build trust between the principal and the teacher, but also significantly improves learner achievement through improved instruction (Garet, Wayne, Brown, Rickles, Song & Manzeske, 2017).

Besides annual assessments of heads, district officials may monitor how heads assess teachers and what outcomes these assessments present. Studyville School District, for example, monitors school leaders' evaluation of teachers annually and expects frequent feedback and coaching for instructional practice improvement (Donaldson & Papay, 2012). A teacher summative rating of: "1 (needs improvement), 2 (developing), 3 (effective), 4 (strong), or 5 (exemplary)" (Donaldson & Papay, 2012: 5) guides the teacher evaluators in assessing teachers' instructional practice quality thrice within the year, with learner performance accounting for 50 per cent of the evaluation weighting and the other requisite professional areas making up the other fifty per cent. While the first two evaluations help the district evaluators identify high fliers and low performers, these ratings are verified and validated by external evaluators (Donaldson & Papay, 2012). It is interesting to note that although the Studyville School District evaluation system aims to improve every teacher through prompt feedback, it does not only recognise outstanding teacher performance, but also transparently, efficiently, and fairly removes consistent underperformers (Donaldson & Papay, 2012). In short, the district officials here seem to annually monitor school leaders' evaluation of teachers, with the prompt feedback focusing on improving every teacher. While the evaluation system rewards high flying teachers, it also appears to be effectively discarding identified underachievers. However, one may question the credibility of solely relying on the heads' evaluation of teachers since subjectivity cannot be ruled out.

The district leaders may employ another motivation strategy. They may recognise and award staff for demonstrating proficiency and quality instructional practice that may be evaluated regularly in the course of the year (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013). Such evaluation of head and teacher instructional practices could result in either a salary increase for a teacher who performs satisfactorily, or a delayed salary increase for a teacher who performs unsatisfactorily. However, it may be difficult to develop an effective assessment for principals and teachers that is aligned to learners' performance because of variations in learner enrolments and movement, subjectivity in teacher evaluation, and the need to compensate individual teachers differently for motivation purposes (Dee & Wyckoff, 2013). Also, after selecting and evaluating principals on the strengths of their instructional skills, effective districts hold them accountable for

school improvement (Cristol & Ramsey, 2014). The bottom line here seems not to be the subjective possibility of the evaluations, but the accountability that rests with the heads in the end. Inevitably, though, the district office leadership should make considerations for the alignment of teachers' academic and professional improvement and learners' continuous quality performance on the one hand, with teacher salary increases on the other hand. That explains why districts have developed reward and pay systems that retain quality teachers (Makhuzeni & Barkhuizen, 2015). Perhaps the district office might not ignore staff career progression and development when determining their remuneration.

Existing literature shows that not all heads perform as expected. It is, therefore, most desirable for the district office to closely monitor underperforming principals to determine the possible causes for the underperformance and decide on a remedy since district leaders are directly responsible for providing technical support to schools that underperform, paying particular attention to improvement in instructional effectiveness (Ashby, 2008; Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010; Campbell, Heyward & Jochim, 2018). For the "principal supervisors" to carry out such supervisory functions more effectively, (Honig & Rainey, 2015: 10):

> Supervisors can become progressively more capable of helping principals only if they receive on-going support, too. … it is particularly important that their own district leaders protect their time, taking other tasks off of their plates so that they can focus on working intensively with principals. Further, they should be assigned a manageable caseload — [estimated to consist] of between 8-12 principals per supervisor, assuming that those principals have varying levels of expertise as instructional leaders and need varying amounts of assistance. [It] is important that supervisors receive intensive professional development as well, in order to perform their role effectively.

It is important to note here that although district supervisors of heads must be intensively professionally developed to effectively monitor underperforming principals and selectively manage their time at work, it appears they must also be assigned reasonable workloads of between 8-12 heads each. Districts are reducing of the number of schools each district schools supervisor is in charge of and the number of principals that each district principal supervisor accounts for, the result of which is not only the management of fewer schools and principals respectively but also "the productive one-on-one coaching, responsiveness, and accountability to schools" (Hitt *et al.,* 2018: 6). Bouffard (2019: 49) concurs when he states that districts "… follow

best practice guidelines for the number of principals for every supervisor." This is instructional transformation where districts align thorough school assessment to standards, while district schools are supported to complete and execute action plans directly relating to continuous teaching and learning improvement (Hitt *et al.,* 2018). Arguably, I feel that this might not be feasible in the mostly struggling economies of developing countries that may not have the capacity to budget for the subsequent increase in the district office staff.

In my opinion, the district office leaders should not bypass principals and confront teachers as this may result in the supervisors missing critical chances of supporting principals. Such a development might lead to weakening instructional leadership in due course, and subverting the coordinated teacher development platforms. In this regard, the district office teacher and principal assessments that respect the principal's leadership position have far-reaching improvements to instruction (Fink & Riggan, 2013). In sync, district office principal supervisors are deliberately decreasing the time that they dwell on school operation and regulations and spending more time on instructional improvement (Honig & Rainey, 2015). The core business of the district principal supervisor is to focus on instructional leadership, particularly mentoring and supporting heads, and spending the greater part of their time in schools (Goldring *et al.,* 2018: 31). Significantly, district leaders "… transform [their] role, which has traditionally focused on operations and compliance, into one that supports principals to be instructional leaders" (Bouffard, 2019: 48). The underlying development might be suggesting a shift from the district's focus on school management and operation supervision to that of enhancing instructional leadership. District leaders anticipate reforms and set up systematic strategies that focus on strengthening ties with individual principals as reform implementation is on-going (Durand *et al.,* 2015). From this observation, one can argue that the district office leaders should separate the less successful institutions from their more successful counterparts to design the most suitable support strategies respectively, an area that my study refers to as district initiated professional development that is need driven.

The provision of a curriculum with clarity, coherence and quality directs teachers to align their lesson plans to standards that buttress the district leadership's efforts of monitoring and supporting instruction and the establishment of a data-driven student management system (Hitt *et al.,* 2018: 6). Furthermore, the districts have "… a

rigorous, effectively articulated standards-based curriculum and sufficient materials and curricular supports to implement the curriculum effectively" (Flemming *et al* 2018: 7). Such a curriculum not only enhances instructional strength in schools but also places the responsibility of learner achievement in assessment on the district (Hitt *et al.,* 2018). It appears that this forces districts to establish structures, expectations, and supports for school leadership teams that place more value on time allocated for improved instructional practice and learner outcomes. Such a shift in the district's culture practice is possible, in my view, when the leadership ensures the cross-pollination of school leadership development through, for example, targeted meetings with principals that allow them to enrich each other by sharing experiences.

2.4.7 Stakeholder and partner engagement

District officials seem to be gradually realising and acknowledging how it is vital to work closely with stakeholders and partners. While the district office leaders use parental, learner and other partners' input to drive school improvement (Honig & Coburn, 2008), they also engage the community in all school improvement initiatives (Nasir, Farooq & Rabia, 2017). It has been proven that schools on their own are not able to improve learner achievement in the absence of the district office and other stakeholder support (Harriet, Anin & Asuo, 2013; Humphrey, Koppich, Lavadenz, Marsh, O'Day, Plank, Stokes, & Hall, 2018). In that regard, district officials evaluate schools and help them in problem resolution through, among others, developing partnership and educational stakeholder relationships (Aldaihani, 2017). It becomes, therefore, a fact that district office leaders have the responsibility of establishing and assisting schools establish close relations with external organisations that may benefit the district office and the schools in several ways as long as those relationships are relevant to both organisations' requirements (Darfler & Riggan, 2013). Therefore, educational stakeholders, including the district office, consider input from all societal levels to design a sustainable teaching and learning strategy that incorporates technology in all schools (Johnson, 2009). It is the district's responsibility, therefore, to explicitly clarify each individual's role in supporting school development and learner progress, while creating room for the school stakeholders' discussion, exploration, and reflection on instruction (Hitt *et al.,* 2018: 11). In addition to emphasising high standards evident in daily practice and reinforced through follow-up strategies

intended to significantly improve learning outcomes, the researchers imply, the district promptly addresses identified needs to support excellent teaching and learning. I, therefore, think that the district should consider stakeholder perspectives to identify and prioritise strategies that would lead to constructively reviewing the school climate. Subsequently, I see the district and school leadership removing the major obstacles so that the school would have the minimum resources and strategies to both sustain student learning and also meet their emotional needs.

Apparently, learners, their parents, teacher representative organisations, school committees, and the local community, among others, constitute the school's stakeholders. Harriet *et al.,* (2013) note that schools, on their own, are not able to improve learner achievement in the absence of the district office and other stakeholder support. The researchers further stress the need for the district office leadership to understand that influential stakeholders are more often than not at variance with each other concerning their understanding of a successful learning environment. There is evidence that district office leaders, because of the inevitable decline in financial support and increased consumption of educational services, have prudently formed partnerships in support of reform initiatives (Blank, Jacobson, & Melaville, 2012). In many districts, to circumvent the various challenges related to supporting teaching and learning in schools, district leaders have continuously partnered with other organisations, parents, and community stakeholders (Durand *et al.,* 2015). Interestingly, one could logically conclude that despite their diverse views, these stakeholders might determine the effectiveness of the district office's strategies.

McBeath (2006) observes that more often than not, district leaders abandon their core business and pay attention to other things that could be done by other people who are not in the district leadership. This could subsequently, though indirectly, adversely affect teaching and learning in schools and, to avert this, the district leaders should partner with heads to achieve district-wide instructional improvement (Honig, 2013). It becomes imperative for districts to engage "expertise and resources that the districts themselves often do not possess" to improve and maintain learner achievement through "developing, implementing, and sustaining systemic reform" that transcends the mediatory advocacy, technical assistance and fund-raising (Fisher, 2003: 4). My study participants provided their views on the district office's engagement with partners and stakeholders and the subsequent impact on the district office and the schools

themselves with a focus on improved district office instructional leadership support to schools.

2.4.8 Professional development

Professional development plays its part, as an instructional leadership strategy, in improving teaching and learning. Cole, Robinson, Ansaldo, Whiteman and Spradlin (2012) suggest that an effective teacher evaluation system considers individual, school and district level professional development needs after which targeted professional development can take place following genuine assessments to identify strong and weak teachers. Their study shows that head and teacher assessments guide the district leaders to plan and implement relevant and productive teacher professional development initiatives (Cole *et al.,* 2012). In that regard, professional development can be meaningful and relevant when it is "… based on data and enhancing resources for coaching" (Hitt *et al.,* 2018: 6). This quotation implies that the district office leaders', heads' and teachers' shared and upheld understanding and appreciation of such professional development might result in quality instruction. This is why district office teacher evaluators ensure, however, that they are relevantly and adequately trained in that regard to foster teacher trust and confidence in the system (Cole *et al.,* 2012). Chinhara and Sotuku (2020), and Clark (2017) emphasise that the district office leadership should commit itself to continuous principal and teacher professional development. Furthermore, the researchers advise the district leaders to provide ample support to new and weak teachers, and the state to avail sufficient resources whose outcome is professional development of a high quality. Accordingly, I learn that the major thrust of continuous professional development should be the district leaders' support for new and underperforming teachers.

It is necessary, at this point, to get a glimpse of the diverse nature of professional development. Prominent researchers (Levine & Marcus, 2010; De Clercq & Phiri, 2013; Kennedy, 2014) point out that in many cases, the traditional one-time workshops, seminars and/or conferences do not effectively improve teacher instructional practices and student achievement. Similarly, teacher professional development through the cascade approach has also been found to be highly inadequate since there is a high possibility of information distortion or misinterpretation

as the information precipitates to the recipient teachers (Dichaba & Mokhele, 2012; Bett, 2016). Care should be taken to ensure that district initiated professional development, while requiring regular evaluation to determine its impact, should not only have a direct alignment with both teaching and learning and the wider aspect of school or district development plan, but should also focus on heads' and teachers' identified needs (Rosen & Parise, 2017). Park (2019: 12) mirrors these findings when he establishes that "… the district develops a scope and sequence for principal professional development for the year that is informed by data and feedback from principals regarding their work." Therefore, "an aggressive professional development programme" is one way in which the district office could improve the quality of instruction in schools (Elmore, Grossman & Akinola, 2007: 33). A typical example is a preschool professional development programme that first assesses the needs of pre-school directors, school heads and teachers to align the programme with their different degrees of experience and expertise (Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis & Sakai, 2011). Literature shows that, generally, the usual workshops, seminars and conferences, and the cascade strategy have failed to effectively improve teacher instruction and learner performance. It is further noted that aggressive district professional development should not only target teaching and learning and the district development plan, but should also focus on the needs of heads and teachers for quality instruction. The participants in my study share their experiences in their exposure to professional development in their respective districts.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (2018) professional development approach coordinates professional learning module content, person to person or online training, and coaching that is targeted. Apart from facilitating discussion and implementation, training produces knowledgeable and skilled principals and teachers who, with district coaching support, improve teaching and learning in their schools. In addition, principal and teacher leader professional development can be highly productive when it focuses on standards and also challenges the principal's and teacher's intellect and is related to their work (Herrmann *et al.,* 2019). It is observed that selective and targeted professional development should result in the retention of good teachers, while the district office leaders should be capacitated with a clearer understanding of their instructional leadership roles. Furthermore, there is evidence that effective professional development of principals

can be enhanced when district principal supervisors not only visit schools and meet with principals with a focus on instruction improvement issues, but also conduct very productive professional development sessions that update and upgrade principals' knowledge and skills for their professional growth and development (Lonyian & Kuranchie, 2018). However, district offices should, on a regular basis, carry out a needs assessment before organising professional development programmes for heads and teachers (Lonyian & Kuranchie, 2018).

Districts that implement needs-based professional development not only improve coaching relevance that is supported by resources but also attract and retain a first-rate teaching force (Hitt *et al.,* 2018). To achieve this, I am sure that district principal supervisors should be visible in schools regularly as they coach and provide valuable feedback on assessment to principals while at the same time supporting that assessment with the requisite resources that include money, time, and people. Although it is not unusual for schools to sometimes look at districts as counterproductive to the schools' improvement efforts, a district and school partnership is fertile ground for successful school improvement. Therefore, this may be why district instructional leaders in the literature are working closely with schools to not only eliminate the traditional practice in which schools use the state's annual tests to measure learner progress, but also to create an enabling platform on which the schools can regularly monitor learner achievement. In so doing, district offices pave the way for principals to assist teachers to promptly respond to challenges, review their teaching methods, and cater for learners' individual differences (Hitt *et al.,* 2018). Furthermore, many districts, after designing the curriculum, select, mentor and evaluate principal candidates, and play a greater role in preparing future principals in readiness for organising schools that more effectively support teachers, with the bottom line being continuous professional development (White, Pareja, Hart, Huynh, Klostermann, & Holt, 2016).

There is another way of improving instruction across the district. This involves leading the system's instructional change by also attending to school-level problems that include people management, goal and expectation setting, strategic resource mobilisation, planning, coordinated and evaluated instruction and curriculum, and an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning (Jaquith *et al.,* 2015). That

could be one reason why districts prioritise improved teaching and learning, with a close link between district goals and the district's efforts for school improvement (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). The researchers also found that sound professional judgment depended on quantitative data use, an example of which is when principal evaluation, student retention, and the development of school objectives relied on analysed learner achievement data. It can also be useful for districts to employ varied principal professional development strategies to promote data use that guides principal instructional decision-making after test result interpretation and reviews of learners' work (Marsh *et al.,* 2005). This can result in district-wide professional development that includes the cultural component of the district that fosters expectation consistency for teachers and heads to control their biases, create lasting bonds with learners and parents, and improved teaching and learning outcomes (Colin & Mwalimu, 2018). Therefore, this could be why the professional development of both teachers and principals places greater emphasis on instructional rather than administrative matters, with expert coaches and trainers employing varied strategies in the initiatives (Cristol & Ramsey, 2014). District officials, I understand, should attend to school-level management matters, but more so on the professional development of heads and teachers by experts in instructional practice. However, the district leaders in developing countries could be accorded the opportunity to make such critical decisions following their guidance from the expert coaches and trainers. This might not only increase the district leaders' confidence as instructional leaders, but might also strengthen trust between the district leaders and the school staff.

Principals' instructional leadership growth relies on intensive supervision that includes more coaching and support than monitoring and evaluation. While teacher professional development should be continuous and classroom-based, it should not merely rely on meetings and workshops that have proved less effective vehicles for real professional growth (Heller, 2018). Since heads' performance guides their professional development needs (Aldaihani, 2017), district office leaders identify principals' specific instructional leadership responsibility gaps and use these to develop learning experiences that more effectively support the principals (Vogel, 2018). It is my understanding that heads require more intensive coaching and support that come after the identification of their specific instructional leadership responsibility needs than monitoring and evaluation. On the other hand, teachers need continuous

and classroom-based professional development. However, pivotal to the district professional development strategy, I gather, must be the thrust to raise the quality of teaching and learning that is visible in learner achievement following informed and effective implementation.

A tactful alignment of professional development is necessary. This ensures consistency in teacher instructional practice that encourages sharing, sustaining, supporting, and aligning with the curriculum for “long-term, consistent, system-wide improvements in teaching and learning” (Spence, 2002: 6). I note that such professional development assumes that consistent learner achievement is closely linked to subsequent consistent teacher instructional practice improvement with resource reallocation to every teacher significantly increasing teacher professional development. In that regard, districts that aim to achieve on-going teacher development begin by further principal training in using current systems for teacher evaluation to link identified teacher needs with available professional development programmes (Rosen & Parise, 2017).

Professional development can be looked at from another angle. The district office can provide (Abele *et al.,* 2003): (a) mentorship targeting new teachers; (b) training relating to the current curriculum and textbooks; (c) on-the-job direction and classroom visits initiated by district office leaders; (d) space that allows teacher professional interchange; and (e) mentorship focusing on the use of classroom assessment generated data in order to improve practice. In addition, the district office can avail experts to support school improvement, reorganise the district structures that professionally develop heads and teachers in curriculum implementation and teaching improvement, and equitably allocate resources to support teaching and learning objectives (Knapp *et al.,* 2003; Alsubaie, 2016). The highlighted areas, in my view, are teacher and head professional development that transcends school administration and management and invades the actual teaching and learning in the classroom.

The district office can make the professional develop of principals and teachers more effective. In this regard, the district office leadership could seek “to integrate [the] organisation’s mission, work processes, decisions, information, and technology in a way that is client-centred” (Howell, 2014: 727). In other words, the central focus of attention of the district office leadership is improved teaching and learning. To achieve

this, the district leaders can ensure that workshops are consistently linked to and meet the district instructional aims. It is my opinion that the district office leadership could design and implement a strategic plan that focuses on reform at every level of the district for the purpose of boosting teaching and learning in line with a clearly articulated mission. Therefore, perhaps to firmly support teachers as dedicated and committed professionals, instructional leadership should focus on challenge and need driven classroom teaching and learning. This could prepare the ground for a lasting, reciprocal and respectful relationship between the schools and the district office. However, Chhuon, Gilkey, Gonzalez, Daly, & Chrispeels (2008: 230-231) question why the structures in the majority of district offices do not allow for "repeated social exchange and interaction", thereby abandoning the school leadership to manage "their schools in relative isolation from each other and from the [district] office". One could conclude that the district office leadership is weighted with the task of initiating and modelling trust. However, let me caution that this trust might be eroded when the district office leadership finds it extremely difficult to improve student performance throughout their districts when the district office may attempt to implement the most recent and popular ideas for education transformation that gobble valuable resources but consequently yield outcomes that are not related to teaching and learning improvement.

2.4.9 Curriculum

An examination of curriculum-related issues is required. The district office instructional leadership support to schools ensures that each school is equipped with "a coherent, standards-based curriculum and instructional programme" that employs as its pivot performance measurement, district office-sourced teaching/learning materials and teacher professional development (Austin *et al.,* 2007: 278). Furthermore, there is a very tight coordination between school objectives and district goals to enhance significant school improvement, with centrally controlled curriculum and instruction goals visible in the structure of the goals (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). Therefore, each school needs the district office to assist it in articulating and interpreting national guidelines relating to teacher practice requirements and learner achievement (Abele *et al.,* 2003; Herrmann *et al.,* 2019). The district office instructional leadership support

to schools seems to guide schools to articulate and interpret national policies on a standards-based curriculum for quality teaching and learning outcomes.

Johnson and Cheng (2007) observe that districts effectively support the introduction of a new curriculum with coaching and supplementary instruction related materials that they distribute to buttress implementation in the schools. On the other hand, Childress *et al.,* (2007: 434) believe that districts spearhead the inception of a district curriculum whose benchmarks outline "the skills every student [is] expected to master in a given subject at each grade [or form] level". Since the skills are linked to Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives, to evaluate how effective teacher instruction, training, material distribution and the district schools' curriculum are, the district office designs and administers district tests per subject and per grade or form level as assessment that buttresses learning (Sullanmaa, Pyhalto, Ptetarinen, & Soini, 2019). In other studies, although some district level structures and principals disagree with the existence of a common curriculum, other district level structures are committed to a common curriculum for the district (Fink & Riggan, 2013). Many countries prescribe to the idea that district consistency in implementing the national curriculum facilitates a shared ownership of the education system (Sullanmaa *et al.,* 2019). The discussion, in my opinion, is premised on the fact that some districts are implementing a common curriculum while others are employing diverse curricula. However, many countries seem to implement a common national curriculum because the majority of the citizens identify with the resultant education system.

2.5 Relationship between the perceived district office instructional leadership structures and practices

Having discussed the district leaders' perceptions of instructional leadership practices, this section of the chapter addresses the relationship between the perceived district office instructional leadership structures and practices. My focus in this research study is to examine the extent to which the district office leadership believes its structures are aligned with supporting schools' instructional leadership development. I will do this through a close examination of professional development, school improvement, resource management, school evaluation, principal preparation, adaptive leadership and challenges that district leaders face.

2.5.1 Professional development

It is noted that several scholars propound varying professional development strategies of aligning the district office structures and practices of instructional leadership. Prioritising learner performance, districts are demanding principals to inspire and coach teachers and to be competent in data management, curriculum design and implementation, pedagogical dynamics, and human capital development for them to remain relevant (Alvoid & Black, 2014). While the district office leadership commits itself to continuous principal and teacher professional development (Lonyian & Kuranchie, 2018), it is prepared to invest considerably in head and teacher professional development to achieve quality teaching and learning (Vogel, 2018). In a nutshell, it is realised that teachers and principals become more effective following the district office initiated professional development interventions.

In addition, districts should capacitate district leaders in several ways. Researchers, Alvoid and Black (2014) observe that district offices, besides providing support to principals, organise sessions for principals to dialogue on practice issues. The districts go on to partner with institutions of higher learning and non-governmental organisations in recruiting and training principals to replace the current ones. However, the district officials do not ignore keeping principals in line with the current district instructional and leadership policies, and supporting principals technologically in recording and sharing data on instruction. In a slight twist, Sanzo and Wilson (2016) acknowledge that it is important to realise that district leaders that collaborate with, and partner universities effectively prepare heads for instructional leadership that merges the district leaders' knowledge and practical experience of the district schools with the university staff's theoretical and research expertise. My study participants shared their different views on how their structures related to their practices of supporting schools.

2.5.2 School improvement

Sometimes, I have viewed district offices as irrelevant to, and intrusive in the development interventions of schools. On the contrary, some district office administrators suggest that ideally the district office is experienced with, trained in, and has the capacity to monitor schools for policy compliance (Honig, 2003). It is

important, however, to note that school heads are accorded district office support and are not abandoned to fate in the wake of rising district and public demands for quality results (Byrne-Jiménez & Orr, 2012). Therefore, the district office leadership understands that good schools rely on strong instructional leaders and that it is the district office leadership's responsibility to ensure that every school has that instructional leadership calibre to spearhead effective teaching and learning (Honig, 2013). The emphasis here is on sound instructional leadership support for effective student learning and school improvement. In addition, Avidov-Ungar and Nagar (2015) emphasise the need for the district office leaders to ensure that the district office and all schools have modern technological infrastructure that would assist administrators and teachers to significantly improve teaching and learning. The argument here appears to be although the district office is supposed to have experienced, trained, and capable officials for monitoring school compliance with policy, the district office leadership also ensures that every school has the right instructional leadership calibre to spearhead effective teaching and learning and school improvement that lean on modern technological infrastructure. In many developing countries, the availability of modern technological infrastructure in schools is a big challenge, thus compromising the intended teaching and learning outcomes. Some of the participants in my study provide insights into this area.

Abele *et al.,* (2003) identify six characteristics of significantly progressive district offices. First is an environment that is conducive to continuous improvement in all learners' performance. An understanding of achievement as every district office leader's core business comes second, while a shared objective that the district office supports and services schools is third. Fourth is the central aim of sharpening instructional practices through researched and coordinated professional development practices. Fifth is rationalised curriculum and instructional practice assessment. Finally, there is the need for training heads in data interpretation to assist them to make informed decisions on instruction. Apart from these professional development responsibilities, the district leadership is also responsible for, among others, fostering the introduction of technology in schools and capacity-building principals in that regard for effective instructional leadership (Aldaihani, 2017). I believe that since it is every educator's responsibility at the district office to appreciate that outstanding learner achievement is the result of continuous productive effort, it is the district office's

responsibility to establish leadership behaviours that are conducive to, and consistent with, continuous learner achievement. Parylo and Zepeda (2014) proffer that the district leadership ensures improvement in the quality of teaching and learning by connecting the district office work to principals' work. In that regard, continuous improvement in education should reflect continued efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning, although districts and schools have slowly implemented continuous improvement, with those that are implementing it already producing remarkable outcomes (Best & Dunlap, 2014).

2.5.3 Resource management

Considering resource management, district office leaders, as instructional leaders, need to place high on their agenda responsibility for school and learner progress by improving teacher and school quality and strategically managing human and material resources to improve learner performance (Lewis *et al.,* 2011). Hornung and Yoder (2014) further the idea by roping in the district leaders' engagement in district strategic communication, financial and human resources management. Other researchers have vigorously advocated for an inclusive education that "…hinges on the premise that all children with and without disabilities should learn, and do sporting activities together," (Mudyahoto, 2018: 215). Rhim, Sutter and Campbell (2016) stress that districts should not only cater for the learners' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, but also accommodate children with disabilities and teach all children to accept, respect, and appreciate such diversity. By human and material resources, what comes to mind are the teaching and non-teaching staff, and buildings, stationery and equipment among others. At the same time, an important resource that cannot be ignored is the learner who comes to school as either able bodied or living with disability. There seems to be a hint on inclusive education that the district leaders have to look out for as both teachers and learners embrace this diverse nature of humans.

In that regard, the district leaders that administer special education should strive to ensure that they distribute human and material resources to improve the welfare of the learners living with disabilities (Lemons, Sinclair, Gesel, Danielson & Gandhi, 2019), an issue that my study brings to light.

2.5.4 School evaluation

Childress and Suesse (2007) advocate for a district office systematic support, as opposed to punishment, for schools. Such seemingly misguided practice may have detrimental effects on the intimidated and threatened principals and teachers in the schools that may lead to a similar ripple effect on student learning and performance. Furthermore, a great deal of challenges faced by districts in providing high quality public education are of a fiscal nature and need the collective efforts of state policy makers and district offices to effect efficient and effective resource utilisation for quality teaching and learning (Childress, Elmore, Grossman & Johnson, 2007; Silvernail & Linet, 2014). The district office leadership should, therefore, evaluate the performance of all the district office staff and ensure that the office structures are properly in place with regards to supporting instructional leadership on a very high level. Subsequently, the district office leadership could ensure that everyone at the district office works to significantly contribute to improved teaching and learning. This implies that even the district office personnel that might be viewed as having nothing to do with instructional leadership ought to be engaged in work activities that, by and large, contribute to improved teacher performance and student learning.

Considering staff motivation, the district office leadership could reform their practices as change inevitably creeps in. For example, a reward system must be put in place to foster not only stimulation and motivation, but also encourage creative behaviour, adaptability and assimilation of effective current instructional practices. This points to the fact that the role of the district office leaders as reform drivers has more than doubled as a result of "systematic testing, explicit performance standards, and levying rewards and sanctions as consequences for results" (Lewis *et al.,* 2011: 3). In my view, while the district office's focus may be on a continuous and effective strategy of school improvement, that effort should be safeguarded by its sustenance. Terhart (2013) cautions, however, that it is worthwhile to note that although it has commonly been assumed that teachers fear reform and criticism, the district office leadership has always been targeting improving learner performance. Therefore, it is important for the district office "to get the resources behind the strategies that were … identified" (Hightower, 2002: 17). Participants in my study highlighted the critical need for resource availability to get meaningful teaching and learning outcomes.

2.5.5 Principal preparation

It should be understood that district officials have a duty to prepare principals for their roles and responsibilities. Principal preparation programmes include an extended probation period, attachment to an effective substantive principal, a well-developed system with regards to entry requirements, principal preparation that caters for diverse individual experiences, and prioritisation of monitoring how effective each teacher is (Taylor, Pelletier, Trimble, Ruiz, 2014). Although the district leadership inducts and professionally develops newly-appointed heads, at the district level, research has proved that "current preparation is leaving some (heads) under-prepared for key functions" (Clayton, 2014: 11). Therefore, for the district to ensure that principals execute their instructional leader duties effectively, it should aggressively professionally develop them (Schoenbach & Greenleaf, 2017). Furthermore, the role of the central office leaders in initiating and supporting improved student learning, principal professional development should include communication, strategic planning, instructional leadership and human relations skills (Archbald, 2016). In addition, district leaders need to train heads in, among others, instructional leadership, down-to-earth decision-making, and school management with a particular focus on the complex statutes that govern the education system (Clayton, 2014). I learn that district level programmes that prepare heads subject the heads to a prescribed probation period, attachment to substantive heads that are performing well, and exposure to the education system. Since research has demonstrated that currently, head preparation is producing half-baked heads, there is the need for aggressive head professional development. My study examined the extent to which the district office leaders prepared newly-appointed heads and deputy heads for their school leadership roles.

2.5.6 Adaptive leadership

Sometimes, the district leadership may have to think outside the box. Many districts engage adaptive leadership since it recognises the reality that some of the organisation's high-ranking officials may not be knowledgeable about addressing challenges in their complexity, novelty, and uncertainty (Durand *et al.,* 2015). Consequently, the top district leaders find themselves delegating the tasks to their subordinates in an engagement that faces real changes and transforms them in a dynamic environment that anticipates change. As such, this professional development

strategy could be visualised as driving the district leaders into gradually and deliberately tapping into, and utilising the other district office staff's expertise and frequently appreciating their dependence on them (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). My examination of the Finance, Administration and Human Resources district office structure brought insights in this regard.

2.5.7 Challenges that district leaders face

I am aware that there are obstacles to the improvement of instructional leadership that the district office should not only be aware of, but should also attempt to adequately address. In light of this, Jaquith *et al.,* (2015: 7) state that for us to understand much about the instructional leadership in a district, varied in "size, scope, location and magnitude of complexity", it is necessary to closely examine the leaders' identification and formulation of the challenges associated with teaching and learning together with their organisation of tasks that lead to problem-solving. In other words, it might be important to appreciate the diverse nature of districts in terms of their expanse, capacity, geographical position and nature before the effectiveness of the district leaders' instructional leadership support to schools can be determined. My study, through the examination of the districts' practices of instructional leadership, similarly sought to provide insights into the challenges that the district leaders encountered and their suggestions to improve their support to schools.

Le Fevre and Robinson (2014) point out three deterrents to district support as: administration activities distracting head supervisors from their central responsibility of improving instruction; inadequate leaders' knowledge of content that may result in, for example, their reluctance to carry out teacher observations; and some of the leadership's lack of human relations skills that nourish improved instruction. Moreover, it has been noted that some district office principal supervisors are not adequately trained, do not have ample time, and are ill equipped to assess principals for professional development that is more inclined to instructional leadership (Kimball *et al.,* 2015). Possible explanations for these shortcomings include principal supervisors facing numerous calls for duty that rob them of valuable time that they should spend evaluating and supporting principals, while more often than not, the instruments that principal supervisors use to evaluate principals are not up-dated, are artificial, misaligned with requirements, invalid and unreliable (Kimball *et al.,* 2015). The

researchers here seem to clearly stress that administrative and other commitments distract supervisors of heads from their core functions of instructional improvement. In addition, inadequate district leaders' knowledge of content, training, time, and human relations skills do not save the day as they often deprive them of the confidence and opportunity to supervise teachers and heads for professional development that relates to instructional leadership. Sometimes, the district supervisors use out-dated, artificial, misaligned, invalid and unreliable instruments to supervise heads and teachers.

There are more challenges that the district officials encounter as they strive to support schools. Honig and Rainey (2015) identify four challenges thus. First, competing officials and the absence of a unifying system in the district office sections can be detrimental to the district office efforts to support improvements in teaching and learning. Second, because of limited information on teacher training needs that should guide resource distribution priorities for teacher development initiatives, there could be contradictions. Third, staff recruitment and selection practices in a number of district offices are not supportive to instructional improvement. Fourth, district office supervisors of heads seldom provide the heads intensive instructional improvement support. To counter such impediments, Murphy and Hallinger (1988: 177) propose that district superintendents consider problems as "issues to be solved or circumvented rather than as barriers to action" since at their highest level of difficulty, problems could be overcome leading to opportunities for attaining critical goals. In addition, district leaders are striving to "support and spread programs and practices that produce results" (Corcoran, Fuhrman & Belcher, 2001: 9), while they are also prioritising "… building positive relationships with school site leaders so that they can have meaningful conversations and growth" (Park, 2019: 4). The major challenges presented by district leaders are first, the absence of internal unity of purpose in the district office structures that could undermine all the district operations. Second, disagreements in the prioritisation of which resources to distribute for professional development initiatives could be unhealthy for the districts. Third, staff recruitment and selection practices may not be supportive to instructional improvement in schools. Fourth, there might be inadequate district office intensive instructional improvement support of heads. To remedy these shortcomings, district officials are encouraged to either squarely deal with them or avoid them instead of conceding defeat to them.

Finally, when the district leaders build positive relationships with heads, significant school development outcomes could be realised.

Despite the increasing demand for district offices to meet annual achievement targets relating to learner performance standards, a significant number of district offices are saddled with high levels of students from poor families and a high percentage of low-achieving learners, coupled with inadequate human, material, and financial resources (Marsh *et al.,* 2005). However, districts are in control of barriers and limitations regarding curricula, teaching and learning, professional development, and measurement of learner achievement as a result of continuous state technical support to districts (Rentner & Kober, 2014). These studies indicate that although to a certain extent, continuous state technical support to districts bails districts out of given challenges, this still leaves the districts with the remaining challenges to grapple with. Therefore, there seems to be the need for the districts to seek further support beyond the state. Perhaps that could partially account for the advent of the Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ).

A new dimension comes into play as districts attempt to chart the way forward in the wake of the diverse challenges they are facing. Since district leaders are battling to come up with the best remedy for struggling schools after acknowledging that there is no single teaching and learning prescription for high results to so complex and diverse a learner population, the option for "creating new, smaller and more diverse teaching and learning environments" is gradually taking centre stage (Hassel, Fullwood & Terrell, 2004: 2). This explains why districts in the USA such as Baltimore, New York City, Milwaukee, San Diego City, Philadelphia and Oakland have acknowledged that new schools are a step in the right direction as they not only reform the educational system but also cater for the diverse needs and choices of learners (Hassel *et al.,* 2004). I acknowledge that by clearing noted challenges, investing resources equitably, and appreciating that new schools are designed to produce academic results, district leaders can catalyse opportunities for creating new schools that in the Zimbabwean context are referred to as independent / private schools and colleges.

2.6 Rethinking: the practice of instructional leadership in the contexts of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and post- Covid-19

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is linked to a “ubiquitously connected and pervasively proximate … world and its response to COVID-19”. (Whalley, France, Parkc, Mauchlinec & Welsh, 2021: 79). Frightening as this may sound, it seems inevitable for the education systems in all countries, together with their district officials, to promptly adopt reforms and innovations in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating effects on teaching and learning.

The Sars-CoV-2 virus, …the COVID-19 pandemic (Whalley *et al.,* 2021: 79) attacked the education systems worldwide, forcing them to shift towards online learning that significantly restricts physical contact between teachers and learners. This disruption of the traditional mode of education has dragged the global education systems into adopting the 4IR technologies that governments seem to believe will significantly reduce the COVID-19 effects on schools (Abdulrahim & Mabrouk, 2020). Therefore, it becomes imperative for district offices and schools to turn their focus on digital learning technology systems to replace the traditional face-to-face teaching and learning approaches.

As COVID-19 ushered in a chaotic era that disrupted progress in global education systems in 2020, suddenly, educational institutions across the world faced a host of COVID-19 related hurdles that did not even give them time to prepare and grow in the aftermaths of the disease (Makina, 2020). Following the sudden closure of all educational institutions in Zimbabwe from March 2020, the resulting blockade to learner academic progress appears to have given birth to “survival of the fittest …to adapt to these changing circumstances of confusion” (Makina, 2020: 198). The confusion parameters seemed to border on the absence of planning and organization fuelled by inadequacies in the availability of e-learning infrastructure and preparedness of the district leaders, teachers and learners.

The requirement for teachers and learners to observe social distancing and related World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines to reduce the spread of COVID-19 exerted pressure on the learners’ parents, the learners themselves, their teachers, the school heads, and officials at the district, provincial and national levels. Access to computers and the Internet appears to be far-fetched for the majority of learners, particularly those in rural and/or poverty stricken parts of Zimbabwe. In the urban areas, the striking gap in the various types of schools may not be ignored. For

example, private schools tend to be better positioned financially to procure and provide their staff and learners with the requisite ICT infrastructure than their public school (government and local authority) counterparts. Therefore, that disparity in learner and staff access to the Internet seems to present further challenges to the district officials and other stakeholders in their bid to provide equal opportunities to learners.

After the first closure of schools in Zimbabwe (between March and September, 2020), the government authorized the schools to reopen in learner batches. The examination classes (Grade 7, Forms 4 and 6) were the first to reopen. Then the rest of the classes reopened later as directed. However, the learners' parents, teacher trade unions, and other stakeholders openly doubted whether most of the public schools had the requisite Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for their staff and learners.

Recent research shows that the COVID-19 era could be considered in the context of change (including change in education systems), an inevitable phenomenon that society should always be prepared to learn and adapt to for progress and growth (Makina, 2020). In the education sector, there is the need to not only urgently reorient the education officials' out-dated mind sets, but also develop quick response systems (Makina, 2020). As a fit to this study, the district officers should be professionally developed and trained "pandemic-informed" officials that can plan, develop and manage such quick response systems (Makina, 2020: 201). This would go a long way to create an environment that capacitates district office leaders to be always alert to deal with unpredicted occurrences for the sake of reducing their interruption of teaching and learning in educational institutions.

Although the COVID-19 induced school closures present an opportunity for authorities and governments to revisit and renovate the education system, harsh realities that are fertile ground for the spread of the pandemic continue to show themselves in public view. In South Africa, a significant number of learners are accommodated "… in disadvantaged communities [that] include dilapidated school buildings, dangerous and unsanitary pit latrines [with] no water supply, shortages of learning materials and large classes (Parker, Morris, & Hofmeyr 2020: 2)".

In Zimbabwe, COVID-19 appears to have further exposed the unequal opportunities for learners as the socio-economic environment that seems to be deeply embedded in extreme levels of poverty and unemployment. On-line learning has been introduced

as a remote learning strategy, with support from television and radio educational programmes that are meant to target those learners who cannot access on-line learning. On March 11, 2021 Zimbabwe launched the Learning Passport, a new and free digital learning platform that was designed to improve the education of learners that are exposed to learning restrictions because they are poor, discriminated against, and live in conflict and pandemics such as COVID-19 (Abrishamian & Feki, 2021). Although the Learning Passport seems to bridge the yawning gap between those learners that can access paid e-Learning programmes and those that cannot, still deep concerns surface considering the fate of the learners from the poor and disadvantaged environments. It is clear that the platform is only accessible to learners and teachers using smartphones. Therefore, those learners that may never dream of possessing smartphones appear to remain disadvantaged as on-line learning and the other introduced types of remote learning appear to be out of their reach. This, definitely, should be food for thought for the district level leaders of education as they provide instructional support to schools.

However, on a more positive note, I am convinced that these challenges have opened the doors to researchers and officials at the district office to think outside the box. They, in other words, have to re-visit and re-craft strategies that should guarantee high levels of preparedness for schools to effectively deal with teaching and learning with very little interruption in the new normal-the COVID-19 era.

2.7 Summary of the literature review

I firstly presented a reflection on Instructional Leadership as the underpinning and guiding conceptual framework of this study, with the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS), as articulated by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) concretising the idea of instructional leadership and its influence on teaching and learning.

In view of the observation that instructional leadership is not actually the prerogative of principals (Heck & Hallinger 2009), I understood that instructional leadership is relevant to the context of education, and actually involves, at higher levels, the district office, the central focus of this study — district leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the study was

fuelled by another gap that arose from the conclusion made by renowned researchers Spillane *et al.* (2003) that it may be difficult for the state and district office staff, with their resource limitations and distance from classrooms, to be able to motivate and support teacher learning on their own and yet such teacher learning actually takes place at the school level.

The history of the district office (Honig, 2012) shows how the district office's core responsibilities evolved from the need to basically regulate and link schools with higher offices that controlled education nationwide, to the inclusion of support for teaching and learning, heads' instructional leadership, learner accountability and guiding, stimulating and accounting for school improvement. Although Leithwood (2013) observes that the general public is convinced that student teaching and learning is the exclusive responsibility of schools, we cannot ignore the pivotal support that district leaders provide schools to improve instruction and the learners' welfare.

A closer look at the district leaders' perspectives on their instructional leadership practices showed the bottom line to be the public expectation for the schools and the district offices to produce results, as opposed to mere representations (Childress *et al.,* 2007). To examine improved teaching and learning for subsequent improved student learning and achievement, I directed the literature review on such district office practices as personnel recruitment, assignment, supervision, compensation and retention; school improvement; professional development; partnership and stakeholder support; performance management; curriculum development; technological support; and student achievement support. This was possible through discussions by prominent researchers such as Elmore *et al.,* (2007); Johnson and Cheng (2007); Honig and Coburn (2008); Prew and Quaigrain (2010); Farley-Ripple (2012); and Fink and Riggan (2013).

I reviewed literature on the relationship between the district office instructional leadership structures and practices (Byrne-Jiménez & Orr, 2012; and Honig, 2012) where, on the one hand the district offices have sometimes been viewed as irrelevant to and intrusive in the development interventions of schools, but on the other hand it has been proved that district offices are actually critical in providing schools with invaluable support that culminates in significant improvement in teaching and learning (Clayton, 2014; Archibald, 2016; and Wilson, 2016). My study contributes to the

seemingly scanty body of knowledge on the district level instructional leadership structures and practices in Zimbabwe and how the district leaders' understanding of instructional leadership adds value to school improvement.

Finally, I presented my personal reflection on the practice of instructional leadership in the context(s) of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and post- Covid-19. Here, the researcher is of the opinion that the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic ushered into the education system seem to have opened the doors to researchers and officials at the district office. They are advised to re-visit and re-craft strategies that should guarantee high levels of preparedness for schools to effectively enhance uninterrupted teaching and learning in the new normal-the COVID-19 era.

Chapter Three presents the methodology that I used in this research study to answer my research question.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The current chapter describes and discusses the research methodology used in exploring the district leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership in the districts of Gutu and Zaka in Zimbabwe. The first section outlines and describes the research approach and paradigm, and the research design. The second part moves on to describe in greater detail the sampling procedure, data collection, data presentation and data analysis techniques.

3.2 Research questions

The study intended to examine district leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership at the district office in Zimbabwe. To carry out the examination, I looked at four sub questions:

1. What do the district leaders understand about the structures at the district level to support effective instructional leadership in the primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe?

2. What are the perspectives of the district leaders on the instructional leadership practices that are enacted by the districts in support of instructional improvement in the schools?

3. How effective are the instructional leadership practices enacted by the districts in support of instructional improvement in the schools?

4. How can the districts improve the effectiveness of their instructional leadership support to schools?

3.3 Research approach

The qualitative research approach was used to investigate the district leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership at the district office. The qualitative research approach is useful to explore and understand an issue and develop a comprehensive understanding of it (Creswell, 2012). I selected the qualitative research approach because qualitative research data largely describe,

account, and show views and feelings in words rather than in numbers, focusing on people in groups or as individuals (Walliman, 2011; Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2015). Furthermore, the major aim of qualitative research to capture study participants' "perspective and views of values, actions, processes and events" was another fit to my study (Fairbrother, 2007: 43). In other words, I was attracted to qualitative study's capability to closely examine respondents in their real world. *Cohen et al.* (2007) and Hammarberg *et al.* (2015) emphasise qualitative research's subjectivity in dealing with people's actual experiences in specific contexts. Qualitative research aims to gather in-depth insights into people's behaviour and the reasons why they behave in that way (Hossain, 2011; Hammarberg *et al.,* 2015). This study focuses on what the district leaders believe is their direct experience at the district office, how they are structured in their specific context and their instructional leadership support to schools.

Qualitative research allows the participants under study to provide clearer and richer answers to the researcher's questions as it also gives room for probing when the researcher needs to extract further information from the participants (Hossain, 2011; Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020). This study examined the importance of district office instructional leadership support to schools and attempted to address the practices that the district office leadership viewed they actually engaged in to enhance teaching and learning (Honig, 2012).

The purpose of the study is general and wide to pave the way for the respondents' perceptions (Creswell, 2012), or how they make sense of the world around them and how they interact with events (Hossain, 2011; Busetto *et al.,* 2020). This is because the key informants' experiences at their place of work cannot be presumed but have to be established through the data collection stage of the study. This study, in line with qualitative research, will provide qualitative data in the form of quotes that come from the participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2012).

This researcher, like Gray (2014), is convinced that the world, sophisticated as it is, cannot be simply presented statistically and that generalising issues is of lesser importance than full comprehension of it as reality. That led the researcher to adopt gathering vast amounts of qualitative data that enabled him to get to the district leaders' perspectives of the practices that they engage in as they interact with schools

to enhance quality teaching and learning. Therefore, conflicting perspectives by researchers (with those of the quantitative school of thought challenging the worth of qualitative approaches) did not distract the researcher from gathering such quantities of data to finally present, in detail, a credible study report (Creswell, 2012). In alignment, Fairbrother (2007: 43) realises that:

> … while qualitative research does not limit the researcher … to particular variables of interest, the … approach is more holistic and naturalistic, examining entire social entities such as schools or communities at many levels and along many dimensions … [whose] goal … is … an interpretive, empathetic understanding, and an attempt to capture the meanings that research subjects attribute to their own particular, yet whole, situations.

The presentation of qualitative study findings goes beyond the careful delineation and measurement of concepts and inclines towards an explanation of respondents' conceptions to develop a clear understanding of the issues at hand (Fairbrother, 2007; Busetto *et al.,* 2020). Therefore, qualitative study more than describes but analyses, interprets and explains intricate issues. In a similar way, as the researchers draw on personal reflection and prior study to produce a flexible final report that displays their understanding and thoughts, they analyse the information gathered from a small number of individuals for description and themes (Creswell, 2012). In view of the richness, depth, and detail that finally result in our increased understanding of the qualitative study participants, I found the qualitative research methodology fitting to examine, through the collective case study, the district leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership.

3.4 Research paradigm

The study was located within the interpretive research paradigm. It sought to examine the district leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership at the district office. Interpretivism can be defined as the "… subjective interpretation of participants involved, such as by interviewing different participants and reconciling differences among their responses using their own subjective perspectives …" (Bhattacherjee, 2012: 19). In other words, the interpretive researcher interprets the data by filtering through a subjective lens that is located in a particular moment (Hossain, 2011; Darder, 2015). People have their own perception of the world around them. As such, the interpretivist paradigm exploits the diverse phenomenon

interpretations of the participants to enhance a better understanding of the issues under study. Associated with qualitative approaches to data gathering and analysis, the paradigm intensively allows the researcher to explore how district leaders experience or view their structures and practices of instructional leadership (Gray, 2014). It is important to take note of the major characteristics of the interpretive research paradigm. The design focuses on people's intentional and subjective creation of their reality within time and context bounds while accommodating the non-generalizability of situations and people and the possibility of diverse perceptions and interpretations of issues under study (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Darder, 2015). In the interpretivist paradigm, researchers gain access to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied together with its complexity that is enshrined in its unique context (Pham, 2018). Interpretivism not only seek to describe the phenomenon, but also to deeply understand them in their social context. In addition, interpretivism demands researchers to conduct this types of research in the participant's natural setting (Pham, 2018). The interpretive paradigm allows researchers the platform to look at the world guided by the participants' perceptions and experiences, and in seeking answers, permits the researchers to use those perceptions and experiences for constructing and interpreting his understanding from the collected data (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

As a fit to interpretive research, I gathered data on the district leaders' understanding of their structures and practices of instructional leadership at the district office to contextualise the study (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Chetty, 2013). This is because interpretivists are convinced that critical to the interpretation of data gathered is an understanding of the research context. In addition, there is more subjectivity than objectivity in the interpretivist paradigm, and researchers here seek to understand a particular context since reality is believed to be a social construct (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). In other words, interpretivism places emphasis on understanding the individuals and their interpretation of that world around them (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Guided by these attributes of the interpretive research paradigm, this study sought to establish what the district leaders perceived as the structures of instructional leadership and what they actually do every day that might support teaching and learning improvements in primary and secondary schools.

3.5.1 Research design

Research designs are beacons that a researcher uses in gathering, analysing and interpreting data (Creswell, 2012). The research designs, furthermore, create activity blueprints that provide answers to research questions and include “selecting a research method, operationalizing constructs of interest and devising an appropriate sampling strategy” (Bhattacherjee, 2012: 22). This research employs the collective case study design by focusing on 11 officers per district office drawn from the Gutu and Zaka districts in the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe. Collective case study research — a number of cases that are studied to get insight into an issue — was adopted for this study on the assumption that investigating a number of cases results in a better understanding of the phenomenon (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Creswell, 2012; Lucas, Fleming, & Bhosale, 2018).

Gay, Mills and Airasian (2011) look at a collective case study as an examination of issues as they occur in a given context. Data on district leaders’ perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership were gathered from Gutu and Zaka districts only. This enabled the researcher to present a concise, “rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case” that brought about a chronologically narrated and analysed report to enhance a clear understanding (Cohen *et al.,* 2007: 254).

Collective case studies represent instances that illustrate common principles or systems such as children, classes or schools over time and within their natural setting in a few sites to present specific practical examples that enable the researcher to describe, understand, predict and/or control them (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Woodside, 2010; Kumar, 2011; Bhattacherjee, 2012; Yin, 2014). In multiple-case studies, a selection of the units of analysis is done to establish the varied attributes that the study attempts to compare (Yamashita & Moonen, 2014). The units of analysis in my study are the district office structures on the one hand, and their practices on the other hand that provided instructional leadership support to schools. Therefore, the field-gathered data was used to describe or explain the events of the cases – the structures and practices of instructional leadership (Yin, 2011; Yin, 2014). For the researcher to gather data, Flick (2014) emphasises that the most preferred data collection tools are interviews, observations, focus group discussions and document analysis where

words instead of statistics largely constitute the information. In line with these requirements of the collective case study, this research employed interviews and document analyses to collect data from the participants.

Based on comparisons that have to be drawn, it is critical for the researcher to choose the cases carefully for easy prediction of similar or contrasting results across cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Lucas *et al.,* 2018). While allowing for within - setting and cross – setting analyses, a multiple case study has provisions for examining more than one case to understand the case similarities and differences (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). In this collective case study, I needed to investigate how the district office leaders perceive their engagement in instructional leadership practices. Indeed, Cohen *et al.* (2007) and Lucas *et al.* (2018) agree that a collective case study enables the readers to appreciate issues clearer than those merely presented in theory that is divorced from context.

Some researchers arguing against quantitative research insist that a collective case study (usually riddled with impression and bias) lacks significant control that "renders it difficult to make inferences to draw cause-and-effect conclusions" (Cohen *et al.,* 2007: 255-6). However, I decided to employ the collective case study design. This is because case studies largely perceive situations according to the key informants by allowing them to present their side of the story, instead of focusing on the researcher's interpretation, evaluation or judgment (ibid). In this study, the researcher was able to gain insights into real humans in their contexts.

3.5.2 Research sites

In the current study, two district offices — Gutu and Zaka — constituted the research sites. Situated in Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe, the two district offices are in rural areas. At each district office, there are supposed to be 11 officers who occupy leadership positions, making a total of 22 officers. The 22 leaders were selected to be the study respondents mainly because they possess the characteristics of interest to the study. Since the collective case study focused on a small number of participants (22 officers), they were in line with qualitative study as it is characterised by the collection of a lot of data in words from a few respondents so that their perceptions are recorded (Creswell, 2012; Mohajan, 2018). District leaders' perspectives on

instructional leadership structures and practices at the district office constituted the central phenomenon requiring exploration and understanding in the collective case study (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Creswell, 2012).

The research sites are critical since they contribute to the contextual significance of the study. This relates to Cohen *et al.* (2007)'s and Oates and Riaz (2016)'s observation that a case study research site, apart from having naturally defined physical demarcations, may rely on context, time, group identity and may reflect the internal organisation of an institution.

The research sites for this study were selected because of their "fit with the research questions" (Bhattacherjee, 2012: 94) and, subsequently, they helped to address the research questions. Therefore, the study was situated in two district offices to examine district office instructional leadership support to schools. Table 1 shows the participants' leadership positions. Each district was supposed to have the same number of officers participating in the study.

Of the two participating district offices, District Office A is situated in a Growth Point that has been upgraded to a town status, while District Office B is in a Growth Point. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms District Office A and District Office B have been adopted for this study. In Zimbabwe, a Growth Point is understood to be a rural business service centre that is the official focal point within a district administrative area. Available, to a limited scale to the public, in the Growth Point are services such as banking, retailing, industrial, and housing. Therefore, as the nucleus of the district area, almost all government ministries have established their departmental offices at the district level.

District Office A

District Office A is in one of the seven districts of Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, District Office A supports both urban and rural schools. A recently constructed complex of offices houses the district office staff. These offices are situated a respectable distance away from the CBD and the public transport system terminus, making them conveniently accessible to the public.

District Office B

Located in a Growth Point, this district office's staff is accommodated in a complex of offices that is still under construction. These offices are conveniently located close to the CBD and the public transport system terminus so that the public can access them easily.

Having briefly examined the two research sites, I present the selected participants. The same number of interviewees was chosen at each of the two district offices. Table 3.1 below presents the selected interview participants for the two district offices.

Table 3.1: District office leadership participant positions by number per district

District Structure	Position of Participant	Participants
District Accounting Office	District Schools Inspector	1
Quality Control	Schools Inspector	3
Finance, Administration and Human Resources	District Accountant	1
Finance, Administration and Human Resources	Human Resources Assistant	2
Finance, Administration and Human Resources	District Administration Assistant	1
Non-formal Education	District Lifelong Learning Coordinator	2
Learner Welfare, Schools Psychological Services and Special Needs Education	District Remedial Tutor	1

The selection of the above participants was based on their leadership positions. It was assumed that these leaders were endowed with the requisite characteristics since they carried out instructional leadership practices at the district offices, and therefore, could offer valuable information in the context of the research study.

3.5.3 Sampling procedure

It is usually impossible for a qualitative researcher to study all the members of a population of interest. Therefore, the population has to be sampled. Sampling is the

intentional selection of a section of a population in order for the researcher to observe and analyse it and answer research questions (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Similarly, Mason (2002) and Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe and Young (2018) believe that generally, the study sample provides the researcher with relevant and adequate data to answer the research questions.

In this study, I decided to use the operational construct purposive sampling technique to access that particular subset of district officers that fit a particular profile (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). Eligibility criteria required individuals to be in leadership positions in each of the two district offices under study because they possess the characteristics required. They work within the instructional leadership structures and practices at the district office, and they provide the requisite information for the researcher to describe the research participants in depth (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Creswell, 2012). This purposeful sampling technique was employed to select 11 district officers. At each of the two district offices, there was a possible population of 15 officials. However, four officials in the Human Resources section of the Finance, Administration and Human Resources department were excluded from participating since the researcher was convinced that sufficient data would be provided by the two that had been selected using the operational construct purposive sampling technique. This was also in line with qualitative research's requirement for the researcher to engage more deeply (in long open-ended interviews) with a few participants so that their perceptions were all recorded (Creswell, 2012; Mohajan, 2018).

The operational construct purposeful sampling was employed in the study as it requires the qualitative researcher to identify persons or places that lead to a better understanding of the core issues (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Creswell, 2012; Guetterman, 2015). Furthermore, the researcher carefully picks the key informants provided they worked at the district office and were knowledgeable about the district structures and practices of instructional leadership that would help the researcher answer the research questions (Cohen *et al.,* 2007). Similarly, Yin (2011) and Vasileiou *et al.* (2018) maintain that in purposive sampling, the researcher selects respondents considering the expected richness and relevance of the information they will provide with regards to the research questions of the study. The sites and participants for a study are usually intentionally selected since they bear those attributes that the researcher feels are relevant for the small-scale, in-depth study (Creswell, 2012;

Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). Mason (2002) concurs when she states that for sampling purposes, the researcher should make a critical decision on how a site can actually provide data that relate to the research questions. In this study, the researcher handpicked 11 officers from each of the two participating districts since these officers were actually involved in providing support services to schools. Therefore, their participation in the study provided detailed information that helped to answer the research questions.

This qualitative study reflects the key participants' full views of what they understood as their instructional leadership support to schools. Their perspectives of the structures and practices of instructional leadership at the district office provided the specific and small-scale context of the research (Fairbrother, 2007: 60). Only two district offices were studied in line with qualitative research's requirement for the researcher to investigate a few respondents or a few cases because the researcher's capacity to effectively and efficiently handle additional participants would be reduced, thereby compromising the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, to save on costs, the two district offices were closer to the researcher's operational base (Zaka) than the other districts. However, the researcher was convinced that he could collect more or less representative data from these two districts.

3.5.4 Data collection

The current collective case study focused on 11 officers per district office. These officers were drawn from the Gutu and Zaka districts in the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe. Data from these two district offices' 22 officers, each of whom is involved, in one way or the other, in instructional leadership activities, provided deep descriptions of the phenomenon in line with qualitative study's requirement of collecting word data from a few participants to obtain the participants' views (Creswell, 2012). The district leaders' perspectives on instructional leadership structures and practices at the district office constituted the central phenomenon that required exploration and understanding (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Creswell, 2012).

Relevant to many research disciplines, the variety of qualitative data collection methods that has been developed includes interviews, focus groups, respondent discourse and conversation analysis and the analyses of texts and documents

(Walliman, 2011). To collect data for this study, the individual interview and document analysis were used. Let us first consider the interview.

3.5.4.1 Interview

Kumar (2011) looks at the interview as an interaction involving two or more people for specific purposes. In the same vein, Bhattacherjee (2012: 78) observes:

> Interviews are a … personalised form of data collection method … using [a] research protocol … [that] may contain special instructions for the interviewer that is not seen by respondents, and may include space for the interviewer to record personal observations and comments.

In the face-to-face interview, the researcher directly interacts with the participant usually in the participant's home or work place by asking questions followed by recording the participant's answers (Bhattacherjee 2012: 78). The participants' work place, the district office, was the researcher's place of interaction with them. This arrangement enabled the interviewer to explain further all ambiguous areas noted by the participants or probe the participants for clarity (ibid).

The researcher used the unstructured interview protocol to interview 22 district officers in this study. This instrument not only provides participants a greater opportunity for dialogue, but it also allows the interviewer to directly interact with the participants as the inquiry progresses (Fairbrother, 2007: 43). Furthermore, interview control was quite possible when the interviewer provided room for free expression, and then probed for full responses bordering on, for example, complicated and sensitive situations, and included a number of general, open-ended questions (in their interview protocol) whose answers would be recorded (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Creswell, 2012). In this study, the interview questions were open ended to reveal as much detail about the interviewees as possible (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; McGrath, Palmgren, & Liljedahl, 2019). The individual interview's flexibility when collecting data enhanced the use of several senses when dealing with vocal and non-vocal interviewee responses (Cohen *et al.,* 2007). To capture data, interview protocols were designed by the researcher. These contained the interview instructions, the questions, and room for recording the interviewees' spoken answers (Creswell, 2012). Jacob and Furgerson (2012) and McGrath *et al.* (2019) confirm that the interview procedurally guides and directs the qualitative researcher throughout the interview.

Before carrying out the interview, I pre-tested the interview protocol. I organised interviews with a District Schools Inspector and a Schools Inspector from a district office that was not one of the two district offices under study. The main purpose of pilot testing the instrument was to facilitate improvements to the questions guided by participant feedback (Creswell, 2012). Responses from these few participants were used mainly to improve on question clarity and subsequently improve the instrument's reliability, dependability, trustworthiness and practicability (Cohen *et al.,* 2007).

The following observations, that facilitated due amendments to be made to the interview protocol, were made from the pilot study. Firstly, question 1 was not clearly presented: "Tell me about your position at the district office (Position; Reports to; Key areas of responsibility; and Human, material, and/or financial support)". As a result, the responses were mixed up. This called for restructuring the question, this time to read: 1. "Tell me about your position at the district office and how you people are organised? (Probe for the section the participant belongs to, the number of people in that section and ask for supporting documents)". This change in the frame of the question was necessitated by the participants' responses that pointed to lack of question clarity. This proved to be very valuable since clearer and more organised responses were later on elicited in the actual interviews, let alone the inclusion of the documents component since document analysis later on supplemented interview data analysis.

Secondly, the spaces in which the interviewer recorded the participant's responses to all the 10 main questions were initially rather restricted. This resulted in the scribbled pilot study responses overflowing onto the space that had been allocated to the following question responses. Therefore, such spaces were extended, thus allowing the interviewer adequate space for capturing every detail of the participant's responses in the actual interview. The pilot study interview protocol was four pages long, versus the final interview protocol that was 10 pages long. Otherwise, no other changes were effected to the rest of the questions in the interview protocol.

I then prepared for the interviews by familiarising myself with the purpose of the study and the manner in which the responses would be recorded and utilised (Bhattacherjee 2012). I also timed the interview sessions to stick to appointments. Before the interviews, I had the University of the Free State ethical clearance letter for

presentation; an authorising letter from the Masvingo Provincial Education Director for presentation; an authorising letter from the District Schools Inspector; participants' invitations (with an attached interviewee consent form) to attend the interviews; the researcher's national identification document for presentation; enough copies of the interview protocol to cover the interview sessions; and an interview schedule that had been developed after contacting the participants.

After enlisting "the [voluntary] cooperation of respondents" seen through their completion of consent forms (Bhattacherjee 2012: 79), the district office leadership that was made up of 22 officers were invited to attend forty-minute individual interviews as individuals. The interviews were meant to identify the district leadership's perceived structures and describe their perceived practices of instructional leadership support to schools. I then enlightened the participants by explaining to them how important the study was and clarified areas that were not clear to them. For consistency in the interview, I followed the interview guide questions by their order of appearance and asked the questions verbatim but repeated them when clarity was not certain. I recorded the key informants' answers manually as the interviews progressed to prevent reliance on mental recall, a threat to research trustworthiness. This was in line with Bhattacherjee's (2012: 96) advice that as soon as "each interview is completed, the entire interview should be transcribed verbatim into a text document for analysis".

3.5.4.2 Documents

While individual interviews allow the participant freedom of responding to questions, and enable probing for more elaborate and clear answers, I used documents to provide valuable supporting data (Creswell, 2012; Dalglish, Khalid, & McMahon, 2020). I gathered documents that included organisational charts, policy documents, a teacher supervision instrument, and a district office organogram. The organisational charts provided the researcher with more insights into some of the districts' key operations. The policy documents assisted the researcher to confirm or find inconsistencies when comparing the data from the interviews with those from the policy documents. The teacher supervision instrument shed much light into teacher evaluation, assessment and appraisal. the district office organogram not only led the researcher into the actual structures that constituted the district office, but also clearly

confirmed or disproved data, relating to the district office structures, that had been supplied by the key informants in the interviews.

Therefore, data from documents are of critical importance to almost all case studies. This data should be systematically collected as well. In consideration of Bowen (2009) and Dalglish *et al.* (2020), I tried to collect documents that relevantly addressed the research problem and purpose of the study, and whose content not only fitted the study's conceptual framework, but also was authentic, credible, accurate, and representative of the selected documents. Such rich data further assisted me to answer the research question.

In this study, data were obtained from documents that were collected from some of the participants soon after the interviews. The researcher concurred with Creswell (2012) when he stated that documents' contribution to research was critical since, as public records, they provided valuable supporting data (about the district office structures and practices in this study). Although Yin (2014: 107) argues that documents "are useful even though they are not always accurate and may not be lacking in bias", he goes on to confirm that "documents … corroborate and augment evidence from other sources". In this study, the documents were consulted with caution, and were not considered literally. All of the ten documents that I obtained from the respondents actually buttressed the interview responses.

Yin (2014: 125) also suggests the provision of "an annotated bibliography of these documents [that] can serve as an index … so that later investigations can inspect or share the database". In this study, I concluded the interview by requesting the interviewee to furnish me with documents that were relevant to what we had discussed in the interview. I then recorded the collected documents on the "interview schedule" for later transcription onto the reference section (see Table 3.2 below).

In that regard, I designed an "Interview schedule" that included both interviews and document collection slots in that order respectively. Table 3.2 and 3.3 show the templates of the "Interview schedule" for District Office A and B respectively.

Table 3.2: "Interview schedule" for the district office leaders (District Office A)

Participant's Position	Interview Date	Documents Collected
District Schools Inspector	12/10/19	None
Schools Inspector	11/10/19	MOPSE TPS
Schools Inspector	19/09/19	None
Schools Inspector	23/09/19	None
District Accountant	03/10/19	District Organogram
District Administration Assistant	19/09/19	None
District Human Resources Assistant	24/09/19	None
District Human Resources Assistant	26/09/19	None
District Remedial Tutor	20/09/19	Special Education P36/90
District Lifelong Learning Coordinator	19/09/19	NFE 13/16
District Lifelong Learning Coordinator	27/09/19	None

Table 3.3: "Interview schedule" for the district office leaders (District Office B)

Participant's Position	Interview Date	Documents Collected
District Schools Inspector	10/09/19	None
Schools Inspector	11/09/19	MOPSE ERI
Schools Inspector	13/09/19	MOPSE PLAP
Schools Inspector	17/09/19	None
District Accountant	10/09/19	19/02/18 SIG
District Administration Assistant	13/09/19	Constitution of Zimbabwe
District Human Resources Assistant	11/09/19	None
District Human Resources Assistant	18/09/19	None
District Remedial Tutor	13/09/19	Director's Circular No. 26 of 2008
District Lifelong Learning Coordinator	17/09/19	MOPSE NFE National Policy
District Lifelong Learning Coordinator	04/10/19	None

The researcher came up with this schedule after consultations with the participants. The reason for using this interview schedule was not only for the convenience of both the researcher and the interviewees, but also for ethical considerations. It would not be ethical for the researcher to present himself unannounced at any of the district offices for the interviews, therefore the need for planned visits.

3.5.5 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is specifically considered as making sense of the data through coding and organising them in themes and categories (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Creswell, 2012; and Yin, 2014). The interpretation and description of findings assist in answering the research questions. Analysing qualitative data that are generated from interview transcriptions enhances sense-making instead of prediction or explanation (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Accordingly, in this study, emerging patterns were established and used for further analyses to make sense of the data and answer the research questions.

The researcher organised, accounted for and explained the data to make sense of emerging patterns, themes, categories and regularities (Cohen *et al.,* 2007). I bore in mind that qualitative data are interwoven "with individual human feelings, attitudes and judgments and their interplay in society" as I examined relationships and determined the level of data significance, coded, clustered and summarised the data, a step that was closely followed by sometimes presenting the condensed data in diagrams and tables (Walliman, 2011: 131). As a fit to my study, I analysed and presented my data by research objective to get insights into individuals and groups that comprise the district office leadership's perceived instructional leadership support to schools. I preferred to organise the data that I had collected from the individual participants according to the issues, cutting across the individual district office leaders, and related to each of the research objectives to remain focused and to bring about a deeper understanding (Creswell, 2012). In other words, firstly I summarised the data per participant category (i.e. by structure at the district office). All the participants' responses on their perceived structures and practices of instructional leadership support to schools, for example, were written down after I had first read through the gathered data and classified them according to their relevance to answering each of the study's research questions (Cohen *et al.,* 2007).

I then presented a detailed description of the perceived instructional leadership practices as it was captured from the participants and in the context of their work environment. In other words, I organised, transcribed, coded (by participant position), analysed, and finally collapsed the collected data into themes and categories to make sense of the data as directed by (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Creswell, 2012). I used thematic

analysis as it involves ploughing through qualitative data to identify, analyse, and report repeated patterns (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Furthermore, I have found thematic data analysis to be very helpful in my description of data since the process accommodates data interpretation and selection of codes as I constructed the themes. Finally, I interpreted the data in an attempt to understand what the perceived district office instructional leadership support practices were, how these practices were carried out, and how the district office environment could be improved for subsequent increased support to schools.

To provide readers with an overview of the findings, the interpretation of the data was in view of the concept and sub-concepts of instructional leadership as discussed in the literature review to show whether the findings supported or contradicted previous findings from other researchers (Creswell, 2012). Finally, I corroborated data from different participants and data types to find evidence to support the themes and categories, thereby ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the study (Cohen *et al.,* 2007; Creswell, 2012).

With the interview data analysis in place, I moved on to document analysis. This process requires the researcher to decide how relevant each document is in view of the research problem and purpose of the study. It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure document content and conceptual framework fit for "authenticity, credibility, accuracy, and representativeness" of the selected documents (Bowen, 2009: 33). In accordance to the process, after selecting the relevant sections of the available documents, I coded and categorised the data guided by those codes that I had used for my interview data since the document analysis was supportive.

3.6 Trustworthiness and credibility

With respect to the trustworthiness and credibility of the study, it is important for the researcher to ensure that her/his study is validated.

Fairbrother's (2007: 43) observation is that "qualitative research conducted in a specific place does not have as its primary aim generalisation to other populations". Therefore, this study's focus is on understanding the instructional leadership support that the district office leadership believes it provides to schools. In line with qualitative research, the researcher targeted gathering a lot of information to come up with a

laden account presented in the form of a final study report (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, the trustworthiness of the study lies in its claim to enhance a deep understanding of the studied phenomenon, but not in its generalizability. To ensure the study's credibility, the researcher tried to minimise risks from some participants who could have deliberately made dishonest responses by prolonging his stay in the field to check on "suspicious" data (Creswell, 2012). Finally, the researcher presented the research report to the participants for them to validate how truthfully their responses had been reported.

I am convinced that the confirmability of the results of this study largely rests on the fact that they are based on the participants' narratives and words, as evidenced by the thick descriptions, and not on the researcher's biases. Furthermore, the documents that I used give credibility to this study since they are official documents. I do not doubt the stability of this study's findings over time and over conditions as other researchers can check for dependability to establish the consistency of the final report with the raw data collected. Finally, if other researchers were to revisit the data, I am sure that they would establish the transferability of the study, that is, they could arrive at similar findings, interpretations, and conclusions about the data.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues in research are issues that accommodate expectations relating to human interaction with specific reference to people participating in a study (Cohen *et al.,* 2007). It is understood that researchers are bound by ethical considerations. Researchers cannot ignore such ethical considerations as participant "informed consent, confidentiality and understanding of the consequences of … their having participated in the study" (Cohen *et al.,* 2007: 262).

Permission to carry out the study was first sought from the University of the Free State. The university granted me this permission on 15 June 2016 as Ethical Clearance Number UFS- HSD2016/0628. Further permission was sought from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Permanent Secretary — through the Masvingo Provincial Education Office — and the two district education offices under study, in compliance with the requirements of the ethical protocols of the university.

Interview participation was voluntary in this study. I informed the participants about the research, their rights to decide whether to participate in it or not, or even to withdraw at any point during the study. As proof of their voluntary and informed agreement, the participants completed consent forms. For confidentiality, the participants' real names were not used in the study. As a security precaution, password protected files stored data on the researcher's computer with only the researcher and his supervisor(s) having access to the data for research purposes only.

Before finalisation of the findings chapter, participants were allowed to read, for verification, the information they had provided.

3.8 Chapter summary

Chapter Three has presented the qualitative research methodology on which this study is premised. A discussion of the research interpretive research paradigm, and the collective case study design was presented in detail. Data were collected from two district offices in Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe where 22 officers were purposefully sampled since they were in the structures that provided instructional leadership support to schools. The chapter then described how the interview and document generated data were organised into themes and categories to make sense of them before they were discussed and presented by objective for the researcher to remain focused. Finally, the chapter presented the trustworthiness, credibility of the study, and ethical considerations. Chapter Four will focus on data presentation, analysis and discussion.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings on the exploration of district leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership at two district education offices in Zimbabwe. Initially, data were collected from October to December 2016. Data were also collected for the second time (to fill up gaps identified in the initial collection) from September to October 2019, from district office leaders at Gutu and Zaka using the qualitative approach. Data from interviews and supporting data from documents that were provided by some of the respondents were organised according to the four objectives of the study. Finally, the chapter presents the discussion on the findings from the data analysis. The research objectives of the study are to:

a) Identify how district leaders perceive the structures that exist at the district level to support effective instructional leadership in the primary and secondary schools;

b) Document the perceptions on the instructional leadership practices that are enacted by the districts in support of instructional improvement in the schools;

c) Examine the effectiveness of the instructional leadership practices enacted by the districts in support of instructional improvement in the schools; and

d) Suggest how the districts can improve the effectiveness of their instructional leadership support to schools in Zimbabwe.

4.2 Data presentation

Before presenting the data, I found it proper to present the respondents by district, position and the code that was allocated to each of them in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Respondents by district office, position and code

District Office A		**District Office B**	
Position	***Code***	***Position***	***Code***
District Schools Inspector	DSI 1	District Schools Inspector	DSI 2
Schools Inspector	Schools Inspector 1	Schools Inspector	Schools Inspector 4
Schools Inspector	Schools Inspector 2	Schools Inspector	Schools Inspector 5
Schools Inspector	Schools Inspector 3	Schools Inspector	Schools Inspector 6
District Accountant	Accountant 1	District Accountant	Accountant 2
District Administration Assistant	Administration Assistant 1	District Administration Assistant	Administration Assistant 2
District Human Resources Assistant	Human Resources Assistant 1	District Human Resources Assistant	Human Resources Assistant 3
District Human Resources Assistant	Human Resources Assistant 2	District Human Resources Assistant	Human Resources Assistant 4
District Remedial Tutor	Remedial Tutor 1	District Remedial Tutor	Remedial Tutor 2
District Lifelong Learning Coordinator	Learning Coordinator 1	District Lifelong Learning Coordinator	Learning Coordinator 3
District Lifelong Learning Coordinator	Learning Coordinator 2	District Lifelong Learning Coordinator	Learning Coordinator 4

The table shows the study participants by district office, position and code. A total of 22 district office leaders participated in this study. These had been purposively sampled on the assumption that their characteristics were relevant to contribute to district leaders' perspectives of instructional leadership support to schools.

4.3 Themes and categories for data presentation

The qualitative data gathered from interviews and documents were transcribed and coded for themes and categories in an MS Word document. Table 4.2 below summarises the themes and categories that emerged from the data.

Table 4.2: Themes and categories

Themes	Categories
1:Structures of instructional leadership at the district level	**1.1:** Accounts Office **1.2:** Quality Control **1.3:** Finance, Administration and Human Resources **1.4** Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs Education **1.5** Non-Formal Education
2: Practices of instructional leadership	**2.1:** Staffing **2.2:** Supervision **2.3**: Professional development **2.4:** School development **2.5:** Stakeholder and partner engagement
3: Challenges	**3.1:** Structure challenges **3.2:** Practice challenges
4: Suggestions for improved support	**4.1:** Improvement on structure **4.2:** Improvement on practice

Table 4.2 outlines how the data were organised by theme and category. The themes and categories guided the presentation of the data so that they were presented in relation to the objectives of the study. While ensuring that the data addressed the research questions, this organisation of the data aligns with Cohen *et al.,* (2007: 461) when they assert that analysing qualitative data involves "organising, accounting for and explaining the data [and] making sense of … patterns, themes, categories and regularities".

With regards to documents, and in line with Bowen (2009), I skimmed, read, and interpreted the collected documents to analyse both the content and the themes after having systematically selected the relevant data from the documents. The data from the documents helped me respond to research objectives 1, 2 and 3 as shown in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3: Documents and data analysed

Document selected	Data analysed	Research objective
"District Office A organogram"	District office structures	1
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Zimbabwe (2014)	The Early Reading Initiative	2 & 3
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Zimbabwe (2014)	The Performance Lag Address Programme	2 & 3
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Zimbabwe (2015)	Non-formal education policy	2 & 3
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Zimbabwe (2016)	Teacher professional standards	2 & 3
Secretary's Circular Minute No. P36 of 1990	Special education: Placement procedures for special classes, resource rooms and special education schools	2 & 3
Secretary's Circular Minute No. 13 of 2016	Circular on implementation of the National Non-Formal Education policy in primary and secondary schools, independent colleges and trustee schools	2 & 3
Permanent Secretary's Circular of 19 February 2018	School Improvement Grant (SIG) Payments 2019	2 & 3
Director's Circular No. 26 of 2008	Remediation in Secondary Schools	2 & 3
Constitution of Zimbabwe	"Right to education"	2 & 3

The ten documents provided valuable support in understanding the district leaders' perceptions of the structures and practices of instructional leadership in Zimbabwe.

4.3.1 District level structures that support instructional leadership

In line with the first research objective, I examined the structures that support instructional leadership at the district office.

To corroborate the data on district level structures that were collected from the interviews, I managed to obtain a district office organogram from District Office A only. It was not possible to collect the District Office B organogram because Accountant 2, explained, "… the district leadership is designing one". The District Office A organogram is presented in Figure 4.1 below.

District Office "A" Organogram

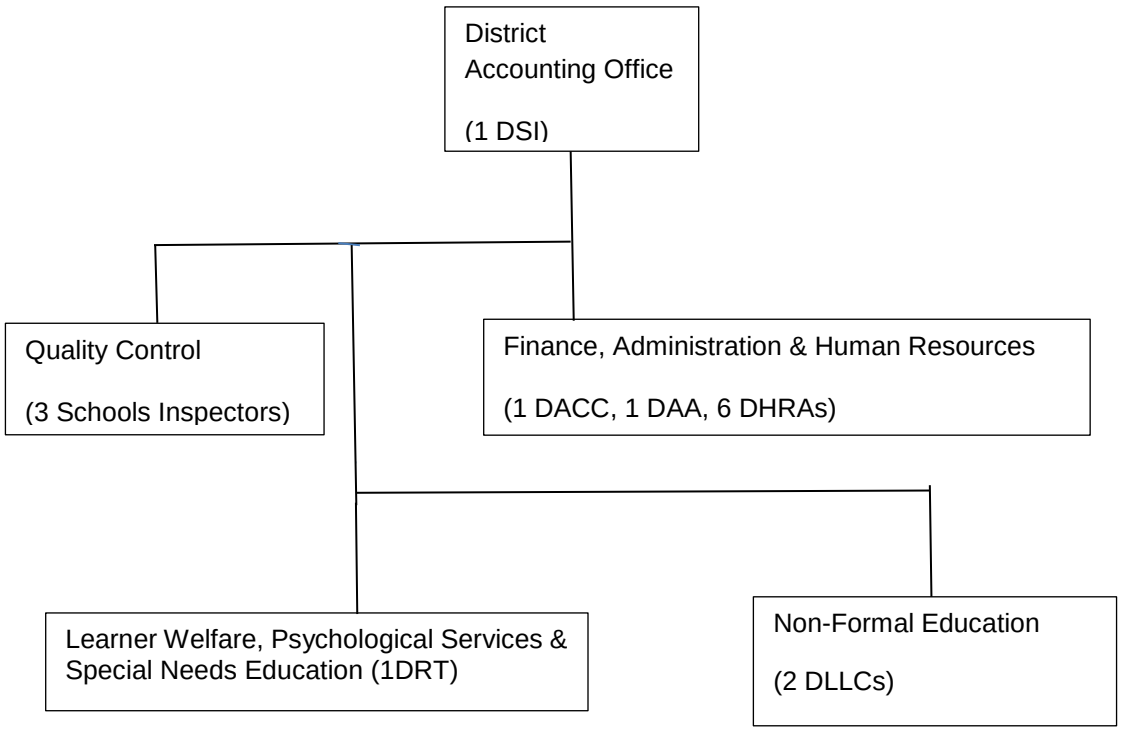

Figure 4.1: District Office A Organogram (Source: Accountant 1 of District Office A)

Figure 4.1 shows the district office structures. In the organogram, the first structure is the District Accounting Office that accommodates one District Schools Inspector. This is followed by Quality Control where five Schools Inspectors are found; then Finance, Administration and Human Resources that had one District Accountant, one District Administration Assistant, five District Human Resources Assistants and one Office Orderly; the Learner Welfare, Schools Psychological Services & Special Needs Education with two District Resource Teachers; and Non-Formal Education with one District Lifelong Coordinator. The structures, according to DSI 2 in the interviews, of District Office B, were "… the same at all districts in Zimbabwe except that the number of officers in the … departments is relative to the size of the district. Of course, there's only one District Schools Inspector in each district".

DSI 2 also disclosed that the Accounting Office, the department to which both District Schools Inspectors belonged, supervised Schools Inspectors in the Quality Control department; the District Accountant, District Administration Assistant, and District

Human Resources Assistants in the Finance, Administration and Human Resources department; the Remedial Tutor in the Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs Education department; and the District Lifelong Learning Coordinators in the Non-Formal Education department.

Therefore, these were the departments that over all constituted the structures at both district offices. One striking observation was that the District Accounting Office was the highest structure in which the District Schools Inspector, the sole position in that structure, believed he was the accounting officer in charge of both the instructional and support structure operations at the district office to ensure quality education, a pointer towards instructional leadership. As evidence, DSI 2 claimed, “I’m the only person in the department since I’m overall in charge of quality control in the district. Every department at the district office reports to me”. To corroborate this claim, in the District Office A organogram, the first structure is indeed the District Accounting Office that accommodates one District Schools Inspector with all the other structures reporting to him.

The next structure was Quality Control, a department composed of Schools Inspectors, claimed that it was responsible for supervising teachers and heads in schools. As evidence, Schools Inspector 5 said, “I’m an acting Schools Inspector in the Quality Control Department that controls schools in the district”. This implies that the Schools Inspectors’ work was to monitor student progress in schools. Shedding more light, Schools Inspector 3 explained, “Each Schools Inspector is allocated a circuit of schools to superintend and the circuit has plus or minus fifty-five schools both primary and secondary”. However, Schools Inspector 6 complained that they were under-staffed:

> … treasury did not release funds to engage more Schools Inspectors to absorb the extra supervisory loads. The MoPSE should employ eight instead of 3 Schools Inspectors at this district office and also review downwards the Schools Inspector termly report target from 30 to a manageable 25 in order not to compromise quality.

It was interesting to note that the Quality Control department was significantly understaffed at both districts, with three instead of eight Schools Inspectors. The District Office A organogram shows further evidence that there are three Schools Inspectors in the Quality Control department. Another important observation was that

at District Office B, none of the three available Schools Inspectors was substantive as they were all in acting positions. This seemed to compromise the effectiveness of the district office support to schools as the Schools Inspectors felt that they could not cope with the demands of frequently visiting the heads at their schools for continuous supervision.

At District Office A, Schools Inspector 1 made another important disclosure, “Of the three Schools Inspectors …, I am the only one with a secondary school supervision background. The other two are only experienced in supervising primary schools”. This was, in a way, similar to the scenario at District Office B where Schools Inspector 4 reported, “I’m the only secondary school acting Schools Inspector”. Therefore, there appeared to be a striking disparity between the number of secondary Schools Inspectors compared to the number of primary Schools Inspectors at both district offices. This disparity implies that the sole acting Schools Inspector in the district might not have the capacity to adequately supervise all the teachers and heads in the district’s secondary schools. Such a state of affairs could point to undersupervision and teacher laxity in secondary schools.

The Finance, Administration and Human Resources structure comprising the District Accountants, District Administration Assistants, and District Human Resources Assistants was next to be examined. At District Office A, the Finance, Administration and Human Resources department was staffed with one District Accountant, one District Administration Assistant, and six District Human Resources Assistants. However, Accountant 1 at District Office A bemoaned the “one District Administration Assistant against 248 schools” situation there. Similarly, Administration Assistant 2 at District Office B was not pleased because the “… department’s grossly understaffed; there’re no assistants to help with office management”. Accountant 2 criticised what he saw as the source of the department’s work woes:

> … shortage of district office staff that is qualified enough to supervise financial management in schools. The MOPSE has abolished the two District Assistant Accountant positions, leaving only the District Administration Assistant to handle all the district work that was previously done by two officers.

Therefore, it seemed that the finance section of this department at the two district offices was also overworked as a result of the reported understaffing. Accountant 2 is convinced that the supervision of school financial management could be compromised

by understaffing in that department, and yet the proper management of school finances is an important instructional leadership consideration. However, the District Human Resources Assistants appeared to be satisfied by their work loads and related conditions since they did not complain. This implies that the section is adequately staffed to carry out the core human resources function-staffing schools-that supports instructional leadership in schools that had effective heads and relevantly qualified and experienced teachers.

The District Remedial Tutors were in the Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs Education department. Remedial Tutor 1 of District Office A stated, “I’m the District Remedial Tutor. I’m the only person in the Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs Education department”. District Office B’s Remedial Tutor 2 confirmed that the same set up prevailed there. The two district leaders emphasised that their department catered for the welfare and psychological needs of both the mainstream learners and learners with special needs. They also believed that their role was to ensure that schools provided learning environments that were user friendly to both the able bodied and learners living with disability, another instructional leadership prerequisite. As support, the Permanent Secretary’s Circular Minute No. P36 of 1990 is a document that directs DSIs:

> In order to implement the Education Act… which states that every child shall have the right to school education, it is the intention of ministry that children with special educational needs shall participate as fully as possible in the national schools curricula.

The circular appears to guide teachers and heads to respect children’s rights to education, and also adopt inclusive education for both the able bodied and special needs children.

The last but not least department was Non-Formal Education. “There are two of us in the Non-Formal Education department”, Learning Coordinator 1 said at District Office A. Learning Coordinator 4 was in agreement at District Office B, “I’m the District Lifelong Learning Coordinator and we are two people in the department of Non-Formal Education”. This department appears to have been established to take care of non-formal education that was supportive to formal education. As an instructional leadership support initiative, the Zimbabwean Non-Formal Education national policy is a document that forces all schools to provide increasing and equal access “to quality

and inclusive education that is relevant in the socio-economic context of Zimbabwe" (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015: 11). Furthermore, "Non-Formal Education is meant to complement the efforts of the Formal Education Sector through improving access to quality education for those who have dropped out of school" (Secretary's Circular Minute Number 13 of 2016).

4.3.2 Instructional leadership practices that are enacted by the districts

The second research objective focused on the perceived instructional leadership practices that are enacted by the districts in support of instructional improvement in the schools. The data are presented under: staffing, supervision, professional development, school development, and stakeholder and partner engagement.

4.3.2.1 Staffing

Since a school needs a head, deputy head and teachers, formal teaching and learning might meaningfully take place when the school is adequately staffed, thereby making the school highly visible. This section of the study looked at what the district leaders believed was their support on school staffing.

Teacher recruitment

Teacher recruitment and appointment is "strictly Human Resources business …" observed Schools Inspector 4. This might explain why all the other departments at the district office claimed that they were not involved in the recruitment and appointment of teachers except the Accounting Office (District Schools Inspector) and Finance, Administration and Human Resources departments. Accountant 2 of District Office B was aware of the recruitment policy:

> This is done by the DSI and his district recruitment committee comprising himself, the Human Resources Assistant, the Public Service Commission's District Human Resources Manager and a representative of a sister ministry.

However, Schools Inspector 3 suspected inconsistencies in the composition of the district recruitment committee:

> On the whole, the responsibility has been taken over by the district office of the Public Service Commission assisted by members from other ministries such as Transport and Infrastructural Development, and Women Affairs, Community,

> Small and Medium Enterprise Development but that are not informed on how the education sector operates.

The participants suggested that not all the district departments were involved in recruiting teachers as this was done by the DSI in the Accounting Office and the Finance, Administration and Human Resources departments with the assistance of the Public Service Commission and other government departments that the Public Service Commission selected. Although it was felt that the Public Service Commission included those other government departments in the recruitment of teachers to curb irregularities such as nepotism, bribery and favouritism if only officers from the ministry of education were involved, this arrangement seemed to raise eyebrows as the Schools Inspectors were convinced of its irrelevance.

Be that as it may, Accountant 1 summed up the teacher recruitment and selection process:

> Teachers who complete their courses at tertiary institutions register with districts of their own choice to both the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Public Service Commission. When treasury releases funds to employ teachers, then a selected group from the national database is absorbed and deployed to schools.

Teaching positions were deemed to be available but these could only be filled when there were back up funds to do so. However, the teacher recruitment and selection process seemed to have checks and balances that guided it at the district and provincial levels as DSI 2 pointed out:

> We refer to the applicants' data base and are guided by "first come, first serve". However, sometimes we prioritise people with disabilities in accordance with the Zimbabwe Constitution. In other instances, the strength of the applicant's teaching area of specialisation takes precedence. The District Recruitment Committee recommends teacher appointments after the selection process. Then the Provincial Recruitment Committee authorizes the teacher appointment.

The response implies that some of the factors that override the "first come, first serve" rule include prioritising applicants living with disability and teaching area of specialisation. This suggests that the teacher recruitment process respects one of the provisions of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (NO. 20) Act (2013: 21): "The State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must recognise

the rights of persons with physical or mental disabilities, in particular their right to be treated with respect and dignity."

DSI 2 made it clear that teachers were also recruited and selected in another way that did not involve the district office, "The bulk of the teacher recruitment work is done by Head Office. Early this year (2019), 3 000 teachers were recruited and appointed at Head Office". Apparently, this did not seem to completely remove the responsibility from the district as DSI 2 confirmed, "However, it is the mandate of this district office's recruitment committee to recruit and appoint teachers for attrition posts. I sit on that committee".

Explaining 'attrition', Human Resources Assistant 3 explained, "… attrition posts are a result of losses incurred in the labour force through death, discharge from service, transfer to other ministries, retirement or promotion." It is implied that although Head Office did the bulk recruitment and appointment of teachers, the district office still recruited and appointed teachers to fill positions that fell vacant after their occupants had died, had been discharged from service, transferred to other ministries, retired or had been promoted.

Teacher evaluation

Notably, the district leaders in my study indicated that they actually evaluated teachers. DSI 2 said:

> We evaluate teachers through narrative supervision reports from the Teacher in Charge/Head of Department, deputy head, head, Schools Inspector and at times myself. As a District Schools Inspector, I don't normally evaluate teachers but heads and deputy heads.

After the teachers had been appointed, it was suggested, they were expected to develop as they were evaluated at work as evidenced by various supervision reports. Schools Inspector 4 was convinced that other factors such as learner pass rates, school visits and supervision reports on teachers by heads were considered when evaluating teachers:

> … we take note of the teacher's results output in the learners' public examination results. For teachers who do not teach examination classes, physical visits to their schools are necessary. Sometimes we refer to the heads' termly reports to evaluate teachers.

Schools Inspector 6 appreciated the Teacher Professional Standards:

> We use the Teacher Professional Standards supervision instrument to evaluate the teachers and make a critical assessment based on their qualifications and suitability to the assigned tasks or responsibilities.

This document, the Teacher Professional Standards is an instrument that was designed by the MoPSE to establish and develop teachers' professional careers and present the evidence to evaluate their practice quality (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Zimbabwe, 2016).

It was not unusual for the focus of teacher evaluation to deviate slightly as Schools Inspector 2 indicated that he "… sometimes prioritised the recently appointed teachers on school supervision visits". Schools Inspector 1 similarly claimed that she evaluated teachers "… through the quality of education reflected in the district". In the same vein, Schools Inspector 3 admitted that his "… teacher evaluation is done through regular assessments". The implied diverse nature of teacher evaluation (learner pass rates, school visits and supervision reports on teachers) was highly appreciated by the participants. They believed that this not only kept the teachers on their toes, but also improved teachers' instructional practice.

Despite the value placed in teacher evaluation, a number of setbacks appeared to have bedevilled the intervention. Accountant 2 lamented, "The Schools Inspectors and the District Schools Inspector should ideally visit schools for this (teacher evaluation) daily but this target is not being met because of financial constraints". In confirmation, Remedial Tutor 2 claimed that he could not "… visit schools ideally ten times per term, but maybe at most four times per term as a district team due to the current difficult economic environment". One can see the impact of the perceived set backs on the effectiveness of teacher evaluation.

To ensure that special education had the right teachers, for example, Remedial Tutor 1's initial teacher evaluation was his insistence at the onset that teachers who "…handle special classes and resource units should hold certificates or diplomas from the United College of Education (Bulawayo) and/or university degrees in special education." However, the Non-Formal Education (NFE) department claimed that they carried out their evaluation differently. In Learning Coordinator 2's words, they "… don't evaluate teachers per se, but evaluate the NFE programmes and produce

institutional reports". Furthermore, the participants suggested their insistence on relevant teacher qualification in special education as one form of teacher evaluation, while the evaluation of the NFE programmes was another. One document, the National Non-Formal Education Policy for Zimbabwe (2015: 12) articulates a key provision:

> The DSI or anyone appointed as DSI shall be responsible for the implementation of the NFE programmes, processing of applications for registration, quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation.

Both the District Schools Inspector and the District Lifelong Learning Coordinator believed that they were directly responsible for monitoring and evaluating on going work in Non-Formal Education in schools.

According to Learning Coordinator 1, school-generated teacher supervision was a very important component of teacher evaluation:

> We write an institutional supervision report where we indicate the teacher's qualifications. Subject delivery supervision is done by the Head of Department, Teacher in Charge and head and their reports are filed in the NFE file that we peruse on school visits to gather information to include in our institutional report.

It is understood that the Non-Formal Education department significantly relies on the school's Non-Formal Education file as a valuable source for the district leaders' institutional reports.

Teacher Retention

To retain teachers, DSI 2 said:

> I encourage heads to provide teachers with decent accommodation and it is ministry policy that teachers should not share house units. As a district, we are trying to modernise schools to retain teachers.

The implication is the district leaders attempted to curb teacher movement from the district by trying to link the district's staffing policy on housing teachers in schools to the MoPSE policy, the bottom line being the modernisation of school infrastructure.

However, Schools Inspector 5 sounded cautious when he reported "… a big challenge in teacher retention is due to poor teacher accommodation in many schools". To counter this, DSI 2 said that the districts did not "… force teachers to stay at particular schools, but allow[ed] them to request transfers to other schools in the district …". DSI

2 also indicated that "… long distances between the teachers' homes and schools force[ed] the teachers to transfer to those schools that are nearer to their homes" and that were sometimes outside the districts under study. Poor teacher accommodation in schools, and long distances between the teachers' homes and their work places appeared to be stumbling blocks to teacher retention.

Teacher retention improved when, in Human Resources Assistant 1's view, the district trained "heads on good staff relations" and the heads actually implemented the intervention. In addition, Accountant 2 felt that teachers were bound to stay in the district when his department successfully encouraged "… heads to practice good school governance and fairness in dealing with teachers." Implied here was good school governance that cemented the head and teacher relationship and encouraged teachers to stay at the school.

Teacher recognition was another strategy to retain teachers in the district. Confidently, Schools Inspector 6 had this to say:

> The induction of newly appointed teachers gives them direction as they grow, and we open up avenues for their promotion to senior teacher. We also recognise their achievement at the district prize giving ceremony every year as part of confidence building. Fair treatment, involvement, transparency and teamwork bind teachers to the district.

The suggested strategies of teacher retention were recognition, induction, promotion to senior teacher, annual district merit awards, fair treatment, and involvement in team work.

As an important retention intervention, the teachers' social life was not ignored. "We try to bring married couples to the same school, or place them at schools that are near each other", claimed Accountant 2. In addition, Human Resources Assistant 4 reported that teachers "… with health challenges are placed at institutions that are close to health centres". Over and above, to nurture teamwork Schools Inspector 2 disclosed that he encouraged "… teachers to organise themselves in beef committees, or pool their personal resources together to better their lives." Implied in the participants' responses was the importance of considerations for the teachers' social welfare that included uniting married couples, placing teachers with health challenges at schools that were close to health-care centres, and encouraging teachers to collectively work towards improving their lives.

As a follow up, Schools Inspector 2 was convinced that recognition might not be divorced from motivation and satisfaction especially when teachers "at the school and cluster levels" were informed on how the "district is performing in many aspects". Furthermore, Accountant 2 was of the opinion that "… some schools give teachers incentives when they produce good pass rates in public examinations". Learning Coordinator 1 argued that although implementing Non-Formal Education programmes in schools had previously been considered "a teacher voluntary exercise", the department now had unique teacher reward mechanisms in place. In view of that, Learning Coordinator 2 said:

> In functional literacy, poultry projects, for example, can pay teachers in kind since there may not be any monetary incentives. In Part-Time and Continuing Education at secondary schools, 90% of the learner fees is paid to the teachers. However, late fees payment or non-payment at all is not surprising.

The Non-Formal Education department seems to indicate that they sometimes paid teachers in kind and also used 90% of the learners' fees to pay the teachers. Despite the stated challenges, the department claimed that it did not seem to falter. Learning Coordinator 3 reported that they went on to organise the district "… Annual Literacy Day Commemorations where the best NFE facilitators (teachers) get prizes in the facilitator category of the competitions". According to Learning Coordinator 4, this was buttressed by "… the District Career Guidance Day every year where NFE teachers and students are motivated by the various facilitators' presentations". Highlighted here were the significance of the district Annual Literacy Day Commemorations and the District Career Guidance Day to teacher motivation.

Other considerations for teacher retention were (Learning Coordinator 3):

> NFE teachers are workshop trained in dealing with adult learners by employing andragogy rather than pedagogy. Andragogy calls for the teacher to avoid spoon feeding the learners that are expected to acquire 20% of knowledge from the teacher and 80% of knowledge on their own.

It was suggested that teachers that were provided direction in their work not only gained confidence but also stayed in the district.

The school infrastructure that was believed to retain teachers in a district might not be limited to standard buildings and groomed grounds. In that respect, Accountant 2 was convinced that as the district leadership, they should assist heads "… electrify schools

and improve the road network to schools to make them accessible". Human Resources Assistant 1 advocated for heads "… providing reliable and safe drinking water". Similarly, Remedial Tutor 2 maintained that they normally "…motivate teachers through requesting heads to supply the special class and resource unit teachers with adequate teaching and learning materials since they are specialists." Furthermore, Learning Coordinator 1 considered "… subject specific workshops focusing on, for example, the introduction of the compressed syllabus that makes the teachers' work easier" as valuable drivers of teacher retention. The participants seemed to appreciate that electrified schools that were accessed by good roads and had safe drinking water together with resource adequacy and subject specific workshops were some of the key factors for retaining teachers.

Movement of teachers from the district

Contrary to retention, the movement of teachers from the district was felt to be an equally integral component of staffing that deserved its share of instructional leadership consideration. The district leaders, to some extent, seemed to be in agreement that one way of moving teachers from the district was discharging them from service for given reasons. For example, DSI 2 had this to say, "Some teachers are discharged from the teaching service for serious indiscipline".

To confirm the claims, Schools Inspector 4 explained:

> To protect the welfare of the learner, when a teacher abuses a learner, the Schools Inspector investigates the case and makes recommendations to the Provincial Office that forwards the case, after holding a misconduct hearing, to the Permanent Secretary and the Public Service Commission for determination. When found guilty, the teacher is discharged from service.

It can be deduced from the participants' contributions that teachers sometimes left the district after they had been discharged from service for seriously contravening statutes.

However, sometimes teachers had to move from the district after the district leaders had pressurised them to transfer to other districts. Usually this happened after the teachers had been evaluated and found to be underperformers. In addition, the nature of the school itself and the teacher's conduct often came into play. To portray this, Schools Inspector 4 reiterated, "Sometimes the poor infrastructure or remoteness of

schools might de-motivate teachers and they will move away from the district". There were other reasons for teachers to leave the district as Human Resources Assistant 1 remarked, "… the District Recruitment Committee transfers teachers on their requests or following overstaffing in schools". Echoing Human Resources Assistant 1 contribution, Human Resources Assistant 2 said, "… such movement should always be initiated by the teachers and their preferred school destinations are usually honoured." Human Resources Assistant 4 believed that when a teacher is no longer wanted at a particular school, his department "… simply transfers that teacher to another school within the district unless the teacher volunteers to leave the district." The varied views imply that the district leaders were authorised to persuade teachers to transfer from the district.

Heads' and deputy heads' appointment

With regards to heads and deputy heads, DSI 1 summed up the process of appointing them, DSI 2 provided the detail:

> I declare vacant posts of heads and deputy heads. The Public Service Commission then flights an advertisement and interested candidates apply for the posts. The provincial level selects, short lists and interviews eligible candidates. The same office finally places the successful candidates at the schools they would have applied for.

The District Schools Inspector seemed to play the initial role of advertising vacant posts for heads and deputy heads although the provincial office appeared to, thereafter, short list, interview and appoint the successful candidates.

Three of the departments, Quality Control; Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs Education; and Non-Formal Education, declared that the appointment of heads and deputy heads was a Human Resources responsibility. To this, Schools Inspector 2 mused,

> The district office is just the interview venue for the Head Office representative, Provincial Office representative and the Public Service Commission representative who conduct the heads' and deputy heads' recruitment interviews.

However, Schools Inspector 4 was quick to pronounce his department's indirect contribution to the process, "We guide the Human Resources people and senior

teachers by making reference to the Results-Based Personnel Performance System to determine whether the applicant is suitable for a given promotion post."

Although it was shown that the district's Human Resources Assistants were involved in the appointment of heads and deputy heads, it was argued that the district was only the interview venue for officers from the Public Service Commission, provincial and head offices. While one district leader claimed that they referred Human Resources to the outcomes of the Results-Based Personnel Performance System, Human Resources Assistant 4 ironically pointed out that their involvement was more or less clerical, "We capture the applicants' submissions and forward them to the Provincial Education Director. We then later do the paper work related to the new appointees". Human Resources Assistant 3 also added, "… we check that all the necessary documents have been attached". However, Human Resources Assistant 1 had this to say about the appointment of acting heads, "… acting heads are appointed by the District Schools Inspector." This implies that acting heads were appointed outside the formal process that substantive heads had to go through.

Learning Coordinator 1 claimed that the Non-Formal Education department came up with supervisors for their centres in a different way, "By virtue of their position of head, school heads become the leaders of the NFE centres". Learning Coordinator 3 indicated that sometimes, this policy provision was ignored in circumstances where "… the head's committed and he/she can appoint the deputy head or senior teacher as supervisor after seeking the District Schools Inspector's approval". Emphasis is on the pivotal role of the District Schools Inspector to approve the appointment of the deputy head or senior teacher as the Non-Formal Education centre supervisor when the head had other commitments. Each school that offers Non-Formal Education programmes officially becomes a centre and requires a centre supervisor.

Preparation for new roles and responsibilities

As part of preparation, District Schools Inspector 2 organised and conducted "induction training workshops for the newly appointed heads and deputy heads" where "the Public Service Commission assisted at the provincial level". Accountant 1 claimed that as part of the training team, he contributed to the training of the heads and deputy heads in "financial management, discipline, procurement procedures, and general

school governance issues". It can be deduced from the interviewees that when the newly promoted heads and deputy heads assumed duty, the district leaders believed that they looked at them as people who still required to be more thoroughly prepared for their new roles and responsibilities in several ways.

In addition, Accountant 1 claimed that "… continuous capacity development programmes are conducted at the district level". Likewise, Human Resources Assistant 4 observed that "… other training interventions are carried out from time to time as the heads and deputy heads are carrying out their duties". Furthermore, Learning Coordinator 3 felt that as they grew older in their positions, "… the heads also attend continuous refresher courses and training". The critical need for continuous leadership capacity development was evident in the participants' contributions.

Commenting on the induction process, Schools Inspector 4 had this to say:

> The Public Service Commission and District Human Resources Assistants induct newly appointed heads without the Schools Inspector input. I'm not sure whether a thorough job is done here. Some schools may not be producing their best and remain so as a result of their heads' inadequate induction.

The Quality Control department, therefore, appeared to be unsettled by the induction training of the newly promoted heads and deputy heads because the process not only ignored the Schools Inspectors, but also appeared inadequate.

Schools Inspector 2 further expressed that they were allowed to meet with the newly promoted heads and deputy heads for "… only one day to orient them to their new roles and responsibilities after the Public Service Commission's one week national induction training workshop". It was the Schools Inspectors' opinion that they deserved much more time with the newly promoted heads and deputy heads at the dawn of their new jobs although they would have been left out of the initial induction training.

However, the Schools Inspectors appeared consoled for a number of reasons. Schools Inspector 3 explained that before they became substantive, the newly-promoted school leaders remained "… probationers and [were] supervised for a year after which the district office [gave] further professional development to assess them in their leadership development". At the centre of the heads' and deputy heads' supervision seemed to be the Schools Inspectors as Schools Inspector 5 explained:

> The newly-appointed heads bring to us their reports on the teachers they would have supervised for guidance. We are mandated to supervise the work spectrum of the heads, deputy heads, and Teachers in Charge/Heads of Departments, too.

Accountant 2 indeed appreciated the support that the Quality Control department gave to his department, "Quality Control assists me when they supervise the heads because they include financial management in their inspection though I personally inspect the heads' school financial records at least twice per year". It was suggested that the district leaders organised further professional development for the probationers while they also continuously supervised their entire work.

To consolidate the development of heads, DSI 2 disclosed that "… every month [he] holds a meeting with all the primary and secondary heads in the district". Besides this consolidation, all the district office departments seemed to concur that the District Schools Inspector's monthly meetings with heads significantly assisted in developing the heads. Schools Inspector 5 confirmed "… the District Schools Inspector's meetings with heads help them develop professionally". Accountant 2 proudly stated that the district leaders conducted

> … mini-training workshops at the heads' monthly meetings with the District Schools Inspector where we are allocated a timeslot in which to address heads on aspects to do with proper school financial management.

Also, Administration Assistant 1 appreciated that he constantly got in touch "… with heads like when we share information with them at their monthly meetings". Remedial Tutor 2 was also enthusiastic about their address to

> … heads during their monthly meetings with the District Schools Inspector… to share information related to special education, eg the school child feeding programme, and Guidance and Counselling.

Finally, Learning Coordinator 1 felt honoured since "… at the District Schools Inspector's monthly meetings with heads, we are given time to market all the available NFE programmes". The district leaders seemed to rally behind the District Schools Inspector's monthly meetings with the primary and secondary heads as the meetings significantly assisted in developing the heads, enabled the district leaders to mini-workshop the heads, share vital information with the heads, and market the available programmes in the various district departments.

More strategies to support the heads and deputy heads were unveiled as Administration Assistant 1 stated that "… individual heads visit us at this office for further assistance". Remedial Tutor 1's approach to capacitate heads and deputy heads had a slight twist as his department "… only workshop heads and deputy heads of schools with special classes and Resource Units". In addition, Learning Coordinator 2 was convinced that the Non-Formal Education department "… staff develop the centre supervisors in two workshops per term though at times the heads visit us at the district office for advice and assistance". In other words, the district leaders believed that they employed varied strategies to capacitate the newly promoted heads and deputy heads that included entertaining them on consultative visits at the district office, and organising cluster and district level workshops for them.

Besides the induction exercise, the district inspection visits to schools, and the District Schools Inspector's monthly meetings, Schools Inspector 6 claimed that they encouraged "… new heads and deputy heads to carry out exchange visits or twin themselves with the more senior and seasoned heads for the less experienced heads to benefit from their more experienced counterparts". Likewise, Learning Coordinator 1 felt, "In workshops, we highlight programme implementation challenges and the Non-Formal Education compliant heads share ideas on how those heads that have not started Non-Formal Education programmes can start". Here, the interviewees suggested that it was very productive for the new heads and deputy heads to embark on exchange visits and twinning with seasoned heads.

School leaders in acting positions were not left out of the leadership development spectrum, the district leaders were convinced. In light of that, Schools Inspector 1 said:

> Where an acting head or acting deputy head isn't effective, we effect leadership change instantly. We also change the leadership structure after our assessments. We make follow-up supervision visits to assess performance and progress. Parents sometimes communicate with us on a head's performance.

It appeared that the district leaders closely supervised acting heads and, with informal assistance from the community, did not hesitate to make prompt structural changes when deficiencies were observed.

Retention

It was brought to light that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education itself at some point appeared to prioritise the retention of heads even after reaching retirement age. This is what Accountant 1 said:

> All heads in Zimbabwe are treated the same. There used to be a scheme to retain heads due for retirement by extending their service for at most two years. However, this has been abandoned due to austerity measures.

This seems to suggest that the education system has had the retention of heads high on its agenda for quite some time.

Schools Inspector 1 believed that they "… advertise schools that have vacant posts for deputy heads and heads and urge senior teachers, acting deputy heads and acting heads in this district to apply and secure the substantive positions". This implies that the district officers subscribed to grooming and nurturing their own school leaders as a leadership retention strategy.

Subsequently, DSI 1 believed that his department sometimes used "incentives to retain heads in posts but the major limiting factor is lack of funding". In the other district, DSI 2 revealed different strategies to retain heads:

> I maintain a good working relationship with heads. I also encourage all the schools' responsible authorities, the community at large and other stakeholders to improve the schools so that heads would be comfortable to work in them.

The implied leadership retention interventions were incentives for heads although lack of funding thwarted the strategy, a conducive teacher/leader working relationship, and an improvement in the school environment. Such considerations included school infrastructure and related facilities.

Schools Inspector 5 claimed that since the Schools Inspector (Quality Control) is the newly appointed head's "… first port of call at the district, a guidance and counselling session with these heads and the production of encouraging supervision reports on the heads motivates the heads to perform better". Still relating to the school work environment, Schools Inspector 4 observed:

> My department tries to create a conducive working environment for heads without taking anything from anyone. No threats and zero tolerance to nonsense have brought stability to the district in terms of retaining heads. We also maintain a high level of understanding and co-operation. The positive

> comments that we make highly motivate heads to stay in the district and work even harder.

Guiding and counselling heads, producing of encouraging supervision reports on the heads, a conducive working environment for heads that is filled with a high level of understanding and co-operation were felt to be strong indicators for leadership retention stability in the district.

Schools Inspector 1 was convinced that heads sometimes never thought of leaving the district "… largely because of the district office's open door policy". On the district's open door policy, Schools Inspector 2 confided:

> Our open door policy requires heads to promptly communicate with their area Schools Inspector when facing challenges. This enhances confidentiality and guidance while nipping the problem in the bud. There's every reason for the heads to smile all the way to the district office a few days after such assistance from their Schools Inspector.

While the district open door policy suggests the significance of effective and direct communication, when heads were visible in the professional organisations to which they were members, it was felt that their attachment to the organisation might be strengthened. To motivate heads in that respect, Schools Inspector 2 urged

> … the National Association of Primary Heads and National Association of Secondary Heads to consider seniority, experience and expertise when allocating heads to structures like Heads-In-Charge of various disciplines such as music, netball, soccer, quiz and research.

In addition, the heads' social considerations were deemed important retention factors. In that regard Schools Inspector 6 disclosed, "We place heads at schools that are close to their homes, especially when they approach their retirement age, and also attend heads' and teachers' funerals, thus bringing us closer together". Similarly, Human Resources Assistant 4 observed, "We ensure that the deputy head or head and their spouses are placed at the same school or at schools that are close together." Considerations by the National Association of Primary Heads and the National Association of Secondary Heads to recognise heads-in-charge of sporting disciplines, and social considerations such as attending heads' and teachers' funerals, and placing heads and deputy heads and their spouses at the same schools were deemed to contribute to leadership retention.

Taking other leadership retention factors on board, Human Resources Assistant 3, though critical of her department, observed:

> It is very critical that we keep all the substantive deputy heads and heads in the district. Apart from staff development training, sometimes we process heads' and deputy heads' transfers to bigger schools when the individuals have demonstrated outstanding abilities in school management. I think leadership retention is an area that is being neglected because not much is being done by my department.

Although the district leaders believed that transferring outstanding heads and deputy heads sometimes motivated them, the district appeared to be attaching very little importance to the strategy.

In their account of the strategies that they used to retain heads and deputy heads, the Non-Formal Education department factored in allowances and awards. Learning Coordinator 3 said, "We motivate heads by paying them supervisor allowances from the learners' fees and project proceeds. At the district annual literacy day commemorations the best school gets prizes in the schools category". To this, Learning Coordinator 4 added, "We recognize the heads' presence and accord them due respect. We have also identified capable heads to lead teachers in the Non-Formal Education module writing programme". The participants implied that other leadership retention strategies included paying the Non-Formal Education supervisor allowances from the learners' fees and project proceeds, awarding the best school a prize at the district annual literacy day commemorations, and identifying capable heads to lead teachers in the Non-Formal Education module writing programme.

Still in the Non-Formal Education department, Learning Coordinator 1, said:

> We mobilise communities to embark on the Zimbabwe Adult Basic Education Course, and then proceed to the secondary school Part-time and Continuing Education to boost the Non-Formal Education enrolment. Other government ministry departments come in to vigorously market these programmes. Since our major target is the school dropout, we also ensure that primary and secondary school heads are motivated when they embark on diverse functional literacy that, when viable, should pay the learners' fees.

The implied element of job satisfaction here that resulted in the retention of heads was the successful implementation of viable and diverse functional literacy programmes.

The overall implication is that the district leaders believed that school leadership staffing was a primary concern at the district level and its success seemed to border

on maintaining very low levels of school leadership turnover. In other words, the developed heads and deputy heads should not think about leaving the district, the district leaders in this study appeared to be convinced, and this was possible provided the measures presented in this section were taken into consideration.

Succession

Heads and deputy heads are only human and, at some point their careers can terminate as a result of death, resignation, retirement, or discharge from service. In the event of that happening, it becomes inevitable for the district to replace the departed heads and deputy heads. Accountant 2 confirmed this development:

> The substantive head or deputy head is expected to be replaced following, for example, his/her demotion, retirement, resignation, transfer to another school, promotion, or death.

Although the district should be prepared for such eventualities, the district leaders in this study had divergent views in this regard. Schools Inspector 4 believed:

> The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education already has a common organogram for all schools and that is the succession plan. The deputy head is supposed to understudy the head in readiness to take over. The system has a succession plan in place already since Heads of Departments/Teachers in Charge are expected to be certificated university degree holders that are mature, responsible and experienced enough to later on lead schools.

The school management structure was seen as the deliberate leadership succession plan in which the deputy head, the Heads of Departments/Teachers in Charge were strategically selected and positioned to eventually take over the office directly above each of them. However, DSI 2 thought differently:

> The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's system is the succession plan. The way the school administration is organized might be another way of preparing people for leadership succession, but in the event of people holding substantive deputy head or head posts dying, retiring or getting discharged from service, succession is through the traditional post advertisement, recruitment and selection process.

Although the school administrative structure was suggestive of a succession plan, the implied reality was that succession was only through the post advertisement, recruitment and selection system, thus rendering the school management structure

simply a preparatory stage in the succession plan. Continuing the debate, Schools Inspector 2 admitted:

> At the district office, we do not have powers to appoint substantive heads. We, however, visit the school when a substantive head retires, for example, and we elevate the substantive deputy head to the position of acting head on condition that he/she has to go through the mill to become a substantive head.

In support, Schools Inspector 6 explained:

> The school management structure is the model succession plan. Members are exposed to almost all aspects of school management from the deputy head, to the senior teacher to the Teachers in Charge/Head of Department levels. These school administrative structures constitute the pool from which applicants for a vacant post of head or deputy head would be drawn.

It could be deduced from the participants' contributions that when a head and/or deputy head departed from a school, the district appointed senior people among the teachers to act in the positions until the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education appointed substantive people after the due process had been diligently followed.

Schools Inspector 5 made an interesting observation that seemed to cloud the indicated succession plan when delays were noted on the way the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and responsible authorities

> … appointed heads' and deputy heads' replacements. Churches have their own succession plans although the Schools Inspectors still insist on respecting the qualification and experience specifications.

This peculiar comparison between succession in public schools and private schools was an eye opener. Human Resources Assistant 4 had this to say:

> The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's public schools succession set up is different from the private school set up. When the head or deputy head vacancies are available in public schools, we just advertise the posts and the recruitment, selection and appointment process runs its course. However, the responsible authorities of private or independent schools are not bound to the ministry's succession process.

It is inferred that while the government had its own school leadership succession in place, the private/independent schools had a different one. However, contrary to the said ministry succession plan for heads and deputy heads, Schools Inspector 3 was convinced that "currently the district has no elaborate succession plans". Likewise, Accountant 1 was in agreement with him when he remarked that "… there's no clear

cut succession plan for heads and deputy heads as, instead, the teaching staff now opt to retire at 55 years of age, disregarding the prescribed 65 years of age."

The Non-Formal Education department added another dimension to the succession of heads that applied to them. In Learning Coordinator 2's words, the Public Service Commission

> … replaces substantive heads by simply marketing the Non-Formal Education programmes. Every school should have a Non-Formal Education programme file that the departing head should leave behind in the office for continuity.

Therefore, Learning Coordinator 1 felt it was imperative for every teacher to know all the Non-Formal Education programmes running at the school so that "… once the head departs, then it would not be difficult for the authorities to find a suitable replacement".

Though to some of the study participants the succession discussion was seemingly inconclusive, the Non-Formal Education department appeared not to depart from the ministry succession plan but went by the school administrative structure records until the ministry had appointed substantive successors to the departed heads and/or deputy heads.

4.3.2.2 Professional development

This part of the study looked at the district leaders' considerations for professional development as part of their instructional leadership support to schools. Claiming direct and personal involvement in professional development, DSI 1 stated:

> We encourage heads, officers at the district office and teachers to enrol at universities and develop their careers. I am actually a holder of a M.Ed. degree and I improve myself through attending workshops and other staff development programmes.

DSI 1 seemed to stress that he played an exemplary role in the professional development of teachers, heads and deputy heads since he himself not only possessed a masters degree but also attended various staff development programmes. Also as confirmation of taking heed of this professional development call, Schools Inspector 6 disclosed, "I'm personally studying professional courses in computing with professional institutes such as the Chartered Institute of Secretaries. I'm also doing an MBA degree programme with a local university".

Furthermore, the government was said to have put in place teacher professional development considerations that were expected to positively impact on their instructional practice. One such consideration, according to Schools Inspector 4, was "… the Teacher Capacity Building programme, in which we recruit potential candidates from teachers for university studies; the government funds the studies and provides study leave for examination purposes". Therefore, workshops and meetings were the platforms from which the district officers claimed they recruited the intended beneficiaries. In addition, Accountant 2 believed that they widened the net when they encouraged "… heads and teachers to read further to obtain higher academic and professional qualifications like university degrees and diplomas including administrative qualifications to improve their efficiency and effectiveness". Emphasising the interviewees' deep involvement in professional development, Human Resources Assistant 1 reported, "Every year in October since 2014, we submit to the Provincial Education Director our district professional development plan …". Human Resources Assistant 3 confirmed, "… we forward application forms for teachers who wish to be part of the Teacher Capacity Development programme to the Provincial Education Director". The participants suggested that they, apart from encouraging teachers and heads to study for further improving themselves academically and professionally, they developed the district professional development plan and forwarded it, together with the teachers' applications for places in the Teacher Capacity Building programme, to the provincial offices.

The Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs department's Remedial Tutor 2 stated their involvement in professional development:

> We encourage teachers unqualified to handle special classes and resource units to embark on further studies related to special education so that they become relevant to the responsibility. To support this, we've created a district social media group to share opportunities when university places for such study arise.

Professional development appeared to cut across the departments as the Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs department claimed that they assisted those teachers that were in charge of special classes and resource units but required the relevant training. DSI 2 presented further evidence of teacher professional development when teachers in secondary schools were provided learning area platforms at the district and provincial levels "… where they rub shoulders and share

experiences in their different areas with subject specialists". In addition, Schools Inspector 4 claimed that all the teachers in the primary and secondary schools were exposed to other programmes that appeared explicitly and deliberately designed to create school environments that supported instructional practice:

> After a health needs assessment at the provincial and district levels by the ministry and its partners, two health masters per school are trained at the district level. The trainees are required to ensure that their schools become self-sufficient in the availability and proper use of toilets, clean and safe drinking water, and waste disposal systems.

It is implied that the district leaders placed much importance on the provision of water and management of sanitation in schools. Workshops enabled the district leaders to reach out to schools, it emerged, and more often than not, the workshops were seen to be need driven. Administration Assistant 2 claimed:

> Once or twice per year we run circuit level and district level workshops for heads, deputy heads, Teachers in Charge/Heads of Departments, and teachers. We deal with procurement procedures, handling of assets and record keeping.

In addition, Schools Inspector 3 explained that these training workshops for heads and teachers at the cluster level were run:

> … when something new is introduced in the education system, and the frequency of the workshops depends on the new programmes, eg Performance Lag Address Programme-termly, Early Reading Initiative-termly, the new curriculum-termly, and the Teacher Professional Standards-termly.

The participant suggested targeted cluster level professional development for heads, deputy heads and teachers especially when the ministry introduced new policies or programmes. On a similar note, Human Resources Assistant 3 said:

> We also organise twice per term district level workshops for heads, and cluster level workshops for teachers. The workshops cover leave management and the terminations policy.

As if not to be outdone, Learning Coordinator 4 indicated that each time there were new Non-Formal Education programmes, "… we mount workshops for teachers and heads at the district, cluster and school levels". In the Non-Formal Education department, professional development occurred, according to Learning Coordinator 3, when they carried out:

> … induction training for Non-Formal Education supervisors and teachers at the district and school levels at the beginning of each year. Recently, we've introduced open distance learning at the secondary school level. Already, the training of personnel has cascaded from the national, provincial, district and school levels with only the teaching modules still to be produced and distributed to schools by early 2020.

The participant's response implied that the Non-Formal Education department professionally developed teachers and heads through annual induction and district and school level personnel training for the open distance learning programme. Documentary evidence lies in the Secretary's Circular Minute Number 13 of 2016 that confirms the introduction of open distance learning programmes at the secondary school level when it indicates that open distance learning:

> … is a correspondence programme for those pursuing primary and secondary education. It is intended to serve learners who are separated by time and distance. It also serves learners who are disadvantaged socially and physically. Currently, Open Distance Learning is practiced by the Government Correspondence School based at Mt Pleasant for primary education only. Open Distance Learning will now be extended to secondary education.

Similarly, Human Resources Assistant 4 pointed out:

> Once every year, my department conducts district level workshops for heads and deputy heads. Disciplinary issues are the focus. When the need arises, we run district level workshops for senior level teachers. Facilitators from the provincial office assist here since the main thrust is policy issues.

It appears that most of the departments at the district office engaged in organising professional development workshops for heads, deputy heads, and teachers. The district leaders believed that they went to the extent of outsourcing workshop facilitation expertise from the provincial office.

Schools Inspector 1 also observed:

> Deputy heads, heads, Teachers in Charge and Heads of Departments attend cluster level workshops termly on the Teacher Professional Standards supervision form to groom teachers and improve the school examination pass rate. Termly, we run cluster level and district level workshops on challenges encountered in schools and how to overcome them. These workshops target teachers, deputy heads and heads.

This Schools Inspector implies that the termly workshops on the use of the Teacher Professional Standards supervision form and training on how to solve common problems in schools help improve schools' examination pass rates.

Schools Inspector 6's remarks rope in stakeholder involvement:

> Professional development programmes are sometimes organised by the PSC and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to train heads and deputy heads to improve skills in accounting. Unicef also supports the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to develop heads' accounting skills in supervising and monitoring the Unicef-funded programmes.

This presents further evidence of the involvement of stakeholders such as the Public Service Commission and Unicef in the district professional development programmes.

One of the critical areas in professional development was performance management. In the districts, the performance management cycle went thus, as Schools Inspector 6 explained:

> We meet heads as individuals or in their clusters four times a year as we go through the Results Based Personnel Performance System (RBPPS)'s key result areas. By 15 January, the SIs and heads agree on the heads' key result areas. By 7 July, and 7 October, the Schools Inspectors and heads review the heads' performance. The final performance rating interview is in November and December.

The district appeared to have set down particular time frames in which the various stages of the RBPPS cycle were supposed to be completed with the final performance rating reflecting the individual head's agreed performance for the year in question. Heads would be expected to reflect on this measurement of their performance to continuously improve their instructional leadership.

To develop teachers implementing the Non-Formal Education programmes, Learning Coordinator 1 stated:

> My department carries out institutional supervision where we check on teachers' areas of specialisation and their relevance to the Non-Formal Education programmes. We make recommendations to effect changes where mismatches are identified in the subject taught and level taught. We do these school visits all year round.

This implies that professional development in the Non-Formal Education department focused on matching the teachers' areas of specialisation with the subjects and levels of the learners that they taught to ensure relevant teaching and learning.

Finally, Schools Inspector 4, made an interesting observation:

> There are more professional development activities at the district level than at the provincial level because funding is at the district level courtesy of the Better Schools Programme of Zimbabwe. There is no functional Better Schools Programme of Zimbabwe at the provincial level.

This seems to emphasise the significance of the district Better Schools Programme of Zimbabwe programme in shouldering the professional development initiatives even at the provincial level.

4.3.2.3 Supervision

The District Schools Inspectors' conception of quality education seemed to relate to the welfare of learners and infrastructural development in schools and that should be possible through supervision. DSI 2 of District Office B confidently said:

> I look into learner welfare and infrastructural development in schools, all converging on the provision of quality education in the district. As District Schools Inspector, I supervise schools, primary and secondary evidenced by generated reports-ten reports per term.

In addition, DSI 2 could not wait to explain how his concern was about the welfare of the learners:

> I engage stakeholders such as Unicef for their input through meetings to support our operations. Over and above, in the schools feeding programme my wish is that every primary school learner should enjoy a balanced hot meal every school day. I've gone further to encourage our secondary schools to feed their learners as well.

The participant believed that stakeholder engagement was very productive in catering for the learners' health in both the primary and secondary schools as evidenced by the Unicef health-related workshops and the learner feeding programmes.

For effective supervision, DSI 1 claimed that he superintended over the various departments to enhance the desired outcomes in schools. Summarising what he expected from the departments, DSI 1 said:

> Quality Control does the overall school supervision to improve the pass rate to bring about quality education. Finance, Administration and Human Resources enhances financial management in schools, and the provision and utilisation of resources, teacher recruitment, staff welfare, and promotion and discipline. Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs Education caters for learner welfare, while Non-Formal Education oversees adult and continuing education.

DSI 1, therefore, claimed that he prioritised effective management of all the district office departments to bring about quality education in the primary and secondary schools. In addition, both District Schools Inspectors disclosed that they produced ten school supervision reports termly each to prove that supervision had taken place and the reports covered infrastructural development and the welfare of learners. Therefore, the District Schools Inspector could be seen as an instructional leader with infrastructure development, financial management, and policy implementation taking centre stage in their roles.

In the Quality Control department, Schools Inspector 2 elaborated his supervisory role:

> Normally, during school supervision we pick on challenges and then we base our staff development on these. We invite clusters to come up with their own needs assessments. Then we sometimes seek Schools Inspector expertise at joint or separate cluster workshops targeting primary and secondary schools. At times we send hand-picked teachers to attend national level Training of Trainers workshops. The work shopped teachers are expected to cascade the training to the provincial, district, cluster and school level.

The interviewee implies that clusters' own needs assessments were accommodated in organising supervision workshops. Conducting separate workshops for primary and secondary schools was found to be effective. Furthermore, training of trainers (TOTs) at the national level was also considered as an effective strategy of spreading the training down to the provincial, district, cluster and school levels.

Visits to schools were considered an important factor in supervision. Schools Inspector 2 explained:

> We visit every primary and secondary school in my circuit at least once per year at whose exit meeting we help the head and teachers identify challenges affecting their performance. We then agree whether these challenges are not beyond our control and then chart the way forward. However, because there are currently three instead of the expected eight Schools Inspectors here, some schools may go for two years without being visited although they may be spot checked.

At least once per year, the participant suggested, the district leaders visited each school for supervision, discussed their observations with the staff and agreed on how to improve teaching and learning in the school. However, the implied acute shortage of Schools Inspectors was believed to have adversely affected the frequency and effectiveness of the Schools Inspector visits.

The other participants were convinced that their approach to school visits took a twist as they "… supervise schools through visits and phone calls to heads to feel the atmosphere at the schools" (Schools Inspector 4). Schools Inspector 5 claimed that they

> … supervise heads, Heads of Departments/Teachers in Charge, and teachers to monitor progress in their respective responsibility areas such as the general outlook of school grounds, the child feeding programme in primary schools, public examination administration (Grade Seven, Ordinary and Advanced levels), and learner results so that schools with red flags are assisted to improve. We also check on the availability of school production units such as fishery, poultry, orchard, goat rearing, dairy, tuck shops, and plantations that bring income to the school.

The Schools Inspectors' responses implied that they employed varied school supervision approaches that included making phone calls to heads determine the atmosphere, and carrying out progress checks in teachers' respective responsibility areas to account for the low performing schools.

Team visits were brought to light when Accountant 2 pointed out that he visited "… schools to inspect their financial records and offer technical assistance. The visits incorporate other district department representatives." In Administration Assistant 1's view, the visits enabled the district leaders to enforce "… school compliance with set financial, administration and asset management policies". The participants thought that school visits benefitted special education as well, for example, when in Remedial Tutor 2's words, they

> … visit(ed) schools to monitor resource units that are established in schools to accommodate learners with severe disabilities. Here, the learners are taught daily living skills such as bathing, brushing teeth and some gardening since such learners can't benefit from the special classes or the mainstream classes.

The district leaders seemed to appreciate team visits since they incorporated most of the district office departments and enabled them to: inspect schools' financial records and offer technical assistance; enforce school compliance with statutes on financial/ administration and asset management; and monitor resource units that catered for learners with severe disabilities.

In Learning Coordinator 2's opinion, "institutional supervision" seemed to be the Non-Formal Education departmental thrust. Learning Coordinator 1 provided the details:

> We visit schools to supervise all the Non-Formal Education programmes in the schools. We prepare an itinerary that is guided by the number of teachers engaged in the Non-Formal Education programmes in the schools to be visited. We write reports on our institutional supervision and make recommendations for improvement that the head and Non-Formal Education programme teachers should later on discuss and implement. Then the head should report progress to the District Schools Inspector.

The participant suggested that institutional supervision was the backbone for Non-Formal Education programme monitoring when the district leaders visited the schools. Taking supervision to another level, the Non-Formal Education department's Learning Coordinator 1 disclosed that their supervision of schools focused on transforming the school projects into enterprises:

> We monitor the new compressed Functional Literacy syllabus whose emphasis is on Functional Literacy being treated as a business for sustenance. The learners and teachers should rely on proceeds from the products to pay their fees, while the teachers' remuneration would come from the learners' fees.

The implied idea is that school self-sustenance contributes to quality teaching and learning.

Some of the district leaders, however, seemed concerned as Schools Inspector 3 explained:

> We make supervision visits to assist schools to improve learning achievement. However, we face a lot of challenges in providing this support mainly because we are under-staffed and it takes long periods to cover all schools. Furthermore, we are incapacitated in terms of inadequate resources to enable us to get into schools. As a result, we end up giving minimal support to schools.

The intentions of the district leaders to improve schools through school visits appeared to be interrupted by forces that the participants could not contend with. They were convinced that understaffing in some departments and insufficient resources forced them to provide very limited support to schools.

Performance management was another dimension of supervision that the participants brought up. About it, Accountant 1 said, "… we allocate circuits for the Results-Based Personnel Performance System (RBPPS) whose thrust is on infrastructural development, supervision, Non-Formal Education and governance". Schools Inspector 6 also stated, "I assess each school's outputs pertaining to agreed areas and their link to the implementation of the ministry's policy on learner access to quality education". Schools Inspector 2 claimed:

> I manage the RBPPS for the heads of primary and secondary schools in my circuit. I sit down with each head. Each Schools Inspector runs a circuit of about forty-five schools – 14 secondary plus 31 primary.

The district leaders implied here that they played a central role in the implementation of the performance management system, the RBPPS that focused on infrastructural development, supervision, Non-Formal Education and governance in all primary and secondary schools. The Schools Inspectors disclosed that their focus was on heads only since the teachers were the heads' responsibility.

In greater detail, Schools Inspector 5 stated:

> The head and I plan outputs together and then sign a work plan agreement. Then I monitor implementation progress with four performance reviews per year. My department plans workshops that address noted common areas for improvement. The RBPPS outputs include supervision to guide quality staff capacitation workshops, infrastructural development, and school governance.

The suggested key features of the Results-Based Personnel Performance System (RBPPS) were the signing of agreements on work plans and the four performance reviews that included the final performance rating interview.

Other approaches to school supervision were accommodated, the participants disclosed. Schools Inspector 2 had this to say:

> For me to effectively supervise schools, I first of all do a needs assessment. The updated curriculum emphasises skills development in learners. Therefore, I target underperforming schools so that they comply with the curriculum demands. I check whether teachers are not deviating from making learners discover since the updated curriculum expects teachers not to teach but to facilitate learning.

Supervision effectiveness appeared to depend on Schools Inspectors monitoring of teacher compliance with the demands of the updated curriculum relating to learner skills development through discovery learning. In the same vein, Schools Inspector 4 claimed:

> I link with the National Association of Primary Heads and National Association of Secondary Heads arms of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and get their assistance in funding subject panel meetings for secondary teachers. I also design termly schedules to assist the low performing schools in the national primary schools Grade Seven exams and secondary schools Ordinary and Advanced level exams.

Schools Inspector 4 was of the opinion that the National Association of Primary Heads' and National Association of Secondary Heads' funding of subject panel meetings for teachers supported her supervisory efforts. She also implied that she visited the underperforming schools in the national examinations to personally help them to improve. Breath-taking was Schools Inspector 4's other contribution, especially the Information Communication Technology part of it, when she claimed that she assisted:

> … in mitigating conflict between heads and teachers by staff developing heads in the production of balanced teacher supervision reports and in policy compliance. Sometimes the heads send videos of school activities to me by whatsapp. I have often requested some heads to use their phone tablets to photograph their end of term reports and forward them to me on my cell phone. I would then inspect the reports.

The participant suggested that while she encouraged heads to produce balanced supervision reports on teachers to reduce conflict, she also convinced many heads to send to her their tablet or phone generated videos and photographs of key school events/activities and reports so that she used these as other sources of her school supervision reports.

On financial management at the district office, Accountant 1, reported:

> I advise heads of schools on financial matters in line with the Public Finance Management Act, treasury instructions and policy circulars issued by the ministry from time to time. I also monitor and supervise school accounts. I prepare and submit statutory returns and acquittals to the provincial office and handle all district office finances. Apart from advising the DSI on financial matters.

Accountant 1 believed that he assisted not only heads by supervising accounting systems and management of funds in schools, but also did the district office financial management by, for example, preparing and submitting statutory returns and making acquittals to the provincial office, handling all district office finances, and advising the District Schools Inspector on financial matters.

Administration Assistant 1 claimed that the heads visited them for other reasons at the district office as he observed, "On such visits, they submit their school termly returns. I also assist heads who come to seek advice on financial and administrative issues pertaining to their respective schools". Furthermore, Administration Assistant 1 indicated that he gave heads and deputy heads "… advice on recording teaching/learning materials and on proper procurement procedures using school funds

or donor funds". In addition, Administration Assistant 2 said that she provided heads with "… guidance on asset management, that is, keeping records of desks, computers, etc". The participants suggested that their advice to heads went beyond financial management to include administrative issues, asset management, and procurement procedures.

Human Resources Assistant 4 summed up his involvement in supervision when he stated, "I ensure that heads properly interpret policy circulars". However, Human Resources Assistant 2 provided more detail:

> I advise the district office senior management and heads on adherence to policy and procedures regarding staffing and performance. After that I check that the teachers adhere to them; the fewer the teacher misconduct cases the better.

The Human Resources officers above implied that they supervised heads, deputy heads and teachers adequately on Human Resources issues that affected them. To emphasise the importance of observing deadlines for the submission and processing of official documents, Human Resources Assistant 2 stated, "I use the social media to ensure that heads come to the district office to collect pay sheets and return them signed by the teachers to me at the district office".

The district leaders regarded meetings with heads played a significant part in supervision. Schools Inspector 1 stated; "… we are given the opportunity to address heads at the District Schools Inspector's monthly meetings with them". In the same vein, Human Resources Assistant 2 said, "… we participate in the DSI's monthly meetings with heads. There is a time slot during which we Human Resources people address both primary and secondary heads on Human Resources related issues". Similarly, Accountant 2 claimed; "I address the heads in their monthly meeting with the District Schools Inspector and my presentations sometimes draw on the internal auditors' findings or observations". Likewise, Learning Coordinator 1 hinted at all monthly meeting for the District Schools Inspector and heads "… we address heads on Non-Formal Education issues. We insist on teachers preparing apparatus and testing them before learners use them in science experiments". The participants appreciated meetings with heads as they offered them supervisory chances to appraise the heads on various issues.

Remedial Tutor 2 brought up another angle of supervision when he said:

> I oversee the implementation of clinical remediation in primary schools in Grade 4 English and Mathematics. I also ensure that learners with disabilities are professionally assessed and placed in special classes where qualified teachers interact with them. For these teachers, I organise district level workshops. The trained teachers extend this training to the school level. Camp meetings are for both teachers and learners.

Remedial Tutor 2 seemed to indicate that their teacher supervision covered the full spectrum of special needs education that embraced: clinical remediation in primary schools; professional assessment and placement in schools of learners living with disabilities; special needs teachers' district workshops; teachers' and learners' camp meetings. However, the implication is that there was no clinical remediation in secondary schools, quite in contravention with the Director's Circular No. 26 of 2008, a document that articulates:

> What is … clear currently is that there are more learners who are struggling in the secondary schools than in the primary schools … In the context of the above, intervention programmes are, therefore, necessary to either prevent or correct learning disabilities. Remediation is, therefore, considered to be very useful as one of those measures aimed at improving the pass rate in public examinations. To this end, there is need to employ scientific approaches such as clinical remediation to ensure effective support to the learners.

The mainstream learners were not left out when Remedial Tutor 1 added that he assesses learners with disability

> …and co-ordinate special class and Resource Unit programmes where I place learners with disability in their appropriate classes. I co-ordinate quiz competitions for all learners, including those learners in the mainstream.

Therefore, the department seemed to be inclusively catering for the needs of both the mainstream and special needs education learners.

4.3.2.4 School Development

Schools Inspector 6 noted; "I think that all school operations are driven by a school development plan". The district office, after supporting the schools in drafting their development plans, was expected to monitor plan implementation through supervising every school thoroughly and regularly to ensure that the planned school development initiatives were effectively implemented.

In monitoring school development plans, District Schools Inspector 2 stated:

> I facilitate and monitor the provision of standard school infrastructure. Since learners need tutorial accommodation, schools should provide a safe learning environment with adequate toilets. In response to survey findings that pointed out schools in dire need of toilets, for example, the Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programme is currently on in the district.

The implied components of the school development plans were standard school infrastructure and a safe learning environment with adequate toilets. The response also suggests that district programmes such as WASH were responsive to the school development plans by assisting schools that had indicated their critical needs and had had their needs confirmed.

Other district leaders echoed DSI 2's observation. Firstly, DSI 1 said, "I insist on good infrastructure". Then Schools Inspector 1 claimed, "I encourage infrastructural development in all my schools since I believe that all my primary and secondary schools should have adequate classroom blocks for effective teaching and learning". Schools Inspector 2 prioritised "… teacher accommodation since teachers deserve comfort and dignity, so standard and modern houses should be available to teachers in every school". In addition, Schools Inspector 5 settled for "child-friendly schools with safe and clean drinking water". It was clear that these district leaders considered infrastructure development as a priority in school development plans and they suggested the inclusion of adequate classroom blocks, teacher accommodation in the form of modern houses, and safe and clean drinking water.

It was felt that infrastructure in the schools should also be sufficiently responsive to inclusive educational demands so that schools were user friendly to learners living with disabilities. On that note, Remedial Tutor 2 stressed the need for having "rumps in the schools so that learners with disabilities, such as the wheelchair-bound, can easily move around the school premises". Further special considerations were found necessary when Remedial Tutor 2 said:

> … at every school, at least one toilet squat hole (one each for boys and girls) should have a rump for easy access by the wheelchair bound learners, and girls who go on their menstrual cycle while at school should have access to a properly constituted room for privacy.

Remedial Tutor 2 implied that a rump in the boys' and girls' toilets made the toilets user-friendly for the wheel chair-bound learners, while specially-prepared rooms

comfortably accommodated female learners whose menstrual cycles affected them while they were at school.

With a focus on the new curriculum, the value of textbooks could not be overemphasised. In that regard, DSI 2 stressed:

> My other focus is on the availability of textbooks in the schools because the learners should interact with textbooks. The updated curriculum now calls for the teacher to simply facilitate that interaction anywhere and anytime.

In addition, Schools Inspector 1 said; “I check that each school has enough textbooks for its learners as I monitor the proper management of textbooks that were purchased using School Improvement Grant [Unicef] funding”. Partner support in the acquisition of such learning resources seemed not only inevitable but invaluable as evidenced by the inception of the School Improvement Grant that was funded by Unicef.

A few of the Schools Inspectors included Information Communication Technology in their supervision activities. For example, DSI 2 stated:

> I oversee the paradigm shift from the traditional school to the modern school by encouraging schools to be electrified so as to embrace the Information Communication Technology component of education.

Schools Inspector 3 also claimed, “… we insist on the procurement of digital technology which enhances learning improvement”. Interestingly, DSI 2 and Schools Inspector 3 implied that they were the only respondents who believed that Information Communication Technology was an integral part of school development. Perhaps the other participants considered Information Communication Technology teaching and learning in just as much as they considered the other areas.

School development was seen as requiring careful staffing as far as the teaching staff was concerned. That could be why DSI 2 remarked; “I ensure that all schools are properly staffed so that learners have specialised teachers in all their learning areas”, and DSI 1 weighed in with the importance of “… a sustainable teacher establishment and a high teacher retention rate”. In Human Resources Assistant 3’s opinion, effective teaching and learning outcomes were the result of “a relevantly and adequately staffed school”. Furthermore, Human Resources Assistant 2 was convinced that the transfer of teachers “… should consider keeping couples at the same school or at schools that are close to each other to help keep the teaching force in good health as far as HIV/

Aids is concerned". Such concerns seemed to indicate the importance that the respondents attached not only to proper school staffing but also to teacher retention.

Within the same primary school, when some teachers were affected by overstaffing, Human Resources Assistant 3 indicated that "… they were re-distributed from one department to another that was understaffed, eg the infants department offloads to the junior department following a 2-3 weeks re-skilling programme". This implied that such teacher re-distribution could prevent teacher mobility and maintain continuity to a reasonable limit, thus increasing teacher retention. On teacher relevancy, Human Resources Assistant 3 stated:

> Professional development equips teachers with the most up-to-date teaching skills. Teachers should be abreast with changing policy issues for them to remain relevant. Teachers should also know the guiding acts of misconduct and their impact on them as professionals.

Human Resources Assistant 3 suggests that teacher relevancy was interrelated to continuity as and knowing the dos and don'ts of the teaching profession was critical.

Non-Formal Education programme implementation was sustainable because the teachers and their supervisors had direction as Human Resources Assistant 3 stated; "Heads and teachers are well-versed in teaching the Non-Formal Education learners using andragogy instead of pedagogy since the students are older and have different learning objectives". According to Human Resources Assistant 3, leadership retention could also be promoted in "… a school with a substantive head and deputy head that tend to display a steady development trend; the office bearers enjoy a sense of permanence and foresee no challenge to their substantive positions". The interviewees seemed to acknowledge the relevance of andragogy when teachers were attending to Non-Formal Education learners, and valued school leadership continuity.

However, more often than not, Human Resources Assistant 4 was convinced, placing teachers by appointment or transfer to relevant positions was not enough since the teachers had to be "… properly paid monthly and motivated. That's why my department attends to teacher-salary queries to keep them motivated". The response emphasised maintaining a motivated teaching force through the payment of monthly salaries.

As schools engaged teachers and pupils in the teaching and learning process, their performance had to be monitored, the study showed. The study participants appeared to display a keen interest in this aspect of school development. While DSI 1 expected "an improved pass rate in all schools", Schools Inspector 1 believed that her "… school supervision efforts are meant to improve the academic performance of learners … and provide heads and teachers with feedback on what is being done right and what needs to be improved". Further interest was shown in the particular attention that was paid to the low performing schools in public examinations. Schools Inspector 2 had this to say:

> Our department vision for school development calls for all our schools to perform better than the national level in public examinations. Therefore, the underperforming primary and secondary schools are the district's baby and have to come up with their own strategies for improvement. Over and above, they write fortnightly tests that the head surrenders to the district complete with the teachers' test evaluation comments and the heads' comments.

The district leaders seemed to be aware that school visibility could be enhanced through good results for learners in their local and national examinations. However, in Schools Inspector 5's opinion, priority for a school that aimed to improve its learners' academic performance should be in the provision of "… adequate amounts of learner-written work that varies from primary schools to secondary schools and their respective departments". Similarly, Schools Inspector 6 provided more evidence that it was the district office leaders' mandate to enhance school academic improvement as they "… insist that each school subscribes to classroom based tests, cluster tests, National Association of Primary Heads/ National Association of Secondary Heads district tests, and national [summative] tests." Furthermore, Schools Inspector 4's concerns spread beyond the school and included stakeholder concerns, "Academic results reflect whether the clients are realising value for their money. Therefore, we focus on the school pass rate trend for five years and deal with the causes of the downs." To improve the learners' academic performance, the participants suggested that the schools could consider: providing adequate learner-written work; administering classroom-based tests, cluster tests, National Association of Primary Heads/ National Association of Secondary Heads district tests, and national tests; ensuring that the community realised value for their money by attending to the challenges that low performing schools encountered.

Water access and waste disposal were critical school development indicators and partnerships with, for example, the District Development Fund for technical assistance was important. In addition, some of the district leaders felt that it was their responsibility to go an extra mile to assist schools to engage stakeholder support for development in terms of accessing water and sanitation. Here is what Remedial Tutor 2 said about the District Water and Sanitation Sub-Committee (DWSSC):

> Heads whose schools have gaps in toilet adequacy report to me, and since I sit on the DWSSC, I can present their needs there. Gaps include inadequate sources of water. Also, when a classroom roof is blown off by the wind, the head reports to me, I record the report and then present it in the DWSSC meetings".

Moving on to sporting activities, although Schools Inspector 5 advocated for "varied sporting activities for total learner development", Schools Inspector 2 and colleagues believed that to keep abreast with current developments in sporting facilities, they should:

> …encourage all schools to move away from the generic soccer and netball sports fields and start adopting the multi-purpose pitch that accommodates, for example, basketball, tennis, and netball simultaneously in order to conserve both space and money.

The participants suggested that while schools catered for the learners' physical development in sports, the current trend in establishing multi-purpose sporting infrastructure was to be taken into consideration. Furthermore, Schools Inspector 3 and Schools Inspector 5, claimed they paid much of their attention to "income generating projects to ensure schools strengthen self-sustenance", and "practical subjects e.g. agriculture plots and gardens" respectively. The District Lifelong Learning Coordinators seem in agreement as Learn Coordinator 3 explained:

> Functional Literacy projects like gardening provide adequate vegetables to the school feeding programme. Welding, carpentry and building studies bring benefits to the learners and the school as the learners would be contracted to do jobs in the school.

In addition, Learning Coordinator 1's words:

> Non-Formal Education projects raise the standard of living in the community. Proceeds from the projects enable the Non-Formal Education learners to pay fees for both themselves and their own children in formal schools.

The participants chronicled income generating projects and practical subjects that they believed strengthened schools' self-sustenance while simultaneously improving the local community livelihoods.

The district seemed to place great importance to the proper management of all schools in the district to bring about inclusive quality education in the primary and secondary schools. As evidence, Schools Inspector 3 remarked:

> We also direct our efforts towards school leadership and management i.e. school governance in general for the smooth running of schools. This is intended to capacity build the heads to enhance operational efficiency.

Still on proper school development, in Schools Inspector 6's opinion, schools were deemed inclusive when "… the diversified needs of learners, including special needs education learners were taken on board", and in Remedial Tutor 1's view, schools should "…have adequate materials for learners with albinism (eg donor-supplied sunscreen lotions), and large prints on displayed charts for learners with visual impairment". This shows that a lot of attention should be paid to the department's resource needs since some of the resources could not be locally obtained.

The participants provided further insight into school development as Schools Inspector 4 observed, "Sound relationships between the learners and the teachers, the teachers themselves, and the learners themselves lay a good foundation for school development". However, the participants could not hide their criticism of heads as sometimes they were believed to be the sources of system derailment. For example, in Human Resources Assistant 2's view, "Heads should be knowledgeable about handling disciplinary issues, teacher grievances and community/parents grievances". It emerged that some of the salient factors that might contribute to school development, or lack of it, included interpersonal relationships, discipline and grievance handling.

Discipline, as far as managing school finances was concerned, contributed significantly to school development, the district leaders believed. In that regard, Schools Inspector 4 was convinced that "… sound school financial management was fertile ground for appropriate utilisation of funds without abuse, for example funds for building construction purposes and procurement of teaching and learning materials". Therefore, proper school financial management began with

> … resource mobilisation, implementation of planned and budgeted activities, acquitting funds received, production of sound reports, and the provision of critical learning resources (Accountant 1).

The responses implied that for significant disciplined financial management to be achieved, heads should utilise funds without abuse to ensure that critical learning resources were made available.

One important observation was that in the absence of strict management of assets and school funds, "… there is no school development" (Administration Assistant 1), and a key driver of school development here was "… a functional School Development Committee that fully knows how it is supposed to operate" (Human Resources Assistant 1). It was, indeed, found prudent for the head to "… adhere to procedures such as acts and statutes related to financial and asset management" (Administration Assistant 1). Furthermore, taking cognisance of the fact that the devastating effects of natural disasters were a topical issue in the education sphere in Zimbabwe, schools that benefitted from donor assistance had to comply with "… the prescribed procurement of teaching and learning materials using donor funds e.g. Unicef funds for both primary and secondary schools, particularly those schools affected by Cyclone Idai in 2019" (Administration Assistant 2). One can deduce that the School Development Committee's presence should translate to strict school asset management that was guided by ministerial statutes.

4.3.2.5 Stakeholder and partner engagement

With particular focus on the Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ), the study sought the district leaders' views on the engagement of stakeholders and partners to support the district efforts in schools. Other stakeholders such as UNICEF and the District Development Fund (DDF) were not ignored if at all they were brought to light by the study participants. Though, going by the district leadership, the membership of the BSPZ District Management Committee was similar in the two districts, there were noticeable variations.

At District Office A, DSI 1 indicated that

> … there was the BSPZ District Management Committee comprising … the District Schools Inspector, a Schools Inspector, the District Accountant,

> National Association of Primary Heads, National Association of Secondary Heads, teachers, and the business community.

However, Schools Inspector 1 included

> … the National Association of Secondary Heads North and South representatives, the National Association of Primary Heads East, North and South representatives, the District Administration Assistant, and primary and secondary teacher representatives.

In Schools Inspector 2's view, part of the BSPZ district management committee consisted of "the primary and secondary male and female teacher representatives, National Association of Primary Heads East, North and South representatives, National Association of Secondary Heads North and South representatives". Administration Assistant 1 remembered that the "School Development Committee representative" was a member. Subsequently, Accountant 2 explained:

> … while some of the members are elected from National Association of Secondary Heads, National Association of Primary Heads, primary and secondary teachers and the business community, the District Schools Inspector, Schools Inspector, District Accountant and District Administration Assistant are not elected.

Therefore, from the respondents' contributions, it could be deduced that the BSPZ District Management Committee at District Office A was made up of the District Schools Inspector, a Schools Inspector, District Accountant, National Association of Primary Heads East, North and South representatives, National Association of Secondary Heads North and South representatives, primary and secondary male and female teacher representatives, the School Development Committee representative, and the business community representative.

The BSPZ District Management Committee at District Office B consisted of the "District Schools Inspector, a Schools Inspector representative, District Accountant, District Administration Assistant, National Association of Secondary Heads representative, National Association of Primary Heads representative", (Schools Inspector 4), including "… secondary and primary teacher representatives" (Schools Inspector 6), plus "the School Development Committee representative" (Human Resources Assistant 4), and "the business community representative" (Remedial Tutor 1). It was implied, then, that at this district office, the BSPZ District Management Committee members were the District Schools Inspector, a Schools Inspector representative,

District Accountant, District Administration Assistant, National Association of Secondary Heads and National Association of Primary Heads representatives, secondary and primary teacher representatives, School Development Committee representative and the business community representative.

The noted differences in the membership of the two districts were in that at District Office A, the National Association of Primary Heads had East, North and South representatives and the National Association of Secondary Heads had North and South representatives, while District Office B did not. Gender representation by both primary and secondary teachers was noticeable at District Office A but was absent at District Office B. However, District Office A engaged stakeholders in the form of the National Association of Primary Heads (East, North and South) representatives, the National Association of Secondary Heads (North and South) representatives, primary and secondary (male and female) teacher representatives, the School Development Committee representative, and the business community representative.

Perhaps it becomes imperative for us to closely look at why, according to the interviewees, the stakeholders were roped into the BSPZ.

The Quality Control department appeared to have an idea about why the committee was in existence. Schools Inspector 4 ventured, "… there's a custodian of the BSPZ funds-more like an School Development Committee-but without executive powers. The body's governed by government policy", and Schools Inspector 3 provided a little more detail:

> The District BSPZ Management Committee was put in place to manage the funds that are contributed by schools in pursuit of supporting teaching and learning programmes in the district. It's also mandated to recruit and supervise staff charged with the responsibility of enhancing staff development.

It was suggested that though the committee managed the BSPZ funds, it had no executive powers and its operations were directed by government policy. In Accountant 1's view, the committee had a number of mandates chief of which lead it:

> … to carry out district educational programmes, construct resource centres, generate revenue, expend in line with budgets, fund the annual district merit awards, organise the culture week commemorations, finance the provincial world literacy day celebrations, and also employ ancillary staff, procure assets and host other gatherings. It reports to the Provincial Education Director and the Permanent Secretary.

Apart from highlighting the key roles of the committee, the interviewee seemed to reinforce the fact that the committee had developed into a pseudo-government entity since it was accountable to the Provincial Education Director and the Permanent Secretary. Furthermore, in their opinion, Administration Assistant 2 felt that "… the committee organises activities of the district, and authorises requests from the district office departments and schools", and Learning Coordinator 3 thought:

> The District BSPZ Management Committee is meant to promote the development of education in the district with funding largely coming from the BSPZ. The committee addresses the challenges that the district office departments face, eg provision of motor vehicles, fuel, equipment, furniture, materials and maintaining the new district office complex.

The district leaders implied that the District BSPZ Management Committee was tasked with enhancing education development in the district and received financial support mainly from the BSPZ. To clarify the funding, it was important for the participants to highlight the actual monetary figures and from where that money was obtained. In that regard, Administration Assistant 1 indicated that "… the District BSPZ Management Committee manages funds from both primary and secondary schools (primary $1 per learner per term; secondary $2 per learner per term)". This shows that the committee had the mammoth task of managing funds that were drawn from all the primary and secondary schools in the district, and using the funds to finance budgeted district educational programmes.

In contrast to the other participants, some participants appeared to know very little, if anything at all, about the BBSPZ District Management Committee. Human Resources Assistant 1 displayed little knowledge when he said:

> There's the BSPZ District Management Committee. I don't know much about this body, but I hear that it approves expenditure and acquisition of educational materials and equipment meant to develop the district. I don't know its composition.

On the other hand, Human Resources Assistant 4 and Human Resources Assistant 3 were seemingly in the dark respectively, as they claimed, "I don't have their operational details" (Human Resources Assistant 4), and "There's a District BSPZ Management Committee but I'm not sure why it's in existence" (Human Resources Assistant 3). This inconsistency in lack of knowledge about all that was going on at the district, particularly stakeholder engagement of that magnitude, might seem unsettling since

every district office leader is supposed to know the key operations and functions of their work place. However, it could be a stark revelation of the truth that sometimes, perhaps by virtue of one's position, not everyone at the district was privy to what was going on.

However, the other participants displayed varying degrees of understanding how the BSPZ District Management Committee functioned. DSI 1 stated:

> The body oversees the ministry's financial operations and obligations at the district level. These include the construction of resource centres, funding the district merit awards programmes, and enhancing supervision of schools.

His counterpart, DSI 2, at the other district added:

> The BSPZ funds are sourced from the primary learners ($1 per learner per term) and secondary learners ($2 per learner per term). The BSPZ District Management Committee sits at the beginning and close of the school term, but might meet at any other time depending on the need to do so. It makes the policies, and is assisted by the finance sub-committee. The BSPZ funds are meant to better the provision of education in this district by, for example, funding district and cluster workshops and procuring a motor vehicle and its fuel supply that cater for emergencies and school supervision purposes. Every school and learner are directly benefitting from the BSPZ intervention.

DSI 2's contribution differed from DSI 1's in a number of ways. Firstly, it provided the monetary figures that each learner, primary and secondary contributed to the BSPZ fund and how frequently. Secondly, DSI 2 indicated not only that the committee had sub-committees, but also that the benefits from the BSPZ were numerous.

Confirming the sub-division of the district committee, Schools Inspector 2 said:

> The entire management committee scrutinises the district annual budget and approves or disapproves it. They plan infrastructural projects, for example, furnishing the district office complex and upgrading it. They hire and fire ancillary staff at the district office. The procurement committee makes comparative schedules for consideration by the finance committee.

An important dimension that Schools Inspector 2 implied was that the BSPZ District Management Committee was mandated to engage and dismiss ancillary staff at the district office. To show how this body's arms operated, Accountant 2 had this to say:

> The management committee delegates its authority to its two arms. The finance committee authorises all payments and the District Schools Inspector chairs it. The procurement committee procures goods and services for the organisation, i.e. the district. The District Schools Inspector isn't part of this sub-committee,

> but the Schools Inspector chairs it. The District Administration Assistant distributes the procured goods and services on behalf of the management committee.

Chaired by the Schools Inspector, the procurement committee purchased the goods and services that would have been authorised by the finance committee, Accountant 2 implied, for distribution to the district office and schools. Two of the participants confirmed the committee structures and functions when they added. Administration Assistant 1 stated, “The procurement committee carries out the procurement process guided by government statutes. State internal auditors audit the district BSPZ fund account annually”. Learning Coordinator 4 further explained, “The management committee is an administrative body that is responsible for the management of funds from schools (BSPZ) and all the funded activities in the district”. These operational arrangements suggest an administrative committee that worked with sub-committees to maintain some level of task distribution through delegation, thereby creating room for monitoring by state internal auditors for accountability and compliance with statutes.

Still on the committee’s operations, Schools Inspector 6 said:

> The committee overseas transparency in the district operations, and fosters teamwork to enhance a high degree of ownership of the district programmes. The committee makes a needs assessment on eg the district centre or schools. The committee meets to make decisions on procurement procedures as observed by prior evaluation on how well the committee is meeting the identified district needs. After the procedural evaluation on service providers, the committee passes decisions on payments to the service providers.

Transparency and teamwork seemed to mark Schools Inspector 6’s scope of understanding of the BSPZ District Management Committee’s operations as it included a needs assessment before decision-making and an evaluation of the impact of the committee’s activities. Schools Inspector 1 was also specific about the committee’s functions:

> The District BSPZ Management Committee holds meetings in order to meet the needs of the ancillary staff at the district office, to agree on how to levy schools, and to ensure that the district office staff have enough materials and equipment to use. The BSPZ funds a provincial prize-giving event and the district prize-giving event annually. Retirees and transferees are also honoured at these ceremonies.

The above suggests that the scope of the committees' activities does not only cover the district ancillary staff but also specially recognises those people that would have significantly contributed to the development of education in the district although they would have retired or transferred from the district.

One of the participants, Schools Inspector 3, was critical of the committee's meetings:

> The committee holds termly meetings to approve budgets and related expenditure. They also hold meetings to review the progress of different projects being carried out. However, they don't seem to be that effective because they are unable to resist the influences of influential figures, thereby making themselves mere rubber stamps.

This suggests that while Schools Inspector 3 appreciated the meetings that the committee held, he doubted their transparency and effectiveness. Since the outcomes of such important meetings were seemingly determined by the influential committee members, transparency and accountability might be significantly compromised. However, Remedial Tutor 2 and Learning Coordinator 3 differed. Remedial Tutor 2 reported that "… the committee coordinates all the district's activities and look after the BSPZ funds in the district, including hiring, firing and paying the district office ancillary staff". Then Learning Coordinator 3 pointed out that "… the committee ensures that all stakeholders are represented, and holds monthly meetings but also meets when the need arises". The responses reflect a thread of optimism since they implied active stakeholder participation at meetings and coordinated district activities.

This section of the study has provided insights into the pivotal role that stakeholders and partners play in supporting the district office's service delivery to schools.

4.3.3 The effectiveness of the district instructional leadership practices

With a focus on examining the effectiveness of the instructional leadership practices enacted by the districts in support of instructional improvement in the schools (research objective 3), the district leaders indicated that the district office faced several challenges. Some of these challenges, in their view, originated from the district (the district office itself, the schools and the local community), while others were from outside the district.

One common challenge, whose origin was the local community, appeared to relate to the non-payment of school fees and levies. DSI 2, had this to say:

> There's generally a low payment of levies by both primary and secondary learners' parents caused by the new Zimbabwe Constitution's provision that no learners should be sent away from school for failing to pay school fees and levies.

The response suggests that the new Constitution might be the scape goat for parents that were not paying fees for their children. The response suggests that the new Constitution might be the scape goat for parents that were not paying fees for their children. From my point of view, some parents just need to be cajoled, reminded and dragged for them to pay school fees for their children. There is also a category of parents that genuinely struggle to earn a living, and therefore, such parents subsequently struggle to raise school fees for their children. For these two types of parents, the new constitutional provision on fees payment might be adopted as a welcome excuse.

However, this poor payment of school levies disrupted "… the production of supervision reports by the district office since money trickles into the district BSPZ coffers," explained Schools Inspector 5. Uncovering even deeper repercussions, Human Resources Assistant 2 reiterated, "So far, since parents in small schools are failing to pay fees for their children, their heads are forced to use their own money to fund their travel to the district office to attend meetings or make submissions". Government programmes have not been spared either, as Schools Inspector 5 complained, "Because there would be no money with which to procure relish, the school child feeding programme has now and then been abandoned when some of the children could not actually be fed on some school days". To the Schools Inspectors, government policy seemed to be shielding learners from paying school fees and levies, and the outcome from Schools Inspector 4's point of view, was

> … a demotivated and incapacitated teacher work force that does not have the required teaching and learning materials that should be procured by the learners' fees and levies.

Because of the slow cash inflow into the BSPZ account, it can be deduced, the adverse effects of this had grounded not only the school operations but also the district operations that included implementing government educational policies.

Other related factors compounded the district work environment when, in Accountant 2's opinion:

> … inexperienced and sometimes unqualified personnel manage school finances. Several primary and secondary school heads assign teachers to manage their finances and we spend a lot of time rigorously training these people to comply with ministry statutes. Some heads mismanage school funds because we don't have enough resources to enable us to supervise all the schools.

There was a hint on mismanagement of school fees by unqualified people that were tasked with managing school funds, and also by heads. There was a hint on mismanagement of school fees by unqualified people that were tasked with managing school funds, and also by heads. Primary school teachers that handled school finances seemed to have received little or no basic financial management training, while some heads seemingly tended to wantonly mismanage school funds when they discovered that the district office seldom followed up on their work.

In addition, the district leaders included policy provisions as other dimensions to the fees and levy challenge. For example, Accountant 1 stated:

> Financial resources to acquire accounting packages are limited, while there are unstable markets for goods and services. Cases of financial malpractice among heads are increasing although parents are failing to pay school fees. The constantly changing regulatory policies from the Ministry of Finance and the use of multiple pricing system in the economy make life tougher for the district.

It is suggested that while market stability might open more foreign trade doors that enabled the importation of affordable goods and services that support education, heads ought to be disciplined enough to properly account for the revenue that would have trickled into their school accounts.

Still on policy, Human Resources Assistant 3 added, "Abrupt policy adjustment documentation takes time to reach the district office thereby disrupting other district operations". According to Administration Assistant 2, "some schools are failing to comply with procurement procedures because some of the procurement procedures aren't feasible in the current harsh economic environment". This forced most schools to deviate from the procurement policy provisions, Human Resources Assistant 3 observed. Furthermore, Learning Coordinator 2 claimed they witnessed many Non-Formal Education "… learners and project members in the functional literacy programmes fail to pay the approved fees, thus stalling the payment of teachers' salaries". Unnecessary delays in policy communication to the district coupled with

procurement procedures that have seemingly been rendered unfeasible appeared to be negatively affecting the district and schools.

Another cause for concern among the participants was indiscipline in schools. DSI 1 sensed "… an increase in teacher misconduct cases". Moreover, DSI 2 reported "… isolated cases of indiscipline among teachers and learners, eg bullying among learners, truancy, early girl marriages, school dropouts, abuse of leave by teachers, and improper association of teachers with learners of the opposite sex." Human Resources Assistant 4 added that "… some teachers exhibit unprofessional behaviour, for example requesting leave days where the request doesn't apply." This implies that the districts were facing teacher indiscipline of a diverse nature that required careful and planned interventions.

Following up on indiscipline, heads seemed to be the greater cause of indiscipline than teachers as Schools Inspector 5 revealed, "… some heads neglect their critical internal school supervision duty and yet their supervision has a prescribed specification". Seemingly, DSI 1 disclosed that many heads were involved in "financial indiscipline". Incidentally, Schools Inspector 5 bemoaned the "… very few staff development workshops organised for teachers by heads at the school level" and Human Resources Assistant 4 complained that "some heads submit important returns late". Heads seemed to be involved in varying types of indiscipline such as neglecting their supervisory functions, financial indiscipline, instituting few staff development workshops and late submission of critical returns to the district office. Such heads appeared to defy their professional expectation of leading their teachers by example.

With regards to staffing, DSI 1 stated, "We are experiencing inadequate staffing levels", implying that staffing presented its own unprecedented challenges. However, DSI 2's concern in the same matter focused on Schools Inspectors:

> There's a yawning gap in the appointment of Schools Inspectors, a gap that should be promptly closed. This is because the Schools Inspector position hasn't been advertised for a long time, hence the current scenario of the presence of only acting Schools Inspectors at this district office.

On that issue, Schools Inspector 4 did not mince her words:

> As long as there's no attractive package and benefits, the Schools Inspector position will have no takers. Perhaps this is why there's no one to coordinate subject Schools Inspectors at the Provincial Office and the Head Office levels.

> The Schools Inspector position isn't well marketed to stakeholders. Sometimes the Schools Inspector's expected to be running the show but is often neglected or left out.

Clearly expressing gravity on an aspect of staffing, Schools Inspector 2 said, "There's an acute shortage of Schools Inspectors in the Quality Control department-3 instead of 8. As a result of that, school supervision is often superceded by other duties". On a similar note, Schools Inspector 6 declared the Schools Inspectors' low levels of confidence and motivation, "Government's delay to appoint me, an acting Schools Inspector for example, to the position of substantive Schools Inspector isn't helping much." What seems to emerge is the gap in the engagement of Schools Inspectors. While the number of Schools Inspectors appeared not to match the quantity of work expectations, their appointment to substantive positions seemed to have been neglected as well. Furthermore, although the reward package for the Schools Inspectors seemed to be unattractive, the position might not also be adequately visible to stakeholders, the result of which could be very low Schools Inspector confidence and motivation.

To make matters worse, Accountant 2 stressed, "… there's a shortage of district office staff that is qualified enough to supervise financial management in schools." Instead of alleviating matters, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education had "… abolished the two District Assistant Accountant positions, leaving only the District Administration Assistant to handle all the district work that was previously done by two officers" (Accountant 2). Perhaps that could explain Accountant 1's dissatisfaction, "Although financial resources're inadequate, the district's too big, there's too much workload, that is one District Administration Assistant against 248 schools". The district leaders in this department hinted a similar situation to the Schools Inspectors in the Quality Control department. Despite the reported shortage of people that were adequately qualified to handle financial management issues in the district, the one person available appeared to be overwhelmed by the current workload that was aggravated by inadequate resources.

Learners living with disabilities are part of the education system. It was inevitable to get concerns regarding their teaching and learning. Firstly, Remedial Tutor 2 indicated, "Engaging learners with disabilities in inclusive sporting activities is really difficult since most of the teachers don't know how to deal with the situation". Then Remedial Tutor

1 noted, “There’s also a shortage of expertise, that is, qualified and trained special education teachers”. Incidentally, Remedial Tutor 2 was critical of what was going on in the resource units, “There’s a resource unit for the hearing impaired learners at one of our primary schools but the teacher in charge of it’s not a specialist in sign language.” The participants were seemingly concerned about the need to involve learners living with disabilities in sporting activities despite the existing challenges, and the need to engage teachers that are qualified to handle special classes and resource units.

Some of the participants identified high staff mobility as one of the major impediments to the district operations. Administration Assistant 1 sounded disappointed when he stated that:

> Staff turn-over is very high among heads and this adversely affects consistency in policy compliance when the substantive head leaves behind an acting head, for example, late submission of critical returns to the district office.

This appears to emphasise the importance of leadership continuity in effective school management. Furthermore, in the schools, sometimes the enrolments affected the class structures as Human Resources Assistant 2 observed:

> Small primary schools are allocated few teachers because of their low learner enrolments. As a result, some of the teachers at these schools have to teach composite classes, eg Grades 4 and 5 combined.

The learners might not benefit much from engaging in the learning activities of a composite class since the set up seemed to be more responsive to administrative convenience than to learner welfare.

At the district office, some issues might appear trivial on the surface and yet their impact seemed to have far reaching effects. For example, Schools Inspector 2 bitterly remarked, “…no accommodation is designated for Schools Inspectors but for the District Schools Inspector. Therefore, one’d rather remain a head with decent accommodation than join the district staff without accommodation.” Also, some silent features in some of the participants’ conditions of service were the subject of dissatisfaction as Accountant 2 stressed:

> The District Accountant position is currently marginalised. Although I offer valuable advice and support to the District Schools Inspector and heads of schools, my remuneration package’s similar to the teacher grade, and it seems

> I am considered as part of the district clerical staff which is unfair. Although I'm an administrator and my position's equal to the Schools Inspector position since I also report directly to the District Schools Inspector, only the Schools Inspector's eligible for promotion to the District Schools Inspector position. I'm not considered. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should consider correcting this irregularity.

Neglecting accommodation considerations for some of the district leaders and marginalising certain district positions appeared to be part of the cocktail for staff demotivation. In addition, there seemed to be dissatisfaction resulting from the disparity in the reward packages and the parallel progression of the Schools Inspector and the District Accountant positions.

A thorny issue among the study participants appeared to be the unavailability of resources. Reportedly, the challenges relating to this issue were diverse as Schools Inspector 3 revealed, "… a good number of heads are operating in difficult circumstances hence efforts to implement instructional leadership programmes are often curtailed". DSI 1 complained that there were "inadequate resources", and Schools Inspector 4 highlighted a "… lack of work consistency due to lack of resources, that is, financial and material resulting in Schools Inspectors [having] to type their supervision reports but [having] very limited time to do the typing". Schools Inspector 1 confirmed, "We're failing to produce our supervision reports because of persistent and prolonged electricity load shedding and unreliable diesel supply for our back-up generator".

Adding to the challenges, Administration Assistant 1 said, "… computers/laptops are in short supply and some district officers don't have these", and maybe as a result of that gap, "Schools Inspectors're lagging behind the global Information Communication Technology advancement," observed Schools Inspector 4. The country was currently experiencing electrical power cuts and, as a result, many organisations and individuals had resorted to alternative power sources such as solar systems and generators. Because of shortages in resources, the participants appeared to be unsettled with the levels of difficulty that some heads faced in implementing instructional leadership programmes in their schools. To the interviewees, the continued disruptions in electrical power supply and unreliable supply of diesel for the generator, and the short supply of computers presented challenges that culminated in the district leaders trailing in Information Communication Technology development.

Other challenges, the study found, included the implementation of the new/updated curriculum in schools, special education and non-formal education programmes. “Textbooks for the new curriculum are in short supply and materials for sciences are inadequate”, DSI 1 pointed out. To Remedial Tutor 1, special education had to endure “… a lack of teaching and learning resources that hampers progress, for example, shortage of HI-sign language dictionaries, special classroom accommodation that’s well-ventilated and well-carpeted”. In the same department, Remedial Tutor 2 reported:

> We need extraordinary support since we’re dealing with special needs classes. Their specialized teaching and learning materials are sometimes in short supply. Learners living with albinism find it difficult to access the sunscreen lotions that they critically need.

It appears that it was difficult to implement the new curriculum in the absence of adequate textbooks and science materials, while special education resources and infrastructure required sprucing up. In addition to that, Learn Coordinator 2 of the Non-Formal Education department complained; “Funding is inadequate for teacher remuneration and many Non-Formal Education teachers believe they’re doing voluntary work”. This implies that teacher morale and motivation were at the lowest ebb.

The majority of the participants indicated that they were experiencing mobility challenges. These challenges were seemingly firstly centred on the fuel that was required. “It has proved to be costly to move district officers to and from schools for supervision purposes”, observed Schools Inspector 2. Administration Assistant 2 was quick to add, “… the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe is crippling the district office operations since we’ve insufficient fuel for our motor vehicle.” Schools Inspector 5 also added, “… fuel’s scarce against an array of activities and communication is hindered by unreliable phone networks.” For Schools Inspector 1, life was difficult since more often than not her department failed “… to go to schools needing psycho-social support following reported child abuse cases because of transport challenges caused by shortage of fuel for the district motor vehicle.” The procurement monitoring people also claimed that they “… face resource constraints such as inadequate motor vehicle fuel to facilitate visits to schools to monitor them” (Administration Assistant 1). The participants’ complaints suggested that their mobility challenges not only reduced their

contact frequency with schools, but subsequently compromised the effectiveness of their instructional leadership support to schools.

The district fuel woes appeared to be aggravated by those related to the official district motor vehicles themselves. “Schools Inspectors don’t have a department specific motor vehicle. They are, instead, using a district pool vehicle that is controlled by the District Schools Inspector”, remarked Schools Inspector 4. Similarly, Schools Inspector 5 complained, “… there’s only one functional motor vehicle”, and Schools Inspector 6 echoed, “… there’s only one functional district motor vehicle for all the Quality Control operations.” Also, Learning Coordinator 2 claimed that they were “… not able to visit all the Non-Formal Education centres due to transport challenges and fuel shortage”, and Learn Coordinator 3 lamented, “… problem schools have to be visited, but we’ve transport challenges as only one district motor vehicle’s functioning, coupled with the national fuel crisis.” As if to wrap up the challenge, Remedial Tutor 1 explained:

> We need a motor vehicle especially reserved for our department for urgent visits to schools to attend to reported cases of learner abuse, etc. The two vehicles at the district office are meant for all the departments and are mostly out of the reach of our department.

It is suggested that the participants believed that their service delivery was not supported by the available pool vehicle(s) and constant fuel shortages. The district leaders were convinced that improvements in that regard would also improve the quality of their support efforts.

To some of the study participants, poor communication between the schools and the district office hampered effective support. Schools Inspector 5 remarked that some road networks were “… in a poor state, making some schools inaccessible for supervision”. Schools Inspector 2 also admitted that “some schools aren’t accessible by road and by phone during the rainy season.” Administration Assistant 1 observed in unison that “… there’re schools that’re so remote that they’re not even reachable by cell phone”. In the same vein, Human Resources Assistant 3 observed that “… heads at remote schools sometimes fail to meet submission deadlines for important documents”. These interviewees’ responses implied that a number of schools were beyond the reach of the district office by virtue of their geographical locations, or during the wet seasons, thereby complicating the communication process.

Another challenge was brought to light. Schools Inspector 3 disclosed:

> … a number of heads do not implement programmes after professional development courses have been run for them. These school heads take advantage of the incapacitated district office and neglect work.

To that, DSI 1 added, "… poor learner pass rate" was inevitable when schools were managed by incompetent heads whose promotion in the first place's even questionable". The participants suggested that some heads displayed high levels of neglect in programme implementation.

The Non-Formal Education department claimed that they had their own challenges as Learning Coordinator 1 reiterated:

> Some schools ignore the Non-Formal Education department policy that compels them to engage in Non-Formal Education programmes. Statistical returns on Non-Formal Education programmes from schools are sometimes submitted late to us. Some schools do not apply for approval to run vacation school programmes, but such schools are not protected by law in the event of accidents, etc during the vacation school activities. Also, some colleges continue to operate without paying the Annual Guarantee Fee to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

Here, the department suggests that some heads disregarded the Non-Formal Education department national policy requirements on implementing programmes, timely submissions to the district office, directives on running vacation schools, and payment of the Annual Guarantee Fee to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

According to Learning Coordinator 4, the mind-set of some of the teachers and heads with regards to Non-Formal Education department might require reorientation, an indication that the district instructional leadership practices relating to the implementation of Non-Formal Education programmes in schools might not be effective:

> One big challenge's heads' and teachers' attitudes towards the Non-Formal Education department programmes. Some heads feel this's extra work. They believe that every learner should be in formal school. The paradigm shift from reading and writing to the current thrust isn't fully understood by some heads and teachers. The Part-Time and Continuing Education teachers in secondary schools are demotivated by the Public Service Commission's withdrawal from paying the teachers' allowances, and expecting the learners' fees to take care

> of the teachers' allowances. This isn't working since the Part-Time and Continuing Education enrolments have shrunk and the programme is now left with dedicated teachers only.

The response implies that many teachers' and heads' attitudes towards the Non-Formal Education department is not supportive as they still clung to the belief that Non-Formal Education department was extra work to them and they did not understand why Non-Formal Education department was not part of the mainstream education. In addition, the participant was convinced that the Part-Time and Continuing Education enrolments, for example, had sharply decreased as a result of the ill-favoured paradigm shift in the payment of teachers' allowances.

Similarly, Remedial Tutor 1 was convinced that special class students were exposed to even greater unfair treatment in the schools, further evidence of some degree of ineffectiveness of the district instructional leadership practices with regards to the welfare of learners living with disability:

> Some of the teachers of the "regular" learners display a negative attitude towards learners with disabilities. Sometimes, learners with hearing impairment fail to communicate with learners with visual impairment, and teachers that aren't qualified or trained for this work fail to communicate with those learners, too.

The department suggests that a number of "regular" class teachers demonstrated a negative attitude towards special education learners, while some of the special education classes were taught by teachers whose training was not aligned to special education.

4.3.4 Suggestions for improving the effectiveness of districts' instructional leadership support

Presented in this section are the district leaders' suggestions on how the districts can improve the effectiveness of their instructional leadership support to schools in Zimbabwe (research objective 4).

The participants made a number of suggestions on how the districts could improve the effectiveness of their instructional leadership support to schools in Zimbabwe. The issue of fees payment came up first with DSI 2 suggesting that "… the government should either engage stakeholders to persuade parents to pay school fees and levies, or amend the Zimbabwe Constitution accordingly". Schools Inspector 4 concurred, "…

government policy on fees payment should be revised or revisited." In the same vein, Accountant 1 opted for "… advocacy programmes to be launched to promote parental positive attitude towards paying school fees and levies." It can be deduced that the Zimbabwe Constitution appeared to be requiring amendments relating to the fees issue, while advocacy was also believed to confront the challenge.

In a slight shift, Learning Coordinator 3 seemed to be addressing the Ministry of Finance:

> Treasury should consider taking over the responsibility of paying the Non-Formal Education teachers' allowances and salaries. The current position is only tenable to a limited extent in the Part-Time and Continuing Education in secondary schools, but isn't in primary schools where ministry prescribes that learners mustn't pay fees.

The response suggests the need for Treasury to pay the Non-Formal Education teachers' rewards since sourcing the rewards from the learners' fees seemed not to work as the participant believed that Non-Formal Education learners in primary schools were not supposed to pay school fees.

The district leaders in the Quality Control department were convinced that they "… should be capacitated, that is, prioritised in material provision" (Schools Inspector 4), and since the Schools Inspector's day called for "travel, work, and travel, there must be a risk allowance for motivation" (Schools Inspector 2). The Schools Inspectors were seemingly not satisfied by their acting status as Schools Inspector 2 said:

> The government should promptly appoint us acting Schools Inspector to substantive Schools Inspector positions for motivation, confidence building and job security boosting.

While suggesting their prioritisation in the provision of materials, the Schools Inspectors felt that they could be more motivated and confident should they be appointed to substantive positions. Their work load, the Schools Inspectors claimed, required prompt attention as Schools Inspector 1 explained:

> The 240 schools in this district are managed by only three Schools Inspectors instead of eight. This isn't a joke. Though the district was authorised to engage acting SIs to fill the gap, these new acting Schools Inspectors' performance might be below expectations.

In the Schools Inspectors' opinion, it was more beneficial for the ministry to boost the number of substantive Schools Inspectors than to engage more acting Schools

Inspectors for quality service delivery. On the benefits accruing to the Schools Inspectors, Schools Inspector 2 had this to say, “The Schools Inspector’s reward package is the same as the head’s. There must be a separating salary notch between the two to motivate the Schools Inspector”. In support, Schools Inspector 1 remarked:

> We’re underpaid despite ourselves making the district tick. The salary gap between school heads and ourselves is marginal, and not motivating at all considering our work demands. It’s not unusual for us to work well into the night when we’re investigating teacher misconduct cases, for example.

The Schools Inspectors suggested considerations for their work loads and related responsibilities to be commensurate with their reward package bearing in mind the distinction between their position and that of the heads they supervised. These district leaders felt that they supervised, for example, a given number of schools while a head supervised a single school. Therefore they claimed that it was only fair for them to accordingly receive a higher remuneration than heads.

Another area that the Schools Inspectors believed needed to be addressed related to conferences and twinning as Schools Inspector 1 said:

> We wish to have conferences at the end of each year to share experiences just like our National Association of Primary Heads and National Association of Secondary Heads NASH counterparts. We also yearn to twin ourselves with district leaders of other countries to share ideas and experiences. In that way, we’ll learn how districts in other countries get their resources, conduct their workshops, and also determine whether we’re ahead or behind other countries.

The suggested critical interventions were annual conferences for the district leaders where they could update themselves with developments in other districts. The participants also believed that twinning themselves with district leaders in other countries could further enrich their practice.

There were other benefits that the participants believed should be considered as Schools Inspector 1 claimed, “… when we go out, our ‘tea packages’ must be availed to us always. It’s not easy to get food from remote rural shops”, and Schools Inspector 2 stated, “I think there should be a communication package for the Schools Inspectors to enable us to read news on our phones, for example.” This implies the need for the availability of food and communication enhancing packages for the district leaders when they go out to the schools.

The other departments had their own suggestions. Accountant 2 pointed out; “Government should reconsider the reinstatement of the two abolished positions of District Assistant Accountant for efficient and effective school supervision”. Similar to the Schools Inspector concern on unmageable work amounts, Accountant 1 suggested; “To rationalise our heavy workloads, ministry should increase the number of personnel in this department. The government fiscus should put more resources into the education sector.” In agreement with him, Administration Assistant 1 proffered, “More personnel should be appointed in the Finance, Administration and Human Resources department for efficiency.” The district leaders here suggested that another District Administration Assistant should be appointed to alleviate the current one’s work load, while an increase in supporting resources was also necessary.

Reinforcing the suggestions that related to the staffing concerns in the Finance, Administration and Human Resources department, resource provision factors and possible interventions were included as Accountant 1 explained:

> To counter the volatile market environment, government should introduce policies that stabilise the market. Government should come up with a clear blue print that promotes stability and confidence to curb the constantly changing regulatory policies. Government should also put more resources in financial management training such as accounting packages to ensure computerised accounting is in place at the district for the benefit of schools.

Implied by the participant was the need for government to introduce policies that not only stabilised the market, but also enhanced the provision of computerised financial management training packages for increased efficiency in managing the district and school finances. Not forgetting the welfare of the teachers, Schools Inspector 4 observed; “Teacher work force conditions of service should be improved for motivation”. Similarly, Remedial Tutor 1 pointed out:

> Adequate, relevantly qualified and experienced special needs education teachers are required but they should be motivated by financial incentives for the special work that they’re doing. This is happening in South Africa and Swaziland. Why not here in Zimbabwe?

A motivated and relevantly placed teaching force was implied here. As if to reinforce how critical that was, the South African and Swaziland education systems were the success referral points. In addition, the district leaders generally agreed that their work required them to be mobile but they experienced several challenges to which they

made suggestions for improving their support to schools. Generally, as Accountant 2 put it, “Government should invite donors to support the district by providing it with motor vehicles and fuel, computers and other vital equipment”. The district leaders here suggested that government and stakeholder support could enhance the acquisition of critical and adequate resources such as reliable motor vehicles and fuel for effective district operations.

School development efforts were included in the suggestions for improved support. Schools Inspector 5 registered his opinion:

> … those schools that aren’t yet connected to the national power utility, the Zesa Holdings (Zesa) grid, should be assisted to connect. Those schools that can’t connect to the Zesa grid should resort to solar energy. Stakeholders should assist those schools that don’t have computers. The District Development Fund should drill water boreholes at schools and ward councillors or Members of Parliament should persuade the internet service providers to connect all schools since Information Communication Technology is now a compulsory learning area. Government should support the remote schools with Information Communication Technology tools in as much as it supports preferred schools.

Implied in this response was the encouragement for schools to connect to the Zesa Holdings grid or use solar energy for electrical power so that the schools would be able to implement Information Communication Technology (ICT) programmes. Further suggestions included the engagement of government and stakeholders to avail the Internet, computers and clean water.

More suggestions to improve heads’ effectiveness were made, with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) being asked to “… help in leadership development and infrastructural development for the district to be able to retain the heads” (Schools Inspector 1). Relatedly, Human Resources Assistant 3 said, “The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should consider organising many exchange programmes for heads in public and private schools for enrichment”. Implied here was the need for stakeholder assistance in school infrastructural and leadership development on the one hand, and the ministry’s support in enhancing exchange programmes for heads in both public and private schools. In Schools Inspector 3’s view:

> Heads, deputy heads, and Heads of Departments/Teachers in Charge need more professional development to equip them with the relevant knowledge and skills so that they are sufficiently prepared for their jobs. The district office

> leaders need capacitation as well if they are to become more effective instructional leaders. Each group of instructional leaders should continue to receive training to support their efforts in assisting schools.

Suggested in the response is the need for continuous capacitation for the instructional leaders at the district office and in the schools (heads and deputy heads). In the study, the fate of the acting heads in most of the unregistered schools did not go unnoticed. Here is what Schools Inspector 2 had to say about it:

> … the government doesn't appoint substantive heads in unregistered schools but expects results. There are no incentives for the acting heads in these schools. I hope the ministry will reward these acting heads for their bravery.

The participant suggests that acting heads in unregistered schools were not motivated and yet the employer expected them to deliver results. In a separate finding, an appeal was made to the heads' attitude towards special classes and to the curriculum designers respectively when Schools Inspector 2 said:

> The attitude of some of the heads towards special classes and resource units should be improved since special education is currently not being prioritized. Since the sign language is currently considered the 16th official language in Zimbabwe, it should be included as a key curriculum component of all teacher training institutions.

There is a hint on the negative attitude of some heads towards special education as they seemed to marginalise it, and a pointing finger for the curriculum designers to factor in the sign language in the teacher training curriculum.

Suggestions to improve support in financial and asset management were the next port of call with Accountant 2 making his emphasis:

> I encourage schools to employ qualified people to do their financial management work. Where schools find it impossible to engage qualified personnel, the district BSPZ and the schools should jointly fund financial management training workshops for the people that are currently doing that work. District level workshops should be mounted for heads on sound school financial management and disciplinary issues. Expert trainers can be outsourced from the provincial office and head office levels.

Schools appeared to be encouraged to engage the right people to manage their finances, or team up with the district BSPZ to fund related professional development training workshops. Out sourcing expert trainers from the provincial and head office levels for heads' and deputy heads' district level workshops in financial management and discipline was also suggested.

Although Human Resources Assistant 3 proposed firm treatment when he said, "… the district should introduce penalties for heads that fail to meet document submission deadlines", Administration Assistant 2 opted to be rather lenient:

> There's need for the district office to visit schools for a hands on feel of heads' compliance with procurement requirements. Now we're understandably adjusting and becoming flexible in treating schools that deviate from the procurement policy requirements.

The district leaders seemed to differ in their views on dealing with deviant heads with some degree of lenience reflecting. The district leaders appear to appreciate and accommodate the challenges that some of the heads experience as a result of, for example, the harsh economic environment coupled with communication impediments. In addition, the district leaders shifted their focus to other essential resources for the district and the schools and, broadly speaking, one of the District Schools Inspectors was seemingly concerned about support for the new curriculum and satellite schools when he said:

> The general education system in the country needs more funding to provide resources to support the implementation of the new curriculum and infrastructure development especially in satellite schools to boost teacher retention (DSI 1).

However, Human Resources Assistant 2 was convinced that "… School Improvement Grant funds should cater for most of the schools and should also be increased for there to be meaningful school development." It is suggested that there should be more government funding to provide resources that support the implementation of the new curriculum and infrastructure development particularly in satellite schools, and an increase in School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding for meaningful school development.

Special consideration, it was claimed, for example, was necessary for the welfare of learners living with disabilities. In view of that, Remedial Tutor 2 said:

> The provision of adequate and appropriate teaching and learning materials for the special classes and resource units should be timeous. The Department of Social Welfare should decentralise the distribution point of the sunscreen lotions from the current one at Head Office in Harare to the scattered district offices since the district offices are much closer to the recipient learners living with albinism. I also believe that schools should develop sporting facilities that are user friendly to learners living with disabilities. To that end, teacher training institutions should include in their curriculum aspects on adaptive sports.

Suggested were the timeous availability of adequate and relevant special class resources, the decentralisation of the distribution points of sunscreen lotions to centres that were closer to the beneficiaries, the establishment of sporting facilities that catered for learners living with disabilities, and the inclusion of adaptive sports in the teacher training curriculum.

Learning Coordinator 2's concern focused on teachers when he proposed that "… Non-Formal Education teachers should be paid for their work by the government to motivate them as dedicated teachers". However, Learning Coordinator 4 took a broader picture when he explained:

> In many countries, Non-Formal Education's very crucial and is part of the mainstream education-South Africa and Nigeria are good examples. Our central government should provide funds to support Non-Formal Education programmes and projects without abandoning this responsibility to NGOs. The Provincial Office and Head Office should also avoid deviating funds designated to Non-Formal Education to other programmes that have nothing to do with Non-Formal Education.

Government was requested to provide more financial support to Non-Formal Education programmes instead of withdrawing some of its support and relying on stakeholder support alone. The ministry was also implored not to redirect funds from the Non-Formal Education to other non-Formal Education programmes. The Non-Formal Education department made further suggestions where Learning Coordinator 3 proposed that "… education partners should fund functional literacy projects such as capital and training in specific project management", and Learning Coordinator 1 suggested:

> From my point of view, we should hold regular meetings with Non-Formal Education teachers, supervisors and responsible authorities so that centres meet the laid down policy requirements. Due to learner financial constraints, school budgets should be Non-Formal Education specific since a pool budget has its own prioritisation challenges.

Highlighted were suggestions for education partners and responsible authorities to adequately fund functional literacy programmes with capital and training, and for the district leaders to regularly meet with centre supervisors to deliberate on Non-Formal Education policy issues.

4.4 Discussion of the findings

This discussion focuses on the following five key findings of the study: alignment of district level structures to support instructional leadership; the district instructional leadership practices; engaging stakeholders and partners; challenges affecting structure; and practice challenges. Finally, the section discusses how to improve support effectiveness (improvements on structure and improvements on practice).

4.4.1 Alignment of district level structures to support instructional leadership

Instructional and support structures

The evidence from this section of the study suggests that the people that were in the district office structures had been placed in specific departments: the instructional (District Accounting Office and Quality Control), and support structures (Finance, Administration and Human Resources; Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs Education; and Non-Formal Education). This mirrors Austin *et al.* (2007: 269)'s assertion that to enhance effective instructional leadership, the district office could be organised into the "instruction and support services" sections, with the instructional unit providing supervisory support, and the "support" unit focusing on financial, curricula, human resources, research, "and special education" support to schools. Furthermore, Flemming *et al.,* (2018) assert that districts enhance structural and process alignment that give rise to effective strategic and coordinated support to schools. What remains to be put in place, in my view, is the equitable distribution of all the available resources for that strategic and coordinated support to schools to be realised in practice.

In the Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs Education; and Non-Formal Education the District Remedial Tutors and the District Lifelong Learning Coordinators respectively were visible. Justifying the presence of the Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs Education department at the district office, the Secretary's Circular Minute No. P.36 of 1990 directs that

> … every child shall have the right to school education, (and) it is the intention of ministry that children with special educational needs shall participate as fully as possible in the national schools curricula.

Therefore, the department was expected to monitor the implementation of all education programmes that were designed for learners with special needs. Evidence from document analysis shows that the presence of the District Lifelong Learning Coordinators in the Non-Formal Education (NFE) department is in resonance with the national policy on non-formal education in Zimbabwe, “In line with the National NFE Policy of 2015, every Primary and Secondary school in Zimbabwe shall offer NFE” (Secretary’s Circular Minute Number 13 of 2016). What the department members seemed to have ignored to bring to light was the critical external support that the department received from, for example, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare whose core business was to cater for the welfare of the disadvantaged and vulnerable citizens, including the provision of education to children living with disabilities.

Furthermore, the District Lifelong Learning Coordinator is carrying out the NFE responsibilities on behalf of the District Schools Inspector. The National Non-Formal Education Policy for Zimbabwe (2015: 12) confirms in that

> The DSI or anyone appointed as DSI shall be responsible for the implementation of the NFE programmes, processing of applications for registration, quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation.

In line with the district structures, scholars (for example Rigby, 2014; Calik *et al.,* 2012) establish that instructional leadership is what all accountable leaders in the field of education do in order to bring education related chances to learners through the provision of environments that are conducive to learning.

Work overload

However, significant understaffing was reported in the Quality Control and the Finance, Administration and Human Resources departments at both district offices. There were three instead of eight Schools Inspectors, and one instead of two District Administration Assistants per district office. It was disclosed that these overworked district officers might adversely affect the effectiveness of the district office instructional and support services to schools. Furthermore, it was revealed that there was no substantive Schools Inspector among those three at District Office B. Leithwood (2010) confirms the need for the district office to decide the possible number of officers to do administration work and those to be responsible for instructional work that leads to effective work in the classroom. At both district offices,

only one Schools Inspector possessed a secondary school supervision background as the other two Schools Inspectors had experience in supervising primary schools. In contrast, Austin *et al.* 2007: 279 observes that the district office itself and the schools should "… have the right people in the right seats". The striking result seemed to attract caution from literature when Austin *et al.* (2007: 273) observe that largely constituting the district office leadership team with people that are experienced in supervising elementary schools may result in many secondary school leaders expressing "concerns that there was a lack of understanding of the needs of older children and high schools in particular". Perhaps one might assume that when the decision makers finally decide to appoint the five Schools Inspectors, to make the full complement of Schools Inspectors at both districts, these would not only be substantive but would also include those with a secondary school background.

This section has discussed the participants' views on the structures at the district office. In the section that follows, a discussion of the participants' perceived practices of instructional leadership will be made.

4.4.2 The district instructional leadership practices

The study established four main district instructional leadership practices. The recruitment, selection, and appointment of teachers, heads and deputy heads was the first practice. This was followed by organising need-driven circuit-level and district-level professional development for heads and teachers. Effective supervision of teachers and heads was followed by developing schools.

4.4.2.1 Recruitment, selection and appointment of teachers, deputy heads and heads

Although it was established that there was a district recruitment committee comprising the District Schools Inspector, the District Human Resources Assistant, the Public Service Commission's (PSC's) District Human Resources Manager (DHRM), and a representative of any sister ministry, inconsistencies in the outcome of this teacher selection were suspected and blamed on members from other ministries who were deemed uninformed on how the education sector operated. However, acknowledged were observations that checks and balances guided the district and provincial levels, and that the district recruitment committee still recruited teachers but for attrition posts.

Moraa *et al.,* (2017) confirm that the district office should recruit and retain qualified teachers who are prepared to continuously work to improve learner performance. Furthermore, Bland *et al.,* (2014) contend that recruiting, placing, developing, and retaining quality staff constitutes the district focus, with a visibility strategy attracting high-performing teachers to the district. It seems the Schools Inspectors argued from a professional point of view. The recruitment of teachers, they were convinced, should be entrusted entirely to them as they had gone through the mill. The inclusion of non-professionals in teacher recruitment did not make sense to the Schools Inspectors.

To appoint heads and deputy heads, it was found that the District Schools Inspector declared vacant posts, the PSC then advertised the posts, interested candidates applied, and the provincial selection committee interviewed eligible candidates at the provincial offices. The successful candidates were finally placed at the schools they would have applied for. Heller (2018) concur that it was imperative for the human resources unit of the central office to be strategic in engaging the most suitable heads for the available positions. Similarly, Turnbull *et al.,* (2015) maintain that district leaders should firstly systematically and deliberately assess and select interested principal applicants for merit prior to appointment. It seems that the existence of the provincial selection committee and the process of interviewing applicants indicate the search for merit and quality.

Motivating heads, deputy heads and teachers

It was established that the district leaders encouraged heads to provide decent accommodation (standard and electrified) to teachers in line with ministry policy for all districts to modernise schools to retain teachers. Despite the poor teacher accommodation in many schools and sometimes the long distances between the teachers' homes and schools, the districts under study claimed that to counter this, they did not force teachers to stay at particular schools, but allowed them to transfer to other convenient schools in the district. Abele *et al.,* (2003: 15) agree that assigning newly-appointed teachers "to the most challenging classrooms and schools" might undermine the district office's attraction and retention of good teachers". It appears that the district might not have dug deep enough into the bag of motivation strategies by simply allowing the dissatisfied teachers to transfer to other schools. The fate of the

learners is often not considered when teachers transfer. Learners do not receive adequate instructional attention until the replacement teachers arrive.

In addition, it was disclosed that the district should provide teachers with adequate resources so that they could perform their duties well. These could include adequate special class and resource unit teaching and learning materials. Research has pointed to the fact that in such a situation where resources are inadequate, the district office human resources department sometimes has to contend with the difficult task of not only staffing, but also retaining staff in “low-performing” schools “because they [suffer] from poor leadership and inadequate working conditions at the school site” (Johnson & Suesse, 2007: 133). The gap in resource inadequacy within some schools can be attributed to incompetent leadership that results in unattractive school environments.

The participants’ responses shed light to the fact that supervision might enhance teacher performance improvement and that might strengthen the head and teacher relationship, thereby increasing teacher retention, especially when the district trained heads on good school governance and fairness in dealing with teachers. The study also indicated that teachers were motivated when the district rewarded their good performance with promotion to senior teacher grade and achievement prizes at the annual district prize-giving ceremonies. Furthermore, acknowledging what individual teachers could do best with little or no supervision might bind teachers to the district. Prominent researchers echo the importance of good governance and teacher recognition. For example, Munich and Rivkin (2015) stress that the district office should put in place special awards targeting teachers that perform very well. In the same vein, Burmaster (2006: ix) is convinced that the district focus on “leadership and governance” and “professional development and staff quality” among others brings about remarkable support to schools. In other words, to stay in the district, teachers are not only enticed by material and financial rewards, but also by heads’ good school governance and fairness that strengthen the head-teacher relationship.

It emerged that the district organised and conducted induction training workshops for newly-appointed heads and deputy heads, where the PSC assisted at the provincial level, on financial management, discipline, procurement procedures, NFE requirements, human resources issues and general school governance issues. I observed that inducting the new school leaders was a very useful intervention for the

district authorities as it set the stage for new roles and responsibilities. A number of studies on districts (Abele *et al.,* 2003; Anderson & Turnbull, 2016) concur that central offices effectively induct the recently-appointed principals in readiness for effective instructional practice and consistently provide new principals with supervisor and professional development support that is aligned to recent evaluation outcomes to improve teaching and learning. The emphasis on support from both the heads' supervisor and professional development seems to be intertwined with evaluation reports to chart the way forward with regards to quality instructional practice.

Continuous capacity development programmes were conducted at the district level, it was established, along with other training interventions such as continuous refresher courses from time to time as the heads and deputy heads were carrying out their duties. All this was done to capacitate the newly-promoted heads and deputy heads for their new roles and responsibilities. Renowned researchers, Elmore *et al.,* (2007: 33) stress, "… an aggressive professional development programme …" is one way in which the district office could improve the quality of instruction in schools. Similarly, Lonyian and Kuranchie (2018) declare that principal and teacher leader professional development can be powerful when it is not only based on standards, but also challenges the principal's and teacher's intellect and is related to their work. It is my hope that the district officials were also going through continuous capacity development on their part for them to remain professionally relevant and keep abreast with the dynamic nature of the education system.

Criticism of who inducted the newly appointed heads and deputy heads and how that was done was evident in the study. It was noted that Schools Inspectors did not take part in the exercise resulting in them blaming the underperformance of some schools on their heads' inadequate induction. The Schools Inspectors claimed that they deserved much more time with the newly promoted heads and deputy heads at the dawn of their new jobs. The Schools Inspectors, however, seemed to acknowledge their significance in supervising the new appointees for a year and further professionally developing them before they graduated from probationers to established substantive heads and deputy heads. In my view, the purpose of those interventions was for the district leaders to effectively guide the newly promoted heads and deputy heads in their work spectrum. Therefore, I do not understand why the Schools Inspectors, former seasoned heads and deputy heads themselves, were not

involved in the initial induction of the newly appointed heads and deputy heads. I am convinced that their vast expertise should show itself from right here.

It was established that the District Schools Inspectors held a meeting with all the primary and secondary heads in the district every month. Evidence points to the fact that the meetings significantly: assisted in developing the heads; helped heads develop professionally; and enriched heads as they shared information. Darfler and Riggan (2013) emphasise that at monthly meetings organised for the heads, district leaders appraise heads on the latest teacher professional development outcomes relating to instruction, thereby closely aligning the heads with the district expectations. Likewise, Leithwood (2013) proposes that districts should allocate most of their meeting time with principals and teachers [traditionally used for largely day to day administrative issues] in targeted professional development that caters for the individual needs of schools, principals and teachers. Emphasis seems to be placed on the sudden shift from focussing the District Schools Inspectors' meetings with heads on administrative issues to instructional leadership matters.

A striking result to emerge from the data was that the Schools Inspectors encouraged new heads and deputy heads to carry out exchange visits or twin themselves with the more senior and seasoned heads for the less-experienced heads to benefit from their more experienced counterparts. Such twinning, I believe, might not be restricted to intra-district but may also be extended to include schools outside the district. However, the participants might have disregarded factors such as the prevailing unfavourable economic conditions that might restrict some schools from financing the heads' twinning and exchange visits. The participants were also convinced that the heads' visits to the district leaders at the district office accorded them further individual assistance. Alvoid and Black (2014) agree that districts should capacitate district leaders in (among others) organising sessions for principals to dialogue on practice issues.

The district leaders instantly effected leadership and subsequent structural change where an acting head or acting deputy head was found ineffective. It was found to be most desirable for the district office to closely monitor underperforming principals, even those that were in acting capacities, to determine the source of that underperformance and decide on a remedy. In agreement, Campbell *et al.,* (2018) observe that district

leaders are directly responsible for providing technical support to schools that underperform. It was quite interesting to note that participants in the current study claimed that while they made follow-up supervision visits to assess performance and progress, parents sometimes communicated with the district leaders on the head's performance. These developments suggest that parents' involvement in the education of their children had reached higher levels, aligning with Honig and Coburn (2008)'s observation that the district office should use parental, learner and other partners' input to drive school improvement. Similarly, Nasir *et al.,* (2017) concur that district office leaders should engage the community in all school improvement initiatives. It might be prudent for the district leaders to exercise some degree of caution when handling contributions from the community relating to heads' performance. Political interference has often invaded and clouded some of the communities' relations with heads, especially when a head was suspected to be aligned to a political party that was not supported by the local community.

A strategy for leadership retention that emerged from the study saw the district leaders grooming and nurturing their own school leaders among the senior teachers, acting deputy heads and acting heads and urging them to apply and secure advertised positions for substantive heads and deputy heads. This seemed to be in response to the primary concern of staffing that emphasised maintaining very low levels of school leadership turnover in the district. Recent evidence encourages districts to select, mentor and evaluate principal candidates, and play a greater role in preparing future principals in readiness for organising schools that more effectively support teachers (White *et al.,* 2016). Working in the districts that would have nurtured them seems to be an effective leadership retention strategy since the resultant heads would be treading on familiar ground.

The participants disclosed that they sometimes used varied motivational strategies such as maintaining a good working relationship, guiding and counselling the heads, and producing encouraging supervision reports on the heads to incentivise and retain the heads in posts. Research has demonstrated that one way of improving instruction across the district involves leading the system's instructional change by also attending to school-level problems that include people management, and an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning (Jaquith *et al.,* 2015). Of course, the payment of

competitive salaries and commensurate benefits to heads and teachers cannot be ignored.

The data suggests that the district leaders assisted to make heads and deputy heads feel more attached to the district when: they placed them at schools that were close to their homes, especially when they approached the retirement age; attended heads' and teachers' funerals; and placed the deputy heads or heads close to their spouses. The schools' responsible authorities were also encouraged to provide heads with decent accommodation with electricity, clean water for drinking and good road networks. Browne-Ferrigno (2007) agree with the district leaders when they assert that where suitable principals find no considerations for their own spouses, districts find it difficult to recruit and retain the principals. Browne-Ferrigno (2007), and Latterman and Steffes (2017) further draw our attention to the fact that quality principals are not prepared to work in schools where (among others) resources are limited and the geography is isolated. In another study, Abele *et al.,* (2003: 15) observe in concurrence that assigning newly-appointed heads "to the most challenging… schools" might undermine the district office's attraction and retention of good teachers". While these suggested interventions might retain heads and deputy heads, the district officials could extend the strategies to include, for example, introducing housing and motor vehicle loan schemes for these critical school leaders.

Evidence from the study shows that heads can derive job satisfaction from well implemented Non-Formal Education functional literacy programmes in schools that become so viable that they transform the schools into enviable enterprises in poultry keeping, piggery, goat keeping, basketry, herbal gardens, apiculture and aquaculture. I am sure that such heads might develop a strong bond with their schools since they identify themselves with the success story of their schools. Moorosi and Bantwini, (2016) seem to confirm this finding when they state that in developing countries such as South Africa, effective district office leaders lean on capacitation and motivation of heads to realise, among others, improvement in schools.

Staff migration from the district

It emerged from the study that teachers that were intimate with learners seriously contravened statutes and were discharged from service. Sometimes problem teachers

were pressurised to transfer from the district, while overstaffing in schools often resulted in the affected teachers transferring to other districts. Donaldson and Papay (2012) concur that districts should not only recognise outstanding teacher performance, but also transparently, efficiently, and fairly remove consistent underperformers. It might be necessary for the districts to have in place consistent policies with regards to the treatment of underperforming teachers. While it seems that undisciplined teachers are discharged, what happens to teachers that underperform is not very clear.

Replacing heads and deputy heads

The study established that following the substantive head's or deputy head's demotion, retirement, resignation, transfer to another school, promotion, or death, the school management structure was a preparatory stage in the leadership succession plan. However, that succession was through the traditional post advertisement, recruitment and selection process. The participants explained that the district office did not have powers to appoint substantive heads but could only elevate the substantive deputy head to the position of acting head when the substantive head departs. The acting deputy heads and acting heads had to undergo intensive training on appointment to prepare them for their new tasks. It looks like the education system in Zimbabwe has some confidence in the schools and districts as far as preparing potential school leaders within the schools themselves is concerned. However, perhaps the higher authorities want to ensure that the preparation has been thorough when they intervene to interview and appoint new substantive heads and deputy heads themselves instead of delegating that responsibility to the district officials.

The study found that the MoPSE delayed to appoint heads' and deputy heads' replacements since they were restricted by budgetary constraints and could only replace heads and deputy heads following treasury approval. It also emerged that although private schools (those owned by churches, private organisations or individuals) had their own succession plans, they also took their time to replace heads and deputy heads. A possible explanation for this delay could lie in the attempt by the churches and private schools to protect their vested interests in members of their church and private organisations respectively. Prominent researchers, Childress *et al.,* (2007: 435) believe that the district office leadership should adopt and implement a

clear staffing policy that promotes the most hard-working teachers and particularises candidature for headship. Furthermore, Alvoid and Black, (2014) caution districts to ensure that there is leadership continuity since its absence could be detrimental to schools and, therefore, advise districts to adopt efficient plans for succession. Although the government and the responsible authorities of private schools appear to blame the lag in replacing heads and deputy heads on treasury and vested interests respectively, the fact remains that leadership continuity is breached. Subsequently, teaching and learning are adversely affected.

4.4.2.2 Need-driven circuit-level and district-level professional development

The study showed that the district office departments seemed to organise need-driven circuit-level and district-level workshops for heads, deputy heads, Teachers in Charge/Heads of Department, and teachers once or twice per year that focused on, among others, procurement procedures, handling of assets and record keeping. The cluster level training workshops were also found necessary when something new was introduced in the district. In that regard, Cole *et al.* (2012) encourage district leaders to plan and implement relevant and productive need driven teacher professional development initiatives. Indeed, need-driven professional development has proved critical, for example, in the successful implementation of the new competence-based curriculum in Zimbabwe recently.

An interesting claim was that sometimes the district leaders made use of Training of Trainer (TOT) workshops at the national level, and the workshopped teachers were expected to cascade the training to the provincial, district, cluster and school levels. However, there were divergent views on this approach to professional development. Renowned researchers (De Clercq & Phiri, 2013; Kennedy, 2014; Levine & Marcus, 2010) point out that in many cases, the traditional one-time workshops, seminars and/or conferences do not effectively improve teacher instructional practices and student achievement. Similarly, teacher professional development through the cascade approach has been found to be highly inadequate since there is a high possibility of information distortion or misinterpretation as the information precipitates to the recipient teachers (Bett, 2016; Dichaba & Mokhele, 2012). In Cole *et al.* (2012)'s view, an effective teacher professional development system caters for individual, school and district level professional development needs after which targeted

professional development can take place following genuine assessments to identify strong and weak teachers. Often criticised are the traditional one-time workshops, seminars and/or conferences, and the cascade approaches to professional development for their cited inadequacies. However, in developing countries it appears that more elaborate professional development strategies might not be adopted due to budgetary constraints as these require more resources.

In addition, the district leaders encouraged heads, officers at the district office and teachers to enrol at universities and develop their careers. Evidently, the district leaders were leading the district by example in professional development of this kind as they indicated that they were engaged in various certificate, diploma and degree level studies with universities and other institutions of higher learning. This is in harmony with Chinhara and Sotuku (2020), and Clark (2017) who emphasise that the district office leadership should commit itself to continuous principal and teacher professional development. Noticeable is the fact that the district officials did not say something about improving teachers' attitudes to become more responsive to further education to improve themselves academically and professionally, even without financial support from the government.

It also emerged that the government had put in place the Teacher Capacity Development programme in which the government funds the selected teachers' studies and provides study leave for examination purposes, with the district office processing the beneficiaries' applications. The participants felt that the government hoped to improve the teachers' effectiveness in facilitating learning. However, there was no concrete government plan in place to professionally develop special class teachers that were not trained to handle such classes. Although teachers in secondary schools appeared to attend subject panels at the district and provincial levels where subject specialists shared experiences with them in their different areas of specialisation, nothing was said about similar arrangements for primary school teachers.

Apparently, after a health needs assessment at the provincial and district levels by the ministry and its partners, all the primary and secondary school teachers had two health masters per school trained at the district level or at their schools. This aimed at making them self-sufficient in the availability and effective use of toilets, clean and safe

drinking water, and waste disposal systems. Rosen and Parise (2017) argue that district initiated professional development, while requiring regular evaluation to determine its impact, should not only have a direct alignment with both teaching and learning and the wider aspect of school or district development plan, but should also focus on heads' and teachers' identified needs. Schools seem to become more user friendly when water and sanitation facilities are available.

4.4.2.3 Effective supervision

One of the findings showed that the district leaders' core business was to supervise all primary and secondary schools to enhance the desired quality education outcomes in those primary and secondary schools. The data appear to be aligned with the Department of Basic Education (2019) when it states that in the Republic of South Africa, education district offices work closely with school principals and teachers for the purposes of improving learners' access to and retention in education, while professionally managing and supporting schools for excellent teaching and learning outcomes. The benchmarks for the district leaders in supervising schools are quality education, and improved learner access to and retention in education.

The district leaders appeared to regard workshops as a critical supervision tool that they used after carrying out needs assessments to identify commonalities or gaps that guided the workshop content and targeted beneficiaries. The workshops, it was stated, were for the district, cluster and school levels. Their focus was mainly on: Information Communication Technology; syllabus interpretation for the updated competence-based curriculum; financial management; procurement procedures; disaster risk reduction and psychological support; special education; and new strategies and policies relating to Non-Formal Education. Marsh *et al.* (2005) and Goldring *et al.* (2018) advocate for the professional development of principals through district principal supervisors that do not only visit schools and meet with principals with a focus on instruction improvement issues, but also conduct very productive professional development sessions that develop principals' instructional leadership skills. Targeted district, cluster and school level workshops appeared to buttress other supervision approaches like school visits. This implies that professional development, when intertwined with supervision, eventually strengthens teaching and learning outcomes in schools.

The district leaders seemed to consider school visits as another important factor in supervision. The Schools Inspectors visited every primary and secondary school in their respective circuits at least once per year where they used the exit meeting to chart the way forward after discussing their observations with the school staff. However, some of the Schools Inspectors reported that some schools might not be visited for two years, but might only be spot-checked because there were currently three instead of eight Schools Inspectors in both districts under study. While spot checks can be considered a supervision strategy, one can doubt their effectiveness since they seem to be rushed in an attempt to cover as many schools as possible. They are usually not planned and lack depth. It is also important observe that some schools are deprived of the crucial Schools Inspector visits for two years. Even though the Schools Inspectors shift the blame onto understaffing in their department, the resultant damage to the unsupervised heads, teachers and learners might remain irreparable. Ideally all schools must be supervised despite the identified challenges at the district office.

Honig and Coburn, (2008) encourage district leaders to value their visits to schools since the visits allow them to measure the quality of teaching and learning for the purposes of determining the nature of district office assistance that each school requires. In tandem, Murphy and Hallinger, (1988) suggest that effective supervision will be possible as superintendents and other district office staff monitor the curriculum and teaching and learning at the schools by supervising and evaluating principals and teachers, and after such visits spare time to hold meetings with the principals and teachers. Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018: 1) confirm that South African school district education officials have an obligation to visit every school in the district “at least once per term, with more frequent visits to schools requiring stronger support for monitoring, [and] guidance”. Therefore, district leaders’ support to schools should prioritise supervision of instruction to improve classroom teaching through observing and evaluating the performance of the teacher, leading to increased instruction quality (Goldring *et al.,* 2018). Furthermore, Burch and Spillane (2004) demonstrate that generally, heads are convinced that district office visits to schools (scarce as they are) build a lasting bond between the district office and the schools. The emphasis here is on the valuable contribution of the district leaders’ visits to schools on improving instructional quality and learning outcomes.

The district leaders placed much importance on monitoring teaching and learning in schools and an improved pass rate in all schools through supervision reports that provided heads and teachers with feedback on what was being done right and what needed to be improved. Key to teacher supervision was the Teacher Professional Standards (TPS), a document that was designed by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to establish and develop teachers' professional careers and present the evidence to evaluate their practice quality (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Zimbabwe, 2016). It is premised on the global recognition that developing teacher professional standards paves the way to attracting and retaining quality teachers in the education system. This is against the backdrop that teachers were the most valuable resource in schools. In this context, TPS were drawn from three interconnected teaching practice domains namely Professional Knowledge and Understanding, Professional Skills and Abilities, and Professional Values and Personal Commitment (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Zimbabwe, 2016). Guided by these domains, each teacher, TIC/HOD, deputy head and head was rated out of 100% by their supervisors. The demands of the TPS seem to underpin establishing and developing teachers', TIC/HODs', deputy heads', heads' professional careers and documenting their evaluated practice quality. In that regard, each TIC/HOD's, deputy head's, head's and teacher's TPS rating was out of 100%. One may assume that both the district officials on the one hand, and the teaching staff on the other have been adequately trained and operate on the same wavelength as far as the implementation of the TPS is concerned.

The Teacher Professional Standards sought, regarding teachers' capacity, to interpret the curriculum and its relevance to specific teaching contexts since the teachers would have proved to be relevantly and adequately qualified for the jobs in question. It is very encouraging to note that the TPS was introduced with positive intentions to monitor and assess teacher competence, growth and development. The TPS intentions seem to mirror Abele *et al.,* (2003: 11)'s study findings that show that each school needs the district office to assist in articulating and interpreting national guidelines relating to "student performance standards and to help teachers know what to do in the classroom so that students will be able to meet those standards". Although the TPS' central purpose is to monitor and assess competence, growth and development in teachers, TIC/HODs, deputy heads, and heads, the district leaders could consider

introducing other documentary supervisory instruments to reinforce the TPS and improve on the validity of the supervision outcomes.

The Quality Control department disclosed that they played a central role in the implementation of the Results-Based Personnel Performance System (RBPPS) whose thrust was on infrastructural development, supervision, Non-Formal Education and governance. The Schools Inspectors indicated that they: allocated circuits to the Schools Inspectors; assessed each school's outputs against agreed areas and their link to the implementation of the ministry's policy on learner access to quality education; planned outputs together with each head before signing the work plan agreement; and monitored implementation progress with four performance reviews per year. Saphier and Durkin (2011) agree that the district office staff conduct an annual assessment of every head to determine their effectiveness in managing, for example, teachers, stakeholders, and finances. The RBPPS, it emerged, did not only target heads but included teachers, TIC/HODs, and deputy heads, but these fell directly under the head's responsibility. However, I have personally noted, during the time I was practicing at the district office, several heads delegating this responsibility to their deputy heads and TIC/HODs particularly in large schools that made it impossible for the head to manage, for example, 65 teachers.

The district leaders claimed that they used other school supervision strategies that included monitoring teachers for compliance with the updated curriculum's emphasis on learner skills development through discovery learning. Funding was sourced from NAPH and NASH to organise subject panel meetings for secondary teachers, and to design termly schedules to assist the low performing schools in the national primary schools' Grade 7 examinations and secondary schools' Ordinary and Advanced Level examinations. The heads' whatsapp videos of school activities and the phone tablet photographs of their end of term reports were valuable sources of information that contributed to their school inspection reports. Kimball *et al.* (2015) support the districts' varied approaches to supervision when they observe that to achieve improved instructional leadership, district leaders are increasing their support to, and supervision of principals by boosting principal supervisors' capacity to evaluate and support principals by engaging varied strategies. It was enlightening to learn that some of the district leaders were responsive to ICT developments in the education system when they generated their school supervision reports using information gathered from their

phone tablets or whatsapp videos. However, these alone might not be adequately effective in the absence of school visits.

The district leaders believed that they assisted not only heads but also the district office in financial management in line with the Public Finance Management Act, treasury instructions and policy circulars issued timeously by the ministry. In agreement, Durand *et al.* (2015) are convinced that districts should engage adaptive leadership since it recognises the reality that some of the organisation's high ranking officials may not be knowledgeable about addressing challenges in their complexity, novelty, and uncertainty. Logically, the top leaders should delegate the tasks to their subordinates to engage them to face real changes and transform them in a dynamic environment that anticipates change. In addition, Murphy and Hallinger (1988) emphasise that district leaders should deliberately tap into, and utilise the other district office staff's expertise and frequently appreciate their dependence on them. Districts that practice adaptive leadership might exude teamwork and shared leadership since all officers would be accorded, unhindered, opportunities to share their expertise and experiences with their colleagues.

4.4.2.4 Developing schools

The data seems to show that since all school operations were driven by a school development plan, the district leaders helped schools craft budgets and school development plans (SDPs). The district officers were then expected to monitor plan implementation through supervising every school thoroughly and regularly to ensure that the planned school development initiatives were effectively implemented. The significance of school development plans is stressed in the Permanent Secretary's Circular 19 of February 2018 that directs districts:

> … payment of SIG will be based on submission of all required information and acquittal of SIG 2018. PEDs and DSIs to ensure that schools have valid and approved School Development Plans. If a school does not submit the required documents timely, the school will be automatically removed from the beneficiary list and replaced by schools on the waiting list to ensure that the number of beneficiary schools remains the same.

It might be deduced that the School Improvement Grant (SIG) and the district office, therefore, reflect their role in assisting the school to develop a development plan that was current and approved by the district office.

Some of the targets of the school development plans, the participants outlined, included the provision of standard school infrastructure. This included adequate toilets, adequate classroom blocks for effective teaching and learning, standard and modern houses for teachers, safe and clean drinking water, adequate and suitable furniture, and properly constituted rooms for the privacy of girls who go on their menstrual cycle while at school. In that regard, Travers (2018: 14) states, “Ensuring appropriate air and water quality and sufficient instructional space and equipment to provide rigorous instruction are important investments.” In a related study, Elmore *et al.,* (2007: 326-7) propose five components of a school development plan: (a) “instruction” — relating to the practice of teaching and learning; (b) “instructional leadership” — what the school leaders do to schedule, manage resources, and plan the teaching/learning content; (c) “professional capacity” — what the district office and school leaders do to improve classroom instructional practices; (d) “learning climate” — what the school adopts to promote effective teaching and learning; and (e) “family and community involvement” — how the school engages in resource mobilisation. In a nutshell, a typical school development plan appears to speak to instruction, instructional leadership, professional capacity, learning climate, family and community involvement. More subtly, the success of school development efforts devoid of parental and other stakeholder participation might be doubtful.

Although every school should set yearly achievement standards in a school development plan that contributes to the attainment of the district overall objectives, Farley-Ripple (2012: 794) interestingly argues that a school development plan that is “meant for compliance purposes only” and that gathers dust “on the shelf … [is] not an effective way to drive instruction or to improve instruction”. In due course, several adjustments may be made to the plans following annual evaluations that draw from district assessments to align current instructional developments with the following year’s plans. In that light, Parylo and Zepeda (2014) stress that the district leadership ensures improvement in the quality of teaching and learning by connecting the district office work to principals’ work. This implies that the district office facilitates the development and adoption of school development plans that align with the district education development plan. However, it might be pointless for heads to merely comply and produce a school development plan that they never care to refer to in their school development activities. This could not only confuse the district officials as they

monitor progress, but could also reflect lack of direction and organisation on the part of the head.

Learner interaction with textbooks and ICT

Since the new curriculum valued learner interaction with textbooks, the district leaders insisted that every primary and secondary school availed textbooks to the learners by monitoring the proper management of textbooks. Invaluable stakeholder support, the study indicated, was evidenced by the inception of the School Improvement Grant (SIG), a Unicef initiative that funded the purchase of textbooks for the core subjects in all primary and secondary schools. Lewis *et al.,* (2011) confirm that district office leaders, as instructional leaders, need to place high on their agenda responsibility for school and learner progress by improving teacher and school quality and strategically managing human and material resources to improve learner performance. Noted is the district leaders' close monitoring of the textbooks that were provided to every schools by the SIG. Such availability of textbooks to learners aligns with the provisions of the new competence based Zimbabwean curriculum where the learner is expected to interact more with the textbooks than with the teachers.

The participants considered Information Communication Technology as an integral part of school development. They not only encouraged schools to be electrified but also insisted on the procurement of digital technology to embrace the Information Communication Technology component of education. This resonated with previous studies on modern technology that have emphasised its importance to school development. Mapp *et al.,* (2007) outline the need for the district office leaders to ensure that the district office and all schools have modern technological infrastructure that would assist administrators and teachers significantly improve teaching and learning. While strides seem to have been made to ensure that ICT finds its way to schools, not all schools might currently have access to ICT. Schools that come to mind in this regard are the remote and disadvantaged ones that might lag behind a by virtue of their unfavourable geographical location, or their poor local socio-economic environment.

Teacher relevancy and security

Proper staffing was found to be an integral part of school development as the participants claimed that they ensured that all schools had: specialized teachers in all their learning areas; a sustainable teacher establishment; a high teacher retention rate. However, the district leaders in the Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs Education department felt otherwise as they indicated that some of their special classes and resource units in the primary schools were being taught by teachers that were not trained to take care of those classes. Otoo *et al.,* (2018) point out that the district office should recruit and retain qualified teachers who are prepared to continuously work to improve learner performance. It, therefore, becomes imperative for the human resources unit of the central office to be strategic in engaging the most suitable teachers and heads for the available positions (Heller, 2018). Similarly, Otoo *et al.,* (2018) argue that school improvement heavily relies on teachers and principals that have skill, commitment, and are well-positioned. The fact that some of the special classes are taught by teachers that were neither trained nor experienced in handling them dents the district leaders' instructional leadership support to schools. It seems that both the district office and higher offices could be playing the blame game much to the detriment of the intended beneficiaries, the special needs learners.

Furthermore, the district leaders claimed that they closely monitored low performing schools. Such low performing schools, it was disclosed, wrote fortnightly tests that the heads submitted to the district with the teachers' and the heads' test evaluation comments. I believe it was most desirable for the district office to closely monitor the underperforming principals to determine the source of that underperformance and decide on a remedy. In alignment, Campbell *et al.,* (2018) conclude that district leaders are directly responsible for providing technical support to schools that underperform.

Apart from tests, a Unicef-funded programme, the Early Reading Initiative (ERI), focused on improving teaching and learning. It " . . . is intended to capacitate the infant school teacher with competencies for the effective teaching of reading and writing skills for children from ECD A to grade 2", (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2014a: 2). I am convinced that laying a good foundation by developing the infants' reading skills at inception into the primary schools should adequately prepare them for academic work later on in their learning. The Ministry has proved that reading skills relate to pupils' performance in examinations, hence the ERI thrust ". . . on strengthening the skills of infant class teachers to improve their service delivery

specifically in the teaching of reading . . .” (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2014a: 2).

Besides the ERI, the Performance Lag Address Programme (PLAP) that receives funding support from the Global Partnership for Education and is implemented through Unicef pays close attention to learners’ literacy and numeracy skills development. As an individualised teaching-learning programme, “the PLAP begins by determining the last point of success for each learner and systematically closes the learning gap” (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2014b: 11). Suggested is a learning gap that should be closed through the individualised teaching and learning strategy by strengthening Grades 3-7 pupils’ literacy and numeracy skills with the starting point being the identified learner’s last point of success. The teaching strategy begins at the last point of success as determined by the curriculum-based test for that grade and the grade below it (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2014b: 11). In addition, the ministry recommends several learner-centred methodologies for effectively implementing the PLAP. These include “… question and answer, drama, modelling, painting, music, discovery, exploration, public speaking, poetry, research/experimentation, project, discussion, and storytelling” (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2014b: 5).

However, there seems to be no reliable evidence that all the primary schools have adopted the PLAP in its true spirit since a few teachers per school are workshop-trained to, subsequently, train their colleagues back at their respective schools. Despite such setbacks, I take it that the PLAP, if sincerely embraced and implemented, might significantly improve literacy and numeracy in primary schools.

Water access and waste disposal

The district leaders seemed to prioritise water access and waste disposal as school development indicators when they encouraged schools to partner the District Development Fund to get assistance to have reliable sources of clean water within the school premises or within one kilometre radius of the school. Evidence from the data points to the fact that one of the district leaders that sits on the District Water and Sanitation Sub-Committee (DWSSC) sometimes directly presented schools’ needs to the sub-committee. Welcome is the inclusion of one of the district officials in the

DWSSC since his presence as one of the decision makers on water and sanitation issues might be a direct benefit to the schools in that regard.

Effective management of schools

It also emerged from the data that the district leaders seemed to place great importance to the effective management of all schools in the district to bring about inclusive quality education in the primary and secondary schools. Three of the interviewees claimed that they insisted on sound school leadership and management that was responsive to the diversified needs of learners. These included the needs of special education learners that should have adequate donor-supplied sunscreen lotions for learners with albinism and large prints on displayed charts for learners with visual impairment. To achieve this, the district office leadership intended to design and implement a strategic plan that focused on reform at every level of the district, for the purpose of boosting teaching and learning in line with a clearly articulated mission, a critical instructional leadership dimension. This could be why Howell (2014: 727) points out that the key functions of the district office leadership include seeking "to integrate [the] organisation's mission, work processes, decisions, information, and technology in a way that is client centred". While the district leaders seem to be firmly in the driving seat for inclusive education, it is hoped that they are also reaching out to the remotest and disadvantaged schools.

The inclusion of all people who had not been captured by the formal education system was spelt out in the non-formal education policy in Zimbabwe. To operationalize the policy, the Secretary's Circular Minute Number 13 of 2016 explains:

> One of the challenges facing the education sector in Zimbabwe is the magnitude of out-of-school children … A 2015 survey established that there were 1 641 232 children, whose ages ranged from 3 -16, out of school. Non-Formal Education is meant to complement the efforts of the Formal Education Sector through improving access to quality education for those who have dropped out of school.

Crafted by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, with the assistance of stakeholders, in 2014, the Non-Formal Education (NFE) programme specifies its targeted beneficiaries as "various categories of learners such as young people and adults who never attended school or [have] dropped out of school" (Ministry of Primary

and Secondary Education, 2015: 1). To set the implementation stage, The National Non-Formal Education Policy for Zimbabwe (2015: 12) states:

> The DSI or anyone appointed as DSI shall be responsible for the implementation of the NFE programmes, processing of applications for registration, quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation.

Buttressing the national policy, the Secretary's Circular Minute Number 13 of 2016 directs, "In line with the National NFE Policy of 2015, every Primary and Secondary school in Zimbabwe shall offer NFE. School heads do not need any authority to register as NFE centres …" This circular shows the gravity of the problem and at the same time the central purpose for implementing the Non-Formal Education policy. The circular not only makes it mandatory for the primary and secondary schools to introduce and run NFE programmes, but also empowers the district leaders to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the NFE programmes in the schools. Non-Formal Education's programmes seem to involve both the illiterate and literate learners, and accommodates the technical and vocation component from which the learners are expected to gain basic survival skills. The programmes appear to be not only an extension of the correspondence mode of learning but are also relevant to learners that might not be able to attend classes at schools. However, these NFE provisions seem to be silent with regards to the inclusion of learners living with disability.

In this study, the planning by the ministry to introduce open distance learning in secondary schools was said to be to be at an advanced stage since what remained to be done was the distribution of the teaching modules to the schools. Such an intervention is in line with the developmental goal of non-formal education of providing increased and equal access "to quality and inclusive education that is relevant in the socio-economic context of Zimbabwe" (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015: 11).

4.4.3 Engaging stakeholders and partners

The participants believed that there was a Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ) District Management Committee at each of the two districts. This committee comprised the National Association of Primary Heads representatives, the National Association of Secondary Heads representatives, the primary and secondary male and female teacher representatives, the School Development Committee

representative, and the business community representative. Consistent with these findings, Harriet *et al.,* (2013) note that schools, on their own, are not able to improve learner achievement in the absence of the district office and other stakeholder support. The district leaders indicated that the BSPZ District Management Committee was put in place to manage the funds that were contributed by schools in pursuit of supporting teaching and learning programmes in the district. Each primary school learner contributed $1 per term while the secondary school learner paid $2 per term. This underscores the critical requirement for the district office to closely work with stakeholders to close the support gaps in the district's operations.

Therefore, it may be logical for the heads (represented by National Association of Primary Heads and National Association of Secondary Heads), teachers and School Development Committees to come on board to ensure that the funds that they had gathered were actually used for what they were intended. It also came to light that state internal auditors audited the district BSPZ fund account annually to ensure accountability and transparency. According to the study participants, the business community were accommodated since they actually did business with the schools and the district office, and often paid back to the education system as their corporate social responsibility. It comes as no surprise that the stakeholders monitor the BSPZ fund utilisation while the state internal auditors inspect the books of accounts annually for transparency and accountability.

Transparency in the district operations and fostered teamwork

The data suggests that the committee oversaw transparency in the district operations and fostered teamwork to enhance a high degree of ownership of the district programmes. However, an interesting criticism of the operations of the committee was in the observation by one of the study participants that influential members of the committee had their way in the committee's termly meetings to approve budgets and related expenditure and to review the progress of different projects. It is important to note that the district office leadership seem to understand that influential stakeholders are more often than not at variance with each other concerning their understanding of supporting a conducive learning environment. It is critical that despite their diverse views, these stakeholders might determine the effectiveness of the district office's operational and developmental strategies. Recent research evidence (Hitt *et al.,* 2018:

11) confirms that it is the district's responsibility to explicitly clarify each individual's role in supporting school development and learner progress, while creating room for "the school community to come together to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning". Aldaihani (2017) observes that district officials should develop partnership and educational stakeholder relationships. Similarly, Fisher (2003: 4) emphasises that it is imperative for districts to engage "expertise and resources that the districts themselves often do not possess" to improve and maintain learner achievement through "developing, implementing, and sustaining systemic reform" that transcends the mediatory advocacy, technical assistance and fund-raising.

The mandate of the BSPZ District Management Committee, it emerged, was to generate revenue for the district to enhance the implementation of all district educational programmes. The committee was also expected to construct the district resource centre and procure assets, organise district level educational functions, finance the provincial world literacy day celebrations, and also employ ancillary staff. The committee reported to the Provincial Education Director and the Permanent Secretary. Recent research has conclusively shown that district officials help in problem resolution through, among others, developing partnership and educational stakeholder relationships (Aldaihani, 2017). My study revealed a very strong working relationship between the district office and its stakeholders where the BSPZ has stepped to rescue the district office by constructing a complex of offices and procuring a new motor vehicle, to mention the major achievements. However, this intervention could be straining a number of schools that might not have a stable financial base because all schools are expected to contribute similar amounts irrespective of the status of their balance sheet.

4.4.4 Challenges affecting structure

The study showed that the district office faced several challenges that affected structure.

Understaffing

Firstly, the districts under study appeared to be significantly understaffed as evidenced by the presence of three Schools Inspectors in post instead of eight per district. There was also only one District Administration Assistant per district instead of two to

supervise financial management in schools. Subsequently, the participants felt, school supervision was compromised. In contradiction to these findings, Honig and Rainey (2015) stress that district supervisors can become progressively more capable of helping principals only if they receive on-going support, too. Data from my study show that learners are the losers when teachers are not effectively supervised. Teachers, therefore, need to be kept on their toes, and when they are under supervised, they tend to relax. The resultant mediocre teacher instruction might have the ripple effect of producing low learner performance.

Non-compliance with national policy

Secondly, it emerged that some schools did not comply with the Non-Formal Education national policy leading some teachers and heads to believe that Non-Formal Education programmes were extra work to them. This attitude seemed to stem from the fact that, according to the data, the Public Service Commission had withdrawn from paying the teachers' allowances and expected the learners' fees to take care of the teachers' allowances. Evidence from the respondents shows that this was not working since the Part-Time and Continuing Education enrolments, for example, had decreased to levels that left dedicated teachers only. Therefore, the district leaders were convinced that the policy makers were betraying the demands of their own policies, thus making it difficult for the district leaders to enact policy implementation enforcement. Przybylski *et al.,* (2018) agree that there are challenges to the district's smooth performance of duties, some of which might arise from inevitable pressure from different levels, especially from higher offices. Inconsistent policies appear to be a thorn in the flesh for the Non-Formal Education department. However, the district officials might have to find other ways of ensuring that all the schools implemented the NFE policy despite the prevalent shifts in policy bearing in mind the beneficiary learner.

4.4.5 Practice challenges

The district leaders indicated that the district office faced several challenges that affected practice.

Support for learners with disabilities

It was evident from the data that some of the teachers of the "regular" learners seemed to display a negative attitude towards learners with disabilities. Sometimes there was communication breakdown among learners with hearing impairment, those with visual impairment and their teachers that were sometimes unqualified or untrained for that work. Similarly, since learners living with disabilities were a constituent part of the education system, engaging learners with disabilities in resource units, special classes and in inclusive sporting activities was found to be very difficult when such learners were under the care of teachers that were not suitably qualified to handle them. In a major study, Smith (2003: 8) concurs that "… providing services to students with disabilities is a moral imperative, a federal equity mandate and one of the most troubled areas of ... education". While it is established that some teachers have a negative attitude towards learners with disabilities, and that sometimes unqualified or untrained teachers attend to resource units, special classes and inclusive sporting activities, the district officials may not be doing enough to assist the affected learners in grappling the attitudinal and staffing challenges.

Parents' low response to pay school fees and levies

It was found that the parents had a low response to pay school fees and levies for their children in both primary and secondary schools. This was attributed to the new Zimbabwe constitution's provision that no learners should be sent away from school for failing to pay school fees and levies. The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No. 20 Act (2013: 15) makes provisions for all citizens' "… common desire for freedom, justice and equality". In that regard, it clearly says, "The State must take all practical measures to promote free and compulsory basic education for children" (The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No. 20 Act 2013: 2: 27: 1: 22), and "Every citizen and permanent resident of Zimbabwe has a right to a basic State-funded education, including adult basic education" (The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No. 20 Act 2013: 4: 75: 1: 37). This implies provisions for every child's free and compulsory education on the one hand, and all citizens' and permanent residents' State-funded education on the other. My study identified some of the far-reaching effects of the non-payment of fees. According to some of the study participants, the non- payment of fees disrupted the production of supervision reports by the district office since money trickled into the district BSPZ account, difficulties for heads to run small schools, and failure by some schools to efficiently implement the

schoolchild-feeding programme. The challenge directly affects the individual schools and the district at large. However, there might also not be a solution to it in sight for a long time until amendments to the constitution, regarding the payment of school fees, are effected.

Though Honig, (2003) argues that the district office is experienced with, trained in, and has the capacity to monitor schools for policy compliance, it was felt that policy provisions were another dimension to the fees and levies challenge. For example, the participants pointed out: limited financial resources to acquire accounting packages; unstable markets for goods and services; constantly changing regulatory policies from the Ministry of Finance that included the use of the multiple pricing system in the economy. In addition, it emerged that primary schools seemed to entrust the management of school finances to inexperienced and sometimes school personnel that were not trained in financial management. That strained the district leaders as they spent a lot of time rigorously training these teachers. Confirming the developments, Przybylski *et al.,* (2018) state that despite the increasing demand for district offices to meet annual achievement targets relating to learner performance standards, a significant number of district offices are exposed to obstacles such as inadequate and inappropriate human, material, and financial resources. The major obstacles outlined here were restrictive policy provisions, and the management of school finances by inexperienced and sometimes untrained personnel in primary schools. Although the district officials indicate that they are straining to correct the situation, there seems to be a call on the authorities to relax the restrictive policies. At the same time, the primary schools themselves appear to be responsible for deciding on whom to entrust with their financial management.

Indiscipline

There seemed to be cases of indiscipline among heads, teachers and learners that included bullying, truancy, early girl marriages and school dropouts among learners. Teachers abused leave and engaged in improper association with learners of the opposite sex. However, heads appeared to be the greater cause of indiscipline than teachers. They seemed to: neglect their critical internal school supervision duty despite the prescribed specification; involve themselves in financial indiscipline; organise very few staff development workshops for teachers at the schools; submit

important returns late to the district office; ignore implementing programmes after professional development courses had been run for them. It emerged that some heads also took advantage of the inaccessibility of their schools by road and by phone during the rainy season to neglect their work. Therefore, it was felt that such a high degree of negligence bordered on incompetence that did not resonate with instructional leadership. Although indiscipline among heads, teachers and learners might be unavoidable, the nature of indiscipline that the participants table reflects on the effectiveness of the district leaders' instructional leadership support to schools.

While it might seem reasonable to deal with the errant teachers and heads accordingly, Campbell *et al.,* (2018) prefer a district office systematic support, as opposed to punishment, for wayward or underperforming heads and teachers. Such seemingly misguided practice, they are convinced, may have detrimental effects on the intimidated and threatened principals and teachers in the schools that may lead to a ripple effect on student learning and performance.

Work inconsistency

The participants believed that there was work inconsistency due to lack of financial and material resources. That included persistent and prolonged electricity load shedding, insufficient diesel supply for the back-up generator, inadequate computers/laptops, and the unavailability of motor vehicles that should be allocated to specific departments instead of a district pool vehicle that was controlled by the District Schools Inspector. These drawbacks, apart from hindering effective teaching and learning, might also stall key district operations such as visiting problem schools, attending to urgent reported cases of child abuse and monitoring the administration of public examinations. Fisher (2003: 4) strongly advises districts to engage "expertise and resources that the districts themselves often do not possess" to improve and maintain learner achievement through "developing, implementing, and sustaining systemic reform" that transcends the mediatory advocacy, technical assistance and fund-raising.

4.4.6 How to improve support effectiveness

The study showed that a lot could be done to improve the instructional leadership support that the district was giving to schools. The suggestions that the participants made to improvements on structure are presented before improvements on practice.

4.4.6.1 Improvements on structure

Employing adequate district officers

The district leaders proposed that the government should revisit the staffing of the Quality Control and the Finance, Administration and Human Resources departments. Also, resource provision should prioritise Schools Inspectors since they were at the core of supervising schools. It was found critical for the authorities to promptly appoint all acting Schools Inspectors to substantive Schools Inspector positions, and employ five more substantive Schools Inspectors instead of acting Schools Inspectors per district to normalise their workloads without compromising the quality of their work. The Schools Inspectors yearned to organise annual conferences for themselves that were similar to the National Association of Primary Heads and National Association of Secondary Heads ones to share experiences. Furthermore, arranging the twinning of Schools Inspectors with district leaders of other countries to learn how districts in other countries went about their core duties was desirable. In short, it emerges that the authorities should elevate all the acting Schools Inspectors to substantive Schools Inspector positions, and appoint five more substantive Schools Inspectors and one District Administration Assistant per district for reasonable and effective supervision. Apart from organising annual conferences for themselves, and twinning with district leaders of other countries, Schools Inspectors expect resource provision to prioritise them. However, in my view, similar interventions could be extended to the other district office structures since they significantly contribute to the district office support to schools.

Likewise, the Finance, Administration and Human Resources department implored the employer to reinstate the two abolished positions of District Assistant Accountant for the efficient and effective supervision of financial management in schools. By the same token, Silvernail and Linet (2014) point out that the district office leadership should evaluate the performance of all the district office staff and ensure that the office

structures are properly in place with regards to supporting instructional leadership on a very high level. Subsequently, the district office leadership could ensure that everyone at the district office works to significantly contribute to improved teaching and learning. This could mean that even the district office personnel that might be viewed as having nothing to do with instructional leadership ought to be engaged in work activities that, by and large, contribute to improved teacher performance and student learning.

The district leaders further encouraged schools to employ qualified people to do their financial management work. Where schools were unable to do so, the district leaders urged the district BSPZ and the schools to jointly fund financial management training workshops for the people that were currently doing their books. In addition, the participants felt, the district should run workshops for heads on sound school financial management and disciplinary issues where expert trainers from the provincial office and head office levels could facilitate. In that regard, Hightower (2002: 17) concedes that it is important for the district office "to get the resources behind the strategies that were … identified." The financial management training workshops appear to include the ICT component since this is the current trend in modern school financial management.

It emerged that Non-Governmental Organisations and other stakeholders could help in leadership development and infrastructural development for the district to be able to retain the heads and the acting heads in most of the unregistered schools. Also, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should organise many exchange programmes for heads in public and private schools for instructional leadership enrichment. It was also suggested that professional development initiatives should touch heads, deputy heads, Heads of Department/Teachers in Charge, teachers and the district office leaders to equip them with the relevant knowledge and skills so that they would be sufficiently prepared for their jobs and become more effective instructional leaders. Hitt *et al.,* (2018) concur when they recommend districts to establish structures, expectations, and supports for school leadership teams that place more value on time allocated for improved instructional practice and learner outcomes. Such a shift in the district's culture practice, in my opinion, is possible when the leadership ensures the cross-pollination of school leadership development through,

for example, district targeted meetings with principals that allow them to enrich each other by sharing experiences.

4.4.6.2 Improvements on practice

Payment of school fees and levies

On the issue of fees and levies payment, it was suggested that though the government should engage stakeholders to persuade parents to pay school fees and levies, and amend the Zimbabwe Constitution accordingly, it should also consider launching advocacy programmes to promote parental positive attitude towards paying school fees and levies. Silvernail and Linet (2014) confirm the suggestions when they maintain that a great deal of the district challenges are of a fiscal nature and they need the collective efforts of state policy makers and district offices to effect efficient and effective resource mobilisation and utilisation for quality teaching and learning. While advocacy programmes might work to a certain extent, the data seems to leave the door open to other strategies to supplement them.

Support in school financial management

Some of the district officers argued that since the market environment was volatile, government should introduce school financial management policies that stabilised the market and brought about a clear blue print that promoted stability and confidence to curb the constantly changing regulatory policies. Increased financial management efficiency was possible, the data suggested, when government supported financial management training with, for example, accounting packages to ensure computerised accounting was in place at the district for the benefit of schools. Perhaps that is why today, education policies and private players demand districts to directly help all schools to continuously improve the quality of teaching and learning (Honig & Copland, 2008). Indeed, consistent school financial management policies that prioritise ICT are critical at both the district and the school levels.

Resource mobilisation

The district leaders generally agreed that their supervisory work required them to be mobile and for that to be not only possible but effective, government, with donor

support, should provide motor vehicles and fuel, computers and other vital equipment to the districts. As a special recognition of their work of supporting education in the district, the other government departments, for example the District Development Coordinator (formerly the District Administrator), could prioritise the districts to purchase fuel at the local service stations instead of joining the fuel queues. Going a step further, some of the district departments felt that they deserved a motor vehicle and telephone reserved for their departments to facilitate confidentiality when handling delicate and sensitive cases of learner abuse, to improve on effective support to schools. Rentner and Kober (2014) maintain that the districts are in control of barriers and limitations regarding curricula, teaching and learning, professional development, and measurement of learner achievement when they receive continuous state technical support. Between the lines, the implication might be that central government should not shun assisting the BSPZ in mobilising resources for the district office. Without state support, the gap that the BSBZ might leave could cumulatively dent the effectiveness of the district office support to schools.

It was further suggested that the responsible authorities and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and other stakeholders should assist schools to: connect to the national power utility grid; acquire computers; drill water boreholes at schools; and connect to the Internet after resorting to solar energy since Information Communication Technology was now a compulsory learning area.

There seemed to be an appeal for the heads and the curriculum designers to change their attitude towards special classes and resource units. It appeared that special education was currently not being prioritised despite the fact that the sign language had been adopted as the 16th official language in Zimbabwe that should be included as a key curriculum component of all teacher training institutions. As a moral and professional obligation, the participants expected the district office, with support from central government, to provide adequate financial and material resources to support special education, thereby focusing more on these students' achievement than on mere policy compliance. In agreement, Smith (2003: 8) observes that the district office focus on the provision of education services to learners living with disability should not be guided by "process compliance (but by) the achievement of educational outcomes".

The Permanent Secretary of Education (Zimbabwe) in The Secretary's Circular Minute No. P36 of 1990, directed DSIs:

> In order to implement the Education Act… which states that every child shall have the right to school education, it is the intention of ministry that children with special educational needs shall participate as fully as possible in the national schools curricula.

It is clear that both the Education Act and the ministry are inclined towards the provision of inclusive education that embraces learners with special educational needs. This is so despite the hurdles that these efforts seem to encounter when it comes to the actual implementation of special needs education. Similarly, Rhim *et al.,* (2016) stress that districts should not only cater for the learners' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, but also accommodate children with disabilities and teach all children to accept, respect, and appreciate such diversity.

New schools

In cases where the ministry or the responsible authorities are overwhelmed, other possibilities should be taken into consideration. For instance, Przybylski *et al.,* (2018) point out that district leaders, saddled with an increasing demand for results, are battling to come up with the best remedy for struggling schools. In that regard, Hassel *et al.,* (2004: 2) consider the option for "creating new, smaller and more diverse teaching and learning environments" since many districts in the USA have acknowledged that new schools are a step in the right direction as they not only reform the educational system but also cater for the diverse needs and choices of learners. The district leaders felt that they need to adopt a more aggressive strategy to bring about the establishment of such new schools. One could think that the currently visible few private and independent schools could be the Zimbabwean example of the new schools that the researchers are making reference to. Some of these schools seem to be providing services to learners of a diverse nature since they cater for school drop outs, repeaters, and the adults among others. However, the learners' parents or guardians have to pay the very high fees that are required to sustain these schools' seemingly more attracting learning environments. The high fees, unfortunately, may create an access barrier for the economically disadvantaged learner in rural and resettlement areas.

4.5 Summary

The chapter has presented, analysed and discussed data that was collected using interviews and documents. There were five major findings of the study. Firstly, it was found that the district instructional and support structures were aligned to support instructional leadership although there was work overload in two departments - Quality Control; and Administration, Finance and Human Resources. Secondly, four main district instructional leadership practices were established. The district leaders participated in the recruitment, selection, and appointment of teachers, heads and deputy heads. They also organised need-driven circuit-level and district-level professional development. The effective supervision of schools was considered as another district level practice. Finally, the district office spearheaded school development efforts. The engagement of stakeholders and partners to foster transparency and teamwork in the district operations was the third key finding. The fourth key finding showed challenges that affected structure. The major obstacles here were understaffing in two of the district office departments and non-compliance with the national Non-Formal Education policy that compromised effective school supervision.

The fifth key finding focused on practice challenges that included: inadequate support for learners with disabilities; parents' low response to pay school fees and levies; indiscipline among teachers and heads; and work inconsistency as a result of inadequate resources and materials to support the district office operations. The final section presents suggestions on how district leaders can support their schools more effectively by: encouraging parents and guardians to pay school fees and levies; employing adequate district officers; providing increased support in school financial management; stepping up resource mobilisation; and motivating players that show interest in establishing new schools.

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings, draws conclusions and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This study sought to examine district leaders' perceptions of instructional leadership practices. More specifically, the focus was on understanding how districts align structure with function for instructional leadership in two district offices in Zimbabwe. The study then draws conclusions and makes recommendations for aligning the district office structures with their practice to strengthen the district office instructional leadership support to schools. Finally, the researcher presents the limitations and implications of the study.

The study attempted to contribute literature on instructional leadership that links structure with function at the district level, especially in the context of a developing country like Zimbabwe. A nexus of studies has over the years highlighted districts as being key instruments in school improvement and learner performance, especially through instructional support (Darfler & Riggan, 2013; Fink & Riggan, 2013; Rice & Rice, 2011; Harriet *et al.,* 2013). My study intends to fill the gap on whether and how the district leaders effectively provide instructional leadership support to schools.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the district leaders' understanding and perspectives on the structures that exist at the district level to support effective instructional leadership in the primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe?

2. What do the district leaders consider as the key instructional leadership practices that are enacted by the districts in support of instructional improvement in the schools?

3. How effective are the instructional leadership practices enacted by the districts in support of instructional improvement in the schools?

4. How can the districts improve the effectiveness of their instructional leadership support to schools?

5.2 Summary of findings of the study

The main findings are guided by the four objectives of the study.

5.2.1 District level structures

The departments

The instructional (District Accounting Office and Quality Control) unit provides supervisory support to schools. The District Schools Inspector in the District Accounting Office department supervises all the departments at the district office and these report directly to that department. It is important to note that this department's member is the District Schools Inspector. It is doubtful whether one officer could individually possess the capacity to manage all the activities of the district office departments. These activities usually include the effective integration of the requisite and available human and material resources to achieve the goals of the district office.

The Quality Control's Schools Inspectors' core responsibility is supervising teachers and heads in schools. Over and above, the Schools Inspectors spearhead head and teacher professional development. They also ensure that instructional work in schools is done effectively and efficiently for qualitative improvement of schools to be realised. In this regard, the Schools Inspectors seem to be at the epicentre of the district office instructional leadership support to schools. However, this department on its own might not be able to do all this work without the vital support from the other departments.

Understandably, the support structures (Finance, Administration and Human Resources; Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs Education; and Non-Formal Education) are expected to provide support services to the instructional unit. In that regard, the study showed that the Finance, Administration and Human Resources department accommodated the District Accountant whose major function is monitoring and supervising financial management at the district office and in schools. Supporting the District Accountant, the District Administration Assistant looks at areas such as asset management and financial management. In the same department, it emerged that the District Human Resources Assistants are mainly responsible for human resources management at the district office and in the schools. Since there are only two officers in the finance and administration section of this department, it might be logical to expect them to subject their activities to continuous scrutiny to make sure that their time and related resources are expended in assisting heads and the district office. The two district officers seem to find it difficult to attend

to individual schools separately as a result of the limited district office resources, but instead, work with strategic coordinated clusters. This does not rule out, however, bar the officers to, from time to time, invite or visit identified individual schools when it is critical for them to do so.

The Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs Education department have District Remedial Tutors whose mandate is to monitor the implementation of all education programmes designed for learners with special needs. They do this after they have placed learners living with disabilities in resource units, special classes and learner remediation programmes. The scope of special education goes beyond children to reach out to adults living with disabilities and that cannot be part of the ordinary school and instructional pedagogy. The district officials in this department, therefore, bear the mammoth task of ensuring that this type of child and adult learner is guided by a curriculum that is diverse and relevant enough to cater for the needs of every nature of disability. Such inclusive education considerations in the mainstream education system seem to be the most appropriate weapon to fight segregatory attitudes in the district office itself and in schools.

Finally, the District Lifelong Learning Coordinators in the Non-Formal Education department are responsible for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the NFE programmes. The District Lifelong Learning Coordinators also process applications for centre registration in line with the National Non-Formal Education policy. While the department is responsible for learner access and participation that is enshrined in ensuring that schools efficiently provide the learners with quality instructional services, it is also entrusted with ensuring that the NFE programmes are buttressed by well managed human, material, and financial resources. Inevitably, the department cannot turn a blind eye on the heads' and teachers' negative attitudes towards non-formal education.

The structural arrangement at the district offices under study echoes Austin *et al.* (2007: 269)'s observation that to enhance effective instructional leadership, the district office could be organised into the "instruction and support services" sections, with the instructional unit providing supervisory support, and the "support" unit focusing on financial, curricula, human resources, research, "and special education" support to schools (Austin *et al.,* 2007: 269).

Overworked departments

The Quality Control department reported significant understaffing. There were three instead of eight Schools Inspectors in each of the districts under study. Furthermore, there was no substantive Schools Inspector among those three at District Office B. At both district offices, there was only one Schools Inspector that was responsible for supervising secondary schools. The remaining two Schools Inspectors were engaged to supervise primary schools. Austin *et al.* (2007: 273) make a cautious observation that largely constituting the district office leadership team with people that are experienced in supervising elementary schools may result in many secondary school leaders expressing "concerns that there was a lack of understanding of the needs of older children and high schools in particular".

The Schools Inspectors admitted that they were overwhelmed by the resultant workloads. In the Finance, Administration and Human Resources departments at both district offices, there was one instead of two District Administration Assistants per district office. This one district officer was expected to perform the duties that had been previously performed by two officers, it emerged. The two District Administration Assistants complained that they were also overworked. The study showed that these overworked district officers might adversely affect the effectiveness of the overall district office instructional and support services to schools. This did not align with one study that showed that the district office itself and the schools should "… have the right people in the right seats", (Austin *et al.,* 2007: 279).

Although there could be several understandable reasons why the two departments were thus understaffed and overworked, it appears that exhaustion and job insecurity might be gradually creeping into the affected officers. Coupled with stress and burnout, the officers' moods and emotions might, as a ripple effect, damage their relationships with colleagues at the district office, heads and teachers, and even their families and friends. Finally, their performance at work might not be spared by the after effects of anxiety and job dissatisfaction.

This section has focused on the structures at the district office. In the section that follows, an examination of the participants' perceived practices of instructional leadership will be made.

5.2.2 Instructional leadership practices

5.2.2.1 How teachers, heads and deputy heads are engaged

Although it was established that there was a district recruitment committee comprising the District Schools Inspector, the District Human Resources Assistant, the Public Service Commission's (PSC's) District Human Resources Manager (DHRM), and a representative of any sister ministry, inconsistencies in the outcome of this teacher selection were suspected. The district leaders lay the blame on members from other ministries who were deemed uninformed on how the education sector operated. From experience, I noted that when central government briefly delegated the selection and recruitment of teachers to school heads and their School Development Committees (SDCs for council and other private schools) and School Development Associations (SDAs for government schools), it quickly received reports and evidence of all forms of nepotism, favouritism, bribery and corruption in the bulk of schools. The government had no option but to repossess teacher selection and recruitment. However, in its efforts to deal with the said vices, other inadequacies seemed to surface and in the context of this study-the criticism relating to the inclusion of officers from other ministries on the district teacher recruitment committee. I am sure this gap is a pointer towards the need for further research in this area.

Despite the levelled dissatisfactions, were the participants seemed to acknowledge that checks and balances guided the district and provincial levels, and that the district recruitment committee still recruited teachers but for attrition posts. To appoint heads and deputy heads, it was found that the District Schools Inspector declared vacant posts, the PSC then advertised the posts, interested candidates applied, and the provincial selection committee interviewed eligible candidates at the provincial offices. The successful candidates were finally placed at the schools they would have applied for. As an initial motivational step in the right direction, the newly appointed heads and deputy heads might find it easy to settle down at the schools of their choice and smoothly take off in their new roles and responsibilities.

Motivation

The study established that the district leaders motivated teachers, deputy heads and heads to improve their practice and retain them. The study participants indicated that

there were several ways in which they prepared the newly-appointed teachers, heads and deputy heads for their new roles and responsibilities for leadership. First, the district organised and conducted their induction training workshops. I take these workshops as the initial confidence-building steps. Recent research has established that central offices effectively induct the recently-appointed teachers and principals in readiness for effective instructional practice and consistently provide new principals with supervisor and professional development support that is aligned to recent evaluation outcomes to improve teaching and learning (Anderson & Turnbull, 2016). Similarly, Lipke (2019) found that the district leaders should properly induct principals for their new instructional leadership role in their schools. It was encouraging to note that considerations for the new teachers' and heads' continuous professional development were put in place.

To retain teachers, deputy heads and heads, the district leaders claimed that the helped develop school infrastructure and create conditions that supported meaningful teaching and learning. Also it was found important for the district to recognise teachers' achievement. On the issue of teacher retention, Abele, Iver & Farley, (2003: 15) argue that assigning newly-appointed teachers "to the most challenging classrooms and schools" might undermine the district office's attraction and retention of good teachers". Moore, Rosenblatt and Badgett (2018: 2 923) agree that "Workplace conditions have a large impact on the teacher turnover rate … [with] attrition linked to instructional leadership, school culture, collegial relationships … professional development resources, [and] facilities". Workplace conditions seem to either motivate or demotivate the new teachers and heads. Besides financial rewards, recognition for achievement might be significant teacher and head retention factors. Furthermore, district office leaders might find it very productive to maintain healthy interpersonal relations with the new teachers and heads although this requires a lot of time on the part of the district leaders.

Staff turnover

The district leaders claimed that on several occasions, they pressurised problem teachers to transfer from the district. However, teachers were also discharged from service when they grossly contravened disciplinary statutes. Donaldson and Papay (2012)'s concur that though a district evaluation system might aim to improve every

teacher through prompt feedback, it should not only recognise outstanding teacher performance, but also transparently, efficiently, and fairly remove consistent underperformers. In my opinion, problem teachers might require the district leaders' prompt but honest feedback that they are misbehaving. As a selected group, these teachers might benefit from targeted professional development interventions that could run for a specified timeframe. Then the teachers could be allowed to continue with their duties with the district officials keeping a watchful eye on their progress. Jumping to discharging the errant teachers, which quite often they are deemed to deserve, might not be the best remedy.

The study established that the school management structure was the platform from which a replacement was drawn following the substantive head's or deputy head's demotion, retirement, resignation, transfer to another school, promotion, or death. However, that succession was through the traditional post advertisement, recruitment and selection process. I recall another way in which teachers were promoted to substantive heads decades ago without going through the stated traditional way. A senior teacher was sometimes placed in an acting head position and stayed there for at least four years after which a team of district officials visited that school and carried out a full supervisory inspection. If the resultant report was more than satisfactory, then the ministry rewarded the acting head with a substantive appointment. This strategy was phased out following, it appears, loopholes such as nepotism, favouritism and bribery involving the district officials and the prospective acting head appointees.

5.2.2.2 Focused professional development

The study showed that the district office departments seemed to organise need-driven circuit-level and district-level workshops for heads, deputy heads, Teachers in Charge/Heads of Department, and teachers once or twice per year. The cluster level training workshops were also found necessary when something new was introduced in the district. Sometimes Training of Trainer (TOT) workshops at the national level workshopped teachers that were expected to cascade the training to the provincial, district, cluster and school levels. However, inadequacies have been identified in this this approach to professional development since one-time workshops, seminars and/or conferences do not effectively improve teacher instructional practices (De Clercq & Phiri, 2013; Kennedy, 2014; Levine & Marcus, 2010). Moreover, information

distortion or misinterpretation is inevitable as the information precipitates to the recipient teachers (Bett, 2016; Dichaba & Mokhele, 2012). The one-time workshops, seminars and/or conferences have been criticised for their lack of effectiveness in improving teacher instructional practices. Perhaps this could be so because some teachers might not be receiving the specific professional development that they require. The needs identification for the need-driven workshops might only have covered teacher groups but neglecting individual teachers' unique needs. In addition, the time allocated for the workshops might be inadequate. However, contextually Zimbabwe, as a developing country, might not have the capacity to adopt the more elaborate and more time consuming professional development strategies for its district offices. With regards to information distortion or misinterpretation as the information precipitated to the recipient teachers, sometimes the workshop facilitators might not have been adequately trained, or might not be competent in content mastery or the actual presentation. However, the workshop beneficiaries themselves deserve their share of the blame.

The district leaders encouraged heads, officers at the district office and teachers to enrol at universities and develop their careers. It emerged that in the government funded Teacher Capacity Development programme, the beneficiaries' teaching practice was expected to improve. However, the programme seemed not to cater for special class teachers that were not trained to handle such classes. Furthermore, it emerged that secondary school teachers benefited from subject panels at the district and provincial levels but their primary school counterparts did not. Rosen and Parise (2017) are convinced that district initiated professional development, while requiring regular evaluation to determine its impact, should not only have a direct alignment with both teaching and learning and the wider aspect of school or district development plan, but should also focus on heads' and teachers' identified needs. The Teacher Capacity Development programme seemed not to cater for special class teachers that were not trained to handle such classes. This indicates that the district officials still have to intervene and ensure that the neglected special class teachers are included in the selection of beneficiaries. The national thrust for inclusive education cannot be realised when the special education class teachers that should spearhead the initiative from the classroom are left out of the this crucial preparation for it. Furthermore, it could be difficult to understand why secondary school teachers benefited from subject

panels at the district and provincial levels while their primary school counterparts did not. Since the primary school teacher teaches all the prescribed number of subjects to his/her class, this could be the more reason why that teacher should undergo professional development that is more or less similar to the secondary school one.

However, a health needs assessment at the provincial and district levels enabled all the primary and secondary school teachers to have two health masters per school trained at the district level or at their schools. The expected outcome was school self-sufficiency in the availability and effective use of toilets, clean and safe drinking water, and waste disposal systems. Cole *et al.* (2012) concur when they prove that head and teacher assessments guide the district leaders to plan and implement relevant and productive teacher professional development initiatives.

5.2.2.3 Supervising schools

The district leaders' core business was found to be the supervision of all primary and secondary schools to enhance the desired quality education outcomes. District, cluster and school level workshops were considered as a critical supervision tool after needs assessments to identify commonalities or gaps to guide the workshop content and target beneficiaries. That means district, cluster and school level workshops have to be appropriately prepared for the intended supervisory outcomes. It is also important to expect these workshops not only to strike a balance between theory and practice, but also to be long enough to benefit the target groups. In addition, the district officials need to gain expertise from, for example, conferences, seminars and workshops to enhance their skills in using workshops effectively for school supervision. Recent study findings, Goldring *et al.* (2018: 60), confirm that districts should continuously

> … clarify, adopt, and specify standards for instructional leadership … [and] also … implement supervisor training that aligns with a clear definition of instructional leadership so that supervisors can support and develop principal leadership.

The district leaders seemed to consider school visits at least once per year per school as also important in supervision. Yes, the district leaders' school visits are important. However, the district officials might fall into the tendency of visiting the performing schools much more than they visit their underperforming counterparts. However, the district leaders' presence and support is more desirable in the performing schools.

In addition, the Quality Control department implemented the Results-Based Personnel Performance System (RBPPS) whose thrust was on infrastructural development, supervision, Non-Formal Education and governance. In agreement, Brown-Sims (2010) proposes that the district office staff conduct an annual assessment of every head to determine their effectiveness in managing, for example, teachers, stakeholders, and finances. This performance appraisal system's scope appears to cover a wide spectrum of responsibilities of educational personnel in schools. However, provided the district officials, heads and teachers do not hoodwink the system by cutting corners, then the outcomes would be valid and reliable.

With funding from NAPH and NASH, the district leaders managed to organise subject panel meetings for secondary teachers, and to design termly schedules to assist the low performing schools in the national primary and secondary schools examinations. In that regard, Lonyian and Kuranchie (2018) advocate for the professional development of principals through district principal supervisors that do not only visit schools and meet with principals with a focus on instruction improvement issues, but also conduct very productive professional development sessions that develop principals' instructional leadership skills. In another recent study, Nkambule and Amsterdam (2018: 1) agree that South African school district education officials have an obligation to visit every school in the district "at least once per term, with more frequent visits to schools requiring stronger support for monitoring, [and] guidance". Subject panels seem to play an important role in the professional development of secondary school teachers. However, teachers in primary schools might equally benefit from this intervention if they were provided access to it. I am sure that virtual subject panel meetings are under consideration as teaching and learning is progressing in the new normal Covid-19 environment. In addition, the district originated termly schedule that is meant to assist the low performing schools in the national primary and secondary schools examinations appears to be a reasonable starting point. Perhaps the district officials could accommodate input relating to the way forward from the individual affected schools themselves since each school's challenges might be unique.

5.2.2.4 Development in schools

School development plans

The district leaders helped schools craft budgets and school development plans (SDPs) and then they monitored plan implementation. The school development plans included, among others, infrastructure development, material provision, and financial plans. However, Farley-Ripple (2012: 794) is convinced that a school development plan that is "meant for compliance purposes only" and that gathers dust "on the shelf … [is] not an effective way to drive instruction or to improve instruction". The involvement of parents and the local community as stakeholders seems not to have been made reference to by the district leaders. This implies that their valuable contribution to the school development plans might not be considered, leaving a yawning gap in the school development outcomes.

Teaching and learning resources

With the new curriculum insisting on learner interaction with textbooks, the district leaders monitored the proper management of the School Improvement Grant (SIG) procured textbooks to ensure that every primary and secondary school had adequate textbooks for the learners. To boost Information Communication Technology in school development, the district leaders also encouraged heads to electrify schools and to procure digital technology. Resource procurement and management seem to be critical practices that directly support effective teaching and learning. However, the practices could be further improved if the district leaders insisted that each school avail library and ICT laboratory facilities to the learners despite the prevailing harsh economic environment. In that light, Avidov-Ungar and Nagar (2015) emphasise the need for the district office leaders to ensure that the district office and all schools have modern technological infrastructure that would assist administrators and teachers to significantly improve teaching and learning. Leithwood (2013) argues that although district senior finance leaders' knowledge is critical, aligning the district's resource allocation with improved instruction and learner achievement requires the collective effort of the other district senior personnel, operations and academic programme leaders.

Staff considerations

The study showed that the district leaders ensured that all schools were properly staffed. However, the Learner Welfare, Psychological Services and Special Needs

Education department revealed that some of their special classes and resource units in the primary schools were being taught by teachers that were not trained for special education. Since proper staffing was found to be an integral part of school development it, therefore, becomes imperative for the human resources unit of the central office to be strategic in engaging the most suitable teachers and heads for the available positions (Heller, 2018). In addition, Campbell *et al.,* (2018) stress that school improvement heavily relies on teachers and principals that have skill, commitment, and are well-positioned. It appears that staffing special classes and resource units in the primary schools is a perennial challenge for the district leaders. However, the unavailability of relevantly qualified teachers on the job market could be circumvented in the long term by, for example, introducing in-service training and continuous professional development programmes targeting the teachers in question. It might also be worthwhile to adopt attaching such teachers to their qualified and experienced counterparts, few as they may be.

Furthermore, close monitoring of low performing schools involved the district supervising fortnightly tests that the heads submitted to the district with the teachers' and the heads' test evaluation comments. This was aimed at determining the source of that underperformance and deciding on a remedy. Campbell *et al.,* (2018) agree that district leaders are directly responsible for providing technical support to schools that underperform. The fortnightly tests, to a certain extent, might assist the underperforming schools to improve. However, the district officials might consider identifying and adopting other strategies since the factors contributing to each school's underperformance could be diverse and unique. Therefore, employing testing as the panacea to school underperformance might not be effective.

In all primary schools, teachers implemented the Early Reading Initiative (ERI), focusing on improving teaching and learning, and the Performance Lag Address Programme (PLAP), focusing on learners' literacy and numeracy skills development with the district office closely monitoring. While the ERI and the PLAP aimed at improving the learners' reading, literacy and numeracy skills, there might be no reliable evidence that all the primary schools have adopted the two programmes in their spirit. Although evidence points to the fact that a few teachers per school are workshop-trained to subsequently train their colleagues back at their respective schools. Distortion and exaggeration of information through interpretation might not be ruled

out. Furthermore, attitudinal factors might also come into play much to the detriment of programme implementation. However, in spite of these drawbacks, those primary schools that have seriously embraced and implemented the ERI and the PLAP might significantly improve their learners' reading, literacy and numeracy skills.

Water and sanitation

The district leaders seemed to prioritise water access and waste disposal. They encouraged schools to partner the District Development Fund so that they would reliably sources clean water within the school premises or within one kilometre radius of the school. A user-friendly environment for teachers and learners goes a long way to promote improved teaching and learning outcomes. Therefore, district leaders need to pay particular attention to those schools that might be struggling to meet the minimum water and sanitation standards.

School management

The district leaders seemed to attach great importance to the effective management of all schools in the district to bring about inclusive quality education. They insisted on school leadership and management that was responsive to the diversified needs of learners including special education learners. To boost teaching and learning in line with a clearly articulated mission, the district office leadership intended to design and implement a strategic plan that focused on reform at every level of the district. Inclusive quality education seems to take on board all learners regardless of their physical or mental disability. Therefore, the district office leadership's intention to design and implement a strategic plan that focused on reform at every level of the district might be coming in a bit late. Such an intervention could have been put in place as early as inclusive education became a topical issue. However, it is better late than never.

5.2.3 Taking stakeholders and partners on board

The Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ) District Management Committee

The Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ) District Management Committee at each of the two districts comprised the National Association of Primary Heads

representatives, the National Association of Secondary Heads representatives, the primary and secondary male and female teacher representatives, the School Development Committee representative, and the business community representative. This committee was responsible for managing the funds that schools pooled together to finance the district operations to support teaching and learning in the schools. It also emerged that state internal auditors audited the district BSPZ fund account annually and the committee reported to the Provincial Education Director and the Permanent Secretary to ensure accountability and transparency. The mandate of the BSPZ District Management Committee, it emerged, was to generate revenue and expend it to enhance the implementation of all district educational programmes. Aldaihani (2017) has conclusively shown that district officials help in problem resolution through, among others, developing partnership and educational stakeholder relationships. As a corporate body, the BSPZ District Management Committee appears to be responsible for procuring and managing funds to finance the operations of the district office in line with supporting teaching and learning in schools. It also seems that the BSPZ has taken over most of central government's responsibilities of funding the district office. In actual fact, the bulk of the BSPZ funds directly come from the schools where each learner is thus levied. Since the BSPZ has been adopted as a pseudo government entity, state internal auditors have to audit the district BSPZ fund account every year. Reporting to the Provincial Education Director and the Permanent Secretary, the committee is expected to be accountable and transparent.

Transparency and teamwork

To enhance a high degree of ownership of the district programmes, the BSPZ District Management Committee oversaw transparency in the district operations and fostered teamwork. Although influential members of the committee appeared to influence critical decisions in the committee's termly meetings, their contributions were seen as pivotal in the resultant district office effective operational and developmental strategies. Hitt *et al.,* (2018: 11) in deed agree that it is the district's responsibility to explicitly clarify each individual's role in supporting school development and learner progress, while creating room for "the school community to come together to discuss, explore, and reflect on student learning". Teamwork seemed to accommodate divergent thoughts and ideas. The teams appeared to benefit immensely from each

member's contribution as long as the input was aligned with the team's aims, objectives and purposes. As such, teams might not be effective and efficient if all members thought alike, although in this case the stated influential members of the BSPZ District Management Committee might need restrain here and there.

5.2.4 Impediments in structure

Inadequate staff

Understaffing in two departments appeared to compromise the supervision of schools in the two districts under study. Firstly, significant understaffing was evidenced by the availability of three Schools Inspectors in the Quality Control department instead of eight per district. Secondly, in the Finance, Administration and Human Resources department there was only one District Administration Assistant per district instead of two to supervise financial management in schools. This contradicts Honig and Rainey (2015)'s observation that supervisors can become progressively more capable of helping principals only if they receive on-going support, too. This study has established that the Schools Inspectors constituted the backbone for supervising schools, while the District Administration Assistants contributed in monitoring school finances and assets. Therefore, leaving the two departments as inadequately staffed as the study has shown results in the undersupervision of teachers, school finances and assets. Eventually, the learners might be neglected by the relaxed school staff, much to the detriment of quality teaching and learning outcomes.

Policy shifts

Some heads and teachers interpreted non-formal education responsibilities as extra work to them since remuneration here was erratic due to policy shifts in the payment of Non-Formal Education teachers' salaries. They ended up abandoning the Non-Formal Education programmes, thus ignoring the policy directive for every school to implement Non-Formal Education programmes. Therefore, the district leaders seemed to face difficulties in enacting policy implementation enforcement. Przybylski *et al.,* (2018) concur that there are challenges to the district's smooth performance of duties, some of which might arise from inevitable pressure from different levels, especially from higher offices. While the heads' and teachers' argument that they were getting a raw deal with regards to their NFE conditions of work might hold water, they

should not ignore commitment and dedication to their work as professionals. In that regard, it might be necessary for the district officials to put in place mechanisms that would positively change such heads' and teachers' mindset.

5.2.5 Obstacles in practice

Negative attitude towards special education

The study revealed that some of the teachers of the "regular" learners displayed a negative attitude towards learners in special education classes. Sometimes there was communication breakdown among learners with hearing impairment, those with visual impairment and their teachers that were taking special classes but were not qualified for them sometimes failed to effectively communicate with the learners living with disabilities that constituted those classes. Such teachers also appeared to fail to engage the special education learners in inclusive sporting activities. In a major study, Smith (2003: 8) confirms that "… providing services to students with disabilities is a moral imperative, a federal equity mandate and one of the most troubled areas of . . . education". Likewise, Lemons *et al.* (2019: 1) insist:

> Special education administrators at both the district and school level are serving in critical roles that uniquely position them to improve academic and behavioural outcomes of students with disabilities by ensuring the special education teachers under their supervision … are able to deliver special education services …

The district officials might not be doing enough to attend to the attitudinal and staffing challenges. Considerations for specified professional development and in-service training for these teachers might be necessary to fill the identified gaps for the sake of the affected leaners.

Parental attitude to payment of school fees

It was found that the parents had a low response to pay school fees and levies for their children in both primary and secondary schools. This was attributed to the new Zimbabwe constitution's provision that no learners should be sent away from school for failing to pay school fees and levies. This implies provisions for every child's free and compulsory education on the one hand, and all citizens' and permanent residents' State-funded education on the other. Some of the far reaching effects of this non-payment of fees, according to some of the study participants, included disruptions in

the production of supervision reports by the district office since money trickled into the district BSPZ account, difficulties for heads to run small schools, and failure by some schools to efficiently implement the school child feeding programme. The non-payment of fees is a challenge that is directly felt by the individual schools and the district at large. However, it appears there might not be a clear way forward for some time until amendments to the constitution, relating to the payment of school fees, are effected. Przybylski *et al.,* (2018) confirm that despite the increasing demand for district offices to meet annual achievement targets relating to learner performance standards, a significant number of district offices are exposed to obstacles such as high levels of students from poor families and inadequate human, material, and financial resources.

It was established that limited financial resources to acquire accounting packages, unstable markets for goods and services, and frequent shifts in the multiple pricing system in the economy posed further challenges in the district operations. It also emerged that primary schools seemed to entrust the management of school finances to school personnel that were not trained or experienced in financial management. The outcome was strain in the district leaders that had to rigorously train these teachers. Although the district officials indicated that they were straining to correct the situation, it seems the relaxation of the restrictive policies is necessary. It also appears imperative for the primary schools to engage relevantly trained and experienced people to manage their finances.

Misconduct

Indiscipline among teachers and heads was reported. However, heads appeared to be more involved in acts of misconduct than teachers. These included their neglect of internal school supervision duty, involvement in financial indiscipline, organisation of very few staff development workshops for teachers at the schools, and late submission of important returns to the district office.

It also emerged that some heads shielded themselves with the inaccessibility of their schools by road and by phone during the rainy season to neglect their work. Therefore, it was felt that such a high degree of negligence bordered on incompetence that did not resonate with instructional leadership. The district leaders blamed some of this

indiscipline on their lack of capacity to be more visible in all schools throughout the year. Although it might be logical for the district leaders to take punitive action against the errant teachers and heads, Campbell *et al.,* (2018) advocate for a district office systematic support, as opposed to punishment, for wayward heads and teachers. Such seemingly misguided practice, they are convinced, may have detrimental effects on the intimidated and threatened principals and teachers in the schools that may lead to a ripple effect on student learning and performance. The disclosed indiscipline among heads, teachers and learners might require the district leaders' self-introspection. Furthermore, nipping the indiscipline trend in the bud might require the district officials to consider mounting aggressive professional development for the identified heads and teachers. In this way, the effectiveness of the district leaders' instructional leadership support to schools could be more credible.

Inadequate resources

The outcome of the availability of inadequate financial and material resources was reported to be work inconsistency. Schools seemed to be struggling to make their regular financial contributions to the BSPZ district fund account leading to the district having, for example, insufficient diesel supply for the back-up generator, inadequate computers/laptops, and unreliable motor vehicles. Besides interfering with effective teaching and learning, these setbacks also seemed to stall key district operations such as visiting problem schools, attending to urgent reported cases of child abuse and monitoring the administration of public examinations. This implies that the district office heavily relies on the BSPZ funding for its operations. There is, therefore, the need for the district to get supplementary resource support from other players such as central government, the donor community and well-wishers. Fisher (2003: 4) acknowledges that it is imperative for districts to engage "expertise and resources that the districts themselves often do not possess" to improve and maintain learner achievement through "developing, implementing, and sustaining systemic reform" that transcends the mediatory advocacy, technical assistance and fund-raising.

5.3 Contributions of the study to literature

Despite the limitations of the study and my awareness that no single study can provide all answers to questions about instructional leadership, I have a strong conviction that

this study begins to contribute to the scholarship on district leaders' perspectives on instructional leadership structures and practices at the district office. It focuses not only on how the district office is structured, but goes further to investigate what these structures actually do to support teaching and learning in schools. Following observations of the top-down, command-and-control district office-school interactions, coupled with district offices' relatively limited capacity to provide assistance to schools, Honig (2008) suggests that there should be more research to establish what the district office structures actually do every day that might support teaching and learning improvements. It is partly because of this suggestion on the need for more research on district leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership that I was prompted to investigate whether and how the district office structures are aligned to their supervisory responsibilities in terms of instructional leadership tasks specifically. Therefore, the study provides insights into the instructional leadership support that the district officials offer to schools.

The present study has pointed out that structural organisation is pivotal to the effectiveness of instructional leadership as it might encourage or discourage the symbiotic relationship between the district office leadership on the one side, and heads and teachers on the other. By disclosing the inadequacies of the district structures for instructional leadership, the current study provides crucial insights on how to rationalise and manage similar district office institutions. Austin *et al.* (2007: 279) observe that the district office itself and the schools should "… have the right people in the right seats". In addition, Austin *et al.* (2007: 273) argue that largely constituting the district office leadership team with people that are experienced in supervising elementary schools may result in many secondary school leaders expressing "concerns that there was a lack of understanding of the needs of older children and high schools in particular".

It emerged in the study that Schools Inspectors criticised their exclusion from the induction of the newly-appointed heads and deputy heads. The Schools Inspectors disclosed that only the PSC and the human resources personnel conducted the induction training while, in the Schools Inspectors' view, they were not adequately informed on the head's roles and responsibilities, nor were they experienced in supervising heads. Subsequently, the Schools Inspectors blamed the

underperformance of some schools on their newly appointed heads' inadequate induction. The Schools Inspectors claimed that they deserved much more time with the newly-promoted heads and deputy heads at the dawn of their new jobs. A number of studies on districts (Abele *et al.,* 2003; Anderson & Turnbull, 2016) emphasise that central offices should effectively induct the recently-appointed principals in readiness for effective instructional practice and consistently provide new principals with supervisor and professional development support that is aligned to recent evaluation outcomes to improve teaching and learning. The fact that the Schools Inspectors in my study acknowledge the significance of induction training and their critical role in it (though they were denied the opportunity to participate) constitutes another part of my study's contribution to literature.

The current findings add to a growing body of literature on instructional leadership in many African countries and states within the United States of America (Lemons *et al.,* 2019; Tinab, 2014; Honig, 2008) focusing on district offices playing a very prominent role in the instructional supervision and support of primary and secondary schools within their jurisdiction. It is hoped, therefore, that this study's findings will make a significant contribution in informing researchers on the experiences of district office leaders' instructional leadership support to teaching and learning in schools in the context of a developing country. Through this study, researchers are welcome to discourse that encourages further studies on how the district office structures align themselves to instructional leadership practices that effectively support schools.

The findings from this study make more contributions to the current literature as first, the opinions of the district office leaders under study with regards to their expectations, demands and comments on their instructional leadership experiences inform leaders in other districts. Second, it confirms that there should be a collaborative effort between the district office leaders and the schools for more effective supervision outcomes by shifting their attention from mere policy compliance to actually supporting improvement in schools, as emphasised by Anderson and Togneri (2003). Third, the findings echo the need for, among others, quality instructional practices that lead to improvements in learner performance as observed by Evans (2008). Fourth, the study links the effectiveness of instructional leadership practices to the visibility, in schools, of the district office leaders, thus confirming Durand *et al.,* (2016)'s study findings. It is

the study's intention to open dialogue on relevant policies and structures at the district level that promote instructional leadership. In that regard, the study has demonstrated that structural organisation is aligned to instructional leadership as it may enhance or hinder team work within the district office structures.

There is not much research, it appears, on instructional leadership that links structure with function at the district level, especially in the context of developing countries like Zimbabwe. Research on the district office instructional leadership has mostly been carried out in America and Europe and, therefore, it is hoped that this study's significant contribution is to inform other researchers on the district office's mediatory role in providing instructional leadership support to primary and secondary schools in the context of a developing country.

Furthermore, the study has added literature on district specific instructional leadership support. Since much of the literature on instructional leadership does not directly relate to the district office sphere, my study makes a unique contribution as it focuses on the district office. Researchers, through this study, are challenged to discourse that provokes further studies on whether the district office structures provide instructional leadership support to primary and secondary schools as Mavuso and Moyo (2014: 1083) claim:

> … district leaders' most pivotal task is to support teachers in improving their instructional practice. This means that … district leaders should be well equipped with necessary skills to deliver their mandate in the interest of teaching and learning process at classroom level.

5.4 Conclusions

Considering the findings in this study, the researcher came to a conclusion that the district office structures seemed to denote people who were organised in alignment with their levels of responsibility, accountability and influence in decision-making. The structures implicitly fell under the "instructional" and "support" units. However, some of the district structures seemed to reel under inadequate staffing. Therefore, it can be further concluded that there was work inconsistency that could result in less effective district support to schools.

With regards to practices, it was established that some of the district leaders were involved in the recruitment and appointment of heads, deputy heads, and teachers.

Here, the PSC was guided by the outcomes of the Results-Based Management system and the applicant database. This hinted at some degree of transparency despite the discomfort among some of the district leaders who felt that they were not fully involved in the recruitment and induction of the heads and deputy heads although they were later fully engaged in their professional development and supervision.

In supervision, while the current practice was that district teams visited schools, the majority of the district office leaders preferred individual visits to team visits, and the need for each of the departments to be provided with a motor vehicle. Furthermore, since some of the participants went out of their way to introduce other supervision strategies such as phone calls to heads, heads' whatsapp videos of school activities, and photographs of schools' end of term reports, it can be concluded that the district leaders were not only insisting on thorough and intensive school supervision, but were adopting ICT as a more adaptive and modern supervision strategy.

Since it was established that the district officials required annual conferences and twinning with district leaders of other countries, it can be concluded that the district leaders lacked exposure to external environments, a professional development strategy that could further enrich their instructional leadership practices.

From the findings, it can also be concluded that through district-monitored school development plans (SDPs), all schools had benefitted from the Unicef donations of core textbooks, a resource that is pivotal in improving teaching and learning.

The BSPZ District Management Committee had emerged as a typical district stakeholder/partner support model whose major target was operational efficiency and teamwork. Therefore, it can be deduced that this corporate body had more or less taken over the funding of the key district operations.

The evidence from this study suggests parents' low response to the payment of school fees and levies for their children in both primary and secondary. Though this comes as no surprise since this parental attitude is a topical issue in the country today, it can be concluded that the low levels of school income from fees indicate inadequate district support to school development in that regard. In essence, this parental attitude seems to dilute the district leaders' efforts to strengthen school infrastructure development, monitor and supervise financial administration, and oversee

procurement and asset management practices to facilitate environments that are conducive to education, including the education for special needs learners.

5.5 Recommendations for instructional leadership practice

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice.

1. The district leaders should consider the engagement of relevantly qualified and substantive officials to address the disclosed current work inconsistency (overworking) that could compromise the effectiveness of the district support to schools.

2. Annual conferences for, and twinning of the district leaders with district leaders of other countries could further professionally develop the district leaders. In addition, the district should invite expert trainers from the provincial office and head office levels to facilitate in workshops for heads on sound school financial management and disciplinary issues. Rentner and Kober (2014) confirm that the districts are in control of barriers and limitations regarding curricula, teaching and learning, professional development, and measurement of learner achievement when they receive continuous state technical support.

3. The evidence from this study suggests parents' low response to the payment of school fees and levies for their children in both primary and secondary. For significant school development to be possible, it is recommended that the district leaders should organise outreach programmes targeting parents, the outcomes of which could be the improved levels of school income for significant school development. It might not be advisable for the district officials to wait for the authorities to, for example, effect amendments to the constitution regarding the payment of fees since these amendments might not change the attitudes of the parents.

4. Although the recruitment and appointment of heads, deputy heads, and teachers reflected some degree of transparency, critical district leaders such as the Schools Inspectors should be involved, more so in the induction of the heads and deputy heads to enhance professional relevancy.

5. The study further recommends that heads and curriculum designers change their attitude towards special classes and resource unit learners. In addition, the district office, with support from central government, could provide adequate financial and

material resources to support special education and mainstream education. This is a pointer towards inclusive education.

6. In supervision, while the current practice was that district teams visited schools, it is recommended that these be replaced by individual department visits after each of the district office departments has possibly been provided with a motor vehicle. This could make the district leaders more mobile and visible for their supervision initiatives to be more effective.

5.6 Recommendations for policy

There is a definite need for the MoPSE to revisit the staffing of all the departments at the district office. The ministry should, therefore, promptly appoint adequate substantive officials in all the departments of the district office to normalise their workloads without compromising the quality of their instructional leadership support to schools.

A critical requirement for effective district support to schools is the availability of financial and material resources. Therefore, to promote parental positive attitude towards paying school fees and levies, the government could enact policies that persuade parents to pay school fees and levies. Furthermore, the government could institute the amendment of the Zimbabwe Constitution's section on fees payment accordingly. Silvernail and Linet (2014) state that a great deal of the district challenges are of a fiscal nature and they need the collective efforts of state policy makers and district offices to effect efficient and effective resource mobilisation and utilisation for quality teaching and learning.

Government supported financial management training with, for example, accounting packages could ensure computerised accounting was in place at the district for increased financial management efficiency that subsequently benefited schools.

The responsible authorities and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and other stakeholders could assist schools to connect to a power source, acquire computers, drill water boreholes, and connect to the Internet for Information Communication Technology programme implementation.

The study recommends that where the ministry or the responsible authorities are overwhelmed, government could consider introducing policies that are conducive to the establishment of new schools that could be more or less similar to the private and independent schools in Zimbabwean. In other countries, some of these schools seem to be providing services to learners of a diverse nature although they demand very high fees. Hassel *et al.,* (2004: 2) support the option for "creating new, smaller and more diverse teaching and learning environments" since many districts in the USA have acknowledged that new schools are a step in the right direction as they not only reform the educational system but also cater for the diverse needs and choices of learners.

Current thinking suggests that, rather than focusing our attention on the observed inadequacies of the current district offices, it is perhaps more progressive and productive to selflessly engage experts, consultants, and other renowned think tanks in the field of educational management and administration. Their contribution towards the development and establishment of a district education office organisational model that will support schools better than the existing one may be the light at the other end of the tunnel.

5.7 Limitations of the study

A number of important limitations need to be considered. Firstly, the case study design provides little basis for the generalization of results to the wider population (Bhattachergee, 2012). Therefore, generalising the findings of this study to all districts of Zimbabwe might not be possible bearing in mind that the study focused on two district offices of the ten provinces of Zimbabwe.

Secondly, although case study has been proved difficult to replicate (Yin, 2011), I have ensured that other researchers can replicate this study by using a similar population, sites and procedures that I used. However, it should be borne in mind that the passage of time might interfere as there might be shifts in policy that might slightly affect some of the replicate study findings.

Therefore, different findings may be obtained from similar research conducted in other district offices in Zimbabwe. If, for example, the sample comprises substantive district officials and is drawn from a population that is not exposed to understaffing in the

replicate study in other districts, then the respondents' responses to some of the interview questions might not be similar to those in my study.

Thirdly, though I tried as much as I could to be objective throughout the study, case study has been criticised for the fact that the researchers' own subjective feeling may influence the study (Yin, 2014). I tried as much as possible to ensure that my questions were neutral and did not hint to the participants what I might have wanted to hear. I also triangulated data from interviews with that from documents for me to more confidently claim that my findings were credible. The use of open-ended questions was meant to elicit truthful and honest answers rather than the simple "yes" or "no". Apart from carefully wording my different questions differently to avoid bias, I tried to make the questions engaging throughout the interview.

Fourthly, Yamashita and Moonen (2014) stress that conducting case study research can be time-consuming and expensive. Therefore, the period of study might have restricted the researcher to access data from a particular time of the year. Data for this study were gathered towards the end of the year and not at the beginning of the year.

Finally, I acknowledge that there is no observation data in my study since I did not use that tecnique and relied on perception interviews and documents only. It is true that my data could have been more enriched by observation data. This is because the observation technique allows the researcher to take note of the things that the respondents might not be aware of, or are uncomfortable to share in an interview. Data thus generated should complement the data from the interviews and documents. However, I am convinced that my study's thick, detailed and rich descriptions from the interviews, supported by the apt documents analysis compensated for the absence of observation data.

5.8 Personal reflection

This study has contributed immensely to me as a researcher of instructional leadership. After reading several scholarly perspectives on the concept of instructional leadership, coupled with personal interactions with my supervisor, institutional authorities, informants and participants, I have gained significant knowledge on instructional leadership. As an educational innovation, the instructional leadership support that district leaders provide to schools clearly demonstrates a shift from the

traditional top down approaches. Instead, instructional leadership is evidenced by the district officials dedicating the bulk of their work time connecting with heads and teachers in schools for the subsequent improvement of both the schools and the learners.

I have also learnt that the structural organisation of the district office is critical as a determinant to the nature of the relationship that exists between the district leaders, heads and teachers. It still echoes in my mind that the frequent and regular presence of the district office leaders in schools was, indeed, fundamental for improved teaching and learning outcomes, and so were resource mobilisation and availability to make that visibility a reality. Apart from having shared with the district officials their experiences of instructional leadership support to teaching and learning in schools, this research is one of the few studies on the instructional role of district education offices in the context of a developing country.

It is my hope that this study has informed researchers on the experiences of district office leaders in providing instructional leadership support to teaching and learning in schools in a low income country. Furthermore, it is envisaged that the study has demonstrated that structural organisation may enhance or hinder team work within the district office structures. In this regard, scholars in instructional leadership are invited to carry out further studies on how the district office structures align to instructional leadership practices to effectively support schools, especially in developing countries.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

About this Interview Protocol

Welcome and thank you for coming to participate in this interview today. I am Michael Muswere and I am a post-graduate student in the School of Education Studies at the University of the Free State (UFS). I am carrying out my research in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. I would like to interview district office staff in leadership positions on their experiences of providing instructional leadership support to schools with regards to their needs, challenges, and perspectives on school improvement efforts. This information will be used to contribute to a knowledge base about the district office's instructional leadership support to schools in order to improve teaching and learning, particularly in the context of Zimbabwe. The developing knowledge base will contribute to the improvement of policy and practice in leadership in education generally.

Confidentiality

All information collected through this interview and/or other instruments will be treated confidentially. While reports and research articles will be developed from the responses, you are guaranteed that your name or the name of your district office will not appear in any of these reports. Furthermore, only the research staff associated with the project will have access to the information. Participation in this study is voluntary and any individual may withdraw at any time.

Content of the Interview Protocol

The interview protocol asks for information about your experiences and beliefs regarding the district office instructional leadership support to schools. You should be able to complete the interview in about 50 minutes. When in doubt about any question or aspect of the interview or if you have comments and/or suggestions to make, please do not hesitate to contact the project leader, Prof LC Jita at (051) 401 7522 or jitalc@ufs.ac.za

Questions

(1) Tell me about your position at the district office and how you people are organised? (Probe for the section the participant belongs to, the number of people in that section and ask for supporting documents)

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(2) Let us consider instructional leadership support. How does your section operate in providing support to schools in the district? (Ask for supportive documents)

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(3) Now let us look at school development. What aspects do you focus on as critical for school development and why? (Ask for supportive documents)

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(4) Let us consider teacher recruitment and appointment. How is this done and when are teachers recruited and appointed? How are teachers evaluated and retained in/removed from the district?

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(5) Let us now consider leadership appointment and development. How do you recruit and appoint school heads? How do you develop the heads? Explain any retention and succession plans that may be in place. (Ask for supportive documents)

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(6) Our focus is now on professional development. Please tell me the professional development initiatives that you engage in. When and how do you carry these out? (Ask for supportive documents)

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(7) Now, let us consider the “district board of trustees” or its equivalent. Is there such a board and if so, please state its composition and explain why it is in existence. Briefly tell me how it operates. (Ask for supportive documents)

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(8) What challenges do you encounter in your work with schools?

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(9) Considering your responses to my previous questions, what suggestions do you make in order to improve the effectiveness of the instructional leadership support that you provide to schools? Please support each suggestion with an explanation.

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(10) Before concluding this interview, would you like to share anything else?

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Thank you for participating in the interview

Appendix B: Permanent Secretary's letter for request to conduct the research

15586 Philip Chatikobo Road

Runyararo West

Masvingo

10 April 2019

The Permanent Secretary

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education

P O Box CY 121

Causeway

Harare

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I hereby request permission to conduct research with officers in two district offices (Gutu and Zaka) in one of your provinces, Masvingo.

My name is Michael Muswere, and I am presently studying for a Doctor of Philosophy degree with the University of the Free State. As part of my Doctoral programme, I am required to conduct research on an aspect of interest with a view to making a contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the issues under study. The title of my research project is:

District leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership in Zimbabwe

The purpose of the study is to examine district leaders' perspectives on the instructional leadership structures and practices at the district office level in Zimbabwe. I am particularly interested in investigating how the district office leaders can improve their practices in their instructional leadership support to schools in Zimbabwe. The study has the potential to benefit teachers, heads of schools, district office leaders and policy makers by pointing out challenges, the successes and the needs for supporting and improving teaching and learning in Zimbabwe. This study will enable participants in this project to take ownership of instructional leadership support to schools. Participants will be assisted to work competently, effectively and independently. The two districts will benefit from this project since they are directly involved in the project and research findings will be shared with them. The Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education will also benefit as the findings will be shared with its leadership for possible policy amendments.

The study will involve: 1) 11 interviews per district office, at the time convenient to the district office leadership comprising the District Schools Inspector, Education Officers, District Accountant, District Administration Assistant, Human Resources Officers, and District Lifelong Learning Coordinator; and 2) document analyses for purposes of understanding and probing instructional leadership structures and practices at the district office. The individual interviews are expected to last no more than 50 minutes per session.

A total of two district offices (purposely selected) will be used.

I undertake to observe confidentiality and to protect participants from physical and/or psychological harm. No names of the district offices and/or persons shall be used in any reports of the research. All participants will be asked to participate voluntarily in the study and may withdraw at any time should they so wish. Upon the completion of the study, I undertake to provide the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education with a copy of the research report and to share my findings with the two district offices under study (and possibly other district offices) as necessary.

If you need any further information and/or have suggestions, please contact me and/or my research supervisor Professor Jita at E-mail address JitaLC@ufs.ac.za or (051) 4017521.

I hope my request will reach your favourable consideration.

Yours sincerely

Michael Muswere

Cell: +263 773 365 898 (E-mail: mikemuswere@gmail.com)

Appendix C: Provincial Education Director's letter for request to conduct the research

15586 Philip Chatikobo Road

Runyararo West

Masvingo

10 April 2019

The Provincial Education Director

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education

P O Box 89

Masvingo

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I hereby request permission to conduct research with officers in two district offices (Gutu and Zaka) in your province.

My name is Michael Muswere, and I am presently studying for a Doctor of Philosophy degree with the University of the Free State. As part of my Doctoral programme, I am required to conduct research on an aspect of interest with a view to making a contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the issues under study. The title of my research project is:

District leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership in Zimbabwe

The purpose of the study is to examine the district leaders' perspectives on the instructional leadership structures and practices at the district office level in Zimbabwe. I am particularly interested in investigating how the district office leaders can improve their practices in their instructional leadership support to schools in Zimbabwe. The study has the potential to benefit teachers, heads of schools, district office leaders and policy makers by pointing out challenges, the successes and the needs for supporting and improving teaching and learning in Zimbabwe. This study will enable participants

in this project to take ownership of instructional leadership support to schools. Participants will be assisted to work competently, effectively and independently. The two districts will benefit from this project since they are directly involved in the project and research findings will be shared with them. The Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education will also benefit as the findings will be shared with its leadership for possible policy amendments.

The study will involve: 1) 11 interviews per district office, at the time convenient to the district office leadership comprising the District Schools Inspector, Schools Inspectors, District Accountants, District Administration Assistant, Human Resources Officers, and District Lifelong Learning Coordinator; and 2) document analyses for purposes of understanding and probing instructional leadership structures and practices at the district office. The individual interviews are expected to last no more than 50 minutes per session.

A total of two district offices (purposely selected) will be used.

I undertake to observe confidentiality and to protect participants from physical and/or psychological harm. No names of the district offices and/or persons shall be used in any reports of the research. All participants will be asked to participate voluntarily in the study and may withdraw at any time should they so wish. Upon the completion of the study, I undertake to provide the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education with a copy of the research report and to share my findings with the two district offices under study (and possibly other district offices) as necessary.

If you need any further information and/or have suggestions, please contact me and/or my research supervisor Professor Jita at E-mail address JitaLC@ufs.ac.za or (051) 4017521.

I hope my request will reach your favourable consideration.

Yours sincerely

Michael Muswere

Cell: +263 773 365 898

(E-mail: mikemuswere@gmail.com)

Appendix D: District Schools Inspector's letter for request to conduct research in the district office

15586 Philip Chatikobo Road

Runyararo West

Masvingo

10 April 2019

The District Schools Inspector

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I hereby request permission to conduct research with officers in your district office.

My name is Michael Muswere, and I am presently studying for a Doctor of Philosophy degree with the University of the Free State. As part of my Doctoral programme, I am required to conduct research on an aspect of interest with a view to making a contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the issues under study. The title of my research project is:

District leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership in Zimbabwe

The purpose of the study is to examine the district leaders' perspectives on the instructional leadership structures at the district office level in Zimbabwe. I am particularly interested in how the district office leaders can improve their practices in instructional leadership support to schools in Zimbabwe. The study has the potential to benefit teachers, heads of schools, district office leaders and policy makers by pointing out challenges, the successes and the needs for supporting and improving teaching and learning in Zimbabwe. This study will enable participants in this project to take ownership of instructional leadership support to schools. Participants will be assisted to work competently, effectively and independently. Two districts will benefit from this project since they are directly involved in the project and research findings

will be shared with the districts. The Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education will also benefit as the findings will be shared with its authorities for possible policy amendments.

The study will involve: 1) 11 interviews, at the time convenient to the district office leadership comprising the District Schools Inspector, Schools Inspectors, District

Accountant, District Administration Assistant, Human Resources Officers, District and Lifelong Learning Coordinator; and 2) document analyses for purposes of understanding and probing instructional leadership structures and practices at the district office. The individual interviews are expected to last no more than 50 minutes per session.

A total of two district offices (purposely selected) will be used.

I undertake to observe confidentiality and to protect participants from physical and/or psychological harm. No names of the district offices and/or persons shall be used in any reports of the research. All participants will be asked to participate voluntarily in the study and may withdraw at any time should they so wish. Upon the completion of the study, I undertake to provide the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education with a copy of the research report and to share my findings with the two district offices under study (and possibly other district offices) as necessary.

I have already applied for permission from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education — through the Masvingo Provincial Education Director — to conduct the study.

If you need any further information and/or have suggestions, please contact me and/or my research supervisor Professor Jita at E-mail address JitaLC@ufs.ac.za or (051) 4017521.

I hope my request will reach your favourable consideration.

Yours sincerely

Michael Muswere

Cell: +263 773 365 898 (E-mail: mikemuswere@gmail.com)

Appendix E: Invitation letter to district office leaders to attend an interview

15586 Philip Chatikobo Road

Runyararo West

Masvingo

10 April 2019

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Dear Sir/Madam

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

I am presently studying for a Doctor of Philosophy degree with the University of the Free State. As part of my programme, I am conducting a research study entitled:

District leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership in Zimbabwe

The purpose of the study is to examine the perceived instructional leadership structures and practices at the district office level in Zimbabwe. You have been identified as one of the district office leaders, also known as instructional leaders and whose leadership practices I would like to learn from and then come up with strategies for improvement. The study has the potential to benefit teachers, heads of schools, district office leaders and policy makers by pointing out challenges, the successes and the needs for supporting and improving teaching and learning in Zimbabwe.

The study will involve: 1) 11 interviews per district office, at the time convenient to the district office leadership comprising the District Schools Inspector, Schools Inspectors, District Accountant, District Administration Assistant, Human Resources Assistants, and District Lifelong Learning Coordinator; and 2) document analyses for purposes of understanding and probing instructional leadership structures and practices at the district office. The individual interviews are expected to last no more than 50 minutes per session.

I undertake to observe confidentiality and to protect all participants from physical and/or psychological harm. No names of the district offices and/or persons shall be used in any report of the research. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time should you wish to do so.

Upon the completion of the study, I undertake to provide the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education with a copy of the research report and to share my findings with the leadership of the two district offices under study (and possibly other) districts as necessary.

If you need any further information and/or have suggestions, please contact me and/or my research supervisor Professor Jita at E-mail address JitaLC@ufs.ac.za or (051) 4017521.

I hope my request will reach your favourable consideration.

Yours sincerely

Michael Muswere

Cell: +263 773 365 898 (E-mail: mikemuswere@gmail.com)

If you agree to participate in the study entitled:

District leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership in Zimbabwe please complete the attached consent form

- I hereby give free and informed consent to participate in the abovementioned research study.
- I understand what the study is about, why I am participating and what the risks and benefits are.
- I give the researcher permission to use a recording device (yes/no).
- I give the researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from my participation, subject to the stipulations he has indicated in the above letter.

Participant's Signature: Date:

Researcher's Signature: Date:

Appendix F: Researcher's Curriculum Vitae

A. Personal details

Surname : Muswere

First Names : Michael

Sex : Male

Nationality : Zimbabwean

Date of Birth : 17 March, 1961

Residential Address : 15586 Philip Chatikobo Road, Runyararo West, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Postal Address : 15586 Philip Chatikobo Road, Runyararo West, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Marital Status : Married

Dependants : One

Home Language : Chishona

Student Number : 2015321264

Contact Number : +263773365898

Passport Number : Z A627392

B. Previous Experience

03/2016 to date : Part-Time Teaching Practice Supervisor (Bindura University of Science Education — Zimbabwe)

01/1984 to 08/2010 : Education Officer, Head and Teacher (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education — Zimbabwe)

C. Qualifications

PhD. (University of the Free State) Pending-Current Studies

M.B.A. (National University of Science and Technology) 2008

M.Ed. (Zimbabwe Open University) 2003 B.Ed. (University of Zimbabwe) 1991

P.T.C. (Bondolfi Teachers' College) 1983

Appendix G: Letter from the editor

CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

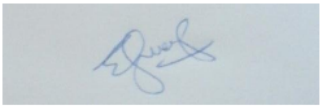
I, Edmore Zvinonzwa, Senior Assistant Editor with the Associated Newspapers Of Zimbabwe – publishers of the Daily News and the Daily News on Sunday – certify that I personally edited this thesis, titled District Leaders' Perspectives on Structures and Practices of instructional leadership in Zimbabwe in accordance with departmental and the University's regulations. On that basis, I confirm that this thesis is examinable.

NAME OF STUDENT: MUSWERE MICHAEL

STUDENT NUMBER: 2015321264

TITLE OF THESIS: District leaders' perspectives on the structures and practices of instructional leadership in Zimbabwe.

SIGNATURE OF EDITOR:



DATE: Thursday, July 29, 2021

NB: Please find below, editor's contact details.

CELL NO: 263772612386/263719612386

ADDRESS: House Number, 24, Shana Crescent, Zengeza 1, Chitungwiza

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Appendix H: Plagiarism Report

Turnitin Originality Report

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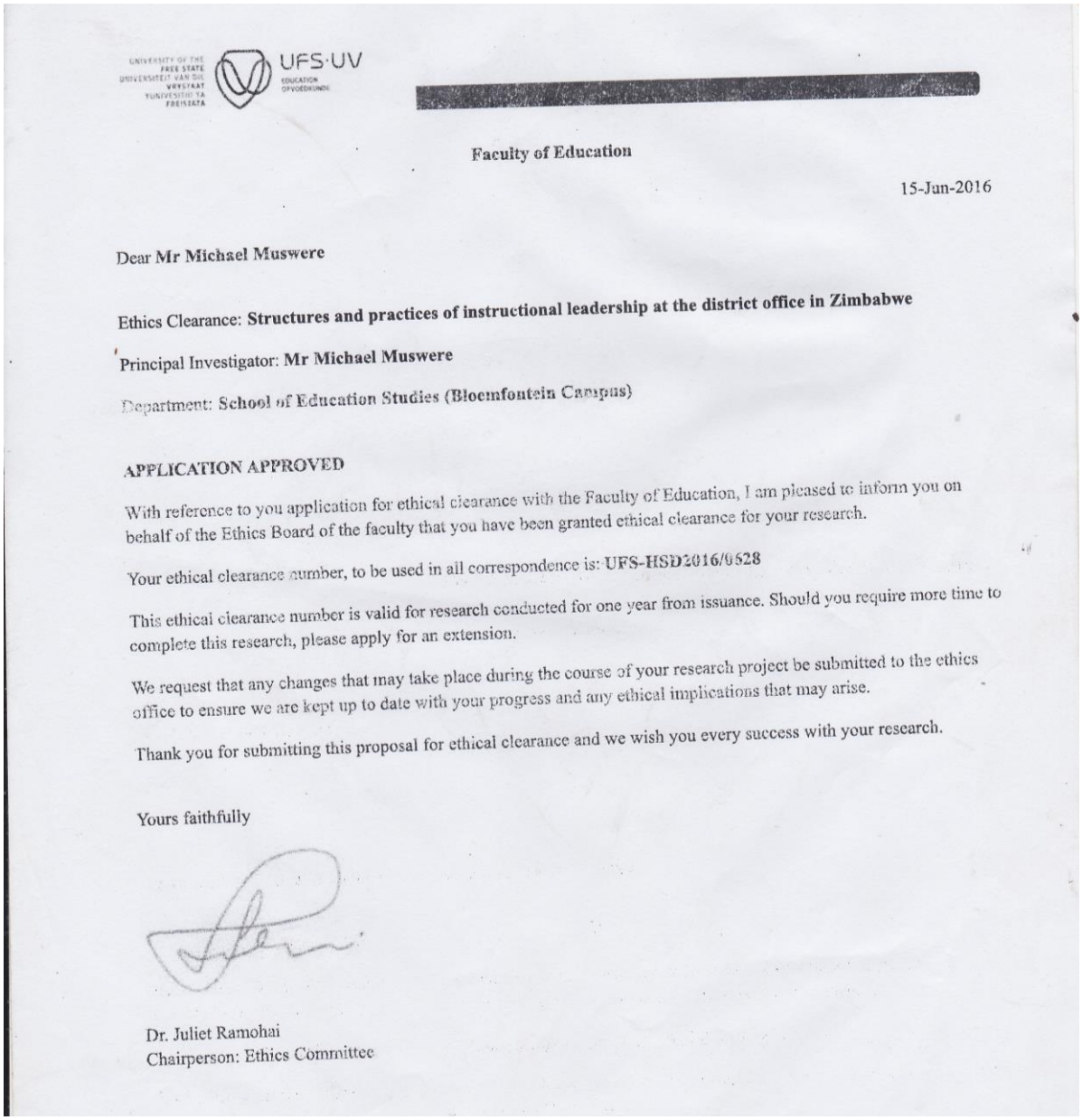
Appendix I: Ethics Clearance Letter



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[redacted]

Faculty of Education

15-Jan-2016

Dear **Mr Michael Muswere**

Ethics Clearance: **Structures and practices of instructional leadership at the district office in Zimbabwe**

Principal Investigator: **Mr Michael Muswere**

Department: **School of Education Studies (Bloemfontein Campus)**

APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to you application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Education, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2016/0528**

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours faithfully

Dr. Juliet Ramohai
Chairperson: Ethics Committee

Education Ethics Committee
Office of the Dean: Education
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