

**Exploring instructional leadership practices of School Management Teams in  
underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi District**

by

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## DECLARATION

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I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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SIGNATURE

17 May 2022

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DATE

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my late father, Henry Subramoney, for always supporting me throughout my academic journey. His financial support, words of encouragement and desire to see me succeed in my studies will never be forgotten. This study is also dedicated to my mother, Kogie Subramoney, for keeping me in her thoughts and prayers every day and motivating me to achieve all my goals in life. To them, I will always be thankful.

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## ABSTRACT

The study focused on exploring the instructional leadership practices of School Management Teams (SMTs) in three underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi District in KwaZulu-Natal that attained an overall pass rate of below 60% in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination over a period of three consecutive years, namely, 2019-2021. Furthermore, the study explored the extent to which SMT members enact instructional leadership through collaborative efforts as a team in their endeavours to improve learner academic performance. The theoretical framework of the study is underpinned by an extended model of instructional leadership derived from Weber's (1996) model of instructional leadership and elaborating on Hallinger's (2007) notion of shared instructional leadership with reference to continued discussion of this in the literature. The methodological approach of the study was underpinned by the constructivist paradigm and employed a qualitative research design via a multiple case study. Data were gathered by semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample of nine SMT members comprising of Heads of Departments (HODs), deputy principals (DPs) and principals from the three selected schools, and a document review. Findings indicated that although SMTs are aware of their instructional leadership responsibilities of managing the curriculum and instructional activities, the managerial and administrative overload they experience creates a challenging context. All three schools were fraught with various factors that impacted negatively on SMTs' instructional leadership practices; however, most SMT members' responses, as solicited in the study, signified a shared vision to improve learner academic performances through the planned interventions, as stipulated in their School Improvement Plan (SIP). The study revealed that the SMT members conveyed different perceptions of their roles in relation to each other, but they recognised the potential for shared instructional leadership to ease their workload through the distributed approach of instructional activities. However, they felt that the Department of Basic Education's (2016) Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) document, which contains their main job descriptions, did not make sufficient provision for this. The main recommendation offered was that, besides the instructional leadership of the SMT, leadership tasks should be shared and distributed to educators and the School Governing Body (SGB).

**Key words:** School Management Teams (SMTs), underperforming secondary schools, shared instructional leadership, School Improvement Plan (SIP), Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM)

## ISIFINQO

Lolu cwaningo belugxile ekuhloleni izindlela zokufundisa ubuholi bamaThimba Abaphathi Bezikole ezikoleni zamabanga aphezulu ezintathu ezingenzi kahle esiFundeni saseMlazi KwaZulu-Natal ezithole izinga lokuphasa elingaphansi kwama-60% ezivivinyweni zeNational Senior Certificate (NSC). Isikhathi seminyaka emithathu ilandelana, okungunyaka wezi-, 2019 ukuya kowezi-2021. Ngaphezu kwalokho, ucwaningo luhlale izinga amalungu eThimba Labaphathi Bezikole elisebenzisa ngalo ubuholi bokufundisa ngemizamo yokubambisana njengeqembu emizamweni yabo yokuthuthukisa ukusebenza kwabafundi ezifundweni. Uhlaka lwethiyori yocwaningo lusekelwe imodeli eyandisiwe yobuholi bokufundisa obususelwe kumodeli ka-Weber (1996) yobuholi bokufundisa futhi echaza ngombono ka-Hallinger (2007) wobuholi bokufundisa okwabiwe ngokubhekiselwe engxoxweni eqhubekayo yalokhu ezincwadini. Indlela yokwenza yocwaningo isekelwe eiparadimu yobuchwepheshe besitayela lapho izinto eziwumshini zihlanganiswa zibe amafomu eselula kuyisifinqo futhi yasebenzisa umklamo wocwaningo lwekhwalithi noma lesimo ngokusebenzisa ucwaningo lwezigameko eziningi. Idatha yaqoqwa ngenhlokhono ezihleliwe ngokungagcwele ngesampula enenjongo yamalungu ayisishiyagalolunye yeThimba Labaphathi Bezikole ahlanganisa iziNhloko zeMinyango, amaphini othishanhloko nothishanhloko bezikole ezintathu ezikhethiwe, kanye nokubuyezwa kombhalo. Okutholakele kubonise ukuthi nakuba iThimba Labaphathi Bezikole bazi ngezibopho zabo zobuholi bokufundisa zokuphatha ikharikhulamu nemisebenzi yokufundisa, umthwalo omningi wokuphatha kanye nokubhekwa okuhlobene nokuqhutshwa kwezikole, ababhekana nakho kudala umongo oyizinsalele. Zontathu izikole bezigcwele izici ezahlukahlukene ezibe nomthelela omubi ezinkambisweni zobuholi bokufundisa beThimba Labaphathi Bezikole; kodwa-ke, izimpendulo zamalungu amaningi eThimba Labaphathi Bezikole, njengoba ziceliwe ocwaningweni, zibonise umbono owabiwe wokuthuthukisa ukusebenza kwabafundi ezifundweni ngokungenelela okuhleliwe, njengoba kubekwe oHlelweni Lwabo Lokuthuthukisa Isikole (HLL). Ucwaningo lwaveza ukuthi amalungu eThimba Labaphathi Bezikole adlulisa imibono eyahlukene ngezindima zawo maqondana nomunye kuya komunye, kodwa abona amandla okuba nobuholi bokufundisa okwabelwana ngabo ukuze kudambise umsebenzi wawo ngokusebenzisa indlela esabalalisiwe yemisebenzi yokufundisa. Kodwa-ke, babone sengathi umqulu woMnyango Wezemfundo Eyisisekelo (2016) Izinyathelo Zokuphatha Zabasebenzi (IZZ), oqukethe izincazelo zawo ezisemqoka zomsebenzi, awuzange uhlinzekele lokhu. Isincomo esikhulu esanikezwa sasiwukuthi, ngaphandle kobuholi bokufundisa beThimba Labaphathi Bezikole, imisebenzi yobuholi kufanele yabelwane futhi yabelwe othisha kanye neSigungu Esilawula Isikole (SEI).

**Amagama abalulekile:** Amathimba Okuphatha Izikole, izikole zamabanga aphezulu ezingenzi kahle, ubuholi bokufundisa okwabelwana ngabo, Uhlelo Lokuthuthukisa Isikole (ULI), Izinyathelo Zokuphatha Zabasebenzi (IZZ)

## TSHOBOKANYO

Thutopatlisiso e ne e totile go tlhlotlhomisa ditiragatso tsa boeteledipele jwa thuto jwa Ditlhopho tsa Botsamaisi jwa Sekolo (diSMT) kwa dikolong tse tharo tse di sa diragatseng sentle kwa Kgaolong ya Umlazi kwa KwaZulu-Natal, tse di fitlheletseng seelo sa phalolo se se kwa tlase ga 60% mo ditlhatlhobong tsa Setifikeiti se Segolwane sa Bosetšhaba (NSC) mo pakeng ya dingwaga tse tharo tse di tlhomaganeng, e leng, 2019-2021. Mo godimo ga moo, thutopatlisiso e tlhlotlhomisitse ka moo ditokololo tsa SMT di diragatsang boeteledipele jwa go ruta ka maiteko a tirsanommogo jaaka setlhopho mo maitekong a tsona a go tokafatsa tiragatso ya dithuto ya barutwana. Letlhomiso la tiori la thutopatlisiso le theilwe mo sekaong se se atolositsweng sa boeteledipele jwa go ruta se se tswang mo sekaong sa ga Weber (1996) sa boeteledipele jwa go ruta mme se tlhalosa ntlha ya ga Hallinger (2007) ya boeteledipele jo bo tlhakanetsweng jwa go ruta go lebeletswe go tswela pele go tlhalosa seno mo dikwalong. Molebo wa mokgwatiriso wa thutopatlisiso o ne o theilwe mo molebong wa kago mme o dirisitse thadiso ya patlisiso e e lebelelang mabaka ka thutopatlisiso ya dikgetsi tse pedi gongwe go feta. Go kokoantswe *data* ka tiriso ya dipotsolotso tse di batlileng di rulagane ka sampole e e tserweng go ya ka dintlhatheo le maikemisetso a thutopatlisiso ya ditokololo tse robongwe tsa SMT tse di akareditseng Ditlhogo tsa Mafapha (diHOD), bathusabagoko (diDP) le bagokgo go tswa kwa dikolong tse tharo tse di tlhophilweng, gammogo le tshekatsheko ya dikwalo. Diphithlelelo di bontshitse gore le fa diSMT di itse maikarabelo a tsona a boeteledipele jwa go ruta a go tsamaisa kharikhulamo le ditiragatso tsa go ruta, go imelwa ke maikarabelo a botsamaisi le tsamaiso ka kakaretso go baka dikgwetlho. Dikolo tsotlhe ka boraro di aparetswe ke dintlha tse di farologaneng tse di amang ditiragatso tsa boeteledipele jwa go ruta jwa diSMT; fela ditsibogo tsa bontsi jwa ditokololo tsa SMT tse di bonweng mo thutopatlisisong di bontshitse ponelopele e e tlhakanetsweng ya go tokafatsa tiragatso ya barutwana ya thuto ka ditsereganyo tse di rulagantsweng, jaaka di tlhagisitswe mo Thulaganyong ya tsona ya Tokafatso ya Sekolo (SIP). Thutopatlisiso e senotse gore ditokololo tsa SMT di tlhagisitse megopolo e e farologaneng ya seabe sa tsona, fela di lemogile kgonagalo e e ka nnang teng fa go abelanwa boeteledipele jwa go ruta go fokotsa mokgweleo wa tiro ka mogopolo wa go phatlalatsa ditiragatso tsa go ruta. Fela, di bona e kete lekwalo la Lefapha la Thuto ya Motheo la Dikgato tsa Tsamaiso ya Badiri (2016), le le nang le ditlhaloso tsa ditiro tsa tsona tota, ga le a dira tlanelo e e lekaneng ya seno. Katlenegiso e kgolo e e dirilweng ke gore, kwa ntle ga boeteledipele jwa go ruta jwa SMT, ditiro tsa boeteledipele di tshwanetse go amoganwa le go phatlaladiwa mo barutabaneng le Lekgotlataolo la Sekolo (SGB).

**Mafoko a botlhokwa:** Ditlhopha tsa Botsamaisi jwa Sekolo (diSMT), dikolo tsa sekontari tse di sa diragatseng sentle, boeteledipele jo bo tlhakanetsweng jwa go ruta, Thulaganyo ya Tokafatso ya sekolo (SIP), Dikgato tsa Tsamaiso ya Badiri (PAM)

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACE	: Advanced Certificate in Education
B Ed	: Bachelor of Education
CAPS	: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CDE	: Centre for Development and Enterprise
CEDU	: College of Education
CIE	: Cambridge International Examination
CIF	: Continuous Improvement Framework
CPD	: Continuous Professional Development
DBE	: Department of Basic Education
DoE	: Department of Education
DP	: Deputy Principal
DSG	: Development Support Group
FAL	: First Additional Language
FET	: Further Education and Training
HESA	: Higher Education South Africa
HL	: Home Language
HOD	: Head of Department
IBO	: International Baccalaureate Organisation
IQMS	: Integrated Quality Management System
KZN	: KwaZulu-Natal
LTSM	: Learning and Teaching Support Material
M Ed	: Master of Education
NEA	: National Education Act
NBT	: National Benchmark Test
NCLB	: No Child Left Behind
NSC	: National Senior Certificate

NSLA	: National Strategy for Learner Attainment
OBE	: Outcomes Based Education
OECD	: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAM	: Personnel Administrative Measures
PCAP	: Pan-Canadian Assessment Program
PIRLS	: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	: Program for International Student Assessment
POA	: Programme of Assessment
PLC	: Professional Learning Community
PMDP	: Principal's Management Development Programme
REC	: Research Ethics Committee
SACE	: South African Council of Educators
SACMEQ	: Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SA SAMS	: South African School Administration and Management System
SBA	: School Based Assessment
SCE	: Senior Certificate Examination
SMT	: School Management Team
SIP	: School Improvement Plan
TIMSS	: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
WEF	: World Economic Forum



## CHAPTER 1 ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In a report commissioned by the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE), Spaul (2013) provided an empirical overview of the quality of South African education since the dawn of democracy in 1994. Spaul's (2013) overview included various independent learner assessments, both nationally and internationally. Globally, some of the significant international tests that South Africa participates in are: *The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS); *Progress in International Reading and Literacy Studies* (PIRLS); and the *Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality* (SACMEQ). Spaul (2013:4) indicated that the assessment results of the SACMEQ in the years 2000 and 2007 showed no improvement in numeracy and literacy, while the TIMSS followed suit between 1995 and 2002 in the areas of Mathematics and Science. The report also showed that South African learners faced difficulty in literacy, numeracy and writing in Grades 3, 6, 8 and 9, which were the grades selected to write the international assessments as well as the South African Annual National Assessments (ANA) (Spaul, 2013:3). The international assessment results reviewed from as early as 1995-2011 are indicative of the change in learner academic performance prior to the 1994 academic year and to other participating countries globally (Spaul, 2013:4). Based on the empirical evidence from the report, it became clear that South Africa's education system was in a crisis (Spaul, 2013:3). Spaul (2013) indicates that, according to the test results reviewed from 1995-2011, South Africa has shown slow progress in improving learner academic performance as compared with neighbouring African countries. Furthermore, according to The World Economic Forum (WEF) 2016/2017 Global Competitiveness Report, South Africa ranked 134<sup>th</sup> out of 138 countries (Haupt, 2017:1).

However, a greater cause for concern is the performance of Grade 12 learners in South Africa who write the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination at the end of the academic year. The NSC examination is especially significant since it is the main school exit level examination in South Africa. In South Africa, most newspapers publish the NSC results of learners. Prior to 2014, if a learner passed the NSC examination, his/her name would be published in the newspaper. However, from 2014 onwards, only the examination number of learners who passed the NSC examinations was published in the newspapers, which was in accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) (Boksburg Advertiser, 2022). Conversely, if a learner's examination number does not appear in the newspaper, it

means the learner has not passed the NSC examination. Thus, the release of the Grade 12 NSC results has become a significant event in the South African school academic year. The involvement of the local newspapers which publish the NSC results every year makes the public and education stakeholders aware of the NSC pass rates (Mthiyane, Bhengu & Bayeni, 2014:296; Spaul, 2013:31).

While the top academic achieving secondary schools receive praise from the public and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) via the media, a lot of emphasis is placed on improving the NSC results in underperforming secondary schools from various education stakeholders. The NSC results recorded a decline in the pass rate in 2008, 2009, 2014 and 2015 (South Africa's Matric Pass Rate, 2020). The poor performance of learners in the NSC examination is of great concern due to Grade 12 learners requiring a minimum pass in the NSC examinations for either securing a job in the South African workforce or admission to tertiary institutions. In 2007, the DBE launched the framework for the National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) which identified those secondary schools with a NSC pass rate of less than 60% as underperforming. With this stigmatising status, all eyes fall upon the School Management Team (SMT) of these secondary schools comprising of the Heads of Departments (HODs), deputy principals (DPs) and principals. High stakes testing and assessments may also be used to measure the performance of SMTs for purposes of accountability. According to an early study by Heystek (2004:308), the SMT is responsible for the professional management of the school which includes all activities that support teaching and learning. In a recent study, Ramango and Naicker (2022:88) posit that "school leaders worldwide and in South Africa, are being held accountable for learner performance". This places the SMT in the vulnerable position of having to take responsibility for the underperformance of Grade 12 learners in their schools. While some scholars argue that the poor performance of learners raises questions about the role and accountability of the principal (Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi 2010:674), others maintain that SMTs have a direct influence through their instructional leadership practices on student achievement (Bush, 2015:487; Jacobson, 2011:38). The increase in standards-based accountability for improved learner academic performance therefore places HODs, DPs and principals (who constitute the SMT) at the helm of educational debates, requiring them to act as instructional leaders (Lee, Walker & Chui, 2012:587).

A substantial body of literature based on instructional leadership practices in relation to learner achievement suggests that instructional leadership may be the key for improving learner academic performances in South Africa. For example, Bush (2015:487) described instructional leadership as "one of the most enduring constructs in the shifting typology of leadership models". Bush (2015:487) suggests that the emergence of instructional

leadership, particularly in the United States (US), could have a positive impact on learner achievement outcomes. Even in South Africa, emerging studies have found that instructional leadership can lead to a positive turn-around for learner academic performance, especially in those schools that are underperforming, as well as transforming the SMT members into effective instructional leaders (Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014:50-51; Bush & Glover, 2016:6-7; Msila, 2013:87; Taole, 2013:75). This tallies with findings from a mixed methods national study by Day, Gu and Sammons (2016) in England over a period of three years that was based on the national examination and assessment results, which also concluded that the SMT has both a direct and indirect influence on school improvement, particularly in learner academic performance.

With many SMTs in South Africa still grappling with the concept of instructional leadership, this study fills gaps in literature by addressing the instructional leadership role of SMTs within the context of underperforming secondary schools in South Africa. This study is significant in that the recommendations from this study can be used as an intervention for the improvement of the NSC results in underperforming secondary schools, thereby contributing to the overall improvement of the NSC pass rate.

## **1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

My interest in instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools emanates from my 14 years of teaching experience as a level one educator in secondary schools. Having taught from 2005-2011 in two high achieving secondary schools which have attained overall NSC pass rates of 80-100%, in 2012 I had assumed duty in an underperforming secondary school. Having witnessed one school attain NSC pass rates of below 60% for five consecutive years, sparked my interest of delving into the world of the SMTs and their instructional leadership practices. From my interactions with educators, parents, School Governing Bodies (SGBs), learners and the SMT at special meetings for underperforming secondary schools (which is exclusive only to staff of underperforming schools), I noticed that the SMT of underperforming secondary schools faced a myriad of instructional leadership challenges due to their status as underperforming. This study was directed towards offering insight into the instructional leadership practices of the nine SMT members selected, with detailed reference to the three underperforming secondary schools selected for my study, and more importantly, as indicated above, the findings and recommendations from this study could significantly contribute towards the improvement of learner academic performances. Whilst Bush and Glover (2016:22) assert that there is a wealth of emerging literature on leadership globally, they argue that it is still not enough to draw conclusions within the South African education context. Bush and Glover (2016:22)

further maintain that instructional leadership within the South African educational context requires further research. My rationale also stems from Bush and Glover's (2016:22) significant concluding question: "Why do most South African schools continue to underperform?"

### **1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Seobi and Wood (2016:1) argue that the general poor performance of learners in South African secondary schools is a result of poor quality teaching. Seobi and Wood's (2016:2) study attributes poor learner performance to a lack of instructional leadership within those underperforming schools. According to the Department of Basic Education's (DBE's) *Twenty Seven Goal Action Plan*, goal number four states that the Department's intention to increase the number of learners eligible to write for a Bachelors Pass in Grade 12 (KwaZulu-Natal DBE, 2011:12). This goal has validity when taking into account the DBE's vision of improving the lives of learners. Ironically, the KwaZulu-Natal's (KZN's) DBE's (2011:3) action plan was proposed to have attained goal four (which was to increase the number of learners writing for a Bachelors Pass) by 2014; however, in that year the Grade 12 results plummeted from 78.2% in 2013 to 75.8% in 2014, and further to 70.7% in 2015. These alarming drops in the Grade 12 results, especially in underperforming secondary schools, were a cause for concern among all education stakeholders since Grade 12 is the school exit level examination in South Africa.

The growing concerns in the Grade 12 results of underperforming secondary schools stress the role of the SMT as they work directly with educators and learners regarding teaching and learning. The instructional leadership practices of SMTs are concerned with the activities that improve student achievement. However, the SMTs in underperforming schools seem to remain stagnant in improving learner academic performance. According to Seobi and Wood (2016:1), the SMTs, although in the best suitable position, do not seem to be fulfilling their instructional leadership roles. The three schools which agreed to participate in this research study (in 2019) had shown little or no improvement and had been officially declared as underperforming by the DBE from 2019 to 2021 (statistics are since the start of my study). I considered that a detailed exploration of the instructional leadership roles as seen from the perspectives of the various role players was thus called for to cast further light on the problem of underperformance. Accordingly, this study set out to explore (via the three cases) the instructional leadership practices of SMTs within the context of underperforming secondary schools. Furthermore, through my interactions with the nine SMT members in the three selected underperforming secondary schools, I wanted to explore their accounts of how they were dealing with instructional leadership practices and how they felt about not

achieving the minimum NSC pass rates (above 60%) even though they intend to fulfil their roles as instructional leaders.

## **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research questions that guided this study consisted of the main research question, which was further directed by sub-questions.

### **1.4.1 The main research question**

What instructional leadership practices do SMTs engage in within underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi District in KZN?

### **1.4.2 Sub-questions**

- How do SMTs perceive their instructional leadership roles in underperforming schools?
- What teaching and learning tasks do SMTs in underperforming schools engage in?
- What are some of the factors that SMTs consider to impact negatively on their instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools?
- How do SMTs consider that their instructional leadership role can lead to improving learner academic performance?

## **1.5 RESEARCH AIM**

The main aim of this study was to explore the instructional leadership practices of SMT members in a sample of underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi District in KZN.

### **1.5.1 Objectives of this study**

- To explore the SMTs' perceptions of their instructional leadership roles in underperforming secondary schools.
- To establish the specific teaching and learning tasks that SMTs in underperforming schools engage in.
- To identify those factors that SMTs consider to impact negatively on instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools.
- To explore the SMTs' considerations of their role as instructional leaders in improving learner academic performance.

## 1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is drawn from two leading scholars in the field of instructional leadership: Weber (1996) and Hallinger (2007). Both scholars provide key elements of instructional leadership, which I have discussed in an extended Weber's (1996) model.

Weber's (1996) model comprises of five key elements for instructional leadership: defining the school's mission; managing the curriculum and instruction; promoting a positive learning climate; assessing the instructional programme; and observing and improving instruction. Compared to other instructional leadership models (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Murphy, 1990), Weber's (1996) model also has an element which focuses on assessing the instructional programme through curriculum planning, designing and evaluating. (See also Chapter 2, Section 2.18.3.) In this study, one of my intentions was to probe SMT members through interviews about whether they are engaged in curriculum planning, designing and evaluating, and if so, to explore with them their experiences of engaging with this aspect of the instructional programme. Although Weber's (1996) model shares similarities to that of Hallinger and Murphy (1985) and Murphy (1990) – see also Chapter 2, Section 2.18.1 and 2.18.2 – I opted to choose Weber's (1996) model because of the element *Assessing the Instructional Programme*, which was not considered in the earlier models. *Assessing the Instructional Programme* was a new element that was introduced by Weber (1996). Furthermore, a secondary school is deemed underperforming in the South African context as a result of failing to meet the minimum national requirements in the NSC examination. The NSC final examination results rely on the instructional programme of the school and the extent to which the school SMTs are effectively assessing the school's instructional programme.

Since my study involved the entire SMT comprising of the HODs, DPs and principals, I considered Hallinger's (2007:5) notion of shared instructional leadership to also form an important part of the theoretical framework for this study. Hallinger's (2007:5) notion of shared instructional leadership is noteworthy since it considers how SMTs (at different levels) share or distribute instructional leadership tasks, to improve teaching and learning. I considered Hallinger's (2007:5) notion of shared instructional leadership as an additional element in what can be considered an extended version of Weber's model. My justification for the additional element of shared instructional leadership is that Weber (1996) only makes reference to the instructional leader working collaboratively with all stakeholders to define the school's *mission*, but his model does not make provision for SMTs to share or distribute instructional leadership tasks in other key areas of instructional leadership, such as

managing the curriculum, promoting a positive learning environment, observing instruction and assessing the instructional programme. To further justify my use of the additional element of shared instructional leadership, I also draw on recent studies which refer to possibilities for “leadership distribution” (or shared instructional leadership in the context of my study). Accordingly, my study explored the way in which the entire SMT (i.e., HODs, DPs and principals) conceived instructional leadership tasks. In short, my study included Hallinger’s (2007) notion of shared instruction leadership (and elaborations of this in the literature) as an additional element to Weber’s model, taking into consideration that models can evolve.

## **1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **1.7.1 Research paradigm**

A paradigm is a set of beliefs that the researcher holds because of what he/she believes about the purpose of research (Lincoln & Guba, 2013:59). As Makombe (2017:3363) advises, it is important to acknowledge the research paradigm that is guiding an inquiry. I have located this study within the constructivist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 2013:23; Makombe, 2017:3367). According to Lincoln and Guba (2013:45), humans construct their meanings through sense making, in which they give sense to their experiences and to others’ experiences as they interpret them. By interacting with the selected participants, I wanted to gain insight into how they construct their meanings of working within their context of an underperforming secondary school. Through this interaction with the participants during the research, I wanted the participants to be able to reflect upon their experiences, guided by the questions I was asking them. Lincoln and Guba (cited in Romm, 2018) argue that the constructs of individuals can be re-framed through confrontation, comparison, and contrast through an encounter with others. Both my-self and the participants were able to develop our perspectives through “dialogical engagement” of the questions asked in the interviews (Romm, 2018:12).

### **1.7.2 Research approach**

A qualitative research approach was used in conducting this research study, as I wanted to explore the instructional leadership practices of the SMT members in their school environments. Qualitative research involves an understanding of people and the way in which they view the world in a specific time and context (Merriam & Grenier, 2019:4). Through a qualitative research approach, I wanted to explore with participants the meanings that they may link to their behaviours as well as their interpretations and perspectives on the

research topic. Merriam and Grenier (2019:4) further state that “exploring how individuals experience and interact with their social world, and the meaning it has for them, is based on an *interpretive* (or *constructivist*) perspective embedded in qualitative approach”. Therefore, by using this research approach, I wanted to gain an understanding of the ideas, opinions, and experiences of the different SMT members about their instructional leadership practices within the context of an underperforming secondary school. The qualitative research method allowed me to conduct a thorough and in-depth exploration with the participants, which enabled me to gain some insight into their experiences within their educational contexts.

### **1.7.3 Sampling and population**

A sample consists of a group of people extracted from a larger population of interest (Mujere, 2016:108). In this study, the population of interest was SMTs in underperforming schools in Umlazi district. The process of sampling involves selecting a noteworthy set of participants from the population, which has significant characteristics for the research study (Mujere, 2016:108). Qualitative researchers make use of non-probability sampling. Unlike probability sampling in quantitative research, “non-probability sampling technique is totally based on judgement” (Sharma, 2017:750). The main sampling technique used for this study was purposive sampling.

According to Mertens (2014:76), participants in purposive sampling are purposefully selected to help the researcher in understanding the phenomenon being studied. Purposive sampling was used to select three underperforming secondary schools from the Karanja and Burlington Circuits in Chatsworth, within the Umlazi District of education in Durban, KZN. These schools have been classified by the DBE as underperforming based on their NSC results from the previous years. Besides this criterion, an element of convenience sampling was employed so that I would have easy access (geographically) to the participants, but I also chose schools on the basis of their contextual characteristics. (See Section 3.5.1` and 3.6.1 for more detail.) In my purposeful selection of the participants, I wanted information-rich key informants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:401) in the field of instructional leadership, hence my choice for selecting the SMT in each school. Purposive sampling was used to select the following SMT members from the three underperforming secondary schools: 3 HODs; 3 DPs; and 3 principals. The different levels of the SMT (i.e., HODs, DPs and principals) were purposefully selected because of their leadership and management positions in the school and were considered as providing knowledgeable insight as instructional leaders.



## **1.8 INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES**

The main data generation methods in this study were the semi-structured interviews and document review.

### **1.8.1 Semi-structured interviews**

The semi-structured interview was chosen as the main data generation method because it allowed me to explore the perceptions of the SMT members through probing and clarification of answers and also allowed participants' freedom to express their thoughts and concerns (Horton, Macve & Struyven, 2004:304). A semi-structured interview schedule with pre-determined questions was used to guide the encounter between myself and the participants during the interviews, although I also invited participants to mention issues that they would like to explore – issues that I may not have foreseen as relevant to instructional leadership. The guiding questions in the semi-structured interviews were used to address the main research question and sub-questions in this study. Based on the key research questions of this study, the semi-structured interview was considered a favourable data generation method. This is because the flexibility, predetermined questions (albeit with some room for generating new questions during the encounter), probing, and open-ended nature of the questions also allowed for an exploration of the participants' expression of their perceptions and experiences regarding their instructional leadership roles within the context of underperforming secondary schools. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine SMT members: 3 HODs; 3 DPs; and 3 principals. Participants were interviewed individually to maintain confidentiality and at their schools (after-hours). The first encounter semi-structured interviews took place from July 2019 to October 2019. Participants were interviewed for approximately 45 minutes respectively. All semi-structured interviews were audio recorded, to which all participants agreed. Apart from these semi-structured interviews, considering the requirement for prolonged engagement in qualitative research, I met with participants to engage in a second encounter follow-up and member checking interview (from 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019 to 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020) based on the discussions from our first encounter semi-structured interviews. The follow-up and member checking interviews were conducted with all nine participants. The duration of most of the follow-up second encounter interviews was 30-35 minutes, while two participants' interviews were 40 and 45 minutes. The main purpose of the second encounter follow-up and member checking interviews was to allow participants an opportunity to reflect, add or modify any of their responses from our first encounter semi-structured interviews. I also used this second encounter as an opportunity to ask participants if my interpretations of the gist of their views

resonated with theirs, as well as further probing the SMTs' roles in relation to each other and their perception of instructional leadership for improving learner academic performance (this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, Section 3.7.3). Further to the follow-up and member checking interview, there were some aspects of my documents review regarding the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the School Improvement Plan (SIP) which were not sufficiently explored during the semi-structured and follow-up interviews, which led to a third engagement with participants via telephonic interviews due to Covid-19 restrictions in public schools at the time. (See also Chapter 3, Section 3.8.) The telephonic interviews were conducted with all nine participants and took place from October 2020 to November 2020. Seven of the telephonic interviews lasted for a duration of about 15-20 minutes each, and two participants spoke passionately for approximately 30 minutes each. All three interactions with the participants (i.e., first encounter semi-structured interviews, follow-up interviews and telephonic interviews) constituted a prolonged engagement with participants, which led to me gaining new insight and knowledge about the SMTs' perceptions of instructional leadership.

### **1.8.2 Documents review**

Document review was used as another data collection method. A document review schedule (Appendix E) was designed to analyse the contents of the documents selected for this research. The documents that I reviewed were: The School Improvement Plan (SIP); and the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) (DBE, 2016). The SIP is an unpublished document which schools design ad hoc according to their own needs which can include aspects like improving learner academic performances, school governance and discipline. The SIP contains the strategies and interventions that are to be implemented in order to bring about whole school improvement in the identified areas for development or improvement. The PAM is a policy document published by the DBE (2016). The PAM (DBE, 2016) contains the conditions of service and main job descriptions for SMTs and educators at all levels. These documents were analysed to compare with the findings from the interviews, as well as to understand the SMTs' interpretations of these documents while working in the context of an underperforming secondary school.

## **1.9 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

To begin with, the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and read several times to gain familiarisation. Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse, and report patterns within the textual data from the interviews. To analyse the data, I read the participants'

responses several times and generated preliminary themes followed by refined themes through a second cycle of analysis. Emerging themes were identified and explored. Thereafter, those themes were interpreted for patterns that may have emerged. Feedback was then provided to the participants in relation to my interpretations. I followed a systematic feedback process to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected from the SMT members. While being immersed in the data analysis process, I also ensured that I had reported my interpretations through the views, perspectives, and opinions of the participants. Participants were given copies of their transcripts and allowed to review, check and authenticate their transcripts. The emerging themes were then cross-checked with the nine participants to verify if I had encapsulated their experiences by my whole interpretation.

To allow for enough depth in my findings, the document review constituted a third encounter with participants as I felt the need to gain insight about how the participants felt about the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP as instructional leaders in underperforming secondary schools. The data from the document review was used to corroborate the findings from the semi-structured interviews or refute them based on the views of the participants. The document review with participants took place between October 2020 and November 2020 and had to be done telephonically (see also Chapter 3, Section 3.8) due to the DBE prohibiting individuals from entering public schools as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The document review focused specifically on the participants' job descriptions in the PAM (DBE, 2016) in relation to their instructional leadership roles and their interpretation of the SIP for improving learner academic performance. A detailed analysis and discussion of the findings of the document review were then presented (in Chapter 5) followed by a synthesis of the findings of both documents from the telephonic interviews. I then linked the data generated from the document review to the relevant themes in Chapter 4 (and also Chapter 5).

## **1.10 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS**

### **1.10.1 Leadership**

Leadership involves influencing others in a systematic way with the intention to assist them in achieving the desired goals of the company or organisation (Bush & Glover, 2003:5). Within the educational context of this study, leadership is defined as the vision created and articulated by school leaders and the way in which the staff is influenced in order to achieve this vision (Bush & Glover, 2003:5). Although Bush and Glover do not focus on this, leadership can also include the staff collectively involved in defining the vision of the school.

### **1.10.2 Instructional leadership**

Instructional leadership refers to the processes or approaches used by school leaders to improve teaching and learning. The main focus of instructional leadership is on achieving student learning outcomes (Hornig & Loeb, 2010:66). In order to achieve student outcomes, school leaders need to manage the curriculum and instructional activities.

### **1.10.3 Shared instructional leadership**

An approach in which instructional leadership tasks are shared amongst the SMT members and also with educators, with the view that the principal (as the main SMT leader), cannot fulfil the role of an instructional leader for the entire school (Hallinger, 2007:5).

### **1.10.4 Underperforming secondary school**

The concept of underperforming schools was first introduced in 2007 by the Department of Education (DoE) in order to improve the results of those schools that were not performing according to minimum standards. Underperforming secondary schools in South Africa are those schools that produce poor learner academic performance (Louw, Bayat & Eigelaar-Meets, 2011:1). Within the context of this study, an underperforming secondary school in South Africa is a school that has achieved below 60% in the NSC Grade 12 examination (Louw *et al.*, 2011:1).

### **1.10.5 School Management Team (SMT)**

The School Management Team (SMT) comprises the HODs, DPs and principals, who as a collective, lead and manage the school. SMTs were formed when South Africa achieved democracy in 1994 with a subsequent reorganisation of the education system. The SMT is responsible for the following: Enhancing teaching and learning; leading a team of educators; curriculum management; providing professional development and appraisal to educators; and coordinating learning materials that are used in the classroom (Ntshoe & Selesho, 2014:479). "In short, they are responsible for the instructional programmes in their subject areas" (Ntshoe & Selesho, 2014:479). In this study the acronym SMT will be used when referring to the collective of the school management, that is, HODs, the DPs and the principal. (HODs are also referred to as Departmental Heads (DHs) in South Africa, but I have opted to use the title of HODs within the context of my study.)

## **1.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY: OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS**

### **1.11.1 Chapter 1**

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study. This chapter outlines the background of the study, the research problem, the research method and design, provides a rationale for the study, and explains the significance of the study. This chapter also outlines the objectives of this study and the research questions guiding the study. A brief discussion of the theoretical framework is provided, followed by the research design and methodology of this study. The key concepts of this study are defined and thereafter, the chapter division is outlined, followed by the chapter summary.

### **1.11.2 Chapter 2**

The second chapter focuses on the literature reviewed in this study on instructional leadership practices in underperforming schools. The literature reviewed comprises of a range of scholarly sources which include journal articles, books, academic articles, online sources (websites) and educational policies from South Africa and globally. The chapter also includes a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework which underpins this study and the chapter summary.

### **1.11.3 Chapter 3**

The third chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research design and methodology utilised in this study, including a discussion of the research paradigm, sampling methods, data generation methods, data analysis, ethical considerations, the quest for trustworthiness followed in this study and the chapter summary.

### **1.11.4 Chapter 4**

Chapter 4 is introduced with the research process undertaken in this study, followed by a discussion on the procedures for data analysis, specifically thematic analysis utilised in this study. The chapter then presents an analysis and discussions of the data generated from the semi-structured interviews and second encounter follow-up interviews in this study, followed by a chapter summary of the findings.

### **1.11.5 Chapter 5**

Chapter 5 is introduced with a discussion on the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP. A detailed analysis and discussion of the document review of the PAM (DBE, 2016) and SIP is

presented, followed by a synthesis of the key findings of the document review. The major findings of this study are discussed in relation to the theory and literature, followed by the chapter summary.

#### **1.11.6 Chapter 6**

The last chapter provides recommendations for practice based on the key findings, followed by the summary of contributions to this study, conclusions drawn from this study and a synopsis of the organisation of the entire thesis.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter presented an introduction and orientation of this study. This chapter focuses on the literature reviewed on instructional leadership. The chapter begins with a review of a definition of leadership, followed by an integrated discussion on “effective” leadership. As a starting point, the historical development of instructional leadership is discussed, which then progresses into a conceptualised understanding of instructional leadership within the context of this study. Included in this literature review, is a critical review of instructional leadership and the role of the SMT members, comprising of the HODs, DPs and principals. Some of the key studies on instructional leadership for academic improvement are discussed, followed by a critical discussion of the South African NSC structure and pass requirements. A portion of the literature reviewed is dedicated to the various factors that have impacted on instructional leadership practices in schools. The theoretical framework is discussed by introducing a number of different models of instructional leadership, followed by a substantiation of Weber’s (1996) model with an additional element of shared instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2007) which forms the theoretical lens of this study (also with reference to later interpretations and applications of his Model). This is followed by global review of instructional leadership in different countries. The chapter concludes with a review of instructional leadership in South Africa, followed by the chapter summary.

#### **2.2 LEADERSHIP**

The definition of leadership, as presented below, serves as a starting point which will map the way to a conceptual understanding of instructional leadership. Benmira and Agboola (2021:3) describe the concept of leadership as complex and sometimes causing confusing debate. There have been various definitions of the term leadership proposed by many researchers (as noted by Benmira & Agboola, 2021:3). While these definitions have been the most commonly accepted in academic literature, Ciulla (2011:512) criticises the definitions of leadership put forward by academics. Ciulla’s (2011:512) argument arises from the notion that academics in their respective research fields do not always agree on a common definition, and if indeed a common definition arises, this still does not help the academic to better understand the concept or word.

Ciulla (2011:512) makes a historical reference to Rost (1991), who collected over 221 definitions of leadership from the 1920s to the 1990s, and came to the conclusion that all the definitions in leadership studies referred to a person influencing others to do something. While the corpus of leadership definitions by Rost (1991) presents a general understanding of the definition of leadership, Ciulla (2011:512) indicates that these definitions may differ in the way leaders motivate others, their relationship with others, the individual who determines the goal of the organisation and the abilities of the leader to achieve the desired goals.

Despite a plethora of definitions on leadership, it is clear that leadership always takes into account the role of the *leader* and the *follower*. However, Hopkins (2013:2) warns that a major drawback in leadership literature is the writer's conflation of personal views about leadership without referring to empirical evidence. To avoid what Hopkins (2013:2) refers to as a "mythical view of leadership that is often embellished by rhetoric," it is important to consider leading scholars in the field of leadership when trying to reach a suitable definition of leadership. For example, Bush (2007:392) refers to the work of Cuban (1988), whom he claims offered one of the clearest accounts of leadership. Cuban (cited in Bush, 2007:392) expressed his views about leadership as an important organisational activity:

By leadership, I mean influencing others' actions in achieving desirable ends. Leaders are people who shape the goals, motivations, and actions of others. Frequently they initiate change to reach existing and new goals ... Leadership ... takes ... much ingenuity, energy and skill.

Further expanding on Cuban's (1988) definition of leadership as "influencing others," an early study by Yukl (cited in Bush & Glover, 2014:554) explained that most definitions of leadership relate to an intentional influence by individuals or groups through social influence over another individual or group. Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2011:4) made a similar point when they considered providing direction and exercising influence as the two main functions found within the definitions of leadership. They go on to suggest that "leadership is all about organisational improvement" (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011:4). Louis and Murphy (2018:172-173), in discussing "positive leadership for school improvement", emphasise that leadership also implies fostering "collective responsibility" and "collective efficacy" towards school improvement. Hence, they mention the importance of fostering teamwork towards improvement (2018:173). Their argument on building capacity towards improvement is further extended in Louis and Murphy (2018). Within the ambit of my study, the SMT members are in the best suitable position through their management roles to influence educators and learners in order to achieve defined goals. Furthermore, the influence exerted by the SMT also supports the concept of distributed leadership (Bush,



2008:277; Day, Sammons & Gorgen, 2020:16), which implies that “leading” can be diffused insofar as various managerial participants and indeed others in the organisation take on leading roles towards the development of goals. Supovitz, D'Auria and Spillane likewise suggest that distributive leadership becomes necessary in the light of what they call the “countless demands that school leaders face” (2019:1).

Considering the gamut of definitions of leadership, Belias and Koustelias (2014:258) endeavour to create a synthesis by stating that leadership should have three essential elements: The ability of the leader(s) to influence others; working towards a common goal; and people that buy into the idea of working towards a shared vision. That is, leadership involves a process of influencing action towards achieving a shared vision. This takes into account the views of Bush (cited in Bush & Glover, 2014:554) who identified three main aspects when defining leadership. Firstly, Bush (cited in Bush & Glover, 2014:554) regarded leadership as influence and not authority; secondly, the leader influences others in order to achieve the goals of the organisation (as defined); and thirdly, leadership can be undertaken by individuals or groups which may branch out into “distributed leadership”. The notion of distributed leadership, as noted by Williams (2011:19; also Supovitz *et al.*, 2019:16), involves “many people” and not just the principal (as the main leader) in advancing instructional leadership. Williams notes that leadership tasks can indeed be distributed amongst the educators as well as the SMT. Williams (2011:192) cites various authors (Barth, 2001:85; Hopkins & Jackson, 2003:100), who aver that educators have the potential to meaningfully contribute towards leadership (through the distributed nature of leadership tasks). In view of this, my study also explored the extent to which the SMTs’ instructional leadership practices provided for the distributed nature of leadership tasks within the SMT and even the educators (based on the SMTs’ responses during my interviews). Nevertheless, a leader should be both effective and dynamic through his/her adopted leadership style which will entice the others to follow or to feel involved in working towards a common goal. As Supovitz *et al.* (2019:24) aver, this amounts to encouraging a distribution of leadership in “solution design and enactment”.

This is not to say that we can create a clear-cut definition of leadership. One particular author of note in this regard is Rosenbach (2018:1) who describes leadership as a discipline which has been studied extensively, yet there still remains an unclear definition of it. In addition, Rosenbach (2018:1) states that leadership is such that despite all the attempts from academics to define it, good leadership is recognisable when experienced. Rosenbach (2018:1-2) concludes by stating that leadership is not based on qualities of power and authority but about the leader and those who follow engaging in a “reciprocal influence” to

achieve the goals and purposes set forth. In other words, the focus is no longer on a leader as authority. Nevertheless, Benmira & Agboola (2021:4) purport that leadership is dynamic and changes over time. As far as instructional leadership goes, Hallinger (2007:5) cites various authors as pointing to the concept of shared instructional leadership (Day *et al.*, 2001; Jackson, 2000; Lambert, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003; Southworth, 2002). Within the context of this study and in considering the instructional leadership practices of SMT members in underperforming secondary schools, *effective leadership* is clearly much needed in order to bring about positive change in learner academic performance. In view of the discussion above, my emphasis is on the SMT as a team and the team members' perceptions of their roles in instructional leadership.

### **2.3 EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

Individuals who comprise the school leadership, such as the HODs, DPs and principals, play a pivotal role in ensuring the success of the school (Horng & Loeb, 2010:66). Ngcobo (2012:417) argues that the mounting pressure by the South African government on sectors like education has made it difficult for schools to adapt to change and establish stability whilst fulfilling the transformational requirements of the government. In a time when transformation is taking place all the time in South African education, effective school leadership is definitely the key to dealing with the changes and challenges.

Anderson, Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012:3) state that all the schools they have researched in the USA, showed improvement in learner academic performances through effective leadership. While Anderson *et al.* (2012) locate this leadership in particular persons (as leaders), their view can be extended to consider the leadership displayed by the SMT. In view of this, my study explored the extent to which effective leadership (if any) is provided by the SMT through their engagement in shared instructional leadership.

Nevertheless, if we compare the South African context to others, it is worth noting that Day, Gu and Sammons (2016:221) provide empirical evidence that principals can promote improvement through effective leadership whether their role is a direct or an indirect one in teaching and learning. They go on to cite various authors (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Moos, Johansson & Day, 2012; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2011) who posit, based on the twenty-country International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP), that effective leadership is crucial in explaining the difference in learner outcomes between schools (Day *et al.*, 2016:6). Day *et al.*'s (2016:6) empirical evidence on effective leadership is further justified when they cite Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom and Anderson's (2009) US study in 180 schools which confirmed that there is a direct link between (principal) leadership and learner achievement.

Day *et al.* (2016) focused their study on the effective leadership of the principal in promoting improvement in learner achievement, however, my study examined the link between effective (instructional) leadership of the entire SMT (i.e., HODs, DPs and principals) and learner achievement which appears to be a gap in literature. This is in line with Leithwood's (2016:117) position when he notes that HODs appear to be underutilised and untapped when it comes to leadership for learner improvement. My study further extended this to include the DP's experiences of leadership in underperforming secondary schools.

One of the challenges that possibly face effective school leadership within schools is trying to get people working together as a team. In the search for a suitable meaning of the term leadership, Mullins (2010:408) states that "leadership today is increasingly associated not with command and control but with the concept of teamwork, getting along with other people, inspiration and creating a vision with which others can identify". Within the context of underperforming secondary schools, we can therefore surmise that if the SMT as a team is able to promote this sense of shared vision, all individuals can be brought on board to assist in improving the NSC results. This also implies that effective leadership of management teams through displaying strong moral purpose and maintaining high expectations, while securing "buy in", impacts positively on academic achievement within schools with challenging contexts.

This would mean using effective leadership of the SMT to create a vision for the school's Grade 12 teachers and learners, which is to improve the NSC results for the academic year. This study therefore sought to determine, through my interactions and interviews, if the SMTs of the underperforming secondary schools are working as a team through the concept of shared instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2007:5).

## **2.4 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Historically, instructional leadership both as a concept and practice can be traced as far back as the 1960s. It is of paramount importance that the historical development of instructional leadership practices is reviewed before a critical look at the various definitions of instructional leadership is taken. The significant historical development over the decades led to a diverse array of conceptualisations of instructional leadership through research by leading scholars in the field. A study of the origins of instructional leadership can be traced to the significant American hallmark study of Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld and York (1966). The controversial Coleman *et al.* Report (1966), based on American schools, stated that the student's family background was a major determining factor in student achievement and the Coleman *et al.* Report (1966) refuted the role of the

school in contributing towards student achievement. The Coleman *et al.* Report (1966) can be considered as particularly relevant for this study, since my study deals with student achievement considered in relation to the instructional leadership practices of the SMT members. That is, this study starts from the premise that instructional leadership can be considered as influencing student achievement.

The Coleman *et al.* Report (1966) may have seemed controversial, but it ironically gave rise to the concept of School Improvement (1970s) and the Effective Schools Movement of the 1980s. In contrast to the Coleman *et al.* Report (1966), a substantial body of literature emerged and formed the foundation of the concept of school improvement. Historically, another American research study by Edmonds (1979) in response to the Coleman *et al.* Report (1966) concluded that all students can learn and family background is important, but not a measurement for student achievement. Edmond's (1979) study which comprised of eight elementary schools from Michigan and inner-city schools in the US (with a low socio-economic background), also concluded that the school plays an important role in student achievement and therefore must take on responsibility for the performance of learners. Edmond's (1979) research also led to a number of significant correlates within their studies. One of the main correlates identified through their research was the introduction and emergence of instructional leadership.

Grady, Wayson and Wirkel (1989:7) described effective schools as those schools that were making a positive difference (academically) in the lives of learners. Ron Edmonds, who served as an assistant superintendent of schools in New York, coordinated an effective school pilot programme which consisted of 15 schools. Edmonds was committed to show that all learners can achieve desirable results if the school was committed towards teaching and learning (Grady *et al.*, 1989:7-8). Edmonds (cited in Grady *et al.*, 1989:8) identified five factors which should be developed to ensure an effective school which could yield positive results: (1) An effective principal committed to learner achievement; (2) high expectations of staff members that no learner will perform below the minimum requirements; (3) an orderly teaching and learning environment; (4) the main focus is on school practices that promote academic skills; and (5) the staff, together with the principal as the leader, engages in monitoring of the instructional programme and student progress, provides feedback and addresses any shortcomings. The five factors outlined in Edmond's (1982) effective schools research have considerable links to instructional leadership practices, which is being explored in my study, albeit that they define the principal as the leader working together with the rest of the SMT, rather than the principal with the SMT being involved in a distributed leadership. My study explores how the various SMT members view their instructional

leadership practices, and how they consider these as contributing to the improvement of learner academic performance, and to a certain degree, an effective school.

## **2.5 DEFINING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Based on the historical development of the School Improvement and the Effective Schools Movement (as discussed above in 2.4), several authors have attempted to define instructional leadership. Although historically the concept of instructional leadership has been deeply rooted in scholarly articles for many decades (Day et al., 2001; Edmonds, 1979; Jackson, 2000; Lambert, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Southworth, 2002), there has been no accepted definition of instructional leadership. However, what is interesting to note is that the concept of instructional leadership has evolved since the 1970s with increasing research on school effectiveness. Instructional leadership, as defined in the literature, and as implemented in practice is essentially based on the immersion of principals in the teaching and learning activities of the school with the aim of improving student achievement (Hopkins, 2013; Mestry, 2017b). The introduction of instructional leadership came about during the Effective Schools Movement during the 1980s, with Edmonds first identifying the importance of the leadership role of the principal in instructional activities.

During the emergence of instructional leadership research, Hallinger and Murphy (cited by Hallinger, 2003:330) defined instructional leadership as the role of the principal in supervising, coordinating, controlling and developing curriculum and instruction in the school. Hallinger (2007:5) re-iterates these roles. Similarly, Mestry (2013:120) defines instructional leadership as the way in which principals delegate or take actions in order to enhance the learning process of students. Instructional leadership involves principals focusing on the curriculum matters of the school and improving student achievement primarily through their role as instructional leaders (Day, Sammons & Gorgen, 2020:18; Mestry, 2013:120). Some of the key features of instructional leadership can be summarised as: Setting clear goals; monitoring lesson plans; evaluating educators; allocation of resources; curriculum management; promoting student learning and growth; and providing quality instruction which is key to instructional leadership (Portland University Education Insight, 2019).

The definitions of instructional leadership remain diverse and seem to focus on the role of the principal as the main leader. For example, Farwell (2016:59) makes reference to Weber's (1997:587) definition in which he describes instructional leadership as the way in which principals interact with teachers within the classroom and protect the instructional

programme in order to improve student learning and academic performances. Ng (2019:3) indicates that the role of the principal in engaging in classroom observations and a direct involvement in the teaching and learning programme (curriculum) was an early conceptualisation of instructional leadership in the 1980s by different scholars (Hallinger, 2003; Meyer & McMillan, 2001). This early conceptualisation of instructional leadership whereby principals engage in classroom observation and supervision is still prevalent to this day. For example, Ng (2019:7) cites various authors who indicate that the principal's engagement in classroom observation and evaluation of teaching and learning are practices related to effective schools which promote enhanced learning (Hargreaves *et al.*, 2001; Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood *et al.*, 2004). This also links with my earlier discussion on effective schools (see Edmond's, 1982, cited in Grady *et al.*, 1989:8) where the research focused on how the principal engages in curriculum monitoring and evaluation to promote an effective school.

However, much uncertainty existed regarding the concept and definitions of instructional leadership during the decades of research undertaken, due to a lack of clarity around the role of the principal's instructional practices (Farwell, 2016:59). This lack of clarity regarding the role of the principal soon became much clearer from a multitude of empirical studies within the domains of change implementation, school effectiveness and programme improvement (Hallinger, 2003:331). The scholarly research within these domains found (indirectly) that principals needed to be skillful in their leadership positions in order to bring about change and improvement in learner academic performance. This led to a substantial body of literature on instructional leadership practices. However, many studies in instructional leadership have focused on the principal as the only significant manager in improving learner academic performance, but have neglected the role of *other* school managers like HODs and DPs. Hence, within the context of this study, and drawing on Goddard, Miller, Larsen, Goddard, Madsen and Schroeder's (2010:337) definition, as well as various authors' notion of shared instructional leadership (cf. Day *et al.*, 2001; Jackson, 2000; Lambert, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003; Southworth, 2002), instructional leadership involves those leadership practices displayed by SMT members with a strong focus on instructional activities that are intended to lead to improved learner academic performance. Evidently, there is a plethora of literature (Bendikson, Robinson & Hattie, 2012; Hopkins, 2013; Mestry, 2017b; Prytula, Noonan & Hellsten, 2013) that focuses on the principal as the main instructional leader; hence my study addressed an area of paucity in this research field by *exploring the instructional leadership practices of the entire SMT* and not just the principal.

## **2.6 THE KEY ROLE PLAYERS IN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP**

### **2.6.1 The principal**

From the account of the research literature explored in Sections 2.4 and 2.5 above, it can be seen that much of the research has focused on the principal as the main management member responsible for the functioning of any school but more especially, for the success of learner achievement, even to the extent of becoming involved in classroom supervision. Historically, the advent of democracy brought about a shift in the South African education system, which saw the introduction of School Governing Bodies (SGBs). The introduction of SGBs resulted in a decentralisation of the role of the principal which required them to become more involved in the teaching and learning programme of the school with a strong focus on the curriculum, rather than to follow an office-based approach. According to Taole (2013:75), the decentralisation of the role of the principal led to a shift from the traditional managerial and administrative duties to a role that focused more on the instructional activities in the school which involves supervision through classroom visits and even teaching.

This paradigm shift (as Taole, 2013 calls it) in the role of the principal placed more emphasis on accountability for improved learner academic performance. Taole (2013:25) further asserts that due to accountability within the education system, principals had to ensure optimal learner academic performance was achieved at high levels, thus leading them to adopt the role of instructional leaders. In view of Taole's (2013) study, instructional leadership research has tended to focus on the principal as the main SMT member when it comes to accountability of learner academic performance. In contrast, my study explored the issue of accountability within the entire SMT. This was to determine if accountability is actually shared between the SMT, or if the principal was ultimately accountable for learner academic performance.

Yasser and Al Mahdy (2015:1504) describe the principal's instructional leadership role as one which involves providing guidance and direction when engaged with the instructional programme of the school. In providing clarity about the instructional leadership role of principals, Bush and Glover (cited in Mestry, 2017b:258) identified the following main activities of principals:

- Whole school curriculum management;
- Evaluating and analysing learner academic performance based on the schools internal assessment programme;
- Monitoring the work of HODs;

- Ensuring that HODs monitor and supervise the work of educators in their respective departments;
- Visiting classes and offering meaningful feedback to educators;
- Controlling Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM).

The activities that principals engage in, as identified by Bush and Glover (2009) are all instructional leadership orientated. The type of activities is also an indication of the need for principals to focus much more on the teaching and learning of the school. Yasser and Al Mahdy (2015:1505) further assert that a narrow interpretation of the principal's role in instructional leadership practices will involve direct engagement in the teaching and learning activities of the school, which includes classroom monitoring and supervision. Bendikson *et al.* (2012:3) argue that principals who take on an instructional leadership role have the ability to improve learner academic performance. However simple it may seem for principals to assume this type of leadership to improve their school performances, Mestry (2013:119) argues that the role of the principal over the last decade has become much more complex due to the demands placed on them, the decision-making processes they are involved in, as well as the amount of responsibility placed on them in order to ensure that the school functions effectively. This implies that the principal's direct engagement in the teaching and learning programme may not be that simple of a task within the South African education context. To further explicate this, principals are often distracted from their instructional leadership practices by an overload of administrative and management tasks (Day, Sammons & Gorgen, 2020:7). For example, Mestry (2017b:258) contends that principals are engaged with complex decision-making as well as newly surfacing demands which adds to their responsibilities unlike previous South African education landscapes. Resource procurement, learner discipline, conflict resolution and learner and educator crises are all the demanding activities that principals have to engage with at present (Mestry, 2017b:258).

While there is an abundance of literature which alludes to the role of the principal as an instructional leader in improving learner academic performance, Fullan (cited in Mestry, 2013:119) reminds us to this day that the role of the principal has changed over the years from an instructional leader to transactional leader and transformational leader, being inundated with management duties, interacting with parents and community, and attending to urgent issues in the school which may arise like an emergency or crisis. This implies that principals have not been given the opportunity to act as instructional leaders but to rather adjust and adopt other types of leadership styles to suit their daily management duties and activities, thereby also neglecting their involvement in the curriculum. This point is also iterated by Taole (2013:75) when he argues that principals "need to free themselves" from



some of their management duties by delegating to the SMT members. By delegating some managerial tasks to the other SMT members, the principal can devote more time (being directly involved) in the teaching and learning activities of the school. This is also argued by Hallinger (2007:5) when he compares instructional and transformative leadership roles, indicating how transformational leaders need to be involved, among many other activities, in “culture building”. Mestry’s point (2013) is that many other management duties may make all of this difficult. An educational article by Portland University on instructional leadership also suggests that instructional leaders should engage in a shift away from management and administrative functions and focus on their leadership objectives (Portland University Education Insight, 2019). By principals occupying most of their day in the office engaged with managerial and administrative matters, they may seem to devote much less time to their role as instructional leaders.

Within a South African context, Taole (2013:75) argues that the instructional leadership role of the principal is of paramount importance to the learner academic achievement levels through their involvement in curriculum management and implementation. However, Mestry and Govindasamy (2021:545) note with concern the challenges principals face with regards to curriculum changes in South Africa. Taole’s (2013) qualitative study found that principals regarded themselves more as managers than instructional leaders. Taole’s (2013:78) findings show that most principals are exasperated with work overload and knowledge of curriculum specifics for the whole school. Taole’s (2013) study is an indication that principals cannot lead in isolation, and suggests that some of their duties will have to be shared with their SMTs. This then supports the notion of shared instructional leadership (as cited in Hallinger, 2007) for improving learner academic performance. The inclusion of HODs and DPs in this study also is aimed at showing if principals are indeed engaging in shared instructional leadership within the context of an underperforming secondary school.

In order for principals to focus on their instructional leadership roles, they will have to re-define their role of principal to carry out their instructional leadership practices effectively. Chabalala and Naidoo (2021:9) also argue that “principals need to create time within their constricted schedules to become instructional leaders”. This may seem a fitting sacrifice to make for principals of underperforming schools when weighing their multi-functional roles as managers and administrators against the instructional leader position which will (or should) reap the benefits of improved learner achievement. This is especially pertinent and manageable insofar as they recognise that they can share the instructional leadership role in what various authors have called shared instructional leadership (as cited by Hallinger, 2007 above). In this study therefore, I have focused upon asking the whole SMT about their

involvement in instructional leadership. Another key question which this study explored is the way in which principals carry out their instructional leadership roles in relation to the other levels of the SMT (i.e., HODs and DPs).

The principal as the main SMT member is at the helm of accountability for learner performance and academic achievement. It is for this reason that principals have to assume the role of instructional leaders and provide ongoing professional development in ensuring the improvement of academic achievement through specialised subject training, workshops, seminars and subject meetings which will enable teachers to improve learner academic performance (Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021:1; Ntshoe & Selesho, 2014:482). To explicate the professional development initiatives, Steyn (2008:22) makes reference to the DoE's (2007:17) National policy framework for teacher education and development in South Africa which identifies four types of continuous professional teacher development (CPTD) initiatives: School-driven activities (initiated by principal and/or the staff); employer-driven activities (initiated by the DBE); qualification-driven activities (e.g., degree, post-graduate qualifications etc.); and organisation approved activities (NGOs, government initiated activities etc.). For this study, I have considered the school-driven activities initiated specifically by the SMT, who are the participants. This study also focuses on the specific teaching and learning activities that the SMT members express that they engage in as part of their instructional leadership practices, where I have also explored professional development initiatives provided by the SMT and their perspectives on CPTD.

An electronic database literature review search by Bush and Glover (2016:214) found that the role of the principal is associated with the following: A focus on developing a shared vision; resource achievement; and safety and security of the school premises. A systematic literature review on school leadership and management in South Africa by Bush and Glover (2016) also highlights the changing role of principals and their leadership style, due to the constant dynamic change in education in South Africa. Based on this literature review by Bush and Glover (2016), it appears that principals seem to spend very little time on the instructional programme of the school, thereby giving a considerable amount of attention to the instructional leadership role of HODs and DPs; hence this study explored the HODs, DPs and principals' perspectives on their (interrelated) roles. Despite the seemingly subtle instructional leadership role that principals seem to play at present (according to Bush & Glover, 2016), they were still included in my study to gain their perceptions about instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools and their role(s) therein.

## **2.6.2 The role of the HODs and DPs**

My study addresses the instructional leadership role of all SMT members as one of the leading gaps in literature. The South African school organogram structure starts with the level one educators followed by the HODs, DPs and the principals at the top of the hierarchy (Ndhlovu, Bertram, Mthiyane & Avery, 2017:19). This structure of school management shows that HODs and DPs are involved directly with the instructional leadership practices more often than the principal. However, previous studies have focused on the role of the principal and very little attention has been given to HODs and DPs in the literature, given their direct involvement in instructional leadership (Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021:9). One author of note is Leithwood (2016:117) whose study was in response to a widespread belief that HODs were not being fully utilised in secondary schools and whose instructional leadership role is so important towards learner achievement. After an extensive review of research, Leithwood (2016:117) found that HODs had a positive impact on improving learner academic performance. It is for this reason that I also examined the instructional leadership practices of HODs and DPs in my study since they appear to be more directly involved in the teaching and learning programme through their (direct) interactions with learners, parents and between professionals (i.e., HODs interact with the educators and DPs interact with HODs and educators).

In one of the first studies of HODs which included 100 South African secondary schools, Ali and Botha (2006, as cited by Bush & Glover 2016:6), stated that HODs are the key role players in curriculum delivery. They also indicated that for improvement to be achieved in the teaching and learning programme of South African schools, HODs will have to spend a considerable amount of time on supervision of educators and learners. This would also mean supervising the subjects in their respective departments (Bush & Glover, 2016:6). Bush and Glover (2016:6) allude to a critical question posed by Ali and Botha's (2006) study, which is: Are HODs carrying out their tasks of monitoring and supervision to bring about improvement in learner academic performance? My study also addresses this critical question which seems to be in limbo at present. It was intended that through my interactions with HODs as well as the DPs, some insights would emerge into the main responsibilities of these SMT members and the work they actually are doing in their school contexts.

Another significant preliminary study involving 142 South African secondary schools by Hoadley, Christie and Ward (2009:144) found that principals claimed to have spent more time on administrative functions rather than on the instructional leadership practices in the school (which included supervising teaching and learning and managing the curriculum). Three questionnaires were distributed, respectively to the principal, an HOD (or DP), and an

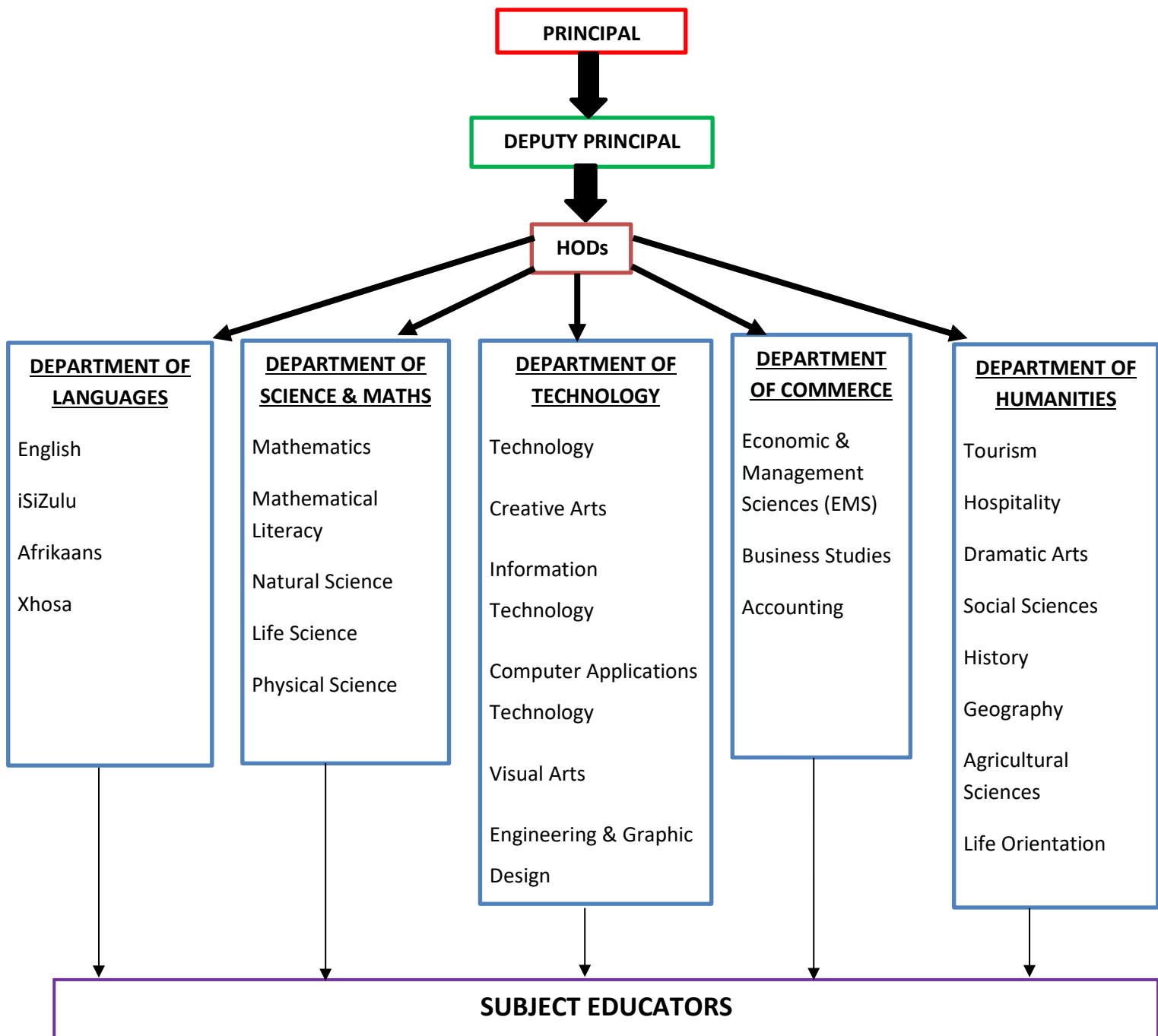
educator in each school (in order to triangulate the responses regarding the management of teaching and learning) across the 142 secondary schools in South Africa. Hoadley *et al.*'s (2009) study found that the management of the curriculum was spread amongst the senior managers of the school. Their findings imply that shared instructional leadership was practised with a distributed approach to tasks. Drawing on Hoadley *et al.*'s (2009) findings, my study explored the extent to which the entire SMT share instructional leadership tasks which also address curriculum management amongst the SMT members. Although the principal is regarded as the main accounting officer in South African schools, there is a certain degree of delegation of tasks to HODs and the DPs. Seobi and Wood (2016:1) assert that the ongoing daily challenges in both township and rural schools impede the instructional leadership practices of HODs and DPs. This is partly due to the fact that the SMT becomes so involved with daily functionality, that they neglect their roles as instructional leaders. With regards to the role of the principal in instructional leadership and the inclusion of the other SMT members (i.e., HODs and DPs), Hoadley *et al.*'s (2009) study forms a significant argument and justification since only 17 percent of the principals in their study claimed to have been directly involved in instructional leadership practices while the others stated that instructional leadership practices regarding teaching and learning were overseen by HODs and DPs. In view of this, it remains unclear as to which level of SMT (HODs, DPs or principals) is impacted by the most (if any) instructional leadership duties; therefore to address this gap, my study also focused on the interrelated roles of the SMT in relation to their instructional leadership practices.

Leithwood (2016:117) contends that HODs are both an “untapped and underutilised source of instructional leadership”. However, current national policy (DBE, 2016) indicates the specific duties of HODs and DPs which point towards instructional leadership practices. An important South African education policy designed by the then Department of Education (DoE) in 1999 (last amended in 2016), was PAM (commonly known as the PAM document in South African education). The PAM (DBE, 2016) document contains the terms and conditions of employment for SMT members and educators in accordance with the Employment of Educators Act (1998) (Christie, 2010:704). According to the PAM (2016:37), HODs are supposed to carry out instructional duties related to the curriculum in promoting a suitable education for the learner. However, Christie (2010:704) argues that the PAM (DBE, 2016) tends to focus on management and administrative tasks with less reference to professional leadership. This argument put forward by Christie (2010:704) relating to the professional leadership (or lack of it) in the PAM (DBE, 2016), re-iterates my choice of utilising the PAM (DBE, 2016) for document review in my study. As far as instructional leadership is concerned, Seobi and Wood (2016:1) argue that HODs are in the best position

of leadership to bring about improvements in learner performance but do not seem to be fulfilling their leadership roles. While many scholars (Farwell, 2016; Ng, 2019; Hopkins, 2013; Mestry, 2013; Mestry, 2017b) note the principal as the key role player in the execution of instructional leadership practices, there has been a considerable amount of emerging literature over the years which seems to now take into account other school management members comprising of the DPs and HODs (Fulmer, 2006; Ghavifekr & Ibrahim, 2014; Seobi & Wood, 2016). Even an early study by Fulmer (2006:110) on instructional leadership argued that principals cannot work in isolation within their instructional programme at school. Fulmer's (2006:110) argument is noteworthy considering the secondary school management structure in South Africa, which takes into account HODs, who are managing teaching and learning within specialised subject departments.

At present, within the South African school education system, the following specialised departments are managed by HODs: Languages; Mathematics and Science; Humanities; and Commerce. From these specialised departments, one can see that HODs are directly involved in the instructional programme of the school. This has been one of my reasons to include HODs and DPs within this study since it will add to the body of knowledge with regard to instructional leadership that seems to be in paucity over the years both globally and within South Africa. The instructional leadership role of the SMT is clearly defined in the Department of Education's SMT Handbook (KZN DoE, 2007:41). With regard to instructional leadership practices, the SMT Handbook states that the principal is both responsible and accountable for managing the school curriculum while the DP will assume the same responsibilities of the principal in his/her absence (KZN DoE, 2007:41). It further notes that the HOD's main instructional leadership role is to supervise the various subjects across different grades within the respective specialised departments (KZN DoE, 2007:41). According to the SMT Handbook (KZN DoE, 2007:41), the HOD is directly involved in the instructional programme of the school through the management of the different subjects within their specialised departments. Figure 2.1 below presents an organogram of the secondary school structure of SMT members:

Figure 2.1: SMT school organogram (Adapted from Glendale Secondary, 2015)



The secondary school organogram depicted in Figure 2.1 shows a graphical representation of the different levels of the SMT, and shows that HODs are the first line of managers for the various subjects within their specialised department as they are directly involved in the curriculum with the educators and learners. The organogram also shows that HODs are directly accountable to the DP with regard to curriculum management in their departments. While the SMT Handbook (KZN DoE, 2007:41) states the importance of the school principal in managing the curriculum, the considerable interaction that HODs and even DPs engage in with the curriculum is considered significant towards filling the gaps in literature which takes

into account their instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools in South Africa.

Studies conducted in South Africa on instructional leadership describe HODs as leaders within their specialised departments, supervising, as well as managing teaching and learning, which is their main role function (Mestry & Pillay, 2013; Naicker, Chikoko & Mthiyane, 2013). With reference to Figure 2.1 above, HODs supervise all subjects under their specialised department. Traditionally, the principal has been regarded as the key role player in the school's instructional programme. Conversely, Naicker *et al.*'s (2013) study argues that there has been a paucity of literature on the role of HODs and DPs in instructional leadership since their main role function is to ensure quality teaching and learning along with monitoring and supervision, which are key characteristics of instructional leadership. In this regard, a quantitative research study by Ghavifekr and Ibrahim (2014:45) highlighted the importance of HODs and DPs in bringing about positive change to the academic programme of the school through their position as instructional leaders. Through a 5-Likert Scale questionnaire, the analysis of the results showed the following: HODs and DPs contribute to improved learner academic performance; they have a positive impact on educator job performances; and provide motivation to educators and learners. Ghavifekr and Ibrahim (2014:54) further contend that HODs play an important role in instructional leadership since they also contribute to the professional development of teachers. By HODs playing an important role in continuing professional development, this in turn assists in developing teaching practices of the staff towards improved learner academic performance. Furthermore, Leithwood's (2016:135) evidence based on an overview of 42 studies found that HODs within their specialised departments have a much greater influence on student learning as compared to the school as a whole, including the principal. This significant body of literature suggests that both HODs' and DPs' instructional leadership practices cannot be ignored, given their direct involvement in the teaching and learning activities.

## **2.7 INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNER ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

There is an array of leadership styles that have been documented in the literature on leadership, but what is generally agreed upon is that there is a no one size fits all approach to leadership. However, there has been emerging literature in support of instructional leadership and specifically shared instructional leadership as the most suitable leadership style for improving learner academic performance (Hallinger, 2007; Hopkins, 2013; Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam & Brown, 2014; Kaparou & Bush, 2015). Bendikson *et al.* (2012:3) assert that instructional leadership is integral to the improvement of learner academic performance.

Their study of 102 secondary schools revealed that even though some principals exhibited indirect instructional leadership characteristics, they still remained a key factor in improving learner academic performance. Their study also took into account the difference in school structure of secondary schools as compared to primary schools. Based on the active engagement of SMT members in the secondary schools, they found that instructional leadership for learner achievement was prevalent through collaborative work by all SMT members (Bendikson *et al.*, 2012). In addition, Kaparou and Bush's (2015:1) explorative study of instructional leadership practices in Greek schools also found that principals, through collaborative leadership with their HODs and DPs, were able to improve learner academic performance in what they termed "semi-instructional leadership", since they shared the instructional programme responsibilities. Similarly, in a recent study, Mestry and Govindasamy (2021:545) also found that when SMTs and educators work collaboratively, "they are more likely to support each other by giving constructive criticisms, finding solutions to challenges, and sharing good practices".

Another significant study by Shatzer *et al.* (2014:445) carried out across 590 schools in the US, comprising of 37 schools, examined the effects of instructional leadership and transformational leadership on student achievement. Shatzer *et al.* (2014:455) concluded that instructional leadership accounted for more of the variance in the scores of the standardised testing. Shatzer *et al.*'s (2014) results offer compelling evidence that instructional leadership attributed more towards improved learner academic performance in standardised testing than transformational leadership. Drawing on this, my study examined the instructional leadership practices of SMT members in underperforming secondary schools, where standardised, high stakes testing, like the Grade 12 NSC examination is a key determinant of whether effective instructional leadership practices are indeed leading to progressive academic learner performances or a regression of the NSC results.

Over the last few decades there has been an astounding body of literature and debates surrounding educational leadership (Bush & Glover, 2003; Day *et al.*, 2016; Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010; Ntshoe & Selesho, 2014). Researchers have put forward their views on leadership styles based on their opinions of which style best suits a school. However, for improved learner academic performance to be achieved, there needs to be a strong focus on teaching and learning. In support of instructional leadership (as a preferred leadership style) for improving learner academic performance, Hopkins (2013:4) states:

Teaching is more than just presenting material; it is about infusing curriculum content with appropriate instructional strategies that are selected in order to achieve the learning goals the teacher has for his or her students. Successful teachers are not simply charismatic,



persuasive and expert presenters; rather, they create powerful cognitive and social tasks to their students, and teach the students how to make productive use of them. The purpose of instructional leadership is to facilitate and support this approach to teaching and learning.

In order to bring about improved learner academic performance, SMTs need to focus on the teaching and learning processes through their instructional leadership roles. In a study conducted by Mestry (2013), eight principals from Gauteng were interviewed. Mestry's study concluded that those principals who focused strongly on instructional leadership practices attained much higher levels of learner academic performance (2013:122). Similarly, Leithwood's (2016:135) review of literature in countries like the US, United Kingdom (UK), Australia and New Zealand, also concluded that HODs have a strong influence on improved learner academic performance as active instructional leaders.

Hopkins (2013:5) makes reference to his facilitation of the "Improving the Quality of Education for All" (IQEA) school improvement projects in the UK, which suggests that instructional leaders display characteristics which take into account the vision and values which assist in student learning. He further goes on to note that instructional leaders have knowledge of pedagogic structures which are able to improve student achievement and learning (Hopkins, 2013:5). Besides pedagogic knowledge, principals, as instructional leaders, should also engage in classroom visits, provide feedback to both educators and learners and promote school-wide professional development (Shava, Heystek & Chasara, 2021:119). This increases teacher competencies and communicates the shared goals to bring about school improvement (Shava *et al.*, 2021:119). Hopkins (2013:5) also considers that learner achievement should be the focus of schooling with instructional leaders providing support to teachers in the form of resources and incentives as a form of motivation so that they can focus on the improvement of learner academic performance. He suggests that the principal should provide the necessary resources and rewards for teachers to maintain their focus on the learner. However, there are schools in South Africa and particularly in this study that cannot afford the luxury of providing resources and incentives to educators. In fact, the sample schools in this study are typical examples of under-resourced schools with financial difficulty (as expressed by the participants).

In South Africa, Bhengu and Mthembu (2014) looked at the effective leadership practices between two secondary schools in the same community within the Umlazi District. This study is noteworthy as Bhengu and Mthembu (2014) provide evidence that the school that performed better was a result of the principal adopting instructional leadership practices and creating a collaborative school environment and a positive school culture. They indicate that in the other school, "underperformance prevailed" (Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014:48). Bhengu

and Mthembu (2014:50) attributed “underperformance” partly to the lack of vision and collaboration amongst the school leadership. Their findings concluded that “instructional leadership makes the difference between effective schools and less effective ones” (Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014:51). Although there seems to be very limited literature on instructional leadership within South African schools, significant studies of South African schools within deprived and challenging contexts suggest that instructional leadership practices may overcome the challenges that SMTs are facing (Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014; Mkhize & Bhengu, 2015, Msila, 2013). Bush and Glover (2014:567) further argue that “while there are different approaches to leadership and management, a focus on leadership for learning, or ‘instructional leadership’, is an essential element for successful schooling”.

There exists a buffet of leadership models available to SMTs, but of particular significance to SMTs of underperforming secondary schools in South Africa may be the instructional leadership model, as conceptualised in the concept of shared instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2007:5). Since underperforming secondary schools’ main problem is teaching and learning, which is also focused on by the DBE in attempts to improve the NSC results, instructional leadership may be the answer for dealing with poor learner performance. Even Bush and Glover (2016:6) contend that instructional leadership may be the right approach in order to improve learner academic performance in South Africa; however, there has not been much attention paid to improvement practices and processes such as monitoring and classroom observations. One of the benefits of instructional leadership for underperforming secondary schools may lie in its direct and indirect contributions towards improving learner academic performance. Msila (2013:81) states that direct instructional leadership focuses on the quality of teaching, curriculum and assessment while indirect instructional leadership refers to internal school functionality processes like daily routines, policies and regulations which aid in promoting quality teaching and learning, thereby improving learner academic performance.

## **2.8 THE NATIONAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE (NSC) EXAMINATIONS**

Since the SMTs of underperforming secondary schools are actively engaged with the Grade 12 learners and the NSC examinations, I have included in this thesis, a discussion on the NSC examinations. In this section, I provide a brief historical overview of the origins of the NSC examinations, the structure of the NSC subjects and a critical review of the NSC Qualification.

The advent of democracy marked a critical period in the South African school education system. The redressing of the past imbalances created by the apartheid era took effect from

1994. The education sector in particular underwent an historical transformation from 1994. As part of the Curriculum 2005 programme, the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) was the response to redress inequalities created by an apartheid curriculum (Mouton, Louw & Strydom 2012:1211). During this period of redress (from 1994-2007), all Grade 12 learners (also known as matrices or matriculants in South Africa) wrote the Senior Certificate Examination (SCE), which was the school exit examinations. Unfortunately, OBE came with its share of challenges regarding its implementation and mounting pressure from various education stakeholders led to it being discontinued (Mouton *et al.*, 2012:1211). Nel and Kistner (2009:954) at the time viewed this as probably sound educational practice in the interest of the South African education system since globally there had been an emerging re-evaluation of school curricula in response to the demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century globalisation.

With both developed and developing countries undergoing educational curricular transformations, South Africa had also jumped on the bandwagon and in 2008 the SCE was replaced with the NSC examinations, which is the official school-leaving examination in South Africa at present (Nel & Kistner, 2009:954). A pass in the final NSC examinations is a prerequisite for those Grade 12 learners who have applied to further their studies at tertiary institutions across the country. On the contrary, if a learner does not meet the minimum requirements of the NSC, then such a learner cannot apply for admission to a tertiary institution. One of the main reasons why I have included the NSC examinations (and results) as a topic for participants to explore is because a secondary school is classified as underperforming due to its NSC results. However, it is not just the Grade 12 NSC results which are classified as underperforming, but the entire school (Grade 8 to 12). With this in mind, I allowed participants to also explore (through our interactions) the impact the NSC results has had on them as instructional leaders within the whole school context. In the next section, I provide an overview of the structure of the NSC subjects and the examination.

### **2.8.1 THE STRUCTURE OF THE NSC SUBJECTS AND EXAMINATIONS**

From 2006, the new phasing in of the NSC structure had begun with the Grade 10 learners. The Grade 10 class of 2006 would then become the first Grade 12 learners to write the final NSC examinations in 2008, which became standardised for the whole country, moving away from the previous differentiated Higher and Standard Grade levels of questioning in the previous SCE papers. Below is a tabular representation (Table 2.1) of the subject structure and the different levels for the NSC pass for Grade 10-12 learners:

**TABLE 2.1: NSC pass levels and requirements (Adapted from Wedekind, 2013:29)**

SUBJECTS	NATIONAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE (NSC)			
	PASS LEVELS AND REQUIREMENTS			
	NSC PASS	HIGHER CERTIFICATE	DIPLOMA	BACHELORS PASS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home Language (HL) (40% compulsory)</li> <li>• First Additional Language (FAL)</li> <li>• Mathematics/Mathematical Literacy</li> <li>• Life Orientation</li> <li>• Three other chosen subjects from the designated list</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 subjects pass at a minimum of 30%</li> <li>• 3 subjects pass at a minimum of 40% (including the HL)</li> <li>• Allowed to fail one subject below 30% (except for HL).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 subjects pass at a minimum of 30%</li> <li>• 3 subjects pass at a minimum of 40% (including the HL)</li> <li>• Allowed to fail one subject below 30% (except for HL).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 subjects pass at a minimum of 40% (including HL but excluding LO).</li> <li>• 2 subjects pass at a minimum of 30%</li> <li>• Allowed to fail one subject below 30% (except for the HL).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HL pass at minimum 40%.</li> <li>• 4 subjects pass at a minimum of 50% (includes HL and LO).</li> <li>• 2 subjects pass at a minimum of 30%</li> <li>• Learner cannot fail any subject.</li> </ul>
<p><i>One of the languages passed (home or first additional language) with a minimum 30% as per <b>meeting the language requirements</b> for further study at a tertiary institution.</i></p>				

As mentioned earlier, Nel and Kistner (2009:954) offered some educational reform assurance regarding the introduction of the NSC in South Africa, noting that the changes were consistent with other countries. However, the changes did not receive a warm reception from all of the education stakeholders. One such academic who had critiqued the pass mark of 30% in NSC subjects (as indicated in Table 2.1 above) was Professor Jonathan Jansen. Jansen, together with academic and political activist, Mamphela

Ramphele, suggested that the 30% pass brought mediocrity into the school-leaving NSC examination system (Wedekind, 2013:11). A proposal by Jansen to increase the pass mark to 50% was also refuted by the DBE. This mediocrity in the NSC Grade 12 pass requirements that academics like Jansen and Ramphele were referring to has had a direct impact on the level that was required by the tertiary institutions. Setting the benchmarks as low as 30% for a pass in a subject would not correlate with a learner entering a Degree programme at a University and tertiary access tests are sometimes conducted with first year students to determine the educational level of exiting Grade 12 learners (Nel & Kistner, 2009:959). Umalusi, which is the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, went a step further and decided to evaluate the level of the NSC qualification. In 2010 Umalusi embarked on a joint research partnership with the Higher Education South Africa (HESA) to evaluate the NSC in relation to selected international qualifications. Umalusi and Booyse (2010) compared the NSC to the following international qualifications: International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO); Cambridge International Examinations (CIE); and the Namibian Department of Education CIE. The findings of Umalusi and Booyse (2010:9-12) were as follows:

- The organising principles and coherence were clear in the NSC Curriculum accompanied by learning outcomes as compared to the CIE and IBO qualifications.
- The NSC showed progression and pacing of year by year content leading to the Grade 12 NSC examinations.
- Regarding the pacing and sequence of the curriculum, South African educators found the NSC quite strenuous as compared to the educators from the other qualifications who were afforded some leniency when it came to planning, sequencing and pacing of the curriculum.
- The NSC was very close in the depth of content as compared to the CIE and the IBO.
- The aims, purpose, vision and general outcomes were clear in all of the qualifications evaluated.
- The teaching and methodology of the NSC are much more clearly stated than the other qualifications.
- The NSC assessment guidelines were the most clearly specified from all the qualifications.
- Regarding the user-friendliness and the availability of the curriculum, the NSC appeared to be lengthy and complex.

However, the comparable evidence from Umalusi and Booyse (stated above) still does not represent the views of tertiary institutions, where staff experience learners exiting the Grade 12 NSC examinations and entering Bachelor Degree Programmes. An empirical study by Prince (2017) investigated the relationship between the NSC school-leaving examinations and the National Benchmark Test (NBT) for university entry. Prince (2017:133) argued that the NSC results were norm referenced and difficult to use as a University entrance requirement as compared to the NBT scores which were criterion referenced and tested the three main areas: Academic Literacy; Quantitative Literacy; and Mathematics. However, the percentage of learners that achieved the NSC pass or Higher Certificate pass (as per the requirements indicated in Table 2.1 above), entered the job market and even engaged in small-scale studies to enhance their skills in areas like basic computers, even though they were not allowed to study at tertiary institutions (Prince, 2017:133). Conversely, one of the main findings from research on the transition from exiting the schooling system to the job market and tertiary institutions was that passing the NSC examinations did not guarantee the exiting Grade 12 learner a job offer, but was rather a gateway opportunity to tertiary institutions (Spaull, 2013:7). Whether or not passing the NSC examinations affords learners a place in the South African job market or tertiary admission, the NSC still requires the motivation of the exiting Grade 12 learner for the path taken for future endeavours. The issue of learners' commitment to passing the NSC examinations is an aspect I co-explored with participants during our conversations to determine the extent of accountability (as perceived by the SMT as instructional leaders) for the decline in NSC results, considering that passing the NSC examinations is crucial to the future of the Grade 12 learners.

## **2.9 UNDERPERFORMING SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

An underperforming secondary school within the South African education system is any school that has achieved below 60% in the NSC examinations (sometimes referred to as Matric Examinations). Grade 12 learners across the country sit to write their final examinations at the end of every school academic year. The NSC examination is the official school exit examination for Grade 12 South African learners. The NSC examination determines a Grade 12 learner's outcome of tertiary institution entry or job employment. The focus always seems to be on the learners who attain the best results in the country in the media, while the learners who do not attain a minimum requirement pass, contribute to the national failure rate statistics. However, there is very little focus on those learners who fail the NSC examinations, but ironically great emphasis on the secondary schools that are underperforming. Passing the NSC examinations is essential for Grade 12 learners entering the tertiary and economic sectors of the country and without a NSC certificate, Grade 12

learners may find themselves struggling without employment and money (Louw, Bayat & Eigelaar-Meets, 2011:1). Below is a tabular representation (Table 2.2) of the NSC pass rates from 2008 to 2020:

**Table 2.2: NSC pass rates from 2008-2020 (South Africa’s Matric Pass Rate, 2020)**

YEAR	NSC PASS RATE (%)	INCREASE (+) DECREASE (-)
2008	62.5%	-2.7
2009	60.6%	-1.9
2010	67.8%	+7.2
2011	70.2%	+2.4
2012	73.9%	+3.7
2013	78.2%	+4.3
2014	75.8%	-2.4
2015	70.7%	-5.1
2016	72.5%	+1.8
2017	75.1%	+2.6
2018	78.2%	+3.1
2019	81.3%	+3.1
2020	76.2%	-5.1

The table above represents the NSC pass rate from 2008 to 2020. The introduction of the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) final NSC examination for Grade 12 learners across the country in 2008 started very low at 62.5%; however, there has been some significant improvement over the years which has seen the NSC pass rate remain steady in the 70% – 78% pass rate zone. Another significant study by McKay (2019) which drew on the data findings from four evaluative studies, informs us that the National Workbook Programme designed to tackle underperformance in schools revealed a positive step in the direction towards improving learner underperformance in South Africa. While to some extent the National Workbook Programme seems to be preparing learners from Gr R –

9 in areas of Mathematics and Literacy, there still remains a band of secondary schools that do not seem to be improving in their learner academic performance. It is through this study that I want to fill gaps that exist specifically for underperforming secondary schools by examining the issue of instructional leadership.

Without dismissing the fact that our NSC pass rate is steadily increasing, my study focuses on the silent statistics of our underperformance. According to the 2017 NSC Schools Performance Report (DBE, 2017:14), 26 schools attained NSC pass rates of below 40% over a five-year period. Furthermore, when these figures are broken down, 13 schools in KZN and 13 schools in Limpopo Province were the only two provinces that attained these alarming statistics, hence the need for this study in KZN, which would provide some new impetus for improving the provincial NSC pass rate through the recommendations offered in this study. Important to add to this below “40% statistic”, is that of those DBE underperforming schools which have attained below 60% pass rates in the NSC examinations. This is also the category of schools which is the main focus of this study. In the Umlazi District of Education there were 51 schools that recorded a pass rate of below 60% in 2017, and in 2018, 40 schools in the Umlazi District recorded a pass rate of below 60%. While the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, stated in her 2016 NSC results speech that improving our education system is “not a sprint but rather a marathon” (Motshekga, 2016), the question is, how long will the marathon take for the underperforming schools to complete? My argument is based on the KZN statistics of underperforming secondary schools discussed above. Over time these schools that obtained a pass rate of 60% and below, became known as in The Framework for the National Strategy for Learner Attainment (NSLA) schools (DoE, 2007). The term NSLA Schools, referring to underperforming secondary schools, became widely used in the Umlazi District of Education in KZN. The NSLA Programme was developed by the DoE with the aim of improving the pass rates of underperforming secondary schools in South Africa. The NSLA Programme comprises short and long term planned activities, interventions and strategies aimed at improving learner academic performance in those underperforming secondary schools (DoE, 2007). Three main areas of priority as outlined by the DoE (2007) follow:

- Special focus on teacher training, retention and development;
- Providing teaching and learning support material;
- Increased the teaching time.

Louw, Bayat and Eigelaar-Meets (2012:1) examined underperforming secondary schools in the Western Cape, South Africa and argued that despite the development of the NSLA



Programme, very little has changed in underperforming secondary schools in South Africa. In view of Louw *et al.*'s (2012) assertion that there has been little change in underperforming schools in South Africa, mostly due to educational policy and socio-economic factors, my study explored the issue of underperformance from a different angle which considered the perspectives of the SMTs as instructional leaders. Within the South African context, the necessary factors that impact on education have to be examined in order to understand the underlying causes of underperformance in secondary schools. In the next section, I review some of the literature which highlights those factors, which impact negatively on underperforming secondary schools in South Africa.

## **2.10 FACTORS IMPACTING ON UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

There is a large body of empirical literature that informs us of the factors that are said to contribute to the underperformance of some schools in South Africa. In terms of this literature, it is suggested that SMT members may at times face challenges along the way that may impede their instructional leadership practices when they are trying to improve learner academic performance, especially within underperforming schools. A particularly relevant study conducted in the Western Cape investigated the confluence of factors impacting on underperforming secondary schools. The study by Bayat, Louw and Rena (2014a) was a mixed methods study which consisted of 14 underperforming secondary schools in the Western Cape, South Africa. Their purposeful selection included nine urban schools (four classified as historically Coloured schools and five as historically African schools) and five rural schools (two classified as historically Coloured and three as historically African schools) (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:43). In view of this, my study of underperforming secondary schools also probed further some of the factors identified by Bayat *et al.* (2014a) as impinging on school performance. (While my sample includes historically Indian township schools, the participants now are not primarily of Indian descent – but include all historically racialised apartheid categories, with significant numbers of African descent.)

In Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a) study, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals, HODs, DPs, educators and learners. Their research focused on considering these various participants' identification of underlying factors which were responsible for poor learner academic performance. Their main research findings show that grade repetition in the selected underperforming secondary schools was significantly related to inappropriate grade promotion policy, school-level factors and socio-economic factors. In

the section that follows I provide a discussion of the main findings of Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a) study which I considered relevant to my study.

### **2.10.1 The promotion and progression policy**

Most of the SMT members and educators in Bayat *et al.* (2014a) highlighted the DBE's (2015) national policy on promotion and progression as a significant contributing factor towards grade repetition. The participants' responses indicated that this policy "forced" schools to promote learners to the next grade despite their acquisition of subject specific knowledge in the previous grade, which led to the underperformance of learners (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:46). Furthermore, most participants in their study expressed frustration over the implementation of the DBE's (2015) promotion and progression policy, with one participant describing it as an "indiscriminate and reckless application of mindless policy", while another SMT member's response was directed at the DBE, describing it as "perverse, a cynical chase after numbers", and another SMT member referred to it as a "a selfish policy, designed to protect the education authorities and the school system whilst doing an enormous disservice to the children and their parents" (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:47). To further add to the concerns raised about the DBE's (2015) promotion and progression policy, most educators and SMTs indicated that the DBE District offices distanced themselves from assisting in the implementation of the policy (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:47). In my study I explored the SMTs' perceptions on policy implementation, specifically probing the DBE's (2015) promotion and progression policy which according to Bayat *et al.* (2014a) contributed significantly to the underperformance of schools in their study.

Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a) findings also identified the following school-level factors: The poor quality of education at primary school; leadership and organisational systems; the role of the SMT; the role of the SGB; absenteeism; class skipping; late-coming by teachers and learners; language of learning and teaching; overcrowding of classrooms; teacher to learner ratio's; and safety and security of the school ecology. Their findings in this regard are discussed below.

### **2.10.2 The quality of education at primary school**

Most principals, educators, SMT members and SGBs attributed poor performances leading to grade repetition in the secondary school to the poor quality of education in primary schools (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:47). They expressed the opinion that primary schools were responsible for not developing learners effectively in literacy and numeracy (and other areas) which filters into the secondary school when the learners enter Grade 8, resulting in

learners' inadequate preparation for the secondary school curriculum. This, according to the participants in their study, may have contributed to underperformance at the secondary school level. However, Bayat *et al.* (2014a:47) caution against the participants' responses on the quality of primary school education level since further research into this field is required to explain underperformance in primary schools.

### **2.10.3 Leadership and organisational systems**

Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a) findings show that leadership and the organisational systems impacted on the quality of teaching and learning in the underperforming secondary schools. SMT responses indicated certain concerns over the quality of principal leadership and commitment to creating an effective school. Their findings revealed that principals appeared weak in acting decisively in areas like educator discipline, learner discipline and protecting educators from parents. Bayat *et al.* (2014a:47) also found that SMTs perceived poor principal leadership as impacting negatively on the quality of teaching and learning since there were discipline problems, educators' morale was low and they lacked enthusiasm.

### **2.10.4 The role of the SMT**

Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a:48) findings indicated there was a lack of communication and dissemination of information by SMTs who hardly ever called meetings with level one educators, and when the SMT did have meetings, it was merely for administrative purposes. This resulted in SMT meetings which did not adequately prepare educators to enhance their teaching or classroom management skills (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:48). They also found that there was a need for SMTs to provide support and mentorship to promote the effective delivery of the curriculum. My study does not include the level one educators as participants and their perceptions of SMT leadership practices, however, since I looked specifically at the perceptions of the SMTs' leadership practices, I explored some of the issues raised by the educators in Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a:48) study, such as SMT curriculum meetings and educator mentorship.

### **2.10.5 The role of the SGB**

The SGB's role in school governance makes them an important stakeholder in contributing towards the vision of an effective school characterised by quality teaching and learning. Even though the SGBs in Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a:48) study thought they had contributed positively towards the educational goals of the school, the principals and educators had

different opinions regarding their involvement. While principals confirmed that SGBs fulfilled their general functions, they also indicated that SGBs lacked expertise in areas of school finances and fundraising activities, which are integral towards the functioning of public schools in South Africa (e.g., payment of salaries to SGB employees and financing the school's essential services). Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a:48) findings indicated a lack of involvement or action taken to improve the school and the criticism of the SGBs led to low morale amongst educators and learners. The SGBs also lacked the capacity to carry out disciplinary measures, conduct the appointment of educators, and raise funds for their schools (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:48). In my study I have also given the SMT members the opportunity to respond about the support (or lack of it) at various levels which allowed participants to explore the role of their SGBs (or any other stakeholder if they wished to) in improving learner academic performance.

#### **2.10.6 Absenteeism, class skipping and late-coming by educators and learners**

Bayat *et al.* (2014a:48) refer to certain frustrations vented by principals and SMTs over the high absenteeism rate of both educators and learners, whom they claim contributed partly to the failure and repetition rates at their schools since their absence impacts on teaching and learning and "time on task spent" at their schools (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:48). Bayat *et al.* (2014a:48) raised concerns that the DBE's lenient leave measures for educators resulted in classes without an educator for a period of (absence) time. Bayat *et al.* (2014a:48) explained that the DBE can only employ substitute educators after the minimum number of days for the absence of an educator has lapsed; however, educators who are on leave return to school within the specified minimum time-frame which rules out the appointment of a replacement educator during the leave of absence. Their findings showed that frequent absenteeism of educators and learners was due to lack of proper policy implementation (within the school) accompanied by weak principal leadership. A significant number of principals indicated that learners' skipping classes and late-coming impacted on instructional time, whilst late-coming of educators was not seen as an endemic problem like educator absenteeism (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:49).

#### **2.10.7 Language of learning and teaching (LoLT)**

The findings of Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a:49) study indicated that the LoLT, specifically in African schools, were considered a barrier to teaching and learning. A significant number of educators were found to be teaching learners in mother tongue (i.e., isiXhosa in the case of the sample schools) and had diverted from the LoLT as specified in the language policy

regulations of the school, which was English and Afrikaans. The researchers also observed how educators had changed their language of instruction at times to explain content, which they also found to be contrary to the language policy regulations set by the school. All participants in the African schools also attributed the LoLT policy as a significant factor towards grade repetition (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:49). My study considered the LoLT concerns (and language barriers for educators and learners), as discussed in the literature, which led to my purposeful selection of a language's HOD to explore how the LoLT may be impacting on learner performance. The sample schools in my study also have a significant percentage of African learners (second language learners) whose LoLT is English.

#### **2.10.8 Overcrowding of classrooms and teacher to learner ratio**

This school level-factor of overcrowding identified in Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a:49) study still remains an issue affecting many South African schools. Furthermore, the findings of Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a:49) study show that overcrowding of classrooms with an educator to learner ratio of 1:40 impacted negatively on teaching and learning. The educators in their study identified the following challenges as a result of classroom overcrowding: Learners showed lack of concentration; movement of educators around the classroom was difficult; individual attention to learners was not possible; and enforcing discipline was difficult for educators.

#### **2.10.9 Safety and security of the school ecology**

The findings show that all the schools in Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a) study were affected by the following safety and security issues: Incidents of violence; intimidation; possession of illicit drugs and weapons; inappropriate sexual behaviour; alcohol abuse; verbal abuse; and learner injuries. Bayat *et al.* (2014a:50) also suggest that the incidents relating to safety and security identified in and out of the classroom (within the school premises) impacted on the repetition rates. They further note, based on the responses of most educators, that acts of violence impacted negatively on the teaching and learning process. Even attempts by the Western Cape Education Department to promote safety and security in Western Cape schools through their Safe Schools Project have proved futile because the lives of individuals were still at risk since the Project focuses only on the safety of the school buildings (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:50).

### **2.10.10 Teaching experience as an indicator of teaching quality**

Bayat *et al.* (2014a:50) measured the number of years of teaching experience and found that repetition rates were lower in classes where educators had a longer teaching experience and high-level qualifications. However, their findings also revealed that educators were teaching subjects that they had not been trained to teach which may also have impacted on repetition rates. The result of this internal subject arrangement has also led to non-specialist educators teaching critical subjects such as Mathematics and Science, which may also impact negatively on learner academic performance (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:50). This led to educators going to classes unprepared and having to improvise and use instruction time for lesson preparation, which impacts negatively on teaching and learning (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:50).

### **2.10.11 Socio-economic factors**

Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a:51) study confirmed that there was a correlation between high repetition rates and unfavourable socio-economic conditions. In order to establish the interrelatedness between the socio-economic background and learner performances, the researchers administered questionnaires to the learners, asking about their communities, household, parental care (or caregivers, legal guardian) and families. The findings suggest that most of the underperforming secondary schools were located in poor communities characterised by social ills like crime, violence, substance abuse and health problems, all of which O' Connor (2004, as cited by Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:51) refer to as a "dysfunctional community". Bayat *et al.* (2014a:51) also cite the work of Berliner (2009:29) who found that "schools whose attendance boundaries include dysfunctional neighbourhoods, face greater challenges in nurturing student achievement than do those that draw students from healthier neighbourhoods". The research findings from learner questionnaires also suggest that learners from underperforming schools belonged to "disintegrated" families (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:51). The absence of biological parent(s) or any caregiver was shown to have impacted on the ability to assist learners in tasks like their homework due to work, single parenting, or poor educational levels which had an adverse effect on learners receiving any educational support at home. Bayat *et al.* (2014a:51) advise that the lack of home educational support requires educators to do as much as possible during school hours to improve underperformance.

Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a) study presented a significant context of some of the factors that may impact on SMTs' instructional leadership practices, especially since the three sample schools in my study are very similar in geographical location, school roll, demographics,

community background, overcrowded classrooms, and they are underperforming according to their NSC results. Noting the reasons for underperformance, as expressed by the respondents and participants to whom Bayat *et al.* (2014a) sent questionnaires and whom they interviewed (namely, principals, HODs, DPs, educators and learners), one of the key research questions that my study aimed to answer concerns the SMT members' perceptions of the negative factors (if any) that impact on their instructional leadership practices. The data from this research question of mine are significant in that they can be compared with some of the findings by Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a) study since my study included schools from an urban context within the province of KZN and particularly within an Indian township. In my analysis, I make reference to the authors' research (in both rural and urban areas) in the Western Cape with their various respondents/participants for purposes of comparison. I refer to the salient factors identified by their research as factors considered as negatively impacting underperforming secondary schools in South Africa, and also include other local and international literature that has relevance to this section regarding those factors that may be negatively impacting on instructional leadership in underperforming schools.

## **2.11 THE RELEVANCE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS**

The findings of Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a:51) study in the previous section confirm that a school composition of learners who belong to challenging socio-economic backgrounds contribute to underperformance and grade repetition. Similarly, and historically, research in the 1960s, for example Coleman *et al.*'s (1966) controversial federal paper report, also found that children from challenging socio-economic backgrounds performed poorly academically. However, historically, there have been studies that have supported the argument that learners from impoverished backgrounds can excel academically within public schools (Edmonds, 1979).

For example, Edmonds' (1979:19) study, which was part of the "Search for Effective Schools Project", addressed the key question of whether schools are instructionally effective for children from challenging socio-economic backgrounds. The first study by Lezotte, Edmonds and Ratner (1974) comprised of 20 schools in the predominantly poor Detroit inner-city neighbourhoods in the US. The mathematics and reading scores of 2500 learners were sampled and compared to the citywide performance norms. In the context of their study, Lezotte *et al.* (1974, as cited in Edmonds, 1979:19) defined an effective school as one that has reached the minimum standards (or above) in the mathematics and reading test scores. Their study found that 20 schools were effective in mathematics, nine were effective in reading and five were effective in both mathematics and reading. As far as the response to

the Coleman *et al.* (1966) Report was concerned (which argued children from poor background contribute to academic underperformance), Lezotte *et al.*'s (1974) study was already a clear indication that children from challenging socio-economic backgrounds can learn and contribute to an effective school. Edmonds (1979:21) argued that the popular belief of people (referring to the American population in his study) that the family background and home environment contribute to poor learner academic performance, may absolve educators from their intentions to act as effective instructional leaders. Edmonds (1979:21) vehemently rejected this notion on the premise that schools are there to service all learners irrespective of their social or economic backgrounds. Edmonds (1979:22) also recommended that schools should be held responsible for effectively teaching basic skills to learners. Drawing on this historical, yet still relevant view of Edmonds (1979:22), combined with the findings of Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a) study concerning the socio-economic background on learner performance, my study explored the issue of accountability for learner academic performance (as well as the teaching and learning activities of instructional leaders) from the perspective of the different levels of the SMT.

A mixed methods approach study by Bhengu, Naicker and Mthiyane (2014) focused on the barriers to principals' instructional leadership practices. The methodology included open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Bhengu *et al.*'s (2014:204) study explored the experiences of principals' instructional leadership practices after they had been developed by undertaking the Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership (ACE: SL). Of the 65 questionnaires administered to school principals, 25 were returned and thereafter six principals were purposefully selected for semi-structured interviews which involved an in-depth probing on their instructional leadership practices. The following themes emerged on the barriers to instructional leadership experienced by principals: Educator apathy; principal workload; lack of support from stakeholders; leading and managing change; teacher unionism; and lack of resources. Their study showed that amongst all the barriers to instructional leadership identified by the principals, learners' socio-economic situation or background was not considered as impacting on instructional leadership practices. By contrast, Bayat *et al.* (2014a:52) stated that high repetition rates in underperforming secondary schools were related to the social and economic background of the learners which impacted negatively on learner academic performance. These learners belonged to communities facing socio-economic challenges, along with a lack of safety and security due to gangsterism (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:52).

Another study undertaken by Bayat *et al.* (2014b) focused specifically on the impact of socio-economic factors on learner performances in 12 underperforming secondary schools in the Western Cape, South Africa. Their paper consisted of both qualitative and quantitative



approaches including interviews, field work, literature, document review and desktop analysis, with the participants comprising of principals, educators and learners. Bayat *et al.* (2014b:189) identified and discussed the following socio-economic variables related to the following: Household level factors; neighbourhood factors; safety and security; and hungry learners. I now discuss these variables identified by Bayat *et al.* (2014b) which also provide insight into the context of the sample schools in my study.

## **2.12 HOUSEHOLD FACTORS**

Bayat *et al.*'s (2014b:189) research on household factors is a reminder of the importance of household electricity for cooking, lighting, heating and the use of appliances and electronic devices. Although the majority of learner households had access to electricity with only 3,5% lacking access to electricity, Bayat *et al.* (2014b:189) assert that inadequate access to electricity (and basic housing services) may impact negatively on the health and hygiene of learners, causing them to be absent from school and missing out on the work covered in the syllabus, which may then lead to a decline in their academic performance. In addition, the learners were asked questions about their household composition, primary caregivers and breadwinners, and the highest level of education of occupants (head of household) and parental support.

The learning that takes place after-school hours is an important remediation task which may assist educators in ensuring learners improve their academic performance. Learners may need assistance and parental support in completing certain tasks. Bayat *et al.* (2014b:191) were interested in the education level of the breadwinners in each learner's household and found that 10% of the breadwinners (of the learner samples) did not have any formal schooling or were illiterate. The authors posit that households where the breadwinners appear to be illiterate are not in the best suitable position to offer learners academic support at home. Furthermore, the authors indicated that a key theme to emerge from their study was the lack of parental involvement, which may be a possible cause for underperformance (Bayat *et al.*, 2014b:192). In addition, learners were asked if the lack of parental involvement had affected their lives and 30% responded that they were affected to a certain extent while 16% indicated that lack of parental involvement had a significant effect on their learning (Bayat *et al.*, 2014b:192). There are learners who endeavour to learn at home even if they have little or no parental support. However, for some of these learners, the home may not provide the silent library type atmosphere conducive to learning. Bayat *et al.* (2014b:193) cite home overcrowding as a barrier to learners trying to study at home. The authors further indicate that in an overcrowded house there are disturbances like people watching TV and

visitors conversing (and entering and leaving the house) which makes it difficult for learners to study or complete school tasks.

### **2.13 NEIGHBOURHOOD FACTORS AND SAFETY**

Bayat *et al.* (2014b:193) explored a range of social issues that may have been found to impact negatively on learner performances. The most striking negative social issue that learners identified was related to safety in their neighbourhoods. Bayat *et al.*'s (2014b:193) study found that more than 40% of learners were affected by crime, violence and gangsterism in their neighbourhoods. Furthermore, a staggering 56% of learners did not feel safe in their neighbourhoods and female learners, in particular, felt unsafe and vulnerable when walking to school in crime riddled communities. Learners also described poor infrastructure (electricity) and unstable housing structures in the townships that made them feel unsafe. Learners identified issues like peer pressure, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, sexual abuse, unemployment, poverty and domestic violence as some of the negative influences in their neighbourhoods (Bayat *et al.*, 2014b:191). According to their findings, the female learners in particular, were more affected by the negative influences in their neighbourhoods than the male learners. The authors attribute the feeling of vulnerability of female learners to living within a male-dominated, patriarchal environment (Bayat *et al.*, 2014b:194).

The socio-economic factors discussed above are confirmation of the reality that some schools are facing at present in South Africa. The literature discussed offers some compelling reasons for underperformance in some South African underperforming secondary schools. Of particular importance, is that the sample schools in my study offer a resembling socio-economic context in relation to the schools in the literature discussed.

### **2.14 IMPACT OF POLICY ON IMPROVING LEARNER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

Policies play an important role in the functioning of any school (Van Wyk & Marumoloa, 2012:101). Policies provide guidelines which SMTs can use in order to carry out daily tasks. However, Ngcobo (2012:417) contends that schools are still grappling with policy changes that have been introduced by the DBE. One such policy introduced by the DBE in 2011 (last amended on 20 December 2015) that has been at the forefront of educational debates is the National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grade R-12 (DBE, 2015). According to this national policy, a learner may "only be retained once in the Further Education and Training Phase in order to prevent the learner being retained in this phase for longer than four years" (DBE, 2015:37-38). This

policy allows learners to move to the next grade even if they have failed, resulting in a group of learners who would possibly contribute to the high NSC failure rate since they have not developed the necessary skills for a certain grade but *progressed* (but not initially promoted) to the next grade based on the policy. For example, if a Grade 10 learner fails in the FET Phase for the first time (this means the learner has been retained once in the FET Phase), then that learner (by policy) cannot repeat (or fail) Grade 10 for a second time and neither can the learner fail Grade 11 afterwards because that would mean the learner has now been retained twice in the FET Phase (Grade 10-12).

Bayat *et al.* (2014a:46) also state that when learners are “held back” (or retained) only once in a phase, there is poor mastery of subject knowledge. Besides the point that Bayat *et al.* (2014a:46) make regarding the acquisition of specific subject content knowledge, the serious implications (in my example discussed above) is that a learner is progressed through to Grade 12 even if that learner has not met the minimum promotion requirements in Grade 10 and 11. They aver that the DBE’s (2015) promotion and progression policy can be regarded as one of the key determinant factors towards underperformance in secondary schools since they have to contend with a challenging and demanding Grade 12 syllabus. Semi-structured interviews with principals, SMT members (HODs and DPs) and educators revealed the negative impact that the policy on promotion requirements had on learner performances, further exasperated by the lack of support from the DBE in the implementation and interpretation of the policy (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:46).

Globally there is evidence of the mounting pressure and difficulty related to state policies imposed like the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in the US which raised questions about the equality of the education system (Daly *et al.*, 2011:172). One of the main tenets of the NCLB was to close the learner academic performance gaps by ensuring learners are provided with opportunities to obtain a high level of education. The main problem with the NCLB Act was that schools that did not attain desirable learner academic performance were answerable to the Department of Education. In view of this, I also probed the issue of accountability with my participants to gain their insight and allow them to express their views about whom they thought should be accountable for learner academic performance which indeed needs clarity within the South African education context.

Conversely, the positive output of NCLB was that because schools were subdivided into various categories like disability and socio-economic status, if one subgroup performed poorly, the entire school was then categorised as underperforming (Ahn, 2015). This meant that the whole school (primary or secondary) would be categorised as underperforming and the school improvement plans would have to be implemented for the entire school. A

potentially positive way of viewing this is that the entire school is working towards the vision of achieving the educational goals of the school, while learners who are already performing at desirable academic levels have the opportunity to further excel in the academic programme. Similarly, in South Africa, the NSC results determine whether a secondary school is underperforming or not. This is similar to the underperformance classification that Ahn (2015) identified in the NCLB policy. Throughout my study, the participants were allowed the opportunity to explore the issue of underperformance across all grades (Grade 8-12) from the perspective of an instructional leader.

It is clear from the above discussion that the SMT members are integral role players in policy implementation. The SMT is ultimately responsible for the success or failure of the implementation of policies. In South Africa, a percentage of learners are progressed without even meeting the minimum promotion requirements as outlined in the National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 (DBE, 2015). This policy then places the SMT in a challenging situation where they are then accountable for the poor NSC results due to the percentage of progressed learners who write the NSC examinations. However, Spaul (2013:7) argues that the policies implemented by the DBE are in fact addressing the issue of underperformance. The National Workbook Initiative and the CAPS Curriculum and the Action Plan 2030 are all initiatives aimed at improving learner academic performance (Spaul, 2013:7). The policy debate and analysis is one that is ongoing and constantly changing. To ensure effective policy implementation in education, the policymakers at various levels within the DBE need to review policies which are effective in improving learner academic performance. By exploring with participants (members of SMT) their vision of their instructional leadership roles in terms also of the various policies, my study developed certain recommendations in this regard.

## **2.15 SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY**

According to Prinsloo and Naser (2007, as cited in Ncontsa and Shumba 2013:2), “school violence is regarded as any intentional physical or non-physical (verbal) condition or act resulting in physical or non-physical pain being inflicted on the recipient of that act while the recipient is under the school’s supervision”. Various researchers, along with reports in the media, point to a number of violent incidents affecting schools in South Africa. (See also Bayat, *et al.*, 2014a:50 and Bayat *et al.*, 2014b:193 who highlight violent incidents in Western Cape schools in South Africa.) Shocking and disturbing media reports on school violence and killings for 2018 were presented on News 24 by Grobler (2019). According to

Grobler (2019), some of the most violent school related incidents that took place in a period of one year (2018) in South Africa were as follows:

- A Grade 11 high school male learner stabbed (multiple times) a Grade 1 learner to death over relationship problems with the Grade 1 learner's sister;
- The Gauteng DBE expelled a learner who threw a stone at an educator which led to minor injuries;
- A Grade 11 learner in Ekurhuleni was arrested and charged for attempted murder after attempting to stab other learners;
- A 16 year old learner in Eastern Cape was arrested for stabbing an 18-year-old learner to death over a cell-phone; and
- An educator in the North West was stabbed to death by a 17-year-old learner.

According to Mestry (2015:655), school-based violence may be attributed to socio-economic ills, gangsterism, substance abuse and gender discrimination. Sadly, with most school-based violence incidents, both educators and learners are sometimes involved. The reality is that educators are sometimes abused and assaulted (physically and verbally) by a learner which then makes their core duty of teaching very difficult. This is also confirmed in Motee and Kelly's (2017:48) study where they cite the studies of various authors (Lokmic, Opic & Bilic, 2013; Garbin, Rovida, Costa & Garbin, 2016) who indicate that educators have experienced some form of violent attack on them by learners while on duty. In addition, 57 cases of educators in South Africa who were victimised by learners were reported to the Gauteng DBE between 2014 and 2016 (Masinga 2016, as cited in Motee & Kelly, 2017:48). Motee and Kelly (2017:61) posit that in order for educators to feel safe and to encourage young individuals joining the teaching profession, there has to be safety policies and measures to ensure the rights of educators are not violated. Furthermore, school-based violence contributes to physical and psychological harm to teachers and learners, thus impacting negatively on teaching and learning (Mestry, 2015:655).

In another study on school-based violence undertaken by Ncontsa and Shumba (2014), a mixed methods approach was used to investigate perceptions of the nature, causes and effects of school violence in four secondary schools in the Buffalo City District (Metropolitan Municipality) in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. In this study (in which the field work was covered in one year), they included a purposive sample of five principals, 80 learners and 20 educators. They used questionnaires and interviews to collect data on school violence as

perceived by educators, learners and principals. The researchers administered 20 questionnaires to learners in each of the four schools with all 80 learners returning their questionnaires. Interviews were conducted with five educators and four learners from the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) in each school. All the participants in their study seemed to be equally concerned with the different forms of violence prevalent in their schools. For example, the results from the questionnaires found that all learners perceived acts of bullying, vandalism to school property, corporal punishment, sexual harassment and gangsterism as the most prevalent acts of violence experienced in their high schools (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2014:5). In the interviews, the four RCL learners conceptualised (collectively) school violence as incidents related to assault, stabbings and shootings which involved other learners and even educators (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2014:4).

The interviews with the educators and principals in Ncontsa and Shumba's (2014) study pointed towards the impact that school violence incidents (and other acts of disobedience) had on teaching and learning. To further explicate this, the interviews with the educators and principals indicated that they perceived the following incidents as impacting negatively on teaching and learning: Loss of instructional time to incidents related to indiscipline; learners' bunking classes; poor learner attendance; learners damaging and stealing textbooks; vandalism of school property; educators not attending classes because they were afraid of being attacked by learners; and learners' disrespect towards educators (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2014:10). In addition, all the educators perceived indiscipline and learners fighting with each other as leading to loss of instructional time since educators had to abandon their lesson and spend the period resolving learner indiscipline issues (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2014:10).

This was consistent with the majority of learners in their study who also reported that their educators had to stop lessons to resolve issues related to violence (learners fighting with each other during lessons), thereby compromising their instructional time. Based on the learners', educators' and principals' responses from the interviews, the researchers suggest that the school violence incidents identified in their study had a negative impact on teaching and learning. In support of their claim, Ncontsa and Shumba (2014:9) go on to note that violent school incidents perceived by the educators and principals deterred the school from achieving its educational goals due to learners engaging in violent acts, causing them (learners) to develop an indifferent attitude towards their school work and disregard for submitting tasks or completing homework.

Nevertheless, McKay, Mohapi, and Romm (2017:250) remind us that "teaching a number of children with different needs, behaviours, attention spans and different contexts can be challenging, especially for novice teachers". McKay *et al.* (2017:250) go on to state that "in

South African schools, there is an ongoing attempt to ensure 'discipline' in schools because schools and communities face numerous behaviours that impact on teaching and learning". This confirms my earlier discussion of the literature reviewed (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a; Bayat *et al.*, 2014b; Motee & Kelly, 2017; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2014), where all the schools that were sampled, faced challenges with learner indiscipline from within the school and outside (the community), but still endeavoured to instil discipline as part of the moral and professional obligation of the school. As far as the ethics of educators in enforcing discipline are concerned, McKay *et al.* (2017:252) indicate that educators sometimes still resort to corporal punishment even though it is prohibited by the South African Schools Act (SASA). Even the responses from all the learner participants in Ncontsa and Shumba's (2014:5) study indicated that corporal punishment (as a form of school violence) was administered in their schools. Referring to statistics from a study conducted by the Human Rights Commission (2012:34), McKay *et al.* (2017:252) suggest that "more than one in three learners are exposed to violence as a means of discipline and/or a way of dealing with conflict". As far as underperformance and discipline are concerned, McKay *et al.* (2017:253) make reference to the works of various authors (Arum, 2005; Gwirayi & Shumba, 2007; Khewu, 2012), indicating that corporal punishment could lead to lower educational achievement and higher rates of delinquency.

In view of the above studies in this section, schools should constitute a safe place for learners and the school staff to ensure effective teaching and learning takes place. As McKay *et al.* (2017:250) point out, an "optimal learning environment does not depend solely on teachers: the school management, parents and, of course, the learners themselves all have a role to play". The stark reality of school-based violence is evident in my purposive sample of one of the schools in my study where two learners were murdered in separate incidents in 2021. Although the incidents took place outside the school, the violence emanated from issues within the school. In my study I have also given the SMT members an opportunity to explore school safety and security concerns which they might find as impacting on their instructional leadership practices.

## **2.16 INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION**

Some authors contend that one of the reasons for underperformance is the result of the inequalities created by apartheid within schools. According to Bayat *et al.* (2014b:183), "the strong legacy of apartheid and the consequent correlation between education and wealth have meant that, generally speaking, poorer students perform worse academically". Similarly, Letseka (2013:74) argues that schools which comprise previously disadvantaged

learners (and indeed currently still disadvantaged) are victims of dysfunction and inefficiency compared to affluent schools regarding the quality of education offered to the learners. South African schools can be found in a variety of contexts stemming from the apartheid era with separate policies and inequality in educational funding (Bush & Glover, 2016:2). Further complicating the context of township and rural South African schools is the lack of resources, poor infrastructure, low morale of educators and inadequate training of educators (Bush & Glover, 2016:3). Although we cannot exclude the historical contribution of apartheid in the South African education system, 28 years later into democracy, the focus should shift to how SMTs can better manage schools (including their roles as instructional leaders) irrespective of the quintile ranking of the school. Of course, this is not to deny continuing inequalities arising from apartheid legacies. Nevertheless, leaving somewhat in abeyance the spatial, geographical, economical or historical characteristics of the schools, my study focuses on underperformance as measured by the NSC examinations and results, and considers how instructional leadership can be used to help improve school performance.

Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane's (2015) study focused on two types of schools in South Africa, the first class schools, which are well-resourced and produce excellent results, and dysfunctional schools that are struggling, as evident by their poor academic results. The legacy of apartheid cannot be ignored for some of the inequalities that are evident in some schools in South Africa. The contrast in schooling is partly due to these top schools being situated in affluent former white areas. Letseka (2013:74) further asserts that parents who send their children to the former Model-C schools are wealthy and play an active role in the teaching and learning of the school. These first class schools have substantial finances, which are used effectively for teaching materials and the employment of highly qualified teachers. This makes these first class schools a significant contributor to the overall national pass rate. Then there are the township and rural schools that lack finances to sustain their schools, which make their operations almost unmanageable – this is one contributor to teachers taking to the streets to voice their discontent. Letseka (2013:74) has noted that these schools lack the following: Electricity; running water; proper classrooms; qualified teachers; and functioning SGBs. All these factors impact on the school's initiatives to improving their academic results. Without the necessary finances, schools cannot purchase teaching and learning support materials, use technology effectively, and create a conducive learning environment for learners. The inequality of funding due to the quintile ranking system has impacted on the schools as they are finding it hard to provide for their learners and teachers in order to improve academic results.



## **2.17 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework of my study is drawn from Weber's (1996) model of instructional leadership and Hallinger's (2007) notion of shared instructional leadership. My justification for framing my study within these lenses is that models can evolve and Hallinger's (2007) notion of shared instructional leadership was an additional element I added to Weber's (1996) model since Hallinger (2007:5) considered the role of the entire SMT and not just the principal as the prime leader.

This *extended* model of instructional leadership is consistent with my study which explored the instructional leadership practices of the entire SMT and the extent to which they share instructional leadership in underperforming secondary schools. I now move on to discuss the various models of instructional leadership with a special focus on Weber (1996), shared instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2007) and subsequent literature which bears on these models.

Since the emergence of instructional leadership research in the 1980s, a number of instructional leadership models have been proposed. Some of the most widely used instructional leadership models since the 1980s have been Hallinger and Murphey's (1985) model; Murphey's (1990) model; and Weber's (1996) model. My study used the lens of Weber's (1996) model of instructional leadership (plus some further elaborations of it in the literature) because this model comprised the key elements of instructional leadership necessary for the context of an underperforming secondary school. Weber's (1996) model seemed an apt choice with which to co-frame this study since the core focus is on the *continuous state of underperforming schools*. Weber's (1996) model also takes into account the assessment, observation and improvement of instructional leadership which is integral to my study. A discussion on the different models of instructional leadership follows, with a special justification on Weber's (1996) model used as one of the theoretical frameworks in my study.

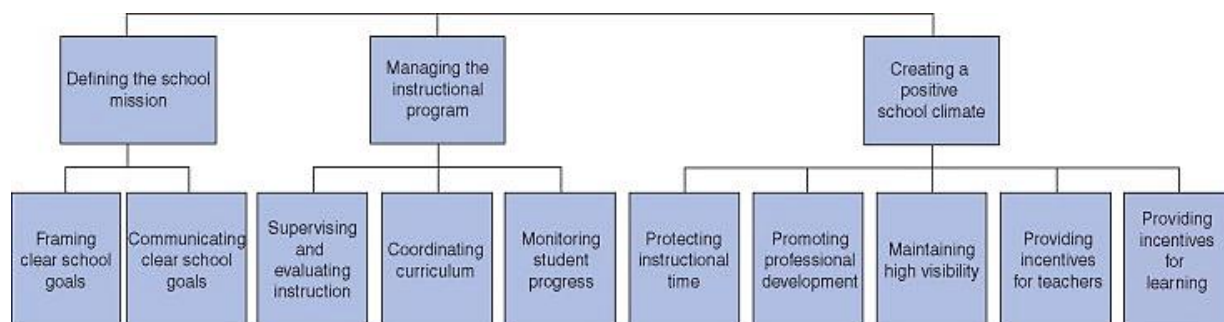
## **2.18 MODELS OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP**

### **2.18.1 Hallinger and Murphy's model (1985)**

The emergence of this model during the 1980s was ultimately the introduction of instructional leadership as we know it today. This model placed emphasis on the principal as the prime instructional leader with one of the key features being leadership with the intent of improving learning performances and outcomes (Hallinger, 2003; 2007). Hallinger and

Murphey's (1985) model comprised of three main dimensions: Defining the school's mission; managing the instructional programme; and promoting a positive school learning climate (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Hallinger and Murphy (1985) further delineated the three dimensions into ten instructional leadership functions.

**Figure 2.2: Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional management framework for principals (Hallinger, 2010:65)**



The first dimension encompasses two functions: (1) Framing the school's goals; and (2) communicating the school's goals. Within this dimension, the principal plays an important role in ensuring the improvement of learner academic performance through working with the staff (Hallinger, 2010:67). In achieving the academic goals of the school, the principal has to establish a school environment that has clearly defined goals that are both measurable and time-based (Hallinger, 2010:67). Hallinger (2010:68) maintains that the principal is responsible to rally support from the whole school community through the communication of the school's goals. The goals of the school can be established by the principal alone, or formulated collaboratively with the staff (Hallinger, 2007). A 1986 study conducted by Hallinger and Murphy in California, using their 1985 instructional leadership model, observed that teachers in the classroom had bought into the mission of the school. They displayed the school's mission, there was a strong focus on academic development accepted by the school community, and the mission was articulated by the principal (Hallinger, 2010:67).

The second dimension, managing the instructional programme, integrated both the leadership and management features which included supervision and evaluation of the curriculum, coordinating the curriculum and monitoring student progress. Within this dimension, the principal plays an integral part in the teaching and learning activities of the school. Hallinger (2010:67) asserts that in order to improve learner performances, principals have to immerse themselves "hip deep" in the instructional activities and programmes of the school. To explicate this further, Hallinger (2010:68) reflects on Hallinger and Murphy's

(1986) American study in which a principal was conversant with the reading level of the entire roll of 650 learners in a primary school. Hallinger (2010:68) identifies critics like Cuban (1984; 1988) who argue that principals may lack the expertise of supervising, monitoring and evaluating an extensive instructional programme. Moreover, critics like Cuban (1984; 1988) at the time argued that the time frames did not warrant principals to take up such an involved role, as demonstrated by the principal who knew the reading levels of the 650 learners in the primary school. Hallinger (2010:68) further argues that secondary schools are significantly different from primary schools in terms of their specialised “discipline-based curriculum” which is made up of subjects belonging to specialised departments supervised and managed by the HODs. My study also sought to examine the way in which SMT members manage the instructional programme within the context of their underperforming schools and if they share some resemblance to the principal mentioned in Hallinger and Murphy’s (1986) study where they fully immerse themselves in the instructional activities and curriculum of the school.

Hallinger and Murphy (as cited in Hallinger, 2010:38) identify the extent to which a principal could engage within the instructional programme of the school. However, given the year in which their study was done (1986), there have since been many changes in education around the world, especially regarding the role of principals and the entire SMT. Although Hallinger (2010:38) maintains that knowing the academic literacy levels of every learner are not a requirement of instructional leadership, his framework shows the importance of the principal’s commitment to the instructional programme. Nevertheless, his framework does not sufficiently take into account the potential problem of principals and indeed SMT members who may be burdened by daily administrative and managerial tasks which impact on their instructional leadership duties. I explored the daily administrative and managerial tasks, alongside instructional leadership practices, with the participants in my study where they were given an opportunity to share their experiences in this regard.

The third dimension of Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) model (as cited in Hallinger, 2010:67), emphasised promoting a positive school learning climate. The functions within this dimension include: Protecting instructional time; promoting professional development; maintaining high visibility; providing incentives for teachers; developing high expectations and standards; and providing incentives for learning. Within this dimension, schools strive for “academic press” (Hallinger, 2010:67). In order to achieve a state of “academic press” the school is required to maintain high levels of expectations for both educators and learners. In order to ensure high levels of learner achievement, principals promote activities that promote professional development of educators. This may be in the form of workshops and seminars.

In this model, the principal maintains high visibility in the school and establishes his/her presence by walking around and visiting classes during instruction time, which creates a feeling of support for both educators and learners.

### 2.18.2 MURPHY’S (1990) MODEL OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

In developing this instructional leadership model, Murphy (1990) drew on previous instructional leadership research, including Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) model of instructional leadership, in order to focus more fully on the principal creating a supportive environment as shown in Table 2.3 below:

**Table 2.3: Murphy’s (1990) model of instructional leadership**

Developing Mission and Goals	Managing the Educational Production Function	Promoting an Academic Learning Climate	Developing a Supportive Work Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Framing school goals</li> <li>• Communicating school goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting quality instruction</li> <li>• Supervising and evaluating instruction</li> <li>• Allocating and protecting instruction time</li> <li>• Coordinating the curriculum</li> <li>• Monitoring student progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing positive expectations and standards</li> <li>• Maintaining high visibility</li> <li>• Providing incentives for teachers and students</li> <li>• Promoting professional development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a safe and orderly learning environment</li> <li>• Providing opportunities for meaningful student involvement</li> <li>• Developing staff collaboration and cohesion</li> <li>• Securing outside resources in school goals</li> <li>• Forging links between the school and home</li> </ul>

Murphy’s (1990) model included the first three dimensions as in Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) model; however, Murphy (1990) added an extra dimension: *The principal developing a supportive work environment*. In developing a supportive work environment, Murphy (1990:174) identified the following functions: Creating a safe and orderly work environment; providing opportunities for meaningful student involvement; developing staff collaboration

and cohesion; securing outside resources for school goals; and forging links between the school and home.

### **2.18.3 Weber's model (1996)**

Weber (1996) identified five domains (or dimensions) of instructional leadership: 1) Defining the school's mission; 2) managing the curriculum and instruction; 3) promoting a positive learning climate; 4) assessing the instructional programme; and 5) observing and improving instruction. Weber's (1996) model includes the same domains from Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model as well as Murphy's (1990) model. However, the main additional domain in Weber's (1996) model was "assessing the instructional programme". This additional domain requires the instructional leader to engage in planning, designing, administering and analysing assessments, which helps to critically evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. I considered the assessment of the instructional programme significant in my study because the principal is tasked with formally assessing their instructional programmes at the end of the NSC examinations in order to design their SIP for the following year (DBE, 2016:43). My study also explored the extent to which the SMT members, as instructional leaders, assess their school's instructional programme effectively. Weber's (1996) model seemed an apt choice with which to co-frame this study since the core focus is on underperforming schools, whose status is determined mainly by the SMTs' engagement in assessing the instructional programme. Weber's (1996) model takes into account the assessment, observation and improvement of instructional leadership which is integral to my study. Weber's (1996) model is especially significant for this theoretical framework, as Weber (1996) concluded that instructional leadership is important even if the instructional leader was not a principal. In line with Weber's (1996) belief that instructional leadership can extend beyond the role of the principal as the main leader, my study included members from the entire SMT. Below is a tabular representation of Weber's (1996) model of instructional leadership:

**Table 2.4: Elements of Weber’s (1996) model of instructional leadership**

<b>Defining the School’s Mission</b>	<b>Managing Curriculum and Instruction</b>	<b>Promoting a Positive Learning Climate</b>	<b>Observing and Improving Instruction</b>	<b>Assessing the Instructional Programme</b>
The instructional leader collaboratively develops a common vision and goals for the school with stakeholders.	The instructional leader monitors classroom practice alignment with the school’s mission, provides resources and support in the use of instructional best practices and models, and provides support in the use of data to drive instruction.	The instructional leader promotes a positive learning climate by communicating goals, establishing expectations, and establishing an orderly learning environment.	The instructional leader observes and improves instruction through the use of classroom observation and professional development opportunities.	The instructional leader contributes to the planning, designing, administering and analysis of assessments that evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Defining the school’s mission is an element of Weber’s (1996) model that requires a collaborative approach involving the SMT members. The SMT works with educators to make decisions; provide resources and establish targets for progress. The instructional leader(s) must work collaboratively with each other as well as the educators to define a common vision and goals for the academic year. My deliberate use of the bracketed plural “leader(s)” is consistent with Hallinger’s (2007:5) elaboration of the notion of “shared instructional leadership” in his later writings (although arguably this is not incorporated in the earlier Hallinger and Murphy (1985) model). Hallinger cites Lambert (2002 in Hallinger, 2007:5) who contends that the “days of the lone instructional leader are over”.

Although Weber (1996) refers to the importance of the instructional leader in collaboratively developing the vision and goals of the school, his model does not explicitly make provision for the consideration of shared instructional leadership within the entire SMT. To explicate this further, the collaborative approach Weber refers to, only indicates that all stakeholders should work together, but does not indicate if instructional leadership tasks can be shared/distributed within the SMT, in order to achieve the school’s goals through the collaboration that he mentions. It is for this reason that my study explored not only if SMTs work collaboratively, but also the extent at which they share/distribute instructional leadership tasks at all levels of the SMT. Nevertheless, when considering theoretical frameworks, we should bear in mind that models can evolve. My additional element of “shared instructional leadership” developed by Hallinger (2007:5) and the concept of “sharing” leadership can prove a useful addition to Weber’s (1996) model. This is also taking

into account the evolution of views of instructional leadership consistent with my study, since I have explored the instructional leadership practices of the entire SMT (i.e., HODs, DPs and principals). The notion of shared instructional leadership is also expressed by Costello (2015:4) when he suggests that principals' daily tasks and responsibilities have increased considerably. He goes on to note, citing various authors (Meyer & Macmillan, 2001; Mitchell & Castle, 2005), that the increase in daily tasks of the principal, as the main instructional leader, includes "managerial responsibilities, administrative tasks, student issues, personnel management, dealing with external agencies, conflict resolution, resource management, and working with parents" (Costello, 2015:4). In support of the notion of shared instructional leadership, he suggests that "shared instructional leadership *alleviates some of the challenges noted above and helps reduce the pressure felt by principals attempting to tackle this responsibility independently*" (Costello, 2015:4, own emphasis).

Managing the curriculum and instructional programme is a significant element to the case of underperformance in this study. This element involves the relationship of the instructional leader(s) and the academic curriculum. Some of the key characteristics of the instructional leader(s) managing the curriculum and instruction include: Interacting with learners and educators; providing appraisal and feedback to learners and educators on academic performance; and protecting the instructional time of the school. The instructional leader(s) must create a learning environment where both the learners and educators can work effectively. In order to create this positive learning environment, the instructional leader(s) must communicate the common mission and vision of the school to all stakeholders. Within this element, the instructional leader(s) observes and learns more about learner academic performance and finds ways of improving learner achievement. The instructional leader(s) uses data analysis of learner achievement levels in order to provide the necessary professional development activities for educators in order to improve learner academic performance. The instructional leader(s) provides professional development activities that are able to help improve learner academic performance that are aligned with the goals, mission and vision of the school.

Assessing the instructional programme was an element of Weber's (1996) model that was a significant addition which other models did not consider. Within this element, the instructional leader(s), according to Weber (1996), plays an important role in assessing and analysing the instructional programme. It is through this element that the instructional leader can evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum, but also find ways of improving the instructional programme, thereby improving the academic performance in the school. However, as indicated above, and as expressed in the bracketed plural "leader(s)", we can

also take note of Hallinger's (2007:5) concept of shared instructional leadership and add this into Weber's model. This means that the direct, as well as indirect part played by the principal in instructional leadership (as explained in Section 2.17), can be accounted for in the (extended) model. My study examined the roles of the entire SMT team in instructional leadership, with attention to exploring the more or less direct role of the principal in the process of such leadership.

## **2.19 RESEARCH STUDIES BASED ON WEBER'S (1996) MODEL**

There has been significant subsequent work that has engaged with Weber's (1996) model. DiPaola and Hoy's (2013:5) work list Weber's (1996) model which can be used by principals and supervisors in improving their instructional leadership practices. What is significant about DiPaola and Hoy's (2013) book, *"Principals Improving Instruction"*, is that they regard the research-based models, including Weber's (1996) model, as being consistent with the roles and challenges that principals and supervisors often face today. What is also significant is that apart from speaking about the principal as an "instructional leader", DiPaola and Hoy (2013:5) use the term "principals and supervisors". This confirms my suggestion that the model can be somewhat extended by referring to (and exploring the extent of) shared instructional leadership in specific contexts, as is done in my study.

In a South African qualitative study on the instructional leadership practices in challenging school contexts, Naicker *et al.* (2013) based their research on theories of instructional leadership, including Weber's (1996) model. Their findings revealed that principals in disadvantaged, high performing schools in challenging contexts, displayed elements of Weber's (1996) model in producing good learner academic performance, as compared to the much more developed and advantaged schools. In another significant South African study utilising Weber's (1996) model, Bhengu *et al.* (2014) administered 65 questionnaires to principals, of which 25 were completed and returned. Bhengu *et al.*'s (2014) study chronicled the barriers to instructional leadership practices facing only principals. As noted above, my study is noteworthy as it *explored the experiences of the entire SMT including the DPs and HODs*. Furthermore, Naicker *et al.* (2013) based their study on instructional leadership practices of principals in high performing schools, whereas my study is different in that it focuses on principals, DPs and HODs in underperforming secondary schools. This will thereby add value in terms of the way in which Weber's (1996) model is used (and extended) in the context of the underperforming secondary school.



## **2.20 EXAMPLES OF STUDIES EXPLORING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES**

My study focuses on the instructional leadership practices of SMT members in underperforming secondary schools in South Africa. In this section, I provide literature from studies that have explored instructional leadership in various countries. My idea of including this section was also to provide empirical evidence that instructional leadership can yield results for learner academic performance, which is what the SMTs of underperforming secondary schools may need to bring about positive changes in their schools. There is a corpus of literature in the field of instructional leadership, but some of the leading scholars in this field from as early as the 1980s are Hallinger and Murphy (who developed their model in 1985). Hopkins (2013:3) makes an important reference to Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) model in what he refers to as "the most fully tested approach to instructional leadership". Hopkins (2013:3) claim is noteworthy since Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) study proposed the first instructional leadership model with the three main domains which were: 1) Defining the school mission; 2) managing the instructional programme; and 3) promoting school climate. Hopkins (2013:3) further supports his view by reminding us about the empirical evidence that was yielded in Hallinger and Murphey's (1985) study which was directly related to learner academic performance.

My discussion below includes research undertaken in various countries, to help understand how instructional leadership is enacted by SMTs within different contexts. The discussion of the literature also helps to understand what works, and what poses a challenge in other countries (and ongoing instructional leadership deliberations) which can also serve as lessons to be learnt within the South African educational context.

### **2.20.1 Ghavifekr and Ibrahim's (2014) quantitative study on teachers' perceptions of HOD's instructional supervisory role in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**

Ghavifekr and Ibrahim (2014) used four main domains of instructional leadership: 1) Effective leadership with clear goals; 2) shared vision and mission; 3) monitoring; and 4) professional development. They used these four domains to identify the factors that affect principals of vocational and technical colleges through a quantitative survey study which included 100 respondents (all were educators) from three private schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Although different from a secondary school, the findings still however suggested that effective leadership with clear goals, a shared vision and mission, monitoring and professional development were all important characteristics of the role of the instructional

leader (Ghavifekr & Ibrahim, 2014:48). Ghavifekr and Ibrahim (2014:48) regarded their study as especially beneficial to Malaysian educators and the Malaysian Ministry of Education. As the findings of Ghavifekr and Ibrahim (2014) suggest, the four domains can only be achieved with an effective instructional leader. In the school situation, this seemed to have meant for them that the principal would have to fulfil a dynamic role as the instructional leader. Nevertheless, instructional leadership in the Malaysian schools in their study appeared to be the responsibility of the principal as the prime leader in fulfilling those instructional leadership practices. However, Hallinger's (2007:5) notion of shared instructional leadership (which also includes HODs and DPs) can offer principals relief from the overload of management and administration tasks so that there is more focus on the instructional programme of the school.

### **2.20.2 Hallinger and Lee's (2014) study exploring the principal's changing role as an instructional leader in Thailand**

Hallinger and Lee (2014) explored the changing role of principals as instructional leaders in Thailand since the country's educational reforms adopted in 1999, which aimed at bringing about changes in approaches to teaching, learning and school management. In order to determine if the role of the principal's instructional leadership practices indeed changed, Hallinger and Lee (2014) compared data from 1999 (the year the Thailand National Education Act (NEA) was adopted), with first-hand data collected in 2008, which explored the impact of the NEA related policies on principals' role behaviour in Thailand. To understand the changing role of principals in Thailand, Hallinger and Lee (2014) conducted a study with 1195 Thai principals from a mix of primary and secondary schools. On a positive note, Hallinger and Lee (2014:20) found that Thai principals engaged in promoting a positive school environment and showed evidence of defining the school mission, however, they lacked in managing the instructional programme. Nevertheless, Hallinger and Lee (2014:21) note that "it is increasingly recognised that the demands of instructional leadership in school settings exceed the capacity of principals alone". This is consistent with Hallinger's (2007) idea of shared instructional leadership which includes the entire SMT in order to reconsider the conceptualised role of the principal as the main leader of the school. Noting that Hallinger and Lee's (2014) study in Thailand focused on the instructional leadership of principals (with no mention of HODs and DPs), the inclusion of the entire SMT may prove effective for the instructional programme for Thailand schools. However, change is complex, and for the principals in Thailand, Hallinger and Lee (2014:6) recommended that the Thai principals undergo a systematic process of training and support to become effective instructional leaders. Hallinger and Lee (2014) do not comment on whether such training

should include involving others in the leadership role (as in shared instructional leadership), but consistent with Hallinger's (2007) notion of shared leadership, it is possible that they would not expect the principal to take on the sole task.

In some recent deliberations on instructional leadership globally and also in the context of Singapore, Ng (2019), in referring to current literature on instructional leadership, points out movement away from the conceptualisation of the principal as being the prime leader. He cites, for instance, Gronn (1999, 2003 in Ng, 2019:5) as proposing that the "term 'school leadership' does not refer to the leadership of the principal alone". He goes on to note, also citing Gronn (in Ng, 2019:5), that "although the principal remains a key player in organisational change, schools cannot rely on the 'power of one' ". Gronn (in Ng, 2019:5) suggests that, "accordingly, the concept of the principal as instructional leader should focus on the principal's role in the development and distribution of the understandings, skills and attributes across the school organisational spectrum". He indicates (in Ng, 2019:5) that this means that "instructional leaders are distributed in nature" (that is, the task of leadership is a distributed one). He believes indeed that more research needs to be undertaken on this notion (and practice) as applied in various school contexts.

Tentatively, based on the studies above from Kuala Lumpur and Thailand, we can infer that the wealth of knowledge and literature from studies on instructional leadership indicate that effective instructional leadership is only as effective as the leader(s) that is/are supposed to be driving the teaching and learning processes through an active engagement in the management of the curriculum. I have again referred to the term leader(s) with a bracketed "s", as Ghavifekr and Ibrahim (2014) refer to the instructional leadership provided by HODs and DPs and not only the leadership of the principal; Ng (2019) also emphasises distributed leadership.

### **2.20.3 Niqab, Sharma, Wei and Maulod's (2014) study examining literature and evaluating data on the instructional leadership potential of principals in Pakistan**

Niqab *et al.* (2014) critically examined available literature in relation to the way in which successful principals manage their schools in Pakistan. Niqab *et al.* (2014:81) posit that the instructional leader must promote a shared vision with educators through teamwork and place emphasis on improving learner academic performance. They also motivated that principals should capitalise on support programmes offered by the State to capacitate them to become effective instructional leaders. This proposal for instructional leadership capacity building can also be considered a referral, due to their claim that some educators are

promoted to leadership positions but lack the necessary skills needed for the position (Niqab *et al.*, 2014:81).

In addition, the literature reviewed by Niqab *et al.* (2014:79) suggest that educators can also assess the performance of principals to determine if the principal is indeed exhibiting effective instructional leadership practices. Niqab *et al.* (2014:79) cite various authors (Khan *et al.*, 2009; Mangin, 2007) who argue that “teachers’ perceptions about head teachers as leaders point to an important dimension to be considered when assessing the leader’s ability, which have a great significance and provide evidence for improvement of school leadership”. Although their study examined the literature of educators’ perceptions of principals as effective instructional leaders, they also highlight that “a leader’s vision, ability to facilitate collaboration, attitude and encouragement can provide countless opportunities to a team to perform in a better way” (Niqab *et al.*, 2014:81). They further assert that in order to achieve school effectiveness, principals cannot embark on a “solo flight” (Niqab *et al.*, 2014:81). This confirms Hallinger’s (2007) notion of shared instructional leadership which takes into account the engagement of the entire SMT. Niqab *et al.* (2014:81) suggests that in order for principals to ensure school effectiveness, they should “take teachers into their confidence, share their visions, and distribute their various tasks”.

#### **2.20.4 Prytula, Noonan and Hellsten’s (2013) qualitative study of principals’ perceptions of large-scale assessments in Saskatchewan schools in Canada**

A study in the Saskatchewan Province of Canada by Prytula *et al.* (2013) yielded findings that offer insight into the role played by large-scale assessments (in terms of national standards) in encouraging processes of instructional leadership in schools. Prytula *et al.* (2013) conducted a study to examine Saskatchewan (Canadian) principals’ perceptions of how large-scale assessments (of national and international standards) impacted on their instructional leadership practices.

They distributed 200 surveys, with 90 principals returning the surveys. The Saskatchewan Province used the Continuous Improvement Framework (CIF). Within the CIF, there are four priorities (goals) which schools within the province must focus on: “Higher literacy and achievement, equitable opportunities for all learners, smooth transitions throughout the system and beyond, and system accountability and governance” (Prytula *et al.*, 2013:9). The results of the priorities (goals) were then reported to the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education where the results were summarised and presented. Saskatchewan schools participate in the following main large-scale National and International assessments: The Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) which assesses maths, reading and science; Program for

International Student Assessment (PISA), where 15-year-olds are assessed for comparing Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries; and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which assesses the reading skills of Grade 4 learners.

Their study yielded some important findings on instructional leadership in relation to large-scale assessments. Firstly, the large-scale assessments were found to have a positive effect on the role of principals which led to them (indirectly) acting as instructional leaders. Secondly, principals were engaging in instructional leadership practices in order to improve learner academic performance in the large-scale assessments (Prytula *et al.*, 2013:22). In trying to achieve good learner academic performance in the large-scale assessments, principals actively engaged in goal setting, managing the curriculum and whole school improvement. For example, 45 respondents reported that large-scale assessments had positively affected their role as principals since there was (positive) pressure placed upon them to improve teaching, learning and the curriculum (Prytula *et al.*, 2013:13). According to Prytula *et al.* (2013:13), the principals reported that “standardised assessments provided the catalyst to take a deeper look at curriculum indicators and outcomes and to plan to improve upon those outcomes”. This meant that the principals engaged in analysing and interpreting the data from the large-scale assessments which allowed them to identify areas of weakness in the teaching and learning programme. The involvement of the principals in analysing the data from the large-scale assessments is also consistent with Weber’s (1996) element where he speaks of assessing the instructional programme.

Furthermore, in pursuing acceptable learner academic performance in large-scale assessments, principals occupied the role of an instructional leader, rather than a managerial role. This was expressed by 65 principals who indicated that the large-scale assessments encouraged them to engage in decision-making, planning and instruction. Furthermore, principals were able to design their school improvement plans for goal setting to improve learning (Prytula *et al.*, 2013:15). This had triggered effective instructional leadership practices since the principals were actively and directly engaging in the teaching and learning activities as well as the curriculum (Prytula *et al.*, 2013:22). In assessing and analysing the large-scale assessment scores based on learners’ individual yearly data, principals had engaged educators in the discussion of ways to improve the curriculum. The inclusion of the educators in the critical engagement of the curriculum resulted in collaboration between the principals and the educators (Prytula *et al.*, 2013:22). The inclusion of educators was done mainly through a dialogical (at meetings or curriculum discussion sessions) and collaborative approach, with a focus on reporting about learning (Prytula *et al.*, 2013:22).

Another significant finding of Prytula *et al.*'s (2013) study was that principals acknowledged accountability for the large-scale assessment scores. Although accountability is not an important characteristic of instructional leadership, it is pertinent within the South African school context, especially underperforming secondary schools in this study. The South African version of the large-scale assessments, that is, the NSC examinations, requires accountability from the SMT, hence the findings of my study also shows how the SMT perceived their level of accountability in relation to the NSC examinations, and if it indeed had a positive effect like Prytula *et al.*'s (2013) study, or a negative impact on instructional leadership practices (as expressed by the views of my participants). While Prytula *et al.*'s (2013) study offers insight into the way in which principals can be positively affected by large-scale assessments, there is little known about the inclusion of the other members of the SMT (HODs and DPs). However, the principals in Prytula *et al.*'s. (2013) study constantly engaged in collaboration as part of their instructional leadership role, which is an important aspect when engaging in shared instructional leadership as also expressed by Weber (1996).

#### **2.20.5 Kaparou and Bush's (2015) qualitative study of instructional leadership in centralised systems in Greek high performing schools**

A relevant study in Greece was undertaken by Kaparou and Bush (2015), who examined the way in which school managers enact instructional leadership in high-performing secondary schools. While my previous discussion of the Canadian study (Section 2.20.3 above) focused on the instructional leadership of only the principal, Kaparou and Bush's (2015) study comprised of *principals, DPs, subject educators and subject advisors*. In contrast to the Canadian study (Prytula *et al.*, 2013), Kaparou and Bush (2015) explored different instructional leadership perspectives and not just that of the principal, where even the educators and DPs were given the opportunity to comment on the principal's instructional leadership practices. Their explorative study utilised a qualitative multiple case study design which included semi-structured interviews, observations and document review. Kaparou and Bush's (2015) document review comprised of national level documents which included the following: Official Panhellenic examination statistics in the district; subject advisors' documents on Mathematics guidelines; and self-evaluation for educators. Other documents reviewed included the following: Committee meeting pedagogical minutes; the principal's school diary; and action book reports on school organisation and management. The semi-structured interviews comprised of sixteen subject educators, four highly experienced educators (purposefully selected on the equivalent to a subject leader), two principals, two deputy principals and two subject advisors. Kaparou and Bush's (2015) observations

included recording the two principals' instructional leadership activities and observing their meetings with educators. Firstly, Kaparou and Bush (2015:16) found that the two principals admitted that they did not give educators the opportunity to be a part of their vision. One of the reasons for the lack of shared vision between the two principals and the educators was that they appeared to be trying to do the bureaucratically right thing by aligning government goals with the school goals. Furthermore, one principal explained how basic teaching pedagogy was favoured over innovative teaching practices in government schools in Greece, thereby making it very difficult to promote a vision which develops the learner holistically (Kaparou & Bush, 2015:18). The Greek curriculum was found to be driven by government requirements and demands. The curriculum was designed in a way that could not be modified due to the use of curriculum monitoring tools. Similarly, the South African CAPS curriculum is standardised for the whole country and cannot be modified for any purpose, including SMT curriculum monitoring tools.

Kaparou and Bush (2015) refer to the study of Demertzi and Bagakis (2006:144) which showed that the Greek National Curriculum is limited and cannot be stretched, even though the staff may collaborate about the teaching design of that curriculum. This also appears to be the same in the South African CAPS curriculum where at DBE subject specialisation (orientation curriculum) meetings, the limited scope of the curriculum, as contained in the Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs), does not allow for any educator negotiations leading to the alteration of the curriculum. In fact, the South African ATPs are week and date specific and cannot be modified to accommodate the (time) extension (or backlog) of any aspect of the curriculum. Kaparou and Bush's (2015:20-21) study found that the evaluation of student results in the two Greek schools were the responsibility of the educators, however, senior members (which consisted of the DPs and HODs) were involved in assessing class performance (classroom/lesson observation) assessment at pedagogical meetings. This shows that there is evidence of some shared instructional leadership amongst the SMT members. In regard to the monitoring of educators' work performance, Kaparou and Bush (2015:23) point out that an official department rule is that the principal must get permission from the class teacher to sit and observe the lesson, which shows limited authority on the part of principals as well as decreasing the value of lesson monitoring as an improvement instrument or tool. Principals and Subject Advisors were only allowed to monitor an educator's lesson if the educator appeared to be pedagogically incompetent with accompanying complaints. In addition, one principal indicated that monitoring of teaching and learning is done discreetly. In contrast to Greek class monitoring protocols, the South African education context allows any SMT member or Subject Advisor to observe lessons with the aim of professionally developing the educator who is being observed (albeit not as a

punitive activity). The duties of monitoring and supervision were an aspect I explored in my study which formed part of the teaching and learning activities that SMTs engage in as instructional leaders.

Another domain that was addressed in Kaparou and Bush's (2015) study was professional development. Although professional development activities were not initiated enough by the Department of Education, the DP of one school stated that professional development activities (which were unofficial) were undertaken in order to promote a subject specific learning community. This led to the principals and DPs, according to their own accounts, becoming proactive and creating a professional development learning space for the educators (Kaparou & Bush, 2015:27). For my study I also considered asking participants about professional development initiatives undertaken by the SMT. Through my interaction with the participants, I wanted to gain insight into how they are creating or initiating activities that they believe are professionally developing staff members, or on the other hand, what may be impeding their attempts at providing continuous professional development.

#### **2.20.6 Leithwood's (2016) review of literature based on studies done in the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand**

Leithwood's (2016) study consisted of 42 diverse empirical studies that were reviewed to establish whether HODs contributed to the improvement of learner academic performance (Leithwood, 2016:117). My previous discussion (Kaparou & Bush, 2015; Prytula *et al.*, 2013) focused on the principal (and to a certain extent the DP) as the prime instructional leader. Leithwood's (2016) study is noteworthy since due consideration is given to the role of the HOD's engagement in instructional leadership practices. This lends some credence to the applicability of the notion of shared instructional leadership as proposed by Hallinger (2007) in ensuring teaching and learning tasks are shared amongst the HODs. Nevertheless, this study was undertaken over a growing concern that HODs were an underutilised form of instructional leadership which was necessary for school improvement and learner academic performance (Leithwood, 2016:134). The results of the review found that HODs have a great influence on learner academic performance, but that HODs are restricted in their instructional leadership roles due to some complex challenges that they may face within their school contexts. Nevertheless, Leithwood (2016:134) suggests that:

Principals working closely with their department-head leadership fosters heads' leadership and this typically means providing formally structured arrangements for sharing decision making with department heads, as well as delegating considerable responsibility to department.



Leithwood thus refers to the need for shared instructional leadership to address what are regarded as challenging school contexts. As my study included HODs, through the interviews with them, I also wanted investigate their instructional leadership practices that they engage with on a daily basis. The responses from their interviews gave me the opportunity to explore, in the South African context, Leithwood's (2016) findings of whether HODs are in fact underutilised and burdened with complex challenges, although some of these challenges may be different and unique in a South African context and within an underperforming secondary school.

## **2.21 RESEARCH ON INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA**

In this section, I turn to a review of literature on instructional leadership in South African schools. A noticeable and significant feature of the body of South African literature takes into account (specifically) learner academic performance based on: Instructional leadership; instructional leadership practices within challenging socio-economic contexts; and the way in which instructional leadership is perceived by school SMTs and educators. I refer in some detail to: a study by Maponya (2020) which sought to examine the instructional leadership role of the school principal on learners' academic achievement; a qualitative study by Mestry (2017) which sought to explore principals' perceptions of promoting a culture of professional development to prepare them for educational challenges as instructional leaders; Seobi and Wood's (2014) study on HODs' instructional leadership in under-resourced schools; a study by Bhengu and Mthembu (2014) comparing effective leadership, school culture and school effectiveness in two secondary schools (one underperforming school and one high-achieving school); a qualitative study by Bhengu *et al.* (2014) which chronicled the barriers principals experienced when translating instructional leadership into practice; and a study by Naidoo and Peterson (2015) which sought to explore primary school principals' instructional leadership practices as a key issue in school improvement.

### **2.21.1 Maponya's (2020) study of the principal's instructional leadership role on learners' academic achievement**

A recent study by Maponya (2020) examined the role of the instructional leadership practices of secondary school principals on learner achievement. Maponya's (2020) qualitative study was conducted in the Limpopo Province of South Africa which included a purposive sample of five secondary schools (from previously disadvantaged backgrounds). Participants in his study included the principal, HOD and DP in each school. Maponya

(2020) utilised semi-structured, phenomenological in-depth interviews to gain insight about the phenomenon being studied.

The findings revealed that majority of the participants perceived learner academic achievement to be the responsibility of the principal (Maponya, 2020:186). The participants felt that principals should offer support for teaching and learning by providing educational resources that will promote improved learner academic achievement (Maponya, 2020:186). Another attribute of the instructional leadership role of principals in contributing towards good learner academic performance was motivation. The findings indicate that motivational support sessions and awarding educators for their effective role in enhancing learner achievement through “good practices” had a positive impact on both educators’ and learners’ morale (Maponya, 2020:187). The principal encouraged both educators and learners who performed well to continue to maintain the high levels of achievement, and he also motivated those that did not perform up to optimal levels, to reflect and improve (Maponya, 2020:187). All the participants indicated that “job satisfaction emanating from positive influence on both teachers and learners was core for improved learner academic performance” (Maponya, 2020:187).

A challenge identified by Maponya (2020) was the creation of a positive teaching and learning culture in relation to learner academic performance. The instructional leader’s role in the creation of a positive learning climate is an element explored by Weber (1996); however, he does not provide for the sharing of this leadership task amongst the entire SMT, which justified my use of an extended model which provides for the notion of shared instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2007) as an additional element. The participants in Maponya’s (2020:188) study unanimously agreed that the creation of a positive teaching and learning environment was the responsibility of the principal to engage in goal setting and promoting a vision for all school activities that involve educators and learners that is in line with the needs of the curriculum. In comparison to Maponya’s (2020) study, my study provided an opportunity for the entire SMT to explore their role in the creation of a positive teaching and learning environment. Further to this, I also examined if SMTs in my study considered creating a positive teaching and learning environment as a shared leadership task.

Further findings from Maponya’s (2020) study revealed that the support provided by the principal was considered an integral aspect in influencing learner academic performance. Some of the vital pillars identified by Maponya (2020:188) in providing support for learner achievement were: Educators providing support as “secondary parents” in which they “adopt” learners (as part of the school’s academic improvement strategy) for mentoring

regarding the learner's academic performance, as well as other social challenges the learner may be experiencing; capacity building for educators; outsourcing specialised educators for subjects that were a concern; and curriculum support. All the participants alluded to the crucial role of the principal in providing support by developing the learner's self-confidence which could lead to improved learner academic performance since many learners faced various challenges that could negatively impact on their academic performance (Maponya, 2020:188). The sampled schools in my study are all classified as underperforming based on their NSC results. In order to improve their NSC results, SMTs would also have to offer sufficient support. In my study I probed the participants' views about the support they offer (if any) to learners in order to improve academic performance. Furthermore, instead of exploring the perceived view that the principal is solely responsible for support as expressed by the participants in Maponya's (2020) study, my study took into account the views of the entire SMT. This gave me insight into the various types of support offered at the different SMT levels and the extent to which the support could positively impact on learner academic performance.

Another issue that emerged in Maponya's (2020) study was parental support. All the participants indicated that parental support (or involvement) can assist instructional leaders in improving learner academic performance (Maponya, 2020:188). All the participants strongly believed that parental involvement in the instructional activities of learners, as well as providing them with emotional and social support, may contribute to improved learner academic performance (Maponya, 2020:189). The views expressed by all the participants in Maponya's (2020:189) study indicated that a collaborative relationship between the school and the parent(s) provided for supporting and monitoring performance, resulting in an effective "home-school relationship". His findings suggest that "such an indirect relational support of instructional leadership of school principals has the ability to produce good learner academic results" (Maponya, 2020:189). The schools in Maponya's (2020) study received adequate parental support which assisted principals (as well as HODs and DPs) in their instructional leadership roles to improve learner academic performance. In my study, when exploring those factors that the SMTs' considered as impacting negatively on their instructional leadership practices, I probed the issue of parental support. Unlike the schools in Maponya's (2020) study which were a sample of high-achieving schools, the three schools in my study presented a different context in that they are all underperforming secondary schools and belong to communities with various socio-economic challenges.

Yet another issue explored by the participants in Maponya's (2020) study was the effectiveness of instructional management towards learner academic achievement. The

varied responses of all the participants point towards quality curriculum delivery through effective planning of lessons, time on task and control mechanisms (Maponya, 2020:187). As far as the curriculum is concerned, Maponya (2020:190) affirms that “principals as curriculum managers are a driving force behind all curriculum matters within the schools”. Although the principal is regarded as the whole school curriculum manager, various authors (Hallinger, 2007; Ng, 2019; Taole, 2013) aver that the principal cannot act alone (as the main leader) when it comes to instructional leadership practices for learner achievement. The participants also alluded to the encouragement of team-teaching amongst the educators. Although the participants allude to a collaborative approach with the educators through team-teaching, they do not however mention or express their views regarding working as a team or even sharing leadership at the level of the SMT, which is an aspect I have explored in my study specifically related to the SMTs’ engagement in teaching and learning activities.

### **2.21.2 Mestry’s (2017a) qualitative study exploring principals’ perceptions of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to prepare them for educational challenges**

In a qualitative study based on research in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, Mestry (2017a) explored the importance of promoting a culture of professional development to prepare principals for some of the educational challenges (within the South African context) that they may be faced with. To begin with, Mestry (2017a:2) refers to Spaul’s (2013) study where he indicated that the global decline in academic standards could be a result of a lack of effective leadership and management in schools. Mestry (2017a) goes on to note that the lack of principals’ knowledge and skills indeed has implications for learner academic performance. Mestry (2017a:2) posits that support from the education authorities (or DBE) is integral for the continuous development of principals which will enable them to lead their schools effectively. I considered Mestry’s (2017a) study an important inclusion of my literature review since the focus on professional development is an aspect Weber (1996) provides for in his model, and which forms a part of my theoretical framework. In his model, Weber describes the role of the instructional leader as providing professional development opportunities to improve instruction.

In order to better understand how principals perceive their own CPD and how their participation in CPD programmes impacted on instructional leadership (or lack thereof), Mestry (2017a) conducted a qualitative study which comprised of 15 principals from primary and secondary schools located in inner cities, townships and affluent suburbs in three

education districts (Gauteng West, Gauteng East and Johannesburg Central) in Gauteng. In order to explore the perceptions of principals and their CPD in relation to their instructional leadership, Mestry (2017a) utilised standardised, open-ended questionnaires, followed by standardised open-ended interviews. Three main themes emerged from Mestry's (2017a) study:

- Principals' access to CPD programmes;
- Self-evaluation; and
- Personal professional development.

I now delve into some of the main findings (in relation to the emergent themes) of Mestry's (2017a) study regarding principals' CPD and its impact (as perceived) on their instructional leadership.

The first emergent theme was the significance of principals enriching their professional qualifications. Mestry (2017a:5) indicated that most participants met the basic minimum qualification requirements: a three-year teaching diploma with seven years of teaching experience. Subsequent to this, the principals had also improved (or upgraded) their qualification by completing the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) or some form of post-graduate qualification which included the Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) Honours and Master of Education (M. Ed) in Leadership and Management. Mestry (2017a:5) goes on to note that the "qualifications empowered them to deal with pertinent administrative, staffing, and teaching and learning matters, by improving their basic qualifications". Mestry (2017a:5) highlighted five principals with improved qualifications such as the ACE, B. Ed (Honours), M. Ed in Leadership and Management and one principal with a Doctorate in Education, who indicated through own self-reporting, that the improvement of the qualification, coupled with school management experience, contributed to effective leadership.

The second theme that emerged was the principals' access to CPD programmes. In theme two, Mestry (2017a:5) draws attention to the main CPD programme currently implemented in South African schools which is the IQMS CPD process for educators and all SMT members (including the principal). The IQMS is a professional development appraisal system consisting of monitoring and evaluation by various role-players (educators, all SMT members and District Officials). In all schools, the educators will peer evaluate other educators, who are then evaluated by the respective HODs. The DP will then evaluate the performance of HODs while the principal evaluates the DP. In the case of principals' evaluation in the IQMS, "a principal should select his/her immediate line manager (district

official) and a peer (principal of another school) to serve on his/her Development Support Group (DSG), and they are responsible for the principal's professional development" (Mestry, 2017a:5). Responses from most of the principals indicated a lack of confidence and dissatisfaction towards CPD initiatives for principals. For example, one principal raised an important concern regarding the IQMS process. This principal had to report on his/her personal professional development plan which was thought to be time-consuming. The principal felt that the Circuit Manager should report on behalf of the principal, taking into account the monitoring activities that the principal engages in with the Circuit Manager at the school level (Mestry, 2017a:6). Another principal indicated that the DBE organised very few CPD programmes for principals. This principal was even uncertain if the SGB workshops and meetings they attended were even related to CPD (Mestry, 2017a:6). Another principal indicated that the CPD workshops did very little to empower principals who needed further training in leadership and management (Mestry, 2017a:6). Another principal expressed concern over the mediocrity of the organised workshops which did not cover any new content or ideas but rather had a "one size fits all" approach which did not really cater for individual needs of the principals or concerns that they may want to raise or needed answers to at the meetings workshops (Mestry, 2017a:6). One principal felt that external organisation attempts at CPD for principals did not really hit its mark as most of the workshops did little to develop principals' leadership and management skills or even equip them to deal with the challenges (and demands) faced in their schools (Mestry, 2017a:6).

The third theme that emerged in Mestry's (2017a) study was the self-evaluation and personal professional development of principals. The IQMS process involves principals' evaluating themselves and thereafter compiling a Personal Growth Plan (PGP). Although all the principals comply with the self-evaluation process, it is sometimes seen as a formality of paperwork to attain a 1% salary increment (Mestry, 2017a:7). Mestry's (2017a:7) findings show that there was little evidence which indicated that principals' initiated their personal professional development programmes, although one principal did undertake professional development on an individual basis and did not wait for CPD programmes to be arranged by the DBE. Another two principals' responses also indicated that they had taken it upon themselves to engage in CPD organised by universities related to leadership and management which has helped them to become confident and effective leaders in their schools. Mestry's (2017a:8) study shows that principals feel that they can contribute to enhancing learner academic performance if they are exposed to quality CPD programmes focusing on the needs of the principals and challenges they may be facing in different contexts. Mestry's (2017a) study highlights the importance of the role of the principal as an instructional leader but does not focus on the other players in management, such as HODs

as instructional leaders. Furthermore, Mestry's (2017a) findings do not show a connection between CPD programmes and improved learner academic performance, but show that principals who are engaged in CPD programmes may have developed into effective instructional leaders, which could have a positive impact on learner academic performance. To address this gap in the literature, my study examined how the various levels of the SMT, as instructional leaders, initiate and encourage CPD programmes to directly enhance teaching and learning with the aim of improving learner academic performance. I also regard the findings of my study noteworthy when it comes to the issue of SMTs initiating professional development for improving learner academic performance, as the sample schools in my study are all classified as underperforming.

### **2.21.3 Seobi and Wood's (2014) qualitative study exploring the improvement of HODs instructional leadership in under-resourced schools**

A study by Seobi and Wood (2016) in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa focused specifically on the instructional leadership of HODs in under-resourced schools. Seobi and Wood (2016) conducted a collaborative action-learning approach study with four HODs of under-resourced schools in a peri-urban area in the Eastern Cape. Their qualitative study generated data through open-ended questionnaires, reflective journals, narratives, photo-voice and transcripts of recorded action learning set meetings. As a starting point in their study, Seobi and Wood (2016:1) argue that poor learner academic performance may be linked to poor-quality of teaching, which stems from a lack of effective instructional leadership in schools. Seobi and Wood (2016) further indicate that education policy suggests that HODs are in a suitable (and direct) position to effect instructional leadership change. The aim of Seobi and Wood's (2016) study was to therefore provide (and develop) a framework for HODs to improve their own instructional leadership practices. The sampled schools in my study are also under-resourced schools, as with the schools in Seobi and Wood's (2016) study. However, what is noteworthy is that since Seobi and Wood (2016) used a process-based model in which the application of the model, as an approach, could be considered and found beneficial for improving instructional leadership in both well-resourced and under-resourced schools. I now delve into some of the main findings of Seobi and Wood's (2016) study.

One of the main findings of Seobi and Wood's (2016) study was that HODs (within their participatory groups), learnt that they play an influential role in guiding educators towards responsibility and development of their own learning by introducing them to a learning environment that is collaborative, focused and democratic. This type of positive learning

environment created by HODs would also contribute to increased educator motivation as the authors point out that by “creating such dialogical spaces, collegial relationships were improved, and teachers at all levels began to feel valued. This can only help to improve teacher motivation and commitment” (Seobi & Wood, 2016:12). A key research question posed by Seobi and Wood (2016:12) was: “How can heads of department in under-resourced schools improve their instructional leadership practices?” All the HODs in their study provided a framework which can be applied to both advantaged (well-resourced schools) and disadvantaged schools (under-resourced schools). To ensure the improvement of teaching and learning, HODs developed a general framework/model (which the authors did not present or explain find within the scope of their article) which was built on a collaborative approach to instructional leadership (Seobi & Wood, 2016:12).

Through reflection of their own learning during the action research process, all HODs found that there were two factors that had to be considered to improve their instructional leadership roles: (1) The importance of teamwork and participation of all stakeholders within the school (which includes educators and the entire SMT) which will improve instructional support to educators; and (2) the formation of good relationships to ensure effective collaboration amongst all stakeholders (i.e., educators and the entire SMT) (Seobi & Wood, 2016:12). Teamwork amongst all stakeholders (referring to the educators and the SMT) in the school was a key characteristic of instructional leadership that emerged in Seobi and Wood’s (2016) study. In my study, I also examined the concept of teamwork as perceived by the entire SMT. I regard teamwork as an important facet in instructional leadership, since after all the ‘T’ in ‘SMT’ is supposed to imply that the entire SMT work together as a *team* in promoting quality teaching and learning. This is one of the issues my study addressed, which was to explore if teamwork (or lack of it) was prevalent amongst the SMTs in the underperforming schools in my study. Drawing on my participants’ perceptions of teamwork, I further probed if they considered working in a team constituted shared instructional leadership.

#### **2.21.4 Bhengu and Mthembu’s (2014) study comparing effective leadership, school culture and school effectiveness in two secondary schools**

A small scale qualitative study by Bhengu and Mthembu (2014) in the Umlazi Township of KZN sought to explore how two secondary schools differed in leadership, school culture and school effectiveness. Their study included one high-achieving school and one underperforming school, both from a community faced with poverty. In order to gain balanced insight into how these schools differed in learner achievement, their sample of



participants included HODs, principals, teachers, and parents. Their study was also relevant to mine in that they used instructional leadership as a theoretical framework, one sample school was underperforming and HODs were part of their sampled participants. The latter was not considered in some other South African studies on instructional leadership (cf. Bhengu *et al.*, 2014; Mestry, 2017a; Naidoo & Peterson, 2015).

The role of leadership was a distinct factor that set the two schools apart. Bhengu and Mthembu's (2014:47-48) findings indicate that the high-achieving school, Nomzamo Secondary (pseudonym), had clearly set and defined goals and their school leadership promoted collaboration amongst the entire staff where the main focus was on teaching and learning. In view of this, the instructional leadership practice of the school can be considered effective, and is in line with Weber's (1996) element of "defining the school's mission" as their SMT works collaboratively with the entire staff to promote the common vision and mission of the school. The principal of Nomzamo Secondary expressed the importance of creating a collaborative vision which included all stakeholders, but gave cognisance to the SMT in leading the way towards achieving their goals (Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014:48). In support of the principal's views, one HOD expressed how teamwork led to the success of the school. Based on the views expressed by the principal and HOD, Bhengu and Mthembu (2014:48) go on to note that "when leadership is distributed as it was the case in Nomzamo Secondary, teachers tend to be empowered to take constructive decisions without fear and threats".

In contrast to Nomzamo Secondary, Khathazile Secondary (pseudonym) lacked commitment to teaching and learning, which contributed towards its underperformance. Bhengu and Mthembu (2014:48) point out that while Nomzamo Secondary reflected, analysed and assessed their past performances as part of effective leadership practices, Khathazile Secondary did not engage in this at all. This indeed shows that the SMT of Khathazile Secondary as instructional leaders did not seem to be fulfilling Weber's (1996) key elements: Managing curriculum and instruction; observing and improving instruction; and assessing the instructional programme. The principal of Khathazile Secondary even went as far as blaming the DBE for using the school as a "dumping ground for difficult learners" as well as parents who failed to show up to address concerns about learners (Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014:48).

Another important factor that set the two schools apart was the focus on effective teaching and learning. In Nomzamo Secondary school, the school culture was largely based on focused teaching and learning (Bhengu & Mthembu, 2014:49). This was evident in their high-achieving NSC examination results, but also due to the effective instructional leadership practices exhibited by the SMT of the school. The views expressed by the

principal of Nomzamo succinctly captured the role of instructional leadership in achieving high NSC pass rates: “Our school has always focussed on instructional leadership. Our teachers monitor learner attendance closely, and they do a follow-up on absent students” (Bhengung & Mthembu, 2014:49).

The views expressed by the principal of Nomzamo, as Bhengung and Mthembu (2014:49) note, embodied one of the tenets of instructional leadership, where the focus is on classroom learning. In contrast, the principal of Khathazile Secondary attributed poor NSC results to learner absenteeism, divisions among staff members and lack of interest in enhancing teaching and learning (Bhengung & Mthembu, 2014:49). As far as leadership is concerned in Khathazile Secondary, the HODs expressed concern over the lack of decisive and effective leadership at the school. One HOD stated: “No matter how much attempts and interventions are made to turn things around, we are frustrated by the lack of decisive leadership from the principal. There are plans, policies and strategies that are discussed but the implementation part is a huge problem”. Bhengung and Mthembu (2014:49) suggests, based on the view of the HOD, the SMT was aware of their wrong-doings but due to lack of effective leadership (by the principal), no corrective measures were implemented.

Bhengung and Mthembu’s (2014) study touches on some important lessons learnt with regard to instructional leadership practices in South African schools when comparing two schools from the same poverty-stricken community but with very differing learner achievement rates. Bhengung and Mthembu’s (2014) findings have shown the importance of effective instructional leadership in attaining high NSC pass rates through goal setting and promoting the common vision of the school, as well as the consequences of a lack of effective instructional leadership, as with the underperforming Khathazile Secondary. Their findings also indicate that leadership that is shared or distributed amongst the SMT (and also the educators) can indeed improve learner academic performance. In the next section I review a study by Bhengung *et al.* (2014) which focuses specifically on the instructional leadership of principals.

#### **2.21.5 Bhengung et al.’s (2014) qualitative study chronicling the barriers to translating instructional leadership learning into practice**

In another qualitative study conducted in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa, Bhengung *et al.* (2014) presented a discussion of their findings on the barriers principals’ experienced when translating instructional leadership into practice. Their sample consisted of principals who had completed the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. They (2014: 203-204) explicitly used Weber’s (1996) model of instructional leadership and hence focused on the *principals’* leadership practices: How they

enact their role as an instructional leader; what barriers they experience in this regard; and how they attempt to mitigate against these. Their results are relevant to my literature review, since my study also explored some of the challenges SMT members considered to be impacting negatively on their instructional leadership practices. Although Bhengu *et al.* (2014) addressed only the principals, some of the themes that emerged are significant for my study (which included the SMT as a whole). Bhengu *et al.* (2014) first piloted their open-ended questionnaires, and then administered these questionnaires to 65 principals (of which 25 returned their questionnaires). They also conducted semi-structured interviews with six principals. One of the recurring themes that emerged in their study was educator apathy in which the majority of the participants expressed concern over the lack of motivation evident amongst educators. Five principals (out of the six interviewed) explained how educators seemed to be frustrated with the multiple daily changes that had to be implemented in their schools. One principal described how a lack of motivation expressed by educators led to them being absent from school and reluctant to go to class (Bhengu *et al.*, 2014:205). Another principal explained how continuing curriculum changes led to educators being confused about what to teach in the class and a sense of not knowing what is expected of them as educators (Bhengu *et al.* 2014:205). The principals, according to Bhengu *et al.*'s (2014:205) synthesis of data, identified some of the causes of educator apathy as being attributed by the "uncertainty, volume and pace of the changes that educators were expected to implement in their schools". Some of the questionnaire responses also pointed to the pace of change. For example, one principal responded in the questionnaire that educators appear to be frustrated (and "fed up") with the continuous changes in the education system, which made it difficult for the principal to keep them motivated (Bhengu *et al.* 2014:205). Nevertheless, Bhengu *et al.* (2014:205) posit that change in education is inevitable and educators need to absorb this realisation. Another example of educator apathy identified in their study was the excessive volume of work associated with teaching multi-grade classes (Bhengu *et al.* 2014:205). Their findings suggest that implementing current educational changes while teaching multi-grade classes demoralises educators, which makes buying into the school's vision challenging (Bhengu *et al.* 2014:205).

Bhengu *et al.* refer to Weber's (1996) model when they posit that the achievement of the school's goals therefore depend on the educators identifying with the vision of the school together with the collaboration of various stakeholders (Bhengu *et al.*, 2014:205). In my study, my use of Weber's (1996) model extended to include a notion of shared leadership as a theoretical framework was to examine if the SMTs articulate a shared vision of the school in their endeavours to improve learner academic performances. In other words, my study delves further than the SMTs identifying with the common vision and goals of the school, in

that my theoretical framework provided for an extended (Weber's) model with the additional element of shared instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2007:5). In my exploration of the extended model (and in relation to my discussion above), I also explored the way in which SMTs articulate a sense of shared vision (if any) in relation to improving learner academic performance in their schools. Bhengu *et al.* (2014) do not identify if any of the principals in this study were from schools classed as underperforming, as this was not the focus of this research, contrary to the focus of Bhengu and Mthembu's (2014) study (and mine).

In Bhengu *et al.*'s (2014) study, many of the principals acknowledged that as instructional leaders they are also motivators of their educators (Bhengu *et al.*, 2014:206). In an effort to motivate educators, one principal conducted staff gathering motivation sessions where ideas are shared, he treated all educators equally, and he hosted various social events that promoted unity amongst the staff which included educators and the SMT (Bhengu *et al.*, 2014:206). Another principal hosted a special awards ceremony to honour the good work done by educators (Bhengu *et al.*, 2014:206). The efforts of the principals to motivate educators are evidence of instructional leadership aimed at revitalising the teaching and learning programme of the school. Bhengu and Mthembu's (2014) study (comparing two secondary schools) also highlighted the crucial role of the principal in the high achieving versus the underperforming sister school in the community, while at the same time they mention (albeit only in passing) the efforts of the leader to introduce distributive leadership. My study follows on from this and delves into this in more detail. All the schools in my study were classed as underperforming for more than three consecutive years, and I allowed my participants the opportunity (if they felt the need) to explore the issue of motivation during my conversations and also to explore how they conceived the issue of leadership. This was to gain insight about the SMT's feelings (including the DPs and HODs aside from the principal) about motivation (or lack of it) while working in an underperforming secondary school, given the fact that all of the schools have not managed to emerge from the underperformance category in the past three years.

Another emergent theme from Bhengu *et al.*'s (2014) study was the workload of principals. This was a theme that I have also explored in my study to gain an understanding of some of the daily administrative tasks of the entire SMT, versus the time they spend on their direct engagement (if any) with teaching and learning activities. According to Bhengu *et al.* (2014:206), a few of their participants in schools with smaller staff sizes indicated in the questionnaire that they carry teaching loads of up to five subjects as compared to some principals who spent more time on administrative tasks and functionality on a daily basis since they did not have key personnel such as administrative staff, HODs and/or DPs. One principal expressed concern over how taking on teaching loads made some administrative

tasks (which is the sole responsibility of the principal) challenging with deadlines being hard to meet (Bhengu *et al.*, 2014:206). As compared to Bhengu *et al.*'s (2014) study, where only the principals expressed their views concerning administrative workload and its impact on their instructional leadership practices, I included the views of the entire SMT. My intention was to understand how each level of SMT viewed their administrative workload in relation to each other, as well as its impact on their instructional leadership practices. I also went a step further to examine if administrative tasks are shared (or distributed) amongst the SMT.

Yet another theme that emerged (and which I have also explored in my conversations with participants in my study) is the support from various stakeholders such as the DBE and parents. In this theme, some principals expressed concern over the lack of support they receive from DBE officials and parents (especially in rural areas) which was seen as a barrier to the delivery of an effective curriculum. One principal said that the lack of support was a result of DBE officials not understanding the specific curriculum needs of the school, while another principal felt that more support was offered to the FET Phase (Grades 10-12) as compared to the GET Phase (Grades 7-9) (Bhengu *et al.*, 2014:208). As far as parental support is concerned, one principal indicated that the lack of parental support may be due to poor levels of education (especially in rural communities) and parents' lack of knowledge about how to support their children academically (Bhengu *et al.*, 2014:208). On a positive note, one principal seemed to show resilience by collaborating with SMT and educators in improving teaching and learning. This resonates with Hallinger's (2007) notion of shared instructional leadership, where the SMT (and even the educators) collaborate to improve the curriculum of the school and the principal shares tasks (as well as leadership and management tasks) with the other SMT members. Bhengu *et al.* (2014) found that the knowledge and skills the principals acquired in the ACE leadership programme did not seem to work in some situations, but helped in others due to the different contexts in which the participants work. To conclude, Bhengu *et al.* (2014:211) acknowledged that the "implementation of instructional leadership learning is not an event; rather, it is a process requiring consolidation of knowledge, values and skills learnt". During my conversations with participants, I allowed the SMT members to explore the issue of support (or lack of it) that they receive from parents and the DBE as instructional leaders and its impact on improving learner academic performance.

#### **2.21.6 Naidoo and Peterson's (2015) study exploring primary school principals' instructional leadership practices within the context of school improvement**

Naidoo and Peterson (2015) interviewed five primary school principals (comprising of quintile one to quintile five schools) who completed the ACE leadership development

programme for principals. Naidoo and Peterson's (2015) study explored the curriculum leadership of principals within the context of school improvement. Naidoo and Peterson (2015:1) argue that "robust training and development in instructional leadership practices become necessary to support school leaders". Similar to Bhengu *et al.* (2014), Naidoo and Peterson (2015:3) wanted to gain insight into the effectiveness of the ACE leadership programme in preparing principals as instructional leaders to improve learner achievement. Naidoo and Peterson (2015) addressed the main research question of how principals who had completed the ACE programme viewed their instructional leadership practices. Their findings indicated that three principals perceived instructional leadership as their main role, whilst the other two principals perceived their roles as managers and administrators in their schools (Naidoo & Peterson, 2015:4). In this regard, my study also explored (through my conversations with my participants) the way in which all SMT members perceive their roles as instructional leaders versus the role of a manager and administrator (keeping in mind that some participants may relate experiences where they fulfil all their duties effectively as an instructional leader, manager and administrator).

As far as curriculum leadership is concerned, three principals' responses indicate that they are directly involved in the teaching processes that contribute to learner outcomes. One participant perceived the role of the principal to lead as the curriculum organiser by working collaboratively with the DPs and HODs (Naidoo & Peterson, 2015:4). This principal's response points to the notion of shared instructional leadership, within the context of curriculum development, as the path towards (and integral) to improving learner performances. In another positive response regarding instructional leadership, one principal explained how extrinsic motivation was used by awarding educators for their teaching efforts at staff functions in the hope of encouraging the staff to achieve better learner performances (Naidoo & Peterson, 2015:4). As far as the effectiveness of the ACE programme is concerned, the perspective of all five participants was that the module titled "Lead and Manage People" was a significant contributor towards their professional development as principals (Naidoo & Peterson, 2015:5). For example, the topic of teamwork emerged when three principals highlighted the importance of "effective team building and teamwork" as effective instructional leadership practices (Naidoo & Peterson, 2015:5). Naidoo and Peterson (2015:5) further posit, citing the work of Kouzes and Posner (2001), that effective instructional leaders promote a collaborative and shared decision-making environment which allows various stakeholders to create a "stable culture of teaching in schools" (Naidoo & Peterson, 2015:5). Besides the internal stakeholders (learners, educators and SMT), the participants in Naidoo and Peterson's (2015) study also mentioned how working with external stakeholders like the DBE, other schools and the local community improved their

culture of teaching. For example, one principal explained how the DBE provided him with an opportunity to be part of an e-Learning campaign which allowed him to empower others in teaching and learning (Naidoo & Peterson, 2015:6). All the participants in Naidoo and Peterson's (2015:6) study reported that the support provided by the DBE helped to improve teaching and learning. Other examples indicated by the participants were networking with other school principals to establish a crisis team to address the issue of curriculum coverage loss through union strikes and the establishment of a school library which also serves the surrounding community (Naidoo & Peterson, 2015:6).

The notion of shared decision-making, teamwork and collaboration also confirms the engagement of shared instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2007) being utilised by the principals in Naidoo and Peterson's (2015) study. The notion of shared instructional leadership is reiterated as one of the topics I have explored in my study through the conversations with my participants to ascertain if and how the SMT of underperforming secondary schools may be working collaboratively or in isolation from the rest of the SMT.

## **2.22 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter began with an introduction to leadership which then progressed to a conceptual understanding of instructional leadership based on the studies of various academics who have contributed to definitions of this concept. The chapter also discussed and substantiated, through various scholarly articles, the positive impact instructional leadership can have on learner academic performance. A justification was given for selecting Weber's (1996) Model as the main theoretical framework, supplemented with the additional concept of "shared instructional leadership" as a lens for this study. This was followed by a review of various scholarly articles on instructional leadership in a number of countries (from various parts of the globe). This in turn was followed by an engagement with the body of literature on instructional leadership reviewed in South Africa, and placing my study in the light of this.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 concerning the instructional leadership of SMTs, indicates that the studies focusing on instructional leadership (globally as well as in South Africa) for the most part have not singled out for attention schools that are termed in the South African context "underperforming" – with the exception of Bhengu and Mthembu's (2014) study which compared a high-achieving school to an "underperforming" school, focusing mainly on how instructional leadership was a key determinant factor in learner achievement. I have suggested, however, that the underperforming school may present a unique context for HODs, DPs and principals and I have justified my focus on exploring the

role of SMTs in secondary underperforming schools as being a gap in the literature. The next chapter focuses on the research methodology utilised in this study.



## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 was introduced with the definition of a leader as a person who has the ability to influence others to work towards a common goal and shared vision. In considering the notion of instructional leadership in schools, it is clear that Weber's (1996) model focuses on the primary role of the *principal*. However, noting Hallinger's (2007) notion of shared instructional leadership, some of the literature points towards the *entire SMT* needing to work together in order to improve teaching and learning. This also is indicative of the changing (instructional leadership) role of the principal, whom it is argued, cannot function alone as the prime leader in enacting the instructional leadership practices of a school.

In the context of South Africa, the roles, responsibilities, duties, and levels of accountability, appear different in schools that have attained the national norm pass rate of above 60% in the NSC examination. Furthermore, there is a myriad of factors that have been considered by various researchers in South Africa (cf. Bhengu *et al.*, 2014; Hompashe, 2018; Mestry, 2017; Seobi & Wood, 2016) as likely to contribute or impact on the ways in which instructional leadership is practised in South African schools. Most of these authors have chosen to focus on the role of the *principal* when examining instructional leadership practices. Bhengu and Mthembu (2014:48) refer in passing to distributive leadership (when comparing two sister secondary schools in a community), but they do not delve into this, while Bhengu *et al.* (2014) concentrate on the manner in which principals who attended an ACE course at the KZN University attempt to enact their role as instructional leaders in their schools. Naidoo and Peterson's study (undertaken in Quintile 1-5 schools) refers to some principals who mentioned collaboration across the SMT team – but their study was set in the context of only primary schools.

In short, the perspectives of the entire composition of the SMT (i.e., HODs, DPs and principals) in relation to their understanding of how they can *still proceed to perform their instructional leadership role(s) (together with the additional element of shared instructional leadership)* is largely unexplored within the context of underperforming secondary schools. It is these understandings that are explored in this study, using interviewing to explore and probe perceptions of instructional leadership. It is intended that the data generated will not only form the basis for future research, but can also contribute towards the development and

positive change within underperforming secondary schools. Since I regard this topic as complex in nature, I considered a research design that would enable me to tap into the realities and perspectives of the SMT members in order to gain a deeper understanding of how they experience their instructional leadership practices in their different schools.

The previous chapter presented a detailed and comprehensive discussion of the literature review on this topic, which in turn pointed to my rationale for undertaking this particular study to fill certain gaps in the literature. This chapter focuses on the research and methodological process that were involved in this study. A description of the paradigm within which this study is located is outlined, in order to place the qualitative research approach that I adopted within this paradigmatic worldview. Further, to this the recruitment phase and type of sampling used in this study (in line with a qualitative research approach) is explained. The justification for the use of the multiple case study methodology is discussed. The semi-structured interviews, follow-up interviews and document review, as research instruments used in this study, are justified for their use. The process for data analysis used in this study is explained in relation to the research instruments used in the study. To ensure all data are credible and that my interpretations are justifiable, issues of trustworthiness are explained within the context of this study. A discussion of the steps employed to ensure ethical issues in this study is outlined. Lastly, some of the limitations that impacted on this study are discussed.

### **3.2 RATIONALE FOR THIS EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

My past experiences as a Grade 12 educator in an underperforming secondary school for four years (2012-2016) elicited my interest in exploring the instructional leadership practices of SMT members within this context. Furthermore, within the period 2012-2016, my experiences as a National Senior Marker in the NSC examinations and my position as an Acting HOD for one and a half years (January 2019 – June 2020), sparked my interest (from a leadership and management position) to explore the instructional leadership practices of SMTs within the context of underperforming secondary schools. I regard this study essential since it involves the perspectives, issues, concerns, challenges and resolutions as discussed by the SMT members in this study. The findings from this research are intended not only to provide significant information on how SMT members perceive their instructional leadership roles in underperforming secondary schools, but also to advance recommendations which may have a positive impact on the NSC pass rates at Circuit, District, Provincial and National levels of education. Through my fieldwork engagement and data collection tools, I was able to gain rich information from participants, which afforded the opportunity to me, as well as to future researchers, to gain an in-depth understanding and

analysis of how SMT members engage in instructional leadership within the context of an underperforming secondary school.

### **3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH**

In this research, a qualitative approach was used and the research design was developed accordingly. Durrheim (2006:36) refers to a research design as a “strategic framework” or a blue-print that steers the research study in a direction that will enable the research to draw conclusions. This study employed a qualitative research design to steer the research and in particular a multiple case study (as explained in Section 3.5.1). Although this formed the blue-print of the study, this is not to imply that the study could be pre-planned in advance. Indeed, certain steps in the design emerged along the way, as also endorsed by Creswell and Creswell (2018: 258) when they state:

The research process for qualitative researchers is emergent. This means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and some or all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data.

The qualitative research undertaken in this study was in keeping with Creswell and Creswell’s (2018: 278) indication that such research involves the “researcher as instrument” in a systematic enquiry of a social phenomenon by engaging with participants to explore their sense-making within their social contexts. As they (2018:278) explain, using the researcher as “key instrument”, data is collected through, for example, “examining documents, observing behaviour, or interviewing participants”. In this case (or cases) particular relevant documents were examined and it was decided to discuss aspects of these with participants as part of the emergent design and interviews were undertaken (with some emergence of additional questions to pose to participants) in order to explore the social phenomenon, namely, instructional leadership in the selected secondary underperforming schools.

Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa and Varpio (2015:669) indicate that the social phenomenon under investigation in qualitative research includes: The way in which people may experience certain aspects in their life; the way in which people behave and give meaning to their behaviour; how relationships are shaped through interactions; and the way in which organisations function. Nevertheless, the qualitative researcher can also endeavour to examine why certain events occur and the significance of these events to the participants in a study. The defining feature of qualitative research is that participants’ accounts of events are accounted for as part of the study.

Qualitative researchers place emphasis on lay participants' interpretation of the social world as well as the interpretation of the researcher and his/her understanding of the research being undertaken (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003:1; Romm, 2001:203; Snape & Spencer, 2003:7). An essential feature of quantitative researchers is their subtle interaction with their participants as part of a process of exploration of meanings together with participants. Such researchers prefer not to employ mathematical and statistical data collection techniques, albeit that they may use such techniques at times in mixed methods research (Hesse-Biber, 2010:457; Romm, 2018:449). Qualitative research concentrates on the stories behind the people and their perspectives, narratives, attitudes, relationships and interactions, in relation to the phenomenon studied.

I opted to use a qualitative enquiry, given the nature of my research, which was both naturalistic and an interactive engagement/investigation with the participants. My study engaged the perspectives of the HODs, DPs and principals in their real-life contexts and their lived experiences; it involved an interaction between the participants and me rooted in a deep understanding that I wished to gain through my interviews with them. A qualitative research design was suitable for this research since I wanted to explore the instructional leadership practices of SMT members within their natural setting, thereby, allowing me to make sense as well as interpret the meanings of the SMTs through the questions I asked them. Unlike quantitative research which is underpinned by statistics, qualitative researchers want to gain an understanding through the internal experiences of the participants and how the meanings which shape individuals are formed through their experiences, thus allowing the researcher to gain insight into a problem much better than before the start of the research process (Creswell, 2008:27).

Furthermore, a qualitative research design allowed me to conduct the in-depth enquiry needed through the interviews to answer the main research question and sub-questions in this study. This study investigated the instructional leadership practices of HODs, DPs and principals, and I used the qualitative research design, given the complex nature of the underperforming context of the sampled schools in this study. It was my intention to understand the views of the participants through probing questions and data collection based on the participants' use of language, which was then analysed to find and interpret themes (Creswell, 2008:27).

Qualitative research is used to explore and understand individuals or people within a context which allows the researcher to make interpretations from the data collected (Creswell, 2014:32). Using the qualitative research approach was primarily to allow me to gain some

insight into the ways in which SMT members interpret their experiences and behavioural patterns of themselves and others, thus providing insight into their perceptions of working within the unique context of an underperforming school. By using this research approach, I wanted to gain an understanding of the ideas, opinions and experiences of the SMT members in relation to their instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools. Qualitative research stems from a set of beliefs or what can be called a paradigmatic world view. In the next sub-section, I justify my worldview and paradigmatic approach in this study.

### **3.4 RESEARCH PARADIGM:**

As explained in the previous sub-section, this study employed a qualitative research design via a multiple case study. A research paradigm in the social sciences is a set of beliefs that the researcher holds regarding the nature of the social world (ontology), the manner in which it should be approached, such that enhanced understanding can be attained (epistemology), the research processes or design that are likely to enhance our understandings (methodology) and the way in which the researcher's values can be accounted for in the research process (ethics) (Lincoln & Guba, 2013:23). In other words, it represents a worldview that defines the nature of the world (in this case social reality), the individual's place in it, people's way of relating to what they experience, how these relationships can be explored within the research process and what this implies in terms of the ethics of research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:107).

My study was located within the constructivist paradigm, as detailed by Lincoln and Guba (2013). In terms of this paradigm, Lincoln and Guba (2013:45) assert that humans construct their meanings through sense-making, in which they give meaning (together with others) in relation to their and others' experiences. By interacting with the selected participants, I wanted to gain insight into how they construct their meanings of working within their context of the underperforming secondary school as instructional leaders. Based on the constructivist paradigmatic conception that reality can be regarded as socially constructed, my intention was twofold: (a) to gain an understanding of the participants' views on their instructional leadership practices; and (b) to reflect upon my own experiences as an instructional leader of the curriculum. Through this interaction with the participants during the research, the participants were able to reflect upon their experiences, guided by the questions I asked them. Lincoln and Guba (cited in Romm 2018:12) argue that the constructs of individuals can be examined via a research process which allows these constructs to be revised through an encounter with participants in which they are prompted to reflect further on their meaning-making. It is through this encounter of information that I

was hoping that a co-construction of knowledge would develop between me and the participants.

Based on my ontological worldview that there is no objective reality to which researchers have access (as stressed within the constructivist paradigm), my study was fitting in that it was able to explore the socially constructed realities of the SMT members within the context in which they experienced the phenomenon taking place as they saw it – that is, as expressed and developed during my interactions with them. Wahyuni (2012:71) states that by engaging in a dialogue, the researcher is better able to understand the world from the perspective and experiences of the participants while engaging with them. Through “dialogical engagement” (Romm 2018:12), both the participants and I could extend and develop our perspectives as the research developed and the participants were stimulated to reflect anew based on the questions being asked.

Although hermeneutics is concerned with interpreting understanding or meaning, constructivists view hermeneutics as a “way to interpret the meaning of something from a certain standpoint or situation” (Mertens, 2014:16). Furthermore, Mertens (cited in Romm, 2015:414) states that the constructivist (interpretivist) paradigm is “characterised as using primarily, qualitative methods in a hermeneutical ... manner (to aid the interpretation of meanings as expressed by participants)”. Perception is a key feature of hermeneutics in research. Based on the fundamentals of hermeneutics, I sought to understand and establish what was unfamiliar in relation to this research topic and integrate that knowledge with what I was already familiar with.

By listening to the participants’ stories and their accounts of how they experience instructional leadership practices in their underperforming secondary school contexts, I was also able to construct new knowledge within the context of this study. The constructivist paradigm was used to allow me to interpret and understand the SMT members’ experiences and feelings about their instructional leadership practices within their complex context of the underperforming secondary school. Furthermore, Krauss (2005:761) states that there is no single reality and, by utilising this paradigm, I hoped to gain multiple realities of the SMT members’ instructional leadership practices, as it takes into account their accounts of their experiences from different levels of school management.

Epistemology is concerned with the way in which knowledge is gained. According to Lincoln and Guba (2013), epistemology, as a knowing process, is an ‘interactive’ process where the inquirer and participant have an influence on one another. Within this paradigm, I wanted to gain rich insight through the knowledge that is socially constructed by the participants in

encounters with one another and also in engagement with me during the research process. Specifically, this study focused on the knowledge of instructional leadership practices of SMT members in underperforming schools, which I co-explored during our encounters. I also synthesised what I gathered to be their various understandings and later presented to all participants this interpretation based on the perspectives of the SMT members, and checked my synthesis with them to see if they wished to add comments/new angles. From this epistemological viewpoint, truths are co-created; hence, by engaging in dialogical encounters with the participants, I was hoping, with them, to gain some rich insights into their experiences of being a SMT member within the context of an underperforming school, especially as pertains to instructional leadership.

It is important to note that I specifically chose to use the first person style of writing in this thesis in order to acknowledge responsibility for the way in which I am presenting insights/interpretations. This is in keeping with the advice of Wessels and Pauw (2006:166) who state that the first person writing style demonstrates the author's acceptance of what he or she writes. As Nkambule (2020:24) likewise indicates, there is a corpus of literature (e.g., Kirsch, 1994; Strunk & White, 2000; Turabian, 2007; Hyland, 2008; Shelton, 2015; Rivombo, 2018; Romm, 2018; Gergen, 2020) advocating for adoption of the first person writing style. The first person writing style expresses that I am acknowledging my "presence" in this study.

### **3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN**

De Vaus (2001:8-9) uses the analogy of the construction of a building to best describe a research design. De Vaus (2001:8-9) asserts that a building cannot be constructed, or materials purchased, without firstly considering the design. In the same way, I firstly considered the research design that would map the way for the research methodology to follow. De Vaus (2001:9) elucidates that the function of a research design is "to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible". In deliberately using the analogy of the construction of a building to describe a research design, I regard my study as a construction of knowledge, which is also in keeping with my epistemological and ontological viewpoints.

Case studies "portray, analyse and interpret the uniqueness of real individuals and situations through accessible accounts" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011:129). According to Stake (cited in Yazan, 2015:137), constructivist epistemologies are essential for qualitative case study research. Case studies are useful as they provide thick descriptions of the phenomenon being researched. By utilising a case study method, the empirical findings of this study were not generalised in any *statistical* sense, but rather the aim was to gain a

deeper understanding through in-depth analysis of the phenomena being studied in their naturalistic setting (Creswell, 2008:476; Yin, 2009:18). Flyvberg (2006:238) notes that when a researcher writes up case study research, he/she attempts “to leave scope for readers of different backgrounds to make different interpretations and draw diverse conclusions regarding the question of what the case is a case of”. In other words, like Melrose’s (2010:91) discussion of naturalistic generalisation which allows the reader to consider the relevance of the case(s) to their own situations, Flyvberg (2006) too argues that this is a feature of case study-type “generalisation”, which enables readers to compare the cases as described with situations with which they are familiar. In view of this, other instructional leaders and educators in what are considered to be underperforming schools can reflect upon the extent to which the findings in relation to the three cases I used in my study find resonance in their settings. (This is related to the question of transferability, which I discuss in Section 3.9.2.)

A case study (or rather, a multiple case study as discussed in Section 3.5.1 below) was suitable for this study which focused on the instructional leadership practices of SMT members in three underperforming secondary schools with the intention of exploring their experiences, perceptions and perspectives within their case-bound contexts. Yin (cited in Yazan, 2015:137) defines a case study as “a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context”. From a Yinian point of view, Yazan (2015:137) purports that a case study is a “comprehensive research strategy” which allows the researcher to inquire into the case being studied, as compared to experimental or historical research. Furthermore, case studies are an extremely powerful method used to explain real-life situations and participants’ perceptions of causal links, where participants are able to express their subjective accounts of their experiences.

My study comprised of nine participants from three underperforming schools. The sample size comprising of nine participants seemed fitting for this study and the cases selected were considered as suitable for providing thick descriptions of the phenomenon studied even with a small sample size. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007:106) make a similar point regarding sample size in qualitative research.

### **3.5.1 MULTIPLE CASE STUDY DESIGN**

As noted above, I employed specifically a multiple case study design. My justification for using the multiple case study design stems from Stake’s (2013) premise that multiple case studies are important when examining how a particular phenomenon may exist or perform in



different contexts and environments. Specifically, within this study, I wanted to explore how the phenomenon of underperformance exists in three different secondary schools, all with their own unique educational contexts. According to Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery and Sheikh (2011:6), the multi-case study approach is an advantageous design as it allows for comparisons across the different cases and/or replication. Although each of the sampled schools was officially declared as underperforming, each school is bound within its own unique context. I opted to sample three schools instead of one with the aim of intensifying this study. A closer examination of each sampled school revealed contextual factors that distinguish them from each other, which were integral to the data collection and generation processes of this study.

School One was officially declared as underperforming for the past three years (i.e., 2019, 2020 and 2021). This is a red flagged school which has had its fair share of change in SMT leadership, rise and drop in learner enrolment, loss of educators to DBE rationalisation processes and a community riddled by negative socio-economic factors like unemployment, drugs, teenage pregnancies and violence. School Two is located in a community which is socially and economically stable; however, the school has seen some of its long-serving educators, HODs, DPs and principals retire, resign or transfer, which has affected the functionality of the school to such an extent that it has now been classified as underperforming due to their decline in NSC results. School Two has been underperforming for the third consecutive year (i.e., 2019, 2020 and 2021). Unlike School One and School Two, School Three appeared to have been functioning well for many years without any functionality challenges. 2019 was the first year that this school was classified as underperforming. School Three has since underperformed also for the third consecutive year (i.e., 2019, 2020 and 2021). School Three is situated in a well serviced community which is socially and economically stable, but there are also a large percentage of learners that attend from a nearby informal settlement.

Therefore, engagement in this study enabled me to offer some significant conclusions regarding underperformance in secondary schools, allowing readers in turn to consider the different contexts and relate the findings to their own ones. In short, the study was aimed at exploring SMT perspectives from three different sampled schools in order to provide valuable data on how these schools experience and deal with the phenomena of underperformance.

## **3.6 SAMPLING PROCESS**

### **3.6.1 Selection of participants**

Mertens (2014:76) indicates that participants can be purposefully selected to help the researcher in understanding the phenomenon being studied. It is for this reason that purposive sampling was employed in my study. Purposive sampling was used to select participants whose features or characteristics would lead to enriched understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Furthermore, the purposeful selection of the participants in this study was based on the premise that the SMT members were identified as “information-rich” key informants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:489) because they had experienced the phenomenon being studied for numerous years.

Purposive sampling was used to select three underperforming secondary schools from the Burlington and Karanja Education Circuits, within the Umlazi District of Education in the KZN Province. All three secondary schools are located in the Karanja and Burlington Circuits in Chatsworth. All the schools are in close proximity to the school at which I work, so this made it feasible for me to undertake visits to the school whenever the participants indicated their availability to be interviewed. (In this sense, the purposive sampling included convenience sampling.) The three specific sample schools were purposefully selected because they have all achieved a NSC pass rate of below 60% in the 2019-2021 (statistics are since the start of my study) academic years and have been officially classified as underperforming by the KZN DBE. Furthermore, as indicated in Section 3.5.1, I also chose the schools in terms of what I regarded to be their specific different contextual factors, thus allowing for a richer understanding of the relationship between context and instructional leadership. It was from these schools that the DPs and principals became participants, along with three HODs that were selected.

### **3.6.2 Criteria for selection of OF HODs, DPs and principals**

The criteria for selecting the entire SMT as participants were based on the following factors: 1) The principal’s role as the main SMT member of the school, the whole school curriculum manager and the person responsible for monitoring and supervising the work of HODs (Mestry, 2017:258); 2) the HOD’s role in ensuring the effective functioning of their specialised subjects in their departments and their monitoring and supervising of the work of educators and learners (DBE, 2016:36-37); and 3) the DPs role in assisting the principal in managing the school and driving the educational programme of learners as well as guiding and supervising the work of the staff, including educators and HODs (DBE, 2016:39-40). I

purposefully selected the three levels of the SMT (HODs, DPs and principals), considering them to be information-rich participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:489) since their roles are related to instructional leadership.

During the recruitment phase of this study, a meeting was set up with the principals of the sampled schools and the nature of the study was explained. The principals then granted me permission to speak to their SMT members to explain the nature of the study. For this study, I sampled three HODs, three DPs and three principals from three underperforming secondary schools. Since previous studies on instructional leadership mostly focused on principals, I chose to include also the DPs from the schools (one from each school), along with a selection of an HOD from each school, in order to add value to the quality of data generated. The principals and DPs from each school became participants since there was only one principal and one DP in each school. One HOD in each school had to be selected. These HODs were selected taking into account the SMT staffing composition in each sampled school. To explicate this further, in School One, the Mathematics HOD was selected since the other HOD positions were vacant due to promotions and one HOD on sick-leave. In School Two, the HOD selected was occupying a dual position role, managing both the Humanities and Commerce departments due to promotions and vacant posts, which led to a shortage of two HODs. In School Three, I included the HOD of the Languages department, which then presented a varied composition of HODs from different specialised departments: Mathematics in School One; Humanities and Commerce in School Two; and Languages (English, Afrikaans and isiZulu) in School Three). During my initial semi-structured interview sessions, I also allowed HODs the opportunity to comment from the perspective of their specialised departments (and subjects) if they felt the need.

Before I continue, it is worth noting that in terms of gender composition of the participants, only two participants were female: one DP and one HOD. In fact, I requested the DP who had been acting at one school to agree to be a participant in order to increase the number of females in my sample. Many studies in South Africa have pointed to the paucity of females in top management positions in the school system and my sample reflected this paucity – in this regard, the sample was “representative” of the general gender composition of the population of interest.

The following summary of codes was used for the different levels of the SMT (specific participants) in each school: I have added their years of experience to signal that they were “information-rich” in terms of their years of experience. I have not offered other details in order to preserve anonymity and ensure that they cannot be identified.

**Table 3.1: Summary of codes for SMT members and years of teaching experience**

SCHOOL	LEVEL OF SMT	CODE	NUMBER OF YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE
SCHOOL ONE	HOD	HOD1	25
	DP	DP1	38
	PRINCIPAL	P1	38
SCHOOL TWO	HOD	HOD2	20
	DP	DP2	25
	PRINCIPAL	P3	25
SCHOOL THREE	HOD	HOD3	17
	DP	DP3	35
	PRINCIPAL	P3	40

### 3.7 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

A significant aim of collecting qualitative data is to “provide materials for an empirical analysis of a phenomenon that a study is about” (Flick, 2017:7). Data collection involves the gathering of information on a particular topic of interest in order to answer the research questions of the research study. Data collection is used to obtain rich data which can be later analysed and assist the researcher when answering the research questions of the study. A significant point made by Romm (2018:23) is that “*research can be regarded as reality-forming* in the sense that what becomes expressed via the research process already makes a difference to the continuing development of life”. Based on this view, I carefully chose my data collection tools that could serve to bring about new perceptions and more especially provide new insight and recommendations to the SMT members in underperforming schools. Data collection (or generation of data in an encounter with participants) is an important phase of a research study and the data collection/generation instruments must be used effectively for the purpose of generating enriched insight. In order to understand the participant’s perspective within the context of the underperforming secondary school, I utilised data collection tools that would best help me gain an understanding of the phenomenon being studied. I employed three main data collection tools in this study: 1) Semi-structured interviews; 2) follow-up interviews; and 3) document review. For the document review I had to employ telephonic conversations with all the participants when I recognised, as part of my emergent design, the need to further probe them about their perceptions about the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP after reviewing my data and

analysis during my initial semi-structured interviews and follow-up interviews. My reason for using telephonic conversations as a data collection tool was a result of the DBE prohibiting individuals (outside of the school) from entering schools due to Covid-19 restrictions and regulations imposed. The processes followed in the telephonic conversations pertaining to the document review are discussed in Section 3.8.

### **3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews**

Galletta (2013:2) argues that the semi-structured interview seems to be an underutilised data collection tool, yet it can enhance the data significantly. Arguably, the semi-structured interview was a valuable data collection tool in this study due to its flexibility and pre-determined set of questions which I drafted in order to guide the interviews (Robson, 2002:278). The semi-structured interview schedule with its questions that I used as a guide, not only allowed participants to generate their own new meanings (and interpretations), but also allowed me as a researcher to gain new knowledge and meanings regarding the main research topic (Galletta, 2013:2). I found the semi-structured interview schedule useful in this study as it led to a free flowing discussion by the participants on various topics.

I found the semi-structured interview to be a favourable data collection tool since the participants, after answering my main research questions, directed me into probing aspects of instructional leadership practices related to the school community. There were some questions which I decided to probe further by directing my conversation with the participants. For example, when I asked participants about some of the factors they considered as impacting negatively on their instructional leadership practices, I had a set of pre-planned aspects which I probed, like parental support, socio-economic factors and school safety. (See Appendices A-C.) There were instances, however, where the participants spurred me into probing what I considered to be a pertinent issue relating to instructional leadership practices of the SMT. For example, when I asked participants to comment about what a typical day was like in an underperforming school, the issue of the high amount of teaching hours allocated to the SMT arose, which I thought I should probe further since it pertained to the PAM (DBE, 2016), which formed part of my document review.

I found the semi-structured interview with the set of pre-determined questions useful when participants responded with new meanings, which allowed me to modify what I regarded as the most appropriate information. Due to the immense workload of underperforming schools including monitored Grade 12 morning and afternoon classes, vacation classes and weekly meetings, all the participants opted to be interviewed at school (after school hours) on an afternoon that they were available. All nine interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes.

### **3.7.2 The interview process followed in this study**

I conducted initial semi-structured interviews with nine SMT members, that is, 3 principals (of which one was an acting principal), 3 DPs (of which one was an acting deputy principal) and 3 HODs (of which one was an acting HOD). The interview schedules that were designed were specific to the role function and level of the SMT member. (See Appendices A-C.) Through the semi-structured interviews, I also wanted to be able to develop an understanding and identify how each level of the SMT impacts on one another, and whether there was a correlation of workload tasks at each level and most importantly whether one of these levels was accountable for the underperforming status as a result of instructional leadership practices at that level.

I regarded the ethical issues as an integral part of the interview process. Respecting the constrained time frames in the underperforming secondary schools in this study, I set up appointments with either the principal or a senior SMT member. To ensure time was not wasted, I prepared all documents in advance for the principal and SMT to read through. Before the commencement of any discussions about my study, I presented my UNISA Ethical Clearance letter and the DBE Ethical Clearance letters to the principals. In my initial discussions regarding my interviews, I explained issues of confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent to the principals and SMT members. After my study was welcomed by the three schools, I began discussing dates and preferable times for my interviews. All participants preferred to be interviewed in their offices within their school premises from 14:30pm onwards. This time was also after-school hours and did not interfere with the instructional time of the school. There were some days when I had to re-schedule interviews due to Grade 12 assessments and examinations in the sampled schools. Most of the interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, with the exception of some participants who spoke quite passionately at length about some topics in the interview schedule. All interviews were audio recorded (with permission from participants) and transcribed.

The interview guide which guided me in the semi-structured interview process is given in Appendices A-C. As can be seen from these Appendices, the questions revolved around my asking participants to reflect upon issues such as: The daily tasks that are specific to HODs, DPs and principals; the specific teaching and learning tasks that each SMT member engages in; the SMTs' perceptions about their accountability with regards to underperformance; those factors that appear to be negatively impacting on the instructional leadership practices of SMTs; the formal training and support provided to SMTs by the DBE in ensuring effective instructional leadership; and the SMTs' perceptions about the concept of instructional leadership in improving learner academic performance.

Notably, many of the participants felt free to re-direct the discussion at times. For example, in speaking about a typical day in the life of a principal in an underperforming secondary school, one of the principals raised the issue of an overload of administrative tasks which led to less time devoted towards instructional leadership practices like direct engagement in the curriculum and teaching and learning activities of the school. Another raised the issue of the stress of unexpected visits by DBE officials to monitor school functionality, mostly revolving around administration of the school and the management of the underperforming learners. On the topic of curriculum management, one of the DPs raised the issue of effective rapport with learners in order to create a positive learning environment to make them understand the importance of education to improve their socio-economic situations, while another raised the issue of personal goals and driving the process of improving learner academic performance in the NSC examinations, and one of the HODs raised the issue of the lack of presence (and support) of the DBE officials in underperforming secondary schools to address learners about underperformance. This meant that my own pre-defined issues of what I considered relevant were modified as the participants introduced issues that they considered important to speak about.

### **3.7.3 FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS**

Follow-up interviews were conducted with all nine participants from 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019 to 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020. (See Appendix D.) The follow-up interview sessions were held with HOD1, HOD2, HOD3, DP1, DP2, DP3, P1, P2 and P3. There are four important occurrences that happened in this follow-up interview, the first three of which are all in keeping with Lincoln and Guba's seminal discussion (1985) on member checking. In this regard Lincoln and Guba (1985: 314) state the importance of member checking by noting that:

The member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stake-holding [participant] groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility.

Lincoln and Guba (1985:314) go on to note that member checking can take many forms, one of which may involve presenting a summary of an interview "to the person who provided it for reaction". They (1985:314) also indicate that the act of "playing back" the summary to the participant may stimulate the person "to recall additional things that were not mentioned the first time around". They (1985:315) note furthermore that as part of the process of member checking of categories and interpretations, "copies of the [draft] inquiry report may be furnished to ... member-check[ing]". In this process, they (1985:315) suggest that even if all those checking the report do not fully agree with its rendition, "checkers may be able to

agree that reconstructions are fair even if they are not in total agreement with them [that is, with the way the researcher has reconstructed the data in the analysis]”. Bearing all these points in mind, in the follow-up interviews, I:

- 1) showed each participant the transcript of the first interview and asked them if they wanted to modify anything;
- 2) showed them my summary of the interview in a paragraph and asked if my interpretations resonated with them;
- 3) showed them my draft analysis of Chapter 4 and asked them to comment, add or modify anything if they wanted to; and finally,
- 4) probed further their understanding of their instructional leadership role in relation to other SMT members and the extent to which instructional leadership could be beneficial to an underperforming secondary school. (This additional probing was a result of my realisation that their understandings of their roles in relation to others in the context of the school needed specific attention in my study.)

Seven of the follow-up interviews lasted for a duration of about 30-35 minutes, and two participants' interviews were 40 and 45 minutes. The purpose of the follow-up interview sessions overall was to allow all participants an opportunity to reflect, edit or share further developments that they may have experienced in their instructional leadership roles since our first interview sessions, which took place between July 2019 and October 2019. The follow-up interviews thus were in accordance with the member checking process associated with qualitative research. As re-iterated by Lincoln and Guba (2013:71), member checking is a method of qualitative inquiry used to check with participants if they agree with the rendition of what was said or recorded during the interview process and even with the interpretation of the gist thereof as highlighted by the researcher. Other authors such as Harper and Cole (2012:2) and Anney (2014: 276) also point to the importance of the member checking process for establishing credibility of results (the practice of which I explain further in Section 3.9.1).

During the member checking process, participants and I established if our conversation during the interview had been correctly transcribed by me and if some of my draft analyses that I had made (which included the range of interviewee responses) made sense to the participants and included their individual contributions to our conversation sufficiently. This process I followed during my follow-up interviews was also to establish if participants felt that



I had written up a credible story that included their perspectives. During this process, I also shared my thoughts and experiences during my study as part of reciprocity where I had not only elicited information from them, but also shared information from my study which they could reflect upon.

After I completed a transcription, I delivered the hard copy to the relevant participant for him/her to browse and inform me if there were any parts of the interview incorrectly transcribed. I had set a date to meet with participants at the end of their school day to engage them in the follow-up interview. I had taken a copy of my Chapter 4 analysis to the follow-up interview meeting with each participant. In addition, I also offered a paragraph indicating how I understood the gist of the interview and asking them if this resonated with how they felt. Each participant and I then revised and discussed the transcript and Chapter 4 analysis together. I guided the participant through the various pages of the Chapter 4 analysis, indicating to the participant his/her specific responses that I had highlighted/cited in my write-up, to determine if I had adequately captured the participant's responses in my interpretation.

My intention to revise and discuss the Chapter 4 analysis with the participant was also due to my consideration towards the SMTs' workload (administrative and management duties) given their underperforming school status. I also felt that a revision and discussion of the Chapter 4 analysis together with the participant would contribute towards a much more meaningful dialogical engagement, taking into account the busy work schedule of SMTs. Furthermore, by reviewing the hard copy of the Chapter 4 analysis with the participant, I was able to explain my interpretation of the gist of the conversation, and if my interpretation resonated with what they had said during our interview. At the end of each revision of the analysis in Chapter 4, I asked the participants if they had any further comments they would like to add or modify. During my follow-up interviews, all participants were in agreement with what they had said during the interviews and in accordance with my interpretations of their interviews and audio recordings. Once again, with the follow-up interviews, all participants opted to be interviewed in their schools after school hours.

Notably, because I had the opportunity to meet these participants this second time, I also decided to try to gain further insight into the participants' perceptions about their instructional leadership roles in relation to the other SMT members in their schools, so I asked them a few additional questions around this. By then I realised that this was an area that needed additional probing, further to the first semi-structured interview. I realised this was still a gap in my analysis, in that I did not have sufficient detail on the question of the SMT members'

sense of their relations with one another in the task of instructional leadership. The aim of these follow-up questions during the second encounter was to establish:

- How each SMT member perceived his/her role as an instructional leader in a specific SMT level and also in relation to the other SMT members.
- After participants had gained insight into the topic of instructional leadership through our interactions since July 2019, I wanted to gain insight about their final thoughts of whether instructional leadership practices can lead to the progress or regress of learner performance in underperforming secondary schools.
- Lastly, all participants were given the opportunity to discuss and/or comment about any issue/topic arising during the study which they felt strongly about or would have liked to comment further on.

Issues around the PAM (DBE, 2016) and SIP had not been incorporated in my original interview guide, but during the follow-up interviews I discussed with participants a way of comparing the documents with what had been said in the earlier interviews as we both realised this could propel us to explore certain aspects of the PAM (DBE, 2016) and SIP. Nevertheless, an in-depth exploration of participant views regarding to these documents did not take place, as the follow-up interviews were more a “member checking” occurrence to check my interpretation of the original interviews and also to discuss relevant parts of Chapter 4 as pertained to the participants in each case. The following section details the processes I carried out regarding my telephonic conversations with participants pertaining to the document review of the PAM (DBE, 2016) and SIP.

### **3.8 TELEPHONIC CONVERSATIONS PERTAINING TO DOCUMENT REVIEW**

Document review was used in combination with the semi-structured interviews and follow-up interviews to corroborate/compare and/or expand upon the findings. The PAM (DBE, 2016) and SIP documents were reviewed to compare the findings of the semi-structured interviews and follow-up interviews. Document review addressed the main topics contained in the documents being analysed, in relation to the key research questions in this study. (See Appendix E.) In the document review stage of the research, I examined the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP of the schools to search for evidence that may support some of the claims made by the participants in their interviews and follow-up interviews revolving around their instructional leadership practices and I subsequently checked with them my interpretations. Related to the key research questions, the PAM (DBE, 2016) allowed me to interpret the

instructional leadership roles as gazetted by the DBE. The SIP provided me with insight of how SMTs are trying to improve the NSC academic results.

Although I had initially planned to conduct the document review with participants during my first and second interviews, I recognised that I still needed to further probe participants about their perceptions and interpretations pertaining to the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP. From this point, it was my intention to engage participants in a third encounter meeting to discuss the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP. By this time, the Covid-19 pandemic had settled in and posed a challenge to meet participants face-to-face due to the DBE imposing restrictions and regulations on individuals from outside the school from entering (visiting) due to Covid-19. It was then that I considered conducting telephonic conversations as a method of communication to discuss the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP, keeping in mind the Covid-19 restrictions imposed, as well as the health safety of the participants, myself and their school environment. Bolderston (2012:72) avers that telephone interviews constitute a useful data collection technique for the following reasons: No travelling is involved; data can be collected from remote participants; it is cost-effective; it is time-effective; and the setting is within the participants' familiar environment. Within the context of my study, the telephonic interviews allowed me to collect data other than the face-to-face method of interviewing to ensure health safety during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fortunately, all participants agreed to continue our conversation telephonically regarding the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP. (This indicated to me that they had probably found our earlier discussions to be a learning experience and in this sense worthwhile.) These telephonic conversations took place between October and November 2020. Two participants preferred WhatsApp voice calls, while the other seven preferred normal voice calls. Before I called the participants, I checked their availability and the most suitable time to call them. In order to gain the insights I needed regarding the document review, I focused my discussion on specific aspects pertaining to the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP. My guiding questions were specific and can be found in Appendix E. Regarding the PAM (DBE, 2016), I asked all participants to comment on two aspects: 1) How each level of SMT perceived their instructional leadership roles in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016); and 2) their views (and final thoughts) on the notion of shared instructional leadership (whilst also considering if the PAM (DBE, 2016) provides for the sharing of leadership). Regarding the SIP, I asked all the participants to comment on two aspects: 1) Their perception of the SIP as an instructional leader; and 2) their considerations about whether the SIP was indeed improving learner academic performance.

Due to my guiding of the clarification questions, most calls were specific and to the point. The duration of most of the telephone conversations lasted approximately 15-20 minutes, and two lasted 30 minutes. The telephonic conversations meant that the document review analysis was enriched by the rich input received from the participants during these conversations. I took extensive notes during each conversation so that I would remember what each participant had said. My analysis of the documents along with the interview material (face- to-face and telephonic) is provided in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Below I turn to the question of the trustworthiness of my research endeavour.

### **3.9 MEASURES OF TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Trustworthiness was achieved in this study using criteria related to credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability which are used by qualitative researchers (Anney, 2014:272; Lincoln & Guba, 1985:289-327; Padgett, 2016:210). The ways in which trustworthiness was achieved is described below.

#### **3.9.1 Credibility**

To ensure credibility in this study, all participants were revisited and member checking was conducted where participants were able to review their transcripts to confirm and check if their data had been accurately transcribed in terms of what they said. Participants were given about a month (or until I met the participant for a second time) to check the accuracy of their transcriptions. To enhance credibility, I made available hard copies of transcripts to each participant delivered to them at their schools. The participants were given the hard copies of their interview transcriptions, usually after one week after our interview. Until I met participants for the second time (one participant in December 2019 and the others mostly between January and March 2020), they had adequate time to read the transcripts and notify me at our second meeting if there were any changes and corrections to what was said at the first encounter interview. Apart from just presenting the transcript to them, I also offered a paragraph indicating how I understood the gist of the interview and asking them if this resonated with how they felt. Member checking involved allowing the participants the opportunity to check, edit and approve the data and verify if my interpretation was in line with their responses or else suggest adjustments (Anney, 2014:277). In this second meeting with the participants, I also presented my Chapter 4 analysis which we read together and discussed if I had fairly interpreted their interviews, as reflected in my Chapter 4, where I highlighted some of their expressions in my analysis. They thus had the opportunity to check this and to suggest revisions if necessary. As Creswell (2013:252) notes, the member

checking process followed in most qualitative research “involves taking data, analyses, interpretations and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account”. He cites Stake (1995:115) who suggests that they [participants] should be asked to examine rough drafts of the researcher’s work and to provide alternative language, “critical observations or interpretations”.

Important additional ideas for what to highlight in Chapter 4’s analysis were offered by some of the participants. For example, HOD1 expressed the difficult (and challenging) role of the HOD in relation to other SMT members due to the engagement in teaching and learning tasks as well administrative tasks. In another member checking interview, HOD2 suggested that teaching and learning tasks need to be divided between the SMT members, which could also reduce the stress levels associated with instructional leadership in an underperforming secondary school. HOD3 suggested that each SMT member (at different levels) should be allocated specific tasks to avoid task overload situations that HODs are sometimes faced with, as well as highlighting the negative impact of the DBE’s (2015) promotion and progression policy on learner academic performance. In another member checking interview in School One, DP1 suggested that the DPs were more involved with principal orientated tasks, while DP2 suggested (and reiterated) the need for a close collaboration (and resiliency) between the DP and the principal in steering the school towards academic improvement. During my second encounter with the principals, P1 highlighted the role of the principal as solely accountable for the academic results as compared to the other SMT members and in School Two, P2 indicated that principals have reached the point of exhaustion and fatigue due to administrative work overload since the principal is engaged in far more administrative task submissions (like school finances and functionality reports) than the other SMT members. In School Three, P3 indicated that, although there was some assistance offered by HODs and DPs, the principal still had the responsibility of preparing all the information for submission to the DBE as well as bearing the accountability for underperformance. These additional ideas (comments) were all incorporated in my final analysis.

Apart from these measures to ensure trustworthiness, I had also planned to meet with participants one more time once my Chapters 5 and 6 were completed. This would give the participants another opportunity to revise my final interpretations and make comments or any changes. However, due to Covid-19 I changed course and rather sent them Chapters 5 and 6 (by email) upon which to comment, but all participants informed me telephonically that no changes were necessary. Meanwhile, as indicated earlier (Section 3.8), I managed to arrange a telephonic conversation with all participants in which I also discussed with them the PAM (DBE, 2016) Document and their SIP in relation to some of their comments during

our first interview. These telephonic interviews were held between October and November 2020. Each participant was subsequently sent a hard copy of their transcript from their interview as part of the member checking process.

### **3.9.2 Transferability**

To make provision for transferability in this study and a meaningful contribution for future research, a paper trail was kept for this research study. I kept a detailed account of field notes and documents used during this research, consisting of data generation instruments and interview transcripts which can be used for future research and in other contexts. I also endeavoured to ensure that a thorough understanding of the context in which the study was taking place – the three schools and sampled participants – was conveyed for future studies by other researchers wishing to compare applicability to other study contexts. Indeed, the rich detail was provided so that any person (professional researchers or other persons) familiar with other contexts can decide to what extent the results hold true for other schools other than the ones identified in my sample. That is, I provided a rich description of the various cases and of the participants, who formed part of the study, to enable judgements on the part of readers to be made about the extent of transferability of the study.

Transferability can be regarded as an attribute for readers to assess to what extent the results are applicable beyond the particular study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:297; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:244). As Creswell and Creswell (2018: 290) summarise, this is enabled insofar as rich descriptions (and analyses) are provided:

Rich, thick description allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability (Erlandson *et al.*, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988) because the writer describes in detail the participants or setting under study.

Lincoln and Guba (2013:79) for their part elucidate that in “case reports”:

The transfer to other contexts (that is, transferability) is a decision which can only be made by a potential user. It is, however, the responsibility of the original researcher to provide sufficient detail about the context, actors (participants), context-embedded (community and program) values.

As far as confidentiality of my descriptions are concerned, all field notes, documents and transcriptions will be clearly labelled and stored away in a safe cupboard for a period of five years so that others will not have unauthorised access to them. Other researchers who may seek authorised access for future studies would only have access insofar as the participants would not be recognised.

### **3.9.3 Dependability**

Dependability refers to whether “the findings and interpretations [can] be determined to be an outcome of a consistent and dependable process” (Lincoln & Guba, 2013:105). Dependability was sought in this study through the use of triangulation, which allowed me to check across the different sources of data and in this way to compare findings. Triangulation was achieved through document review of the sample school’s SIP and the PAM (DBE, 2016) documents, compared to statements made in the various interviews that referred implicitly or explicitly to these documents. Triangulation through document review was an overlapping method undertaken to ensure dependability and to corroborate findings. In my final conversations (telephonically due to Covid-19) with all participants, I discussed some of the key aspects as contained in the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP, in relation to the some of the main themes that emerged in Chapter 4. I also extracted and discussed specific sections from the PAM (DBE, 2016) document, such as the specific instructional leadership roles of SMT members and curriculum management tasks (with a focus also on shared instructional leadership) in order to focus our conversation around the topics of instructional leadership and underperformance, considering the comprehensive nature of the documents (which also included some aspects which were not relevant to my study). I began my conversations with all participants by drawing their attention to the aim of the job of the HOD, DP and principal respectively as contained in the PAM (DBE, 2016) document. I then allowed each participant (at the different SMT levels) to respond in relation to their specific job description (but also allowing them to consider the sharing of instructional leadership tasks in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016) document). Since the SIP was unique to each school, as it was designed by the SMT of that school, I allowed the participants to freely explore the SIP used in the specific school. All the participants found the SIP to be a practical document in addressing the issue of underperformance. In Chapter 5 I present a detailed account of the participants’ interpretation of the PAM (DBE, 2016) document and the SIP.

### **3.9.4 Confirmability**

To ensure confirmability, I met and discussed with the participants if the data generated (from individual responses of each SMT member) resonated with their understanding of the interaction that took place during the interviews. To further explicate this, all participants were given (about a month in advance) a hard copy of their transcriptions to browse and cross-check if there were any parts of their interview incorrectly transcribed. I had then set a date to meet with each participant at the end of their school day to engage them in the follow-up interview. I had taken a copy of my Chapter 4 analysis to the follow-up interview

meeting with each participant. Each participant and I then revised and discussed the transcript and Chapter 4 analysis together (specifically as pertained to that participant). I offered each participant a brief account (about a paragraph) of my interpretation containing the gist of our conversations and asked them if this resonated with their responses. Thereafter, I guided the participant through the various pages of the Chapter 4 analysis indicating the specific responses to determine if I had adequately captured the participant's responses in my interpretation. I also allowed all participants the opportunity to comment and/or make changes. (Section 3.9.1 above discusses some modifications made.) Also, to ensure confirmability in this study an audio recorder was used for first encounter semi-structured interviews, and I also took detailed notes during the follow-up interviews as well as the telephonic conversations for authenticity of the data. Regarding the telephonic conversations, these were sent (by email) to participants for member checking, as were my draft Chapters 5 and 6. No modifications were made at this point.

### **3.10 RESEARCH ETHICS/ ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Research ethics is concerned with the morality of what is right or wrong when engaging with participants to obtain data in research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:117). In keeping with research ethics, this study ensured that all participants, as well as the sampled schools, were treated in a way which was deemed ethically and morally proper through respect and consideration for the constitutional rights of all participants. Application to conduct this study was made to the University of South Africa (UNISA) and the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education (KZN DBE) to conduct research in the selected KZN schools with the principals, DPs and HODs.

In keeping with the UNISA protocol for research ethics application, I submitted an application for research ethical clearance, which was then submitted to the UNISA College of Education (CEDU) Research Ethics Committee (REC) via my supervisor. I had completed the outline of my study on the prescribed CEDU REC application form and attached examples of the following: Semi-structured interview schedules (Appendix A, B & C); forms on informed permission to conduct research in the public schools (Appendix I); examples of participant information sheets (Appendix K); examples of consent letters to participants (Appendix J); and letter of application to the KZN DBE to conduct research in KZN public schools (Appendix F).

Once the CEDU REC reviewed my application, I then made minor amendments based on the recommendations of the CEDU REC. I was then granted ethical clearance and given the



ethical clearance certificate (Appendix H) for this study. After receiving my ethical clearance certificate, I proceeded to the next phase, which was to attain ethical clearance from the KZN DBE. I completed the KZN DBE prescribed form for research ethical clearance and also attached a copy of my CEDU REC ethical clearance certificate as well as data collection tools. Ethical clearance (Appendix G) to conduct research in the three KZN public schools chosen for this study was then granted by the KZN DBE.

An informed permission form (Appendix I) stating the purpose of the study and data collection methods was sent to the principal of each school. Informed consent was achieved by sending participant information sheets (Appendix K) regarding the purpose of the study and making prospective participants aware that their participation was voluntary and they were at liberty to withdraw from the study at any point. The informed consent form (Appendix J) clearly stated the data generation instruments that were to be used in this study and that all interviews were ideally going to be audio-recorded. During my preliminary discussions with the participants, I gave them assurance of anonymity by assigning a special alias code for this research and assured them that their names would be kept confidential and only used for the purpose of this research.

The same interview questions (more or less, depending on whether participants had other questions they wished to discuss) were asked to all participants in this study. Some of the main ethical issues discussed with participants were their right to withdraw from the study without penalty, and informing them that the data generated from their interviews were going to be used for research purposes only. Confidentiality and anonymity in this study was maintained by using participant aliases and code names, allowing them to individually review the study. I had also given completed hard copies to the research participants. Participant review involved the participants reviewing their transcripts to suggest any changes, that is, request modification, or addition of data (on examination of the gist of the interview). This was done in-person during the follow-up interviews. This process included also discussing with participants, relevant sections of my interpretations in Chapter 4, at which point some participants requested some modifications by way of addition. (See Section 3.9.1.) For the telephonic interviews, member checking of transcripts was handled via email, and this included asking participants for feedback on my final synthesis of all the data by sending them Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. After reviewing Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, none of the participants felt the need to change any of their data responses from my first encounter semi-structured interviews, follow-up interviews, or the telephonic conversations pertaining to the document review.

### 3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter explicated the rationale for undertaking this particular empirical research study and the research question and sub-questions that were posed (relating to perceptions of instructional leadership in three selected underperforming secondary schools in South Africa). The multiple case study design within a qualitative research approach and guided by a constructivist paradigm was explained. Further to this, the sampling process; data collection tools; measures to ensure trustworthiness; and ethical considerations were detailed. I also gave a detailed account of the research process followed concerning the first encounter semi-structured interviews, follow-up interviews and a justification for later utilising telephonic conversations as a data collection tool, as part of the evolving research design.

As far as the sampling process is concerned, I conducted the research in three underperforming secondary schools belonging to the Karanja and Burlington Circuits, located within the Umlazi District of Education in the KZN Province. My research into the three underperforming secondary schools began upon the release of the sampled schools NSC results in January 2018. Since the start of this study, all three sampled schools had been declared underperforming for the academic period 2018-2020.

My data collection was based on the availability of the SMT members according to their official school hours. In all schools, interviews were done from 14:30pm onwards (the end of the school day for secondary schools). Whenever an SMT member notified me of their availability, I visited them at their school after school hours. Initial semi-structured interviews and a second encounter of follow-up interviews contributed to emerging themes regarding the SMT members' instructional leadership practices within the context of their underperforming secondary schools.

In the next chapter, I discuss the emergence of the themes based on my initial semi-structured interviews and second encounter follow-up interviews with the SMT members. That is, I discuss the data analysis and interpretation based primarily on the first and second encounters with the participants (with brief reference to telephonic interviews and how this impacted on the themes). In Chapter 5 I continue the data analysis with specific reference to the additional data generated during the telephonic interviews.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS AND FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter begins with a summary of the research process undertaken in this study (as detailed in Chapter 3) and then proceeds to a detailed explanation of the data analysis framework utilised in this study. The chapter then follows an in-depth data analysis and discussion from the three case studies of School One, School Two and School Three, based on the first encounter semi-structured interviews and follow-up interviews (including the member checking process). Following the completion of the initial semi-structured interviews, I conducted follow-up interviews (member checking) with the intention of providing participants an opportunity to check the fairness of my data interpretation and to amend or further comment on any aspect of my study they felt strongly about. During my engagement in the member checking process, the participants shared valuable insights which I thought I could link back to some themes in the study that I had located in my draft Chapter 4 (as shared with participants in the follow-up interview).

The preliminary themes that were tabulated are presented below first (Figures 4.1-4.5), followed by another tabulation of the refined themes and codes (Table 4.2-4.5). The refinement of the themes was in part my response to the participants' feedback, and in part, a response to my re-examining the data with a fresh perspective. In view of the refinement of my themes, an in-depth analysis and interpretation are presented with themes and sub-themes that emerged during this study based on the initial semi-structured interviews and my follow-up interviews, followed by the chapter summary.

As specified in previous chapters, my study aimed to investigate SMT members' instructional leadership practices within the context of an underperforming secondary school. The data presented are complemented by a diverse composition of SMT members which included the HODs, DPs and principals. Engaging the three main levels of the SMT (i.e., HODs, DPs and principals) presented different perspectives of the way in which instructional leadership is enacted at the various levels of SMT in the three different schools.

#### **4.2 DATA ANALYSIS**

Maguire and Delahunt (2017:3351) assert that data analysis is integral in qualitative research. For this study, I employed thematic analysis to interpret the data collected. Thematic analysis involves identifying emergent themes and patterns from the data collected

(Maguire & Delahunt, 2017:3352). Braun and Clarke (cited in Maguire & Delahunt, 2017:3352) posit that thematic analysis can be considered more a method instead of a methodology since it is not bound to epistemological and theoretical perspectives, thus making it a very flexible method of data analysis. For this study, I used, as a guideline, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase guide as a framework for analysing the data collected as presented below:

**Table 4.1: Framework for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006:87)**

Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarising yourself with the data.</li> <li>• Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, jotting down initial ideas.</li> </ul>
Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generating initial codes.</li> <li>• Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</li> </ul>
Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Searching for themes.</li> <li>• Collating codes into potential themes, gathering the data relevant to each potential theme.</li> </ul>
Phase 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing themes.</li> <li>• Checking the themes application in relation to the coded-extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic “map” of the analysis.</li> </ul>
Phase 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defining and naming the themes.</li> <li>• Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall narrative by the analysis: generating clear definitions and names of each theme.</li> </ul>
Phase 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Producing the report.</li> <li>• The final opportunity for analysis. Selecting vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the analysis of the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report on the analysis.</li> </ul>

Using as guideline Braun and Clarke's (2006:87) framework for thematic analysis, supplemented by my decision to involve the participants also in the thematic analysis as noted above, I followed various phases in order to conduct a credible data analysis presentation. The first step in my analysis was to transcribe the nine participants' first encounter semi-structured interview recordings verbatim using the Microsoft Word programme. I then read the semi-structured interview transcriptions and second encounter follow-up interviews several times to gain a better understanding of the participants'

responses in relation to each interview question. Before the next phase of generating codes, I re-read the transcriptions one last time and made sure to make notes (jot down) my interpretations and ideas which were going to be used in the coding process. At this point, I had also set up a meeting with each participant to engage in a follow-up interview and share my understanding and interpretations from our first meeting semi-structured interviews. At this meeting, the participant and I inspected and discussed relevant sections of my Chapter 4 analysis to date. The purpose of this follow-up interview meeting was so that the participants could verify if I had fairly interpreted the gist of our conversation during the first interview and also share their final thoughts (and perspectives) about their specific instructional leadership role in an underperforming secondary school. This also constituted the member checking process. I had also offered participants a paragraph indicating how I understood the gist of the interview and asking them if this resonated with how they felt. At the end of the follow-up interview, participants were also given the opportunity to add or modify any of their responses from our first interview.

What I added in this rendition of Braun and Clark's (2006:87) advice on how to proceed is that I gave participants the opportunity to contribute in some way to the analysis by discussing my draft Chapter 4 to date with them in the member checking interview. Important additional ideas for what to highlight in the final analysis were offered by some of the participants (as noted in Chapter 3, Section 3.9.1).

### **4.3 A NOTE ON MY ANALYSIS OF FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS AS CONTRIBUTING TO THEME REFINEMENT**

In my discussion of the content of the various follow-up interviews I show how each one contributed some additional detail (further to the first interview) to the analysis offered in the thematic analysis as depicted in Figures 4.1-4.4 below, while also contributing further to the notion (as discussed in the literature) of instructional leadership as possibly being a "shared" enterprise. Since the first encounter semi-structured interviews (which took place between July 2019 and October 2019), these additional questions were asked during the follow-up interviews, which took place from the 2 December 2019 to 20 March 2020. Most of the follow-up interviews lasted about 30-35 minutes and two interviews were 40 and 45 minutes respectively. Notably, during the follow-up interview, most of the participants stood firm on their original commentary offered in the first interview and did not feel a need to revise the transcript either, but some did add some additional input related to their understanding of their relations with the other SMT members (as I had hoped) as well as their thoughts on whether instructional leadership can enhance learner academic performance in

underperforming secondary schools based on my additional questions that I asked them in this encounter. (See Appendix D.)

Their input therefore added detail to the discussions on perceptions of instructional leadership (which added mainly to the refinement of Theme 4 in Figure 4.4 below). As far as their contributing to the draft analysis of Chapter 4 that I had presented to them too, some of the participants offered points such as the challenging role of the HOD in relation to the other SMT members (i.e., the DP and principal). Some participants reiterated the need for a much more collaborative working relationship amongst all SMT members to ensure positive changes in learner academic performance. Some participants also brought to the fore what DP1 termed a “tripartite alliance” in our first encounter which focused on the three key role players for learner academic improvement which included the relationship between the school, the learner and the parent. Indeed, some participants highlighted the need for a change in attitude amongst learners, as well as increased parental support and monitoring of learning at home to support and supplement the work done by educators at school. Some participants even offered points based on optimism that patience and change will eventually pave the way for an improvement in learner academic performance, especially in the NSC examinations. All participants’ contributions to my draft Chapter 4 have been incorporated into my final data analysis discussion and interpretations in various themes that emerged during my study.

Some participants suggested important modifications while we were discussing Chapter 4, particularly based on the additional questions I asked, which explored the way in which the different levels of SMT perceived their roles in relation to each other, which was an aspect I felt was not sufficiently explored during the first encounter semi-structured interviews. For example, HOD 1 asserted that SMTs of both the primary and secondary schools should be accountable and that educators and the entire SMT should actively engage in their specific duties and responsibilities to bring about improvement in learner academic performance. HOD3 suggested a structural change in the way work or tasks are allocated specifically to HODs, alluding to the fair share of work distribution amongst SMT members of different levels. Since our first encounter interview, HOD3 also alluded to trying alternate ways to improve learner academic performance since not much change had taken place, yet all instructional leadership practices have been implemented. In another member checking interview, DP1 took a turn about by suggesting that the DP needs to work collaboratively with the principal in order to monitor the work done by HODs as instructional leaders. Participants also helped me to recognise some areas of omission to which I had not given sufficient attention in my draft Chapter 4. For example, as indicated earlier, the issues that

were brought more to the fore as participants and I discussed my analysis were how SMT members perceived their role as instructional leaders in relation to the other SMT members in the different levels. The participants also helped me by sharing their insight into whether they thought instructional leadership could actually benefit them within the context of an underperforming secondary school. Furthermore, as part of this follow-up interview, I decided to also probe the participants about some other issues that I realised we had not explored in sufficient depth in the first encounter. These were:

- How each SMT member perceived his/her role as an instructional leader in a specific SMT level and also in relation to the other SMT members.
- After participants gaining insight into the topic of instructional leadership through our interactions since July 2019, I wanted to gain insight about their final thoughts of whether instructional leadership practices can lead to the progress or regress of learner performance in underperforming secondary schools.
- All participants were given the opportunity to discuss and/or comment or make modifications to any issue/topic arising during the study which they felt strongly about or would have liked to comment further on and my analysis reflects their additional input.

In the discussion below (Sections 4.7.2.1 and 4.10.1) I have incorporated their views on this. I now turn to an account of the process of construction of the main themes (of which there are 4) and their sub-themes.

#### **4.4 CONSTRUCTION OF THEMES IN RELATION TO THE FIRST ENCOUNTER SEMI-STRUCTURED AND FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS**

To begin this section, I offer a thematic representation of the themes and sub-themes that emerged during the various cycles of analysis. I offer this representation for readers to obtain an overall sense of the way in which the thematising worked out based on those interviews. I then proceed to offer the “audit trail” of how the themes arose, in relation to the source data (namely, the participants’ expressions). Apart from my first and follow-up interviews, I also engaged in several telephonic conversations from October to November 2020, as I could not meet participants due to the Covid-19 pandemic which prohibited visitors in public schools. The purpose of the telephonic conversations was primarily to clarify and understand the participants’ perspectives on the two documents reviewed in my study, which were the PAM (DBE, 2016) document and the SIP of each school. I also raised with them as part of the interview, while discussing the PAM (DBE, 2016), the question

“What are your views about the notion of shared instructional leadership?” (Appendix E). This is discussed in some detail in Chapter 5 but alluded to in some parts of the discussion below. As far as the additional input that I received from the telephonic interviews with the participants when I discussed with them the PAM (DBE, 2016) and SIP documents, these served to enrich especially the fourth theme, which appears in the thematic representation below and which is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. This refinement is placed under the theme entitled “Views concerning instructional leadership to enhance improvement”.

Figures 4.1 to 4.4 represent my thematic map of the data from my first encounter semi-structured interviews and my second encounter follow-up interviews which also included the member checking process with the addition also of the sub-themes titled “Promoting Shared Vision” and “Activating Potential for Shared Instructional Leadership” under Theme 4, which was impacted by the telephonic interviews. The various tables outlined below (i.e., Tables 4.2 to 4.5) – a different table for each theme – offer an indication of my coding of responses and my placing them in categories (sub-themes) under a theme. The tables, as presented below, do not depict how the different players (SMT members) seemed (or not) to offer different nuances/emphases in relation to the themes. At times indeed there were differing approaches altogether, for example, in regard to some of their views on who is ultimately accountable for learner academic performance. In my discussion below (Sections 4.7 to 4.10), I proceed to indicate how the different levels of leadership, at times, offer differing perspectives on some of the issues thematised and I also show how the participants in the different schools responded. During my follow-up interviews, various participants added some additional input apart from their commentary in the first interview. After analysing the data from the follow-up interviews, I realised that the participants’ responses added substance to, and refinements of, some of the themes and sub-themes like: *Experience of Managerial Overload, Accountability, Underperformance Stressors*, as well as a detailed discussion of their perceptions of instructional leadership in Theme 4. However, my refinements of themes and location of sub-themes did not follow a chronological process, occurring only after the follow-up interviews. Refinements were already emerging for me before this point, and the follow-up interviews (and later the telephonic ones) just helped me to further refine all the themes by locating additional sub-themes and placing the coded data accordingly into the new categories. This involved sometimes “moving” aspects of the material into a different theme, as was the case with my decision to move some of the expressions regarding instructional leadership and perceptions of accountability from Theme 1 to Theme 4, to highlight the potential benefits of shared instructional leadership.



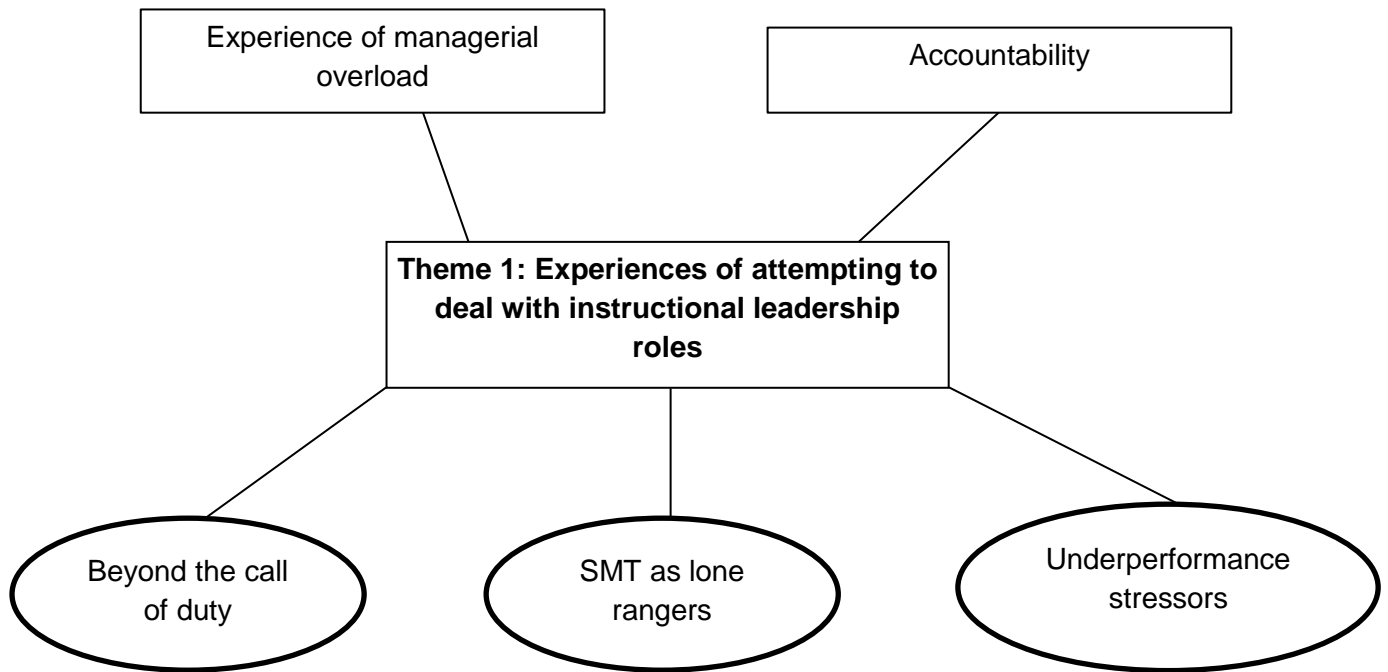
All my refinements are represented by the ovals in Figures 4.1-4.4. As indicated above, this did not follow a linear process; the process was an iterative one as I was continually re-engaging with the data (as advised by Braun & Clarke, 2006:87), but for heuristic purposes I have called the refinements a “second” cycle of analysis.

My discussion below begins with the upper boxes of the four themes identified in Figures 4.1-4.4, namely Themes 1, 2, 3 and 4. Figures 4.1-4.4 indicate the iterative process of refining the themes. The four main themes, with the upper box rectangles in the figures as sub-themes, emerged already as significant after my initial semi-structured interviews with all the participants, while the refinements were made by re-coding data and identifying sub-themes (as reflected in the lower ovals of Figures 4.1-4.4). In the discussion below I start by pinpointing the four themes and the associated sub-themes that emerged in the *first* cycle of analysis, I then turn to the sub-themes that emerged in what can be called my *second* cycle of analysis – the cycle which led to refinements of the themes via the creation of additional sub-themes to enrich and add nuance to the themes. These refinements were based on examining again the data based on the initial interviews and then supplementing this with certain codes based in part on some feedback from participants during the member checking interview (follow-up interview). As a further detail, I also refer to a refinement of Theme 4 which emerged after the telephonic interviews when I asked participants to comment on their view of the notion of shared instructional leadership – a concept that had emerged in some of the earlier interviews but which I felt had not been sufficiently probed and that was also relevant to the implementation of the PAM (DBE, 2016). (This refinement also appears as an oval in Figure 4.4 and is called “Activating Potential for Shared Instructional Leadership”). Below I provide a thematic representation of all four themes.

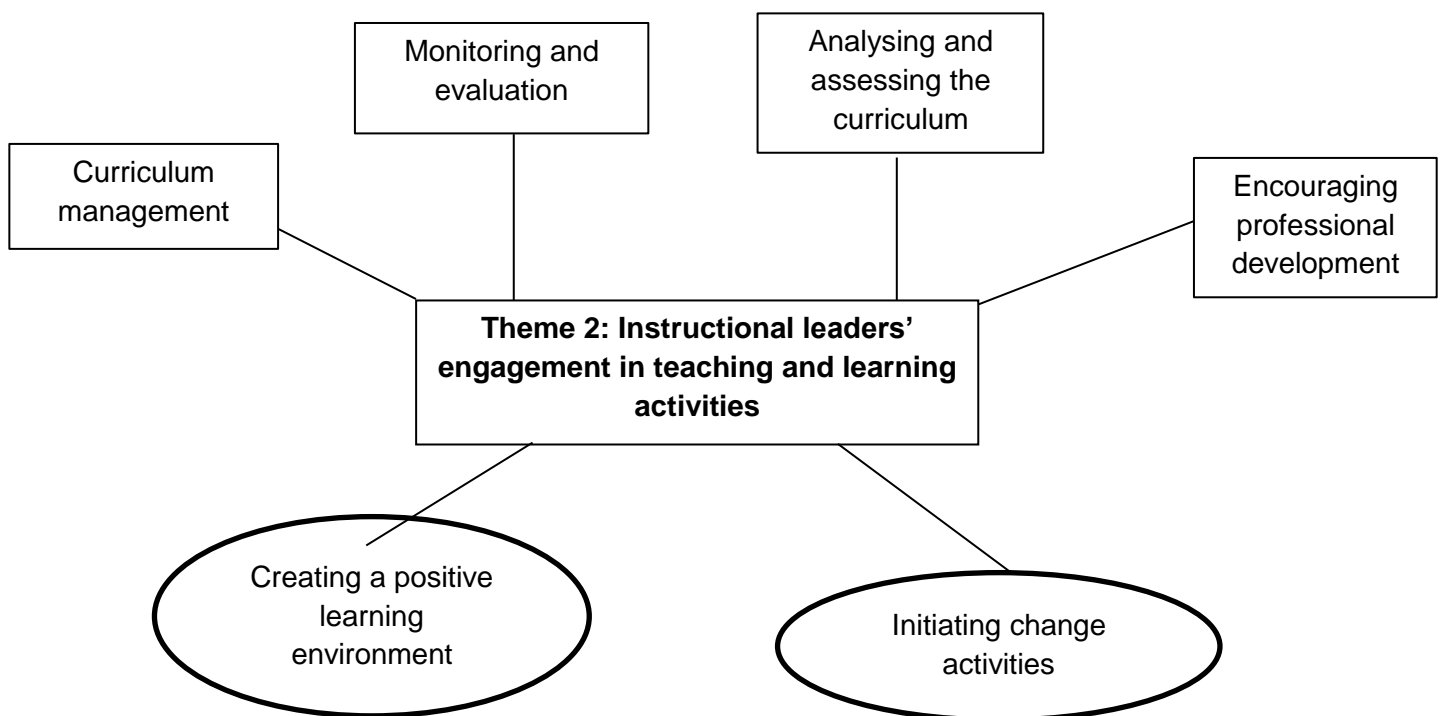
#### **4.5 FINAL THEMATIC MAP REPRESENTATIONS**

To explicate my thematic representations in Figures 4.1-4.4, I have used shapes to signify the *first* and *second* cycle of analysis followed in this study. The main theme is indicated at the center of each thematic representation, with upper box rectangles indicative of the sub-themes that emerged during my initial semi-structured interviews, which formed part of my first cycle of analysis. The ovals which appear at the bottom of each thematic representation signify my second cycle of analysis, which included a refinement of the themes (i.e., Themes 1-4) based partly on the initial semi-structured interview and the member checking (follow-up) interview; however, the four main themes remained constant across the first and second cycle of analysis.

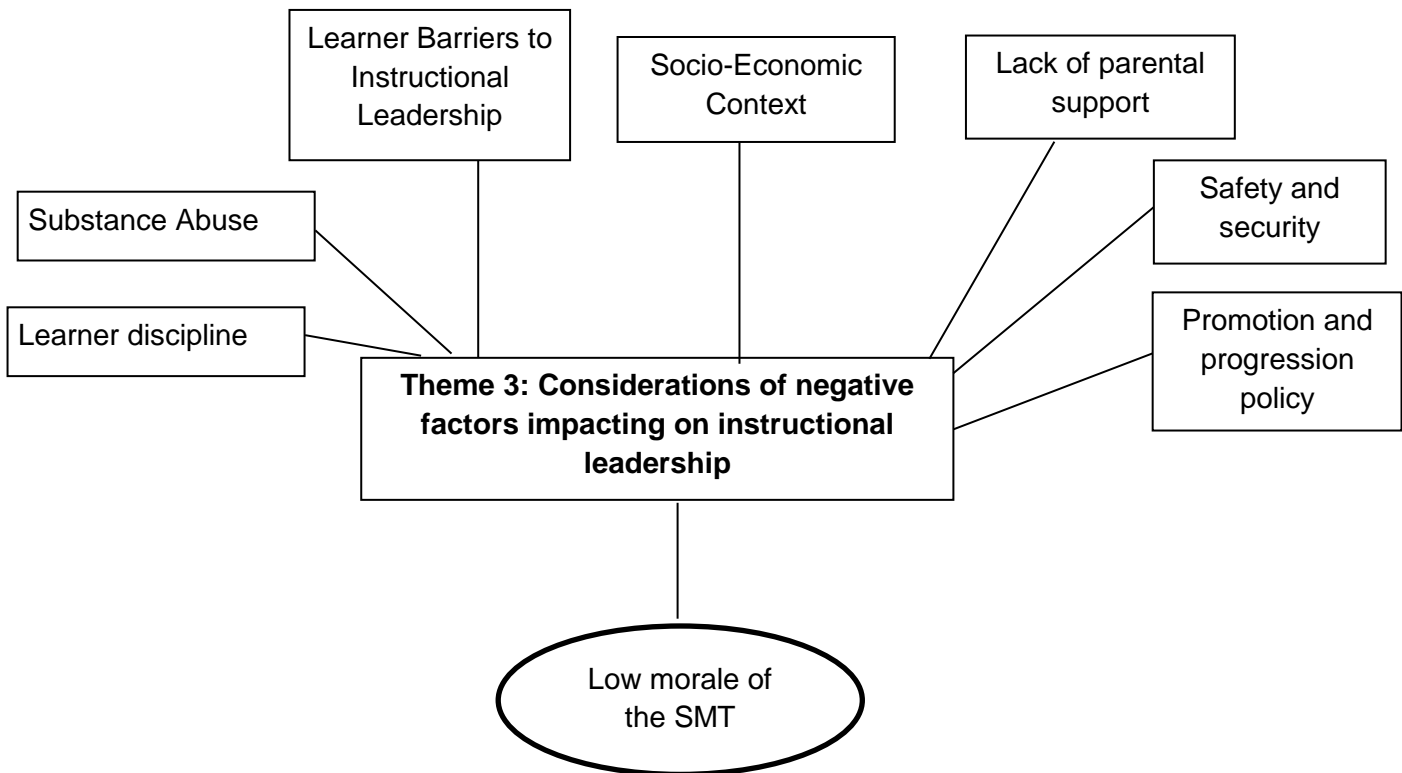
**Figure 4.1: Thematic representation of Theme 1**



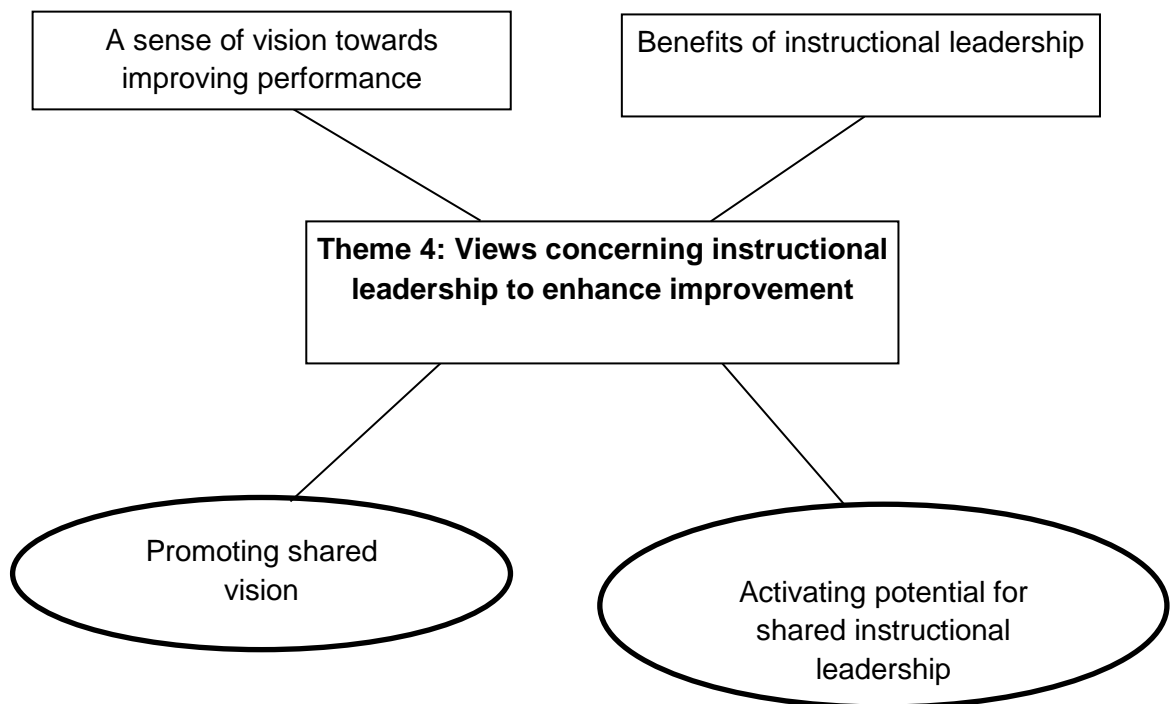
**Figure 4.2: Thematic Representation of Theme 2**



**Figure 4.3: Thematic Representation of Theme 3**



**Figure 4.4: Thematic Representation of Theme 4**



#### 4.6 THEME 1 PRELIMINARY THEMES AND CODING

For the emergence of Theme 1, I followed a path of identifying certain sub-themes across the data and then going into the detail of the different levels of the SMT (as expressed by the participants in the different schools). This process evolved as follows:

**Table 4.2: Theme 1 Sub-themes and Coding**

<b>THEME 1: EXPERIENCES OF ATTEMPTING TO DEAL WITH INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLES</b>		
<b>Sub-Theme: Experience of managerial administrative overload</b>	<b>Sub-Theme: Accountability</b>	<b>Sub-Theme: Perceptions of the different levels of SMT in relation to each other</b>
<p><b>Codes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excessive administrative workloads</li> <li>• More admin than other schools</li> <li>• Unnecessary admin tasks</li> <li>• Admin not improving results</li> <li>• Overload of admin tasks for managers</li> <li>• Admin interrupts instructional leadership role</li> <li>• Short notice for admin tasks</li> <li>• Admin delegated</li> <li>• Pressure from all levels (DBE, parents)</li> <li>• Pressure from within the school</li> <li>• Stress of anticipating DBE visits</li> <li>• Stress of being called to office by DBE.</li> <li>• Stress of working in an ‘underperforming’ school.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Codes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on SMT for results</li> <li>• Various levels of accountability</li> <li>• HODs accountable for educators’ work</li> <li>• Shared accountability</li> <li>• SMTs’ perceptions of accountability</li> </ul>	<p><b>Codes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Principals collate information</li> <li>• Principals’ submission of data</li> <li>• DPs assist principals</li> <li>• Exhausting role of the principal</li> <li>• HODs and DPs assist in admin</li> <li>• DPs monitor HODs</li> <li>• DPs’ work similar to principals</li> <li>• Change in work structure of SMTs</li> <li>• HOD’s workload</li> <li>• Division of tasks</li> </ul>

##### 4.6.1 Discussion and interpretation of Theme 1 from the analysis

The discussion and interpretation of Theme 1 that follows is in response to the first research sub-question: *How do SMTs perceive their instructional leadership roles in underperforming schools?* The research objective in relation to this research question was to explore the way in which SMTs perceive their instructional leadership roles within the context of an underperforming secondary school.

#### 4.6.1.1 Sub-theme: Experience of managerial administrative overload

The literature reviewed described instructional leadership as the way in which instructional leaders engage with the teaching and learning of the school with the aim of improving learner achievement (Hallinger, 2005:4). All the participants were remarkably knowledgeable about their instructional leadership roles and practices. However, they highlighted concerns over an obstruction of their instructional leadership practices caused by undue administration, which was specific within the context of underperforming secondary schools. While all SMT members were knowledgeable about their specific job descriptions, when I analysed the data, I found there to be a common frustration regarding the role of an *instructional leader* and *administrator*. The SMT members expressed their concern regarding the overload of administration tasks on a daily basis. The participants felt that the overload of administrative tasks seemed to overshadow their main role functions as an instructional leader and even a manager. Each level of the SMT (i.e., HODs, DPs and principals) expressed different perspectives about their instructional leadership roles based on their daily administrative tasks, which appear to have impacted on their managerial and leadership roles at times.

I now go on to discuss the various responses from HODs, DPs and principals about how they experienced a managerial administrative overload of tasks. I begin my discussion on this theme with the responses from the three HODs in this study. To begin with, all three HODs viewed the managerial administrative tasks as work overload which appeared to impact on their task orientated role as an instructional leader.

An early study of HODs in South African secondary schools by Ali and Botha (cited in Bush & Glover 2016:6) iterates the role that HODs have to play in ensuring effective curriculum delivery, but for this to happen, HODs would have to focus their time on supervising learners and educators. I started off by asking HOD1 about her instructional leadership tasks in an underperforming secondary school. HOD1 described her instructional leadership role as follows:

*I see it as the way I go about ensuring teaching and learning is effective by supervising learners' and educators' work in my Department.*

Despite HOD1 perceiving her instructional leadership role, as expressed by various authors (Goddard *et al.*, 2010:337; Hallinger, 2007:5), she felt strongly about the administrative tasks placed upon the level of the HOD in relation to the instructional leadership tasks and had this to say:

*One of the main challenges we face in an underperforming school is administration. Because we are an underperforming school, there is a lot of administration that comes to us in terms of monthly results, analysis and quarterly analysis.*

HOD1 also felt that with all the administration related to an underperforming secondary school, there had still not been any improvement in the NSC examination results. HOD1 felt strongly about the administrative tasks, which had a negative impact on the instructional time of Grade 12 learners. HOD1 felt that more time should be spent on teaching, rather than excessive amounts of administrative tasks. Literature suggests that SMTs should focus their role specifically on their instructional leadership objectives and shift away from administrative task orientated roles (Portland University Education Insight, 2019). HOD1 supports this assertion and stated:

*How is all that administration assisting us in improving our matric results? We are filling in forms all the time, throughout the day. We are called in... fill in this monitoring form, fill in that analysis form... ok the analysis is important, that I'll accept, but all the administration the HOD has to do, don't you think that's taking us out of our teaching time? What should we really be focusing on? What comes out of the admin that we do?*

To confirm the experiences of administrative overload in School One by HOD1, in School Two, HOD2 also shared similar sentiments. To begin with, HOD2's understanding of his instructional leadership role pointed to his leadership in improving learner academic performance. HOD2 remarked:

*It is my leadership of the curriculum and instructional programme to improve the learners' results.*

Like HOD1, HOD2 thereafter outlined the number of administrative tasks that had to be completed on a daily basis. The tasks, as listed by HOD2, seemed overwhelming and tiring when also considering that the SMT still has an abundance of instructional leadership and management functions to perform on a daily basis. The time factor in relation to the administrative tasks certainly did not add up for an SMT member who also has a considerable amount of teaching hours as well. HOD2 said:

*We do administration related directly to our underperforming Grade 12 learners. Some of our administration tasks include statistics for Grade 12 learners, and this could range from subject analysis to reasons or explanations as to why our learners*

*are not improving. Then there's the socio-economic related statistics that the Department asks for. Some stats that the department asks for are learner pregnancy rates, child-headed households, transport problems experienced by learners and social welfare information. So, as you can see, we carry out a lot of administration tasks.*

The above-mentioned response from HOD2 indicates that in School Two, it is the duty of the HOD to collate most of the learner-related statistics. Part of the learner statistics also includes the NSC statistics that are controlled by the HOD. Important to note is that besides occupying a substantial teaching load, the HOD has to engage in various managerial administrative tasks. The response from HOD2 is an indication of the numerous hours spent on administrative tasks, rather than instructional leadership tasks. HOD2's response is in line with Mestry's (2013:119) view that many other management (and administrative) duties makes carrying out instructional leadership tasks difficult.

In School Three, HOD3 highlighted key instructional leadership duties like supervision and monitoring but also spoke about the paperwork associated with the role of the HOD and had this to say:

*There are also other duties that I do that are important to the functioning of the school like LTSM stock control of the books that belong to my department, learner supervision and checking educators' portfolios. There is also a lot of paperwork that I do every day like getting class information about learner's subject details or taking statistics from subject educators to pass on to the department.*

As far as the SMT level of the HODs is concerned, all three HODs in the different schools were consistent in their responses, citing an overload of administrative tasks in their role as instructional leaders. Important to note is that all the administrative work being undertaken by HODs does not constitute instructional leadership practices. The challenges faced by SMT members in executing their instructional leadership duties have also been identified by Seobi and Wood (2016:1), who found that time spent on daily functionality (administrative) tasks, led to less time being spent on instructional leadership practices. This was an indication that the overload of administrative tasks in the three schools had taken up time that could have been spent on the HOD's involvement in teaching and learning tasks, which would then have led to some positive contribution towards instructional leadership. Based on the responses of the three HODs, Leithwood's (2016:117) argument holds weight when he refers to HODs being an "untapped and underutilised source of instructional leadership".

Nevertheless, the DPs and principals also shared their experiences of administrative tasks in their senior management roles. In School Two, DP2 described his position as the main supporting role to the principal. DP2's response was indicative of a supportive role to the principal. DP2 also acknowledged his role in managing the curriculum as part of his instructional leadership duties. DP2 described his instructional leadership role as follows:

*The deputy principal is like the second line of defence to the principal, which means I carry out many of the academic duties as well the administration duties assigned to me by the principal.*

DP2's response was an indication that the principal shared some of the duties with the DP. This was also an indication (and an example) of shared leadership practices that School Two was engaging in. DP2's tasks that are shared with him by the principal lend support to Hallinger's (2007) notion of shared instructional leadership. Apart from the administrative tasks, it appears that DP2 also acknowledged that there are still management duties that need to be fulfilled. DP2 said:

*Apart from the administrative tasks, I still have to manage the curriculum of the school.*

Some of the other administrative tasks were highlighted by DP3 in School Three, which included the control of LTSM and the NSC examination. DP3 indicated that the time frame to complete DBE administrative tasks was narrow. This appeared problematic since SMT members also teach classes, and this made it difficult for them to find the time to complete urgent administrative tasks. In School Three, DP3, similarly to DP2, said that there are excessive administrative tasks; however, management of HODs still remained an important instructional leadership task. DP3's management of HODs in the school was an indication of instructional leadership practices being undertaken in School Two. This is what DP3 had to say about administrative tasks in School Two:

*There are a lot of administration tasks, and then I have to lead and manage HODs and their departments. The department always asks us for stats and information which we have to submit sometimes on short notice.*

The responses of the principals in the three schools were somewhat different from HODs and DPs. For instance, in School Three, P3 had a different perspective about administrative tasks. P3 elucidated his role and responsibility as a principal and had this to say:



*Most of my work is directly related to the administration and management of the whole school. Sure the admin is a lot sometimes, but it is part of the job and the principal's responsibility is to get it done.*

P3's response suggests that the principal's instructional leadership role may be indirect as a result of more time spent on administrative and managerial tasks. P3's indirect instructional leadership role (which focuses mainly on administrative and managerial tasks) is consistent with Msila's (2013:81) description of principals who engage indirectly in daily routine tasks, but still contribute to the teaching and learning programme. However, still important to note, is that P3 engaged in whole school management as well, but in striking a balance between administrative and instructional leadership tasks, P3's involvement in teaching and learning may be considered more indirect than an immersed, active role in the curriculum. P3's ability to strike a balance between administrative and instructional leadership tasks would have to become a new normal as Mestry (2017b:258) points out that the present South African educational landscape places far more (emerging) demands than the previous decades.

P2 recognised that there is an abundance of administration tasks, but uses delegation among HODs to complete tasks. This is an indication that P2 considers that he can share leadership tasks within the SMT. This form of shared leadership (responsibility) also points to the notion of distributed leadership, as expressed by Ng (2019:5) as distributing tasks to other members of staff (or within the SMT). One of the ways in which the workload of excessive administrative tasks is reduced by P2 is to share various administrative tasks with the HODs. Instead of the principal taking on all of the administrative tasks single-handedly, HODs are utilised as the middle managers for the gathering and collation of information necessary to carry out the various tasks. The delegation of duties by the principal to HODs then allowed the principal more time in fulfilling his instructional leadership role. This is what P2 had to say about the delegation of administrative tasks:

*I do tons of administration which I sometimes delegate to the respective personnel. What happens is that HODs collate the information and give it to me and I submit the documents to the department. I also track learner progress and do the curriculum tracking to make sure all the work is completed according to the syllabus.*

The responses from HODs and DPs indicate that the administrative tasks that they have to complete on a daily basis may be causing interference in their goal of improving learner academic performance. Although all the participants were indeed familiar with their instructional leadership roles, their responses indicate that there appears to be a managerial administrative overload in relation to their instructional leadership roles. The principals

indicated that instructional leadership may sometimes occur indirectly as a result of the delegation of administrative tasks to the HODs, thus providing more time for principals to focus on their instructional leadership roles. This is in line with Taale's (2013:75) suggestion of task delegation to other SMT members (i.e., HODs and DPs) to allow for more time to be spent on the instructional programme of the school. While delegation of tasks from the principal to the SMT members like HODs may ease the workload of all SMT members, the DBE continuously requests administrative information from the SMT. The administrative role of the SMT results in loss of time in their management duties and it also impacts negatively on the instructional time of the academic programme. Hence, the time spent on administrative tasks could be used constructively in improving learner academic performance, especially in the Grade 12 classes.

#### **4.6.1.2 Sub-theme: Accountability**

The participants felt strongly about the expectation that they were accountable (as SMT members) for the underperforming NSC results. Learners exiting Grade 12 upon completing their NSC examinations have to enter the social and economic spheres of South Africa. The skills obtained from the quality of schooling have to equip these Grade 12 learners for life in South Africa. Based on this high stakes scenario involving the Grade 12 learners, the participants had different perceptions regarding who is ultimately accountable for improvement of learner academic performance (and the Grade 12 NSC results). In Chapter 5 I provide a full discussion of the documents with the participants (that is, via my final conversation with them telephonically). The addition of the discussion of documents with participants was important for this study to co-consider with them, how the documents might be interpreted in terms of the relevance of the documents for their leadership and management tasks. Through my own analysis of the PAM (2016:26-44), I found that it does not state who is accountable for learner academic performance. However, the participants gave a clear indication that there should be shared accountability with regard to the NSC results. My discussion that follows highlights the different SMT members' somewhat brief responses during the initial semi-structured interviews, about how they felt about accountability (and their thoughts on who is ultimately accountable), which I probed further with them in the additional telephonic interviews.

Most of the participants (HOD1, HOD2, HOD3, DP1, DP2 and DP3) in this study were of the opinion that accountability should be inclusive of other role players and not just the SMT. The responses of these participants substantiate Spillane *et al.*'s (as cited in Hoadle *et al.*, 2009:141) view that instructional leadership comprises of and is stretched across a number

of role players and situations within the school. In School One, HOD1's feeling was that even parents should be accountable for the NSC results. The parents (or guardians) play a crucial role in supporting their child's learning (Taole, 2013:80).

When HOD1 said that even parents must be held accountable, it was an indication that parents were partly to blame for the drop in the NSC pass rates. HOD1's response was a clear indication that parents are not providing support or assuming accountability for the learners' poor results. HOD1 was of the opinion that SMTs should not be held accountable solely for poor learner academic performance in the NSC examinations. This is what HOD1 had to say:

*My personal belief, especially as I see it in our school, is that the entire focus is on the teacher and the managers of the school in terms of results, so you have shifted the entire focus of education now strictly on the teachers and the SMT of the school, but remember learning involves all stakeholders, alright, so where is the accountability for the parents? So personally, I believe that the department should not hold the SMT responsible for the learner.*

HOD1 further raised the issue of accountability in primary schools. The primary schools are indeed responsible for the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior Phase learning which then progresses to the secondary school level. HOD1 suggested that far too much focus is on the Grade 12 NSC results, yet little is being done to correct learner challenges at the primary school level. Interestingly, Bendikson *et al.* (2012:3) distinguish between instructional leadership in primary and secondary schools. Drawing on the response of HOD1 with regard to accountability of improving learner performances in primary schools, Bendikson *et al.* (2012:3) note that SMTs in primary schools occupy direct instructional leadership roles which can afford them the opportunity to improve learner performances due to smaller subject departments and SMT hierarchy, as compared to secondary schools. HOD1's response that follows thus raises concern over the effectiveness (or lack of) instructional leadership practices in primary schools that provide a source of learner enrollment to secondary schools. HOD1 had this to say about primary versus secondary school accountability:

*Managers are being overburdened with the matric results. The whole focus of the school is the matric results but let me tell you where the problem lies; it is in the primary school because you have attention deficit learners, you have slow learners and learners with barriers that are being passed on with no accountability at Grade 7 level.*

Both HOD1 and HOD2 were of the opinion that learners contribute to poor academic performances and the SMT should not bear the brunt for poor results. While HOD1 and HOD2 acknowledged a direct role in accountability for educators' and learners' work, they felt that learners should also be jointly accountable for their academic performance. In fact, HOD1's response indicated that the work of educators was something the HOD would account for, but learner performance on the other hand, is still a difficult aspect for HODs to account for. In the discussion, HOD1 also indicated that she cannot solely account for poor learner academic performance and that it was also up to the educators in conjunction with the learners to assume accountability for poor learner academic performance; however, she did allude to her role as the HOD in ensuring accountability for the leadership and management of teaching and learning. HOD1 further argued:

*The HOD must be accountable for the teacher's work and the learner's work. Yes, I can monitor it, yes, the teacher is doing an excellent job... but now how can I answer for the learner's performance?*

Similarly, in School Two, HOD2 remarked:

*As a HOD, yes, you are accountable, but I do not think it is fair for HODs to take all the responsibility for poor results. The learners also contribute to poor results.*

Although HOD2 mentioned that the learners should be jointly accountable for their actions based on their attainment of poor NSC results, he was also of the opinion that accountability should be shared and the responsibility of all role-players who interact with the Grade 12 learners. He shared the following thought:

*I definitely think that accountability should be shared. Some of the people that should share this accountability for the poor NSC results should be the subject educator, HOD, the parent, the learner, the principal, as well as the Department.*

In School Three, HOD3 was also of the opinion that there should be shared accountability for the Grade 12 results. HOD3's response suggests (like HOD2), there is some direct accountability associated with the level of HODs through their involvement in checking the work of educators and learners, however, HOD3 also pointed out that the principal is subject to criticism by the DBE for the Grade 12 NSC results. HOD3 also felt that the principal is ultimately accountable for the Grade 12 NSC results, citing the criticism that the principal has to endure at DBE Grade 12 principal meetings. This is what HOD3 had to say about accountability:

*Since I am the HOD, I will also be answerable for underperformance, but I really feel sorry for the principal because he has to go to the department meetings and take all the scolding for the poor results. When you look at a school and the way it is structured, there are many people that are involved, and the Grade 12 results are dependent on the learners themselves, the educators, parents, school management and even the SGB. So, underperformance or the improvement of the results is everyone's business.*

HOD3 viewed accountability as “everyone’s business” which linked with the notion of shared accountability and working collaboratively. Furthermore, HOD3 also mentioned that the SGB is one of the stakeholders that plays a part in the improvement of the results. The acknowledgement of the role of the SGB in this case is an important one since the SGB is the parent representative component of the school, which can offer effective collaboration in trying to improve the academic results of the school.

In School One, DP1 was delegated the task of ensuring learner academic performance in Grade 12 was up to standard. DP1 highlighted different levels of accountability, from the learner, to the educator, to the Department; however, DP1 had a different perspective from the HODs and felt that accountability should start at the learner and end with the learner. In defence of the educators, DP1 felt that accountability of academic results should not stop at the educator. DP1 also related two examples where a learner performs well and does not perform well. In both examples, DP1 was of the opinion that the learner is accountable for his/her poor or excellent academic results, not just the educator. When asked about who is accountable for learner academic performance, DP1 responded:

*If the teacher is accountable to the student, then the department is accountable to the teacher and I feel that the teacher is in a very invidious position at schools. You know; if a child does well, we say: What a bright pupil! He's a hard worker! The child gets all the glory, and it should be that way, but I also feel that if a child performs poorly, it's that child's responsibility. If we are looking at accountability, then I feel it should not stop with the teacher.*

In School Two, DP2 was in favour of shared accountability and considered three important stakeholders: The school; the learner; and the parent. When DP2 mentioned school accountability, he brought to my attention the “entire staff” and their role in accepting accountability for poor performance in the NSC examination. In addressing the issue of accountability, DP2 had the following to say:

*You cannot blame any individual for poor results. Education involves a number of key role players like the school, the learner and the parent. Even the parent needs to be accountable for the child's results. As a school, I think the entire staff needs to accept responsibility for poor results, just as we would celebrate above-average results that would take us out of the underperforming category.*

DP3 made a similar point and remarked:

*Unfortunately, the SMT of any school with poor NSC results are going to be in the firing line; however, I feel that everyone who works with the Grade 12 learners should be accountable, not just the SMT. It is everyone's duty to ensure that the learners pass the NSC examinations. Why should the SMT be the only ones to answer for poor NSC results? The parents need to assist the school as well.*

DP3 confirmed that parents also need to be accountable for learner academic performance. DP3 goes on to state that parents must assist the school in its efforts to improve learner academic performance.

In School One and School Three, the principals (P1 and P3) were in favour of shared accountability for the NSC results, however, based on their fulfilment of their conditions of employment as principals; both of them firmly stated that they are ultimately accountable for learner academic performance and the NSC results in particular. In contrast, the PAM (2016:32-35) document does not explicitly indicate that the principal is indeed ultimately accountable for learner academic performance (including the NSC results). In addition, there is a degree of ambiguity in the literature, as well as the PAM (DBE, 2016) document, as discussed above, which points to the notion of *shared instructional leadership*, instead of the principal acting alone as the central leader when it comes to SMTs' involvement in learner academic performance. (For this reason, in my "second" cycle of analysis, I focused on this issue, as also impacted by some of the comments proffered by participants during the telephonic conversations – as indicated by the oval entitled "Activating Potential for Shared Instructional Leadership" in Figure 4.4 above.)

A seminal author of note in the literature on instructional leadership is Hallinger (2007:5) who posits that the principal cannot carry the burden of school leadership alone; he suggests the need for educators (and the entire SMT, in the case of my study), to be involved in instructional leadership as a route to improved learner academic performance. In contrast to Hallinger's (2007) notion of shared instructional leadership, Mpungose and Ngwenya

(2017:5) make the point that the principal has a key role to play in satisfying parents by being accountable for both educators' and learners' performance and ensuring the school attains good results. P1's view about accountability was in line with the view, as expressed by Mpungose and Ngwenya (2017:5) above, and assumed full accountability for learner academic performance, as compared to P3 who was an advocate of shared accountability. Even though P1 acknowledged that there may be other role players who are responsible for poor learner academic performance, he stood firm in his belief that the principal is ultimately accountable for learner academic performance:

*The principal is the accounting officer of the school, so I am obviously the one who has to answer to the department when we are underperforming. Although there are many others who are also responsible for underperformance, unfortunately the principal has to be the one to answer for poor NSC results and I also have to give solutions and improvement plans to the department. However, as a principal, I agree that the NSC results and pass rate is my full responsibility, and it would be unfair as the accounting officer of the school to blame other people.*

Similarly, when I had probed the role of the principal as an accounting officer, P3 said:

*The principal is the accounting officer of the school but I think he/she should not be the only one responsible for poor results. Everyone should bear the brunt of poor results, from the subject teacher to the parent, but unfortunately principals have to answer for poor results as it is policy and part of my job description.*

P1 and P3 described themselves as "accounting officers" of the school and primarily accountable for the NSC results. There is no legislation or policy that designates the principal as the main "accounting officer" yet the principals in this study assumed this title. When I asked P1 about the concept of an accounting officer, P1's response was that the DBE officials normally use that terminology at meetings. During my discussion about accountability, P1 felt that accountability should not only be shared, but also equal under circumstances, especially when it came to below-average NSC pass rates. P1 lamented about his notion of shared accountability regarding learner academic performance:

*I would like for accountability to be something that is shared by a number of role players like the parents, teachers and the entire SMT. Shared accountability must be of equal value and no individual should be considered more responsible than the other because there are many factors that lead to underperformance in the NSC results.*

P2 accepted accountability for the NSC results rather than trying to pin underperformance on others, and like P1, P3 was accepting of the job description as a principal in terms of learner academic performance. However, P2's response indicated that moving back to the rank of a level one educator would be better off in terms of less work related stress and pressure. This was P2's feeling about being accountable for underperformance:

*I am the one who is responsible for the NSC results and the functioning of the school, but I would rather be a normal level one educator and have nothing to worry about, just teach and go home.*

The responses above indicate that SMT members welcome the idea of accountability that can be shared amongst role players like the learner, parent, educator, as well as the DBE. Furthermore, the type of relationship that is forged between the school and the parent can positively impact on learner academic performance (Wilder, 2014:377). At present, the SMT comprising of the HODs, DPs and principals are all accountable for learner academic performance in some way or another; be it above or below the national norm results. The work of the HODs indicated that their role is more directly accountable for educators' and learners' work under their supervision, whereas the DPs appear to be indirectly involved in accountability of learner academic performance. Although the participants in this study are strong advocates of shared accountability, Mohapi, Magano, Mathipe, Matlabe and Mapotse, (2014:1224) iterate that the principals are the leaders of the SMT and should be ultimately accountable because they are the "chief facilitators of the curriculum". The principals in this study have all indicated that poor learner academic performance is their business and responsibility as prescribed in their job descriptions, although they would prefer shared accountability.

#### **4.6.2 Analysis and discussion of data from follow-up interviews**

##### **4.6.2.1 Perceptions of the different levels of the SMT in relation to each other**

This sub-theme emerged during my follow-up interviews when I realised I needed to further probe how each level of the SMT perceived their instructional leadership role in relation to one another. An additional question that I asked participants during the follow-up interview was how the different levels of the SMT perceived their instructional leadership role in relation to each other. (See also Appendix D.) This was an area I felt that I needed to gain more insight so I could establish the way in which the SMTs are working in underperforming secondary schools. What also motivated me to further probe this area is that the "T" in the acronym SMT stands for "TEAM", so my intention was to delve further and probe whether



the SMTs in the sampled schools were working as a team or not, irrespective of their different SMT levels (i.e., HODs, DPs and principals). I now turn to some of the responses from my follow-up interviews about how the different SMTs viewed their instructional leadership roles in relation to each other.

In School One, HOD1 drew on two key areas that emerged during my study when commenting about the instructional leadership role of the HOD in relation to the other SMT members. These were: 1) accountability; and 2) administrative tasks. I began my follow-up interview by probing HOD1's perception of the HOD as an instructional leader in an underperforming secondary school. HOD1 still stood firm from our first interview and maintained that the HOD should not be held accountable for the NSC results and that both the primary and secondary schools should be jointly accountable for learner academic performance. HOD1 further added:

*Accountability must come from all SMT members from both primary and secondary schools.*

All three HODs noted with concern the excessive workloads in relation to the other SMT members. In School One, HOD1 mentioned that the HOD has a "difficult role" to play in underperforming secondary schools as compared to the DP and principal. Some of the tasks mentioned by HOD1 (also adequately covered by the literature) include: Curriculum management; administrative tasks; managing specialised subject departments; managing teaching and learning; and supervising learners and educators (Ghavifekr & Ibrahim, 2014; Mestry & Pillay, 2013; Naicker *et al.*, 2013). HOD1 argued:

*The HOD has the most amount of work in an underperforming secondary school because we deal with learners, parents, educators, and report to the DP and principal.*

In School Two, HOD2 remained firm on the responses from our first interview session but further commented on the specific role of the HOD in instructional leadership, highlighting the excessive workload associated with the role of the HOD. HOD2 also felt that HODs sometimes engage in work that was supposed to be allocated to educators and the other SMT members, thereby creating an unmanageable situation. HOD2 opined:

*HODs sometimes do the work of the educators, DPs and principals and we cannot handle it sometimes.*

HOD2 further suggested:

*Teaching and learning tasks need to be divided between all SMT members.*

This also resonates with the notion of shared instructional leadership between all SMT members, which had emerged during my study. In School Three, HOD3's comments were consistent with those of HOD1 and HOD2 regarding workloads of HODs. HOD3's comments further confirmed that HODs appear to be facing challenges when it comes to the workloads (related to administrative and curriculum matters) in their instructional leadership roles. When I asked HOD3 how he perceived the role of HODs in instructional leadership, he felt that there should be changes to the workload of all SMT members. HOD3 said:

*A possible change in the structure of the workload of SMT members will help to ease some of the excess tasks that HODs have to carry out.*

When I probed further and asked HOD3 how the structural change in the SMT levels would help in their instructional leadership roles, HOD3 remarked:

*The HODs currently supervise and manage all teaching and learning tasks as well as manage the whole school curriculum, so each SMT level should be allocated a specific and designated task. For example, HODs supervise teachers and learners, DPs supervise teachers, and principals maybe complete all administrative tasks.*

In School One, Two and Three; all three DPs viewed themselves to be in a supporting role to the principal. The PAM (2016:39) document states that the aim of the job description of the DP is to "assist the principal in managing the school and promoting the education of the learners in a proper manner". In School One, DP1 reiterated the support that has to be offered to the principal by the DP. DP1 believed that the role of the DP is to support the principal in the instructional programme and assist in monitoring and supervising the work of the HODs as the principal's main delegate from senior management. DP1 stated:

*I have to work closely with the principal and check if HODs are fulfilling their duties which make my job more of a senior management advisory role to the principal, instead of class to class supervision of learners' work that is normally done by the HODs.*

In School Two, DP2 indicated that the role most DPs currently play in underperforming secondary schools is almost similar to that of the principal. DP2 opined:

*DPs are doing the tasks that principals normally do, especially when it comes to the administrative functions.*

DP2 showed no sign or response of irritation or objection when engaging in tasks that principals do, which indicated that this DP was indeed offering support to the principal. This comment also confirmed the position of DP2 since our first interview, where DP2 referred to DPs as the “*last line of defence*” to principals, since the DPs engage in numerous curriculum and administrative tasks on behalf of the principal.

In School Three, DP3 shared similar sentiments as DP1 and also suggested that the DP has to offer support to the principal by assisting in monitoring and supervising the work of the HODs. With regard to the instructional leadership role of the DP in relation to the other SMTs, DP3 said:

*The DP has an important role to play in instructional leadership because we have to ensure HODs are performing their duties effectively and apart from that, the DP has to work closely with the principal to carry out all the necessary curriculum and administrative functions of the school.*

When I asked P1 about the specific role of the principal as an instructional leader in relation to the other SMT members, he still believed that the role of the principal as an instructional leader required accountability for the Grade 12 NSC results and the status of the school (i.e., whether the school is underperforming or not). P1 confirmed this by stating:

*I feel that unlike the other SMT members, the principal is solely responsible for the NSC results and in fact the whole school results. The principal has to make sure all the necessary measures are in place so that our results are improved.*

During the course of my study, there had been conflicting views from different levels of the SMT about who is actually accountable for the NSC results as well as learner academic performance in the school. (See Section 4.7.1.2 above.) Upon analysing the PAM (DBE, 2016:42), I found that the job description of the principal is specifically related to the academic performance of the school. This is not stipulated for any other level of the SMT. However, the PAM (DBE, 2016:42) document, with reference to academic performance, appears to be ambiguous with regard to the job description of the principal. To explicate this further, the PAM (DBE, 2016:42) states that the job of the principal is to prepare and submit “the academic performance of that school in relation to minimum outcomes, standards, and

procedures for assessment, determined by the Minister in terms of section 6A of SASA". Furthermore, the PAM (DBE, 2016:42) does not explicitly state that the principal is accountable for the NSC results or the academic performance of the whole school. The ambiguity lies in whether the submission of the report on performance deems the principal accountable, or if this has seriously been misinterpreted in the PAM (DBE, 2016) document since its formulation, which is in need of further research in the future. Nevertheless, all three principals in my study indicated that they are ultimately accountable for the NSC results and whole school learner academic performance.

Mestry (2013:122) suggests that principals should balance administrative and managerial duties in order to fulfil their role as an effective instructional leader. P1 further acknowledged the work of the other SMT members in striking a balance between administrative and management duties and had this to say:

*It is not easy being the principal of an underperforming secondary school with all the admin work and seeing to curriculum needs of the school, but fortunately, my HODs and DP work closely with me, and we manage to get our job done.*

In School Two, P2 reiterated the importance of the role of the principal in ensuring the effective functioning of the whole school and stated:

*As an acting principal it has been very exhausting so far with countless Department (DBE) weekly submissions, and then I still have to make sure teaching and learning is above board.*

P2 felt that unlike HODs and DPs, the principal is still the one who has to provide data to the DBE for various administrative tasks, whereas HODs and DPs generally submit data that is curriculum related. P2 made the following comparisons with regard to the instructional leadership role of the principal in relation to the other levels of the SMT:

*The principal has to submit financial audits, staffing recommendations, sort out the income and expenditure and see to the functionality of the school, and HODs and DPs are mostly involved in the academic programme.*

The settling in of exhaustion, as expressed by P2, appeared synonymous with the view of Mestry (2013:119) cites Fink and Resnick (2001) when he describes the duties of principals as going beyond the role of the instructional leader, into the realm of an administrator and manager engaging in various other activities. I noticed by the body language of P2 that fatigue seemed to be settling in, with the state of underperformance resting on the shoulders

of the principal. Denham and Onwuegbuzie (2013: 673) refer to “latent content analysis” of data as including body language.

In School Three, P3 alluded to exhaustion (his own and that of other principals) even though the other SMTs were assisting in the academic programme of the school. As far as the instructional leadership of the principal is concerned, P3 remarked:

*Principals of underperforming schools are now tired and there has been little or no change and the learners are partly to blame because our teachers are doing everything in their power to improve the Grade 12 results. Although HODs and DPs are assisting, I still have to collate all the underperformance stats and answer to the DBE for underperformance.*

P3 described the role of the principal as very challenging in an underperforming secondary school as compared to other SMT members. P3 shared his experiences of encounters where he was visited by the Provincial DBE officials and questioned about certain areas for improvement in learner academic performance, especially in Grade 12. Fusarelli and Johnson (cited in Mpungose & Ngwenya, 2016:13) explain that this is a task done by the DBE District offices every year to take stock of the Grade 12 NSC results in order to develop improvement plans for underperforming secondary schools. P3 acknowledged that, although there were other SMT members, “the buck stops with the principal”. P3 was of the opinion that the principal is ultimately accountable for the functionality of the school and concluded by saying:

*The principal compared to other SMT members has the most important role because I am directly accountable to the DBE for learner results, finances and administration, and when the Department visits they question the principal not the other SMT members.*

The discussion above showed that the different levels of the SMT perceive their instructional leadership roles as being different in relation to each other, but at times there are tasks where there is shared leadership between the DP and the principal. In Chapter 5 I delve further into the job descriptions of the different levels of the SMT, as stipulated in the PAM (DBE, 2016), in which I provide a full discussion based on the data analysis from my telephonic conversations. I now move on to discuss the findings in Theme 2.

#### 4.7 THEME 2 PRELIMINARY THEMES AND CODING

For the emergence of Theme 2, I followed a similar path of identifying the sub-themes across the data and then going into the detail of the different levels of the SMT (as expressed by the participants in the different schools). This process evolved as follows:

**Table 4.3: Theme 2 Sub-themes and coding**

<b>THEME 2: ENGAGEMENT IN TEACHING &amp; LEARNING ACTIVITIES</b>			
<b>Sub-theme: Curriculum Management</b>	<b>Sub-theme: Monitoring and Evaluation</b>	<b>Sub-theme: Assessing and Analysing the Curriculum</b>	<b>Sub-theme: Encouraging Professional Development</b>
<p><b>Codes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educators' files</li> <li>• Impact on NSC results</li> <li>• Record keeping</li> <li>• Administration</li> <li>• Checking learners work</li> <li>• Supervision</li> <li>• SMT Meetings</li> <li>• Feedback by SMT</li> <li>• CAPS Policy alignment</li> <li>• Different levels of monitoring</li> <li>• Checking educators' and learners' work</li> <li>• Supervision files</li> <li>• Supervision procedures</li> <li>• Checking ATPs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Codes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different levels of monitoring</li> <li>• Checking educators' and learners' work</li> <li>• Supervision files</li> <li>• Supervision procedures</li> <li>• Checking ATPs</li> <li>• Curriculum Tracking</li> <li>• Lesson Observation</li> <li>• IQMS</li> </ul>	<p><b>Codes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submission of monthly performance reports</li> <li>• Analysis feedback</li> <li>• NSC statistics</li> <li>• Identifying strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>• Scrutinising mark sheets</li> <li>• Subject analyses</li> </ul>	<p><b>Codes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD)</li> <li>• CPTD meetings</li> <li>• Initiating professional development</li> <li>• Internal and external professional development</li> <li>• Professional development for improving teaching and learning</li> <li>• Limited scope of professional development workshops</li> <li>• Professional development topics (areas of focus)</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum Tracking</li> <li>• Lesson Observation</li> <li>• IQMS</li> </ul>			
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#### 4.7.1 Discussion and interpretation of Theme 2 from the analysis

The discussion and interpretation of Theme 2 that follows is in response to the second research sub-question: *What teaching and learning tasks do SMTs in underperforming schools engage in?* The research objective in relation to this research question was to establish the specific teaching and learning tasks that SMTs in underperforming secondary schools engage in.

##### 4.7.1.1 Sub-theme: Curriculum management

I regarded this theme as central to my study, since instructional leadership has a strong focus on the way in which the curriculum is managed to ensure effective teaching and learning takes place in order to improve learner academic performance. This theme also ties up with the theoretical framework of my study, which is informed, *inter alia*, by Weber's (1996) model of instructional leadership. This theme represents the element of Weber's (1996) model of instructional leadership titled "Managing Curriculum and Instruction", which involves monitoring of the classroom, in line with the school's mission, and promoting instructional best practices through support and resources with data-driven support to advance the instructional programme.

All participants in this study related to me the way in which they manage the curriculum, albeit some SMT members' approach in which they managed the curriculum was somehow different. All schools are different in their contexts, which will also sometimes require different approaches to leadership and management. In my conversations with the participants, I attempted to explore the different approaches to curriculum management (as part of their instructional leadership role), as expressed by the different levels of the SMT. I now explore some of the ways in which the curriculum is managed in the three schools, focusing on the HODs, DPs and the principals. In School One, HOD1 regarded curriculum management as an important aspect in improving the NSC results and moving the school

out of the underperforming status. HOD1 managed the curriculum through administration and the management of teaching and learning. This was HOD1's perspective on curriculum management:

*One has to remember that the curriculum is a very important aspect of an underperforming school since it has a direct impact on the NSC results. For me personally, the way in which I manage the curriculum determines whether we make the NSC pass rate or not, but one must also understand that there may be other reasons that could have led to the poor pass rate. The way in which I manage the curriculum is through record keeping for administration, management, teaching and learning.*

In School Two, some of the main records kept by HOD2 was the DBE curriculum tracking document, which informs any SMT member or DBE official about the progress of the curriculum for a specified period (in a specific school term). HOD2 also engaged in the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS), which is an appraisal system SMT members used to evaluate the work of educators and learners. The use of the IQMS appraisal system is regarded by Mpungose and Ngwenya (2017:11) as a quantitative performance indicator in South African education policy which can "enhance the quality of education" in schools.

HOD2 made use of the IQMS as a tool to check educators' and learners' work thoroughly, maintaining observation and individual educator reports with the intention of enhancing the quality of education in School Two. HOD2 also regarded the monitoring of learner workbooks as part of curriculum management, however, HOD2 aligned the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) dates to the dates in the learner's workbook to ensure the curriculum was on track. HOD2 described his curriculum management processes as follows:

*I check learners' and educators' work at certain periods in the month. There is an ATP which I check to verify if the work stipulated by the CAPS policy has been covered by the teacher or not. I also check at random, five or six learners' books, against the educator's ATP, to see if it corresponds according to dates and weeks. Whenever I have a free period, I go to a class and mark and check random books of learners as well. At the end of each term, I complete a curriculum tracking form which goes to the Department and outlines the work and assessment coverage for the whole term. During the IQMS process, I have the opportunity to check all educator files and really go through their work with a fine comb.*



In School Three, HOD3 engaged in curriculum management by focusing on the work of the educators. HOD3 managed the curriculum by ensuring that the educators have fulfilled the requirements stipulated by their respective Subject Advisors. HOD3 showed some leniency when managing the curriculum by expressing compassion towards educators who may be experiencing stress, as a result of working in an underperforming school, and even afforded them additional time to complete work related tasks. As far as HOD3's instructional leadership role is concerned, direct engagement in the educators' work and also assisting educators in completing work that they may not have completed, can be regarded as good leadership practices. HOD3 described his curriculum management activities as follows:

*I basically go through each educator file and what I look for is if they have followed the requirements for their subject files that were given to them by their Subject Advisors at their content workshops. If all their work is done according to the requirements and I am happy, I will sign off and stamp the different parts of their files. I would say I am a bit casual in checking the educators' work and I give them sufficient time to get all their stuff ready because as it is, they are already stressed being in an underperforming school. If an educator doesn't have something, I will get it for them or give them a little more time.*

My discussion above confirms that HODs are engaged directly (more or less) in curriculum management processes such as monitoring the work of educators through checking of educators' files and dates in the ATPs, in relation to DBE curriculum requirements. I now focus my discussion on some of the DP level responses with regard to curriculum management.

In School One, DP1 alluded to a laid-back style of curriculum management not to create added stress and pressure for the educator. DP1 perceived his role in curriculum management as the level of SMT that monitors the work of learners and educators.

*They have to have the ATP, POAs and lesson plans, so we do it on a weekly basis where the teacher's work is... maybe monitored is too strong a word, but the teacher knows because of the structures we have in place that DP1 is walking around and might come into the class and say, "Mam, how is it going?" I just walk around informally look at the learners' books and say, "Mam, can I sign whatever files you have?" I sign what the teacher has and tell them when you have the time, can you send me the file and some learners' books? It feels like hopefully for the teacher it's not an intrusive method, rather than have a teacher know on Monday morning I want all their books in my office.*

DP1's response indicated a direct role in curriculum management with a weekly involvement in curriculum related tasks like checking educators' ATPs, assessment programmes and lesson preparation. DP1 described the word "monitored" as coming across too strong when checking the work of educators. DP1's informal way of managing the curriculum by walking around and visiting educators portrayed a casual leadership approach which did not create pressure and anxiety amongst educators. As far as DP1's instructional leadership role is concerned, there was a direct involvement in teaching and learning through engaging in classroom visits.

In School Two, DP2 expressed concern over the excessive administrative tasks, combined with a substantial personal teaching load, which appeared to impact on the time needed for managing the curriculum. This is what DP2 had to say about curriculum management:

*The problem with my teaching hours is that I have less time to carry out my management or leadership duties because I spend more time in the classroom. I am very actively involved in the academic curriculum of the school, but I feel I cannot put a lot of effort into the curriculum as I would like to because of the large amount of administrative duties and the workload is just unmanageable. When I do have time available, I take a walk to each class and supervise learners' books by going through random books in each subject and signing them. I sometimes supervise educator files, but as far as possible I leave that to the HODs to monitor.*

DP2 does make some attempts to engage in curriculum management by checking learners' work during casual walks in the teaching blocks. In School Two, it appears that the teaching and administrative load created a challenge for DP2 to carry out instructional leadership tasks like curriculum management. In order to ensure the curriculum is being managed, DP2 relies on HODs to carry out the task of curriculum management. In this case, DP2 appeared to be occupying an indirect role towards instructional leadership related to the management of the curriculum.

In School Three, DP3 engaged in curriculum management by checking the work of both educators (educator file) and learners (workbooks) and maintained records in this regard. DP3 aligned the educator file to the learner's book to establish if the work scheduled in the syllabus had been completed. Each educator also completed a curriculum verification form which informed DP3 about the progress of each subject with regard to the curriculum. Moshwana and Thaba-Nkadimene (2016:248) regard this practice of monitoring and evaluating work as contributing to effective curriculum management. DP3 was yet another example where there was direct involvement in the management of the curriculum as part of

the instructional leadership role. This is how DP3 interpreted her role in curriculum management:

*As the deputy principal, it is very difficult because I have to manage both the learners' work and the work of the HODs. I keep a record of all educators that I have checked. I check the educators' files and learners' books to see if the syllabus is being covered. After checking educator files, I normally sign and stamp the checked documents. There are also documents that we use for checking if the curriculum has been followed or not. In each subject, there are special curriculum forms that have to be completed by the subject educator, which I use to check if the work is being done or not.*

I now turn to some of the responses from the three principals about the way in which they manage the curriculum. The responses from the three principals are presented from the perspective of the principal as the main instructional leader of the SMT. In School Three, P3 received updates from the HODs about what was happening regarding the business of teaching and learning. While the delegation of duties may be regarded as sound management practice, P3 was at the same time engaging in shared instructional leadership. Sharing of leadership tasks, like curriculum management, is an excellent way of involving the other SMT members (in this case HODs and DPs) in the teaching and learning activities of educators and learners. The delegation of curriculum management tasks to HODs also suggests that P3 was indirectly involved in the curriculum. However, P3 still tries to engage in some curriculum management tasks (e.g., checking learners' workbooks) while walking about the school. When I asked about the principal's involvement in teaching and learning activities, P3 responded:

*As a principal, unfortunately I cannot teach every day because of the overload of administrative submissions I have to do almost daily, but I do check learners' work when I am walking around. The HODs give me a full report of what is happening and follow a number of procedures to ensure teaching and learning is going on.*

P3 received detailed reports on the teaching and learning from the HODs, which was indicative of an indirect instructional leadership role. In School One, P1 managed the curriculum through the different levels of the SMT, utilising the HODs and DP for curriculum management. P1's style of managing the curriculum, with the assistance of HODs and DPs, followed the same leadership style as P3. This also confirmed that P3 and P1 use shared instructional leadership to include other members of the SMT. Similar to P3, P1 (through

shared leadership), used the curriculum management records of educators, compiled by the HOD and DP, to complete an overall curriculum management and replied:

*To ensure whole school curriculum management, HODs keep curriculum management files where they keep records of each educator in their department. The Deputy Principal and I then manage the HODs' records on curriculum management of each educator from each department and subject specialisation.*

In School Two, P2 seemed a lot more involved in the curriculum management processes of the school. P2 regarded curriculum management as priority and engaged actively with the rest of the SMT in addressing the curriculum needs of the school. P2 remarked:

*At the top of my list is curriculum management and as you know it is my job to ensure every single educator in this school is delivering the curriculum in the most effective way. I have regular SMT meetings and the SMT has to report and give me feedback about what is happening in terms of the curriculum.*

Similarly to P1 and P3, P2 also relied on HODs and DPs to carry out the field work when it came to evaluating both the educators' and learners' work. P2 received reports and feedback from HODs which was indicative of another example of a principal that shared instructional leadership tasks like curriculum management with other members of the SMT. Apart from sharing leadership with the other SMT members, P2 showed a little more engagement with being directly involved in the curriculum management of the educators. In managing the curriculum, P2 tends to go directly to the educator's files and check if the work that is being done is in accordance and on track with the prescribed syllabus. When I asked P2 about engagement in teaching and learning activities, P2 responded:

*Every term I supervise the educator's lesson files and check their lesson plans and their forecasts just to make sure they are following the CAPS Policy. Before I check, the HODs would have already checked the educator's files.*

What I discovered in my interviews was that all the SMT members regarded curriculum management as an integral part of their instructional leadership practices, which could possibly change the underperforming status of the school. However, they offered different perceptions of what their particular functions might be in this process, also in relation to the rest of the SMT. Responses from HOD2, HOD3, DP1, DP2, DP3, P1, P2 and P3 indicated that curriculum management was about monitoring and evaluating educators' and learners'

work, with principals sharing leadership and the task of curriculum management with the HODs. The responses from the HODs were also an indication that their practices are in line (more or less) with Weber's (1996) element on "Managing the Curriculum".

#### **4.7.1.2 Sub-theme: Monitoring and evaluation**

This theme was strongly expressed by all the participants, since they found that this aspect of instructional leadership was integral to their role function as an SMT member. Each SMT member (at the level of the HOD, DP and principal) engaged in different ways of monitoring and evaluating educators' and learners' work. For example, in the previous section (4.8.1.1), P1 and P3 shared instructional leadership roles with HODs and DPs who were tasked with monitoring and evaluating educators' and learners' work. The review of the literature also confirmed that monitoring and evaluating the curriculum integrates with the instructional leader's role in assessing the curriculum, which also formed part of the theoretical framework lens of this study. The question of monitoring and evaluating is well provided for in Weber's (1996) model of instructional leadership, to which (as I noted in my literature review in Chapter 2, Section 2.18.3) I proposed the addition of the concept of "shared instructional leadership" to supplement the model in order to account for the various ways in which the SMT members might consider that they can fulfil this role.

The findings from the three schools suggest that HODs, DPs and principals engaged in systematic monitoring and evaluation of educators' and learners' work. P1 and P3 engaged in different levels of monitoring and evaluating the work of educators and learners. The different educator levels of monitoring and evaluation began with the HOD checking the work of the educator in his/her respective subject specialisation department, followed by the DP who monitors and evaluates the work of the HODs, and lastly the principal who monitors the work of learners, HODs and the DP. All the participants gave accounts of monitoring and evaluation through the checking of learners' workbooks, supervising educators' files and ATPs, while the principals and DPs explained how they monitored the HODs', educators' and learners' work as senior SMT members. Their instructional leadership practices of monitoring and evaluating appear synonymous with those researched by Hompashe (2018:29), which seems to be protocol for monitoring in the South African education context.

P1, P2 and P3 engaged in shared leadership (for monitoring and evaluating tasks) with HODs and DPs, which created a team activity in which all SMT members worked collaboratively to complete. Surprisingly, my findings, based on the responses of P1, P2 and P3, posed a striking confirmation for instructional leadership within the context of

underperforming secondary schools. To explicate this further, Hoadley *et al.* (2009:144) assert that the dispersal (or distribution) of instructional leadership tasks, which include overseeing the curriculum, monitoring and supervising educators, implies that these tasks do not take up most of the principal's time. Given that the task of monitoring and supervising seems to be shared amongst DPs and HODs it can be extrapolated (and confirms my findings in Sub-Theme 1, Section 4.7.1.1) that these principals are indeed inundated (and spend more time) with administrative tasks and other daily routines, making their instructional leadership role a more *indirect* one. P1's response demonstrated how monitoring and supervision is shared amongst the SMT:

*We use the following levels when monitoring the curriculum, we start off with HODs checking the educators, then the deputy principal monitors the work of the HODs, and lastly I monitor the work checked by the deputy principal. Sometimes I do check each HOD's and educator's work, one subject and department at a time. It is very time-consuming, but it is something that has to be done in an underperforming school. The department is very particular about curriculum monitoring and management in underperforming secondary schools, so that is why everything has to be on board.*

In School Three, P3 ensured HODs and DPs maintain supervision records related to the curriculum and lesson preparation, which are then handed over to the principal. Similar to P1, P3 uses different levels of management to monitor and evaluate the curriculum, and this was confirmed when he responded as follows:

*Each HOD, as well as the DP, keeps supervision records which are submitted to me where I can see how teachers are completing the curriculum and whether they are preparing their lessons thoroughly. Every term I also check learner, educator and HOD's files and stamp the work they have done.*

In School Two, P2 explained the process that went into the HODs supervision of learners' work. Once again, P2 (similar to P1 and P3) exhibited shared instructional leadership, through engaging HODs in monitoring and evaluating the work of learners at the classroom level. The indirect involvement of P1, P2 and P3 (but still sharing instructional leadership duties) was also identified in an early study by Hoadley *et al.* (2009) where the participants, who were principals, delegated some of their duties to HODs and DPs. P2 described his monitoring and evaluating process as follows:

*The HODs take a class list and choose about five books in the subject that belongs to their department. They go through the learners' work and sign and stamp the workbooks. Those same five books then come to me and I also supervise the work, sign and stamp.*

In School One, DP1 was of the opinion that record keeping was important in monitoring and evaluating the curriculum. DP1 considered maintaining records through a "paper trail" which he indicated was useful to him for accountability purposes:

*I've come to realise that as a manager and a senior manager that the paper trail is important; otherwise I can tell you we are doing this, but if there is no paper trail to show what is being done then there is a problem.*

DP1 then went on to explain the process of monitoring and evaluating in School One. DP1 also engaged in the same process of monitoring and evaluation as some of the HODs, which involved checking learners' books. P1 explained his detailed monitoring and evaluating processes:

*In terms of pupil's books, we have files, classroom files and supervision files. The manager, when I say the managers, the HODs, the deputy that is me...I have a supervision file and the chief (principal) has a supervision file. Part of that supervision is about the child, so it's not just pupils' books ticked off. We put a tick in the corner of the child's name, the books seen, the child's name is written down, work checked, work marked, remedial work, everything has to be there.*

In School Three, DP3 utilised HODs of the various subject departments to carry out the monitoring and evaluation tasks and merely checked the work of the HODs. This form of monitoring and evaluation undertaken by DPs and principals by checking if HODs are doing their work is consistent with monitoring and evaluation processes as expressed in literature (Moshwana & Thaba-Nkadimene, 2016:249). This confirmed that DPs and principals do not appear to be passing the buck of monitoring and evaluation to HODs. The process that DP1, P1, P2 and P3 followed with regard to monitoring and evaluation helps to improve the performance of the school as well as the learners' performance (Moshwana & Thaba-Nkadimene, 2016:249). As with other SMT members' responses (e.g., P1, P2 and P3), again through DP3's response we are informed about the different management level of monitoring and evaluating the curriculum. This was expressed by DP3 as follows:

*I check educators' forecast of work planning on a weekly basis, mostly on a Monday. I check the educators' teaching plans to see that they have covered the daily or weekly tasks set out in that subject. Normally, HODs monitor and evaluate their own departments and I oversee their work. During the IQMS I manage and appraise the work of the HODs and I get a chance to see if everything is in order. It's really difficult to go too in-depth with monitoring and evaluating because there is no time because of other admin duties.*

In School Two, HOD2 had given me insight about monitoring and evaluation at the classroom and learner level. Besides monitoring the learner's work, HOD2 also checked to see if the ATP dates were aligned to the dates in the learner's workbook. The monitoring and evaluation process implemented by HOD2, according to Moshwana and Thaba-Nkadimene (2016:249), provides effective internal control measures which gives the SMT an opportunity to assess whether policies are implemented, and the progress of work is in accordance with the work plans or pace setters. In this way of monitoring, HOD2 was able to check the work of the learner and educator, and still determine if the syllabus was on track. This is what HOD2 had to say about monitoring and evaluation:

*I check learners' and educators' work at certain periods in the month. There is an ATP which I check to verify if the work stipulated by the CAPS policy has been covered by the teacher or not. I also check at random five or six learners' books against the educator's ATP to see if that corresponds according to dates and weeks.*

HOD2 also informed me of the DBE level monitoring and evaluating that HODs have to engage in and the documents that are concerned with this process. HOD2 provided insight about the DBE curriculum tracking by explaining how the curriculum tracker tool works:

*The process of curriculum tracking allows me to monitor the curriculum. A curriculum tracking form which is sent by the department has to be completed every term. Curriculum tracking is done for all grades and all subjects. Curriculum tracking allows me to see how many aspects of a specific curriculum has been covered and if the syllabus has been completed.*

One concern is that the supervision of learners' work does not seem to have a follow-up if there are problems or concerns. None of the participants indicated the measures to address incompetency in learners' work. Although Moshwana and Thaba-Nkadimene (2016:249) assert that monitoring and supervising may be an effective curriculum management exercise, the response of HOD1 suggests that there appears to be paucity on whether



learners are “absorbing” what is being covered in the curriculum despite daily monitoring of teaching and learning activities. In this regard, HOD1 expressed concern over the commitment of the learners to learning the content being taught despite extensive monitoring and evaluating to the extent where the HOD sits in on lessons. HOD1 stated:

*The teacher is in the class every single day because I am monitoring teaching and learning. The teacher is in the class every day, and we go in and sit in on lessons, and we see teaching and learning taking place, but how much is that learner sitting in class and absorbing?*

Monitoring and evaluating the curriculum is an important activity in underperforming secondary schools. The principals, through shared instructional leadership, engaged other members of the SMT (HODs and DPs) in the process of monitoring and evaluation. The role played by HODs was mainly to monitor learners’ work by checking their books and dates according to the scheduled ATP of the curriculum. The DPs largely do the same monitoring and evaluation of learners’ work as the HODs, with DP3 monitoring and evaluating the work of HODs as well. The monitoring and evaluating processes that P1, P2 and P3 engaged in such as the monitoring of the HODs’ work, evaluating the assessment programme and ensuring that HODs monitor the work of educators and learners, are listed as the main activities for principals by Bush and Glover (as cited in Mestry, 2017:258). The SMT members in all the researched schools actively engaged in the monitoring and evaluating processes; however, the effectiveness of this process can be questioned due to the small amount of time spent because of other administrative duties that SMTs have to perform and also that only a few of the learners’ work is sampled, signed and stamped by the SMT members. This may make this important process more of a formality to strike off on the school’s management checklist.

#### **4.7.1.3 Sub-theme: Analysing and assessing the curriculum**

All the participants in this study indicated that they were actively involved in analysing and assessing the curriculum. This theme is also provided for as one of the elements in Weber’s (1996) model, which forms part of the theoretical framework for this study. All the participants in my study appeared to be engaging in analysing and assessing the curriculum, as outlined in Weber’s (1996) Model of Instructional Leadership. During my interviews with the participants, I discovered that different SMT members expressed different interpretations of how they analysed and assessed the curriculum. I now delve into the various ways in

which the curriculum is assessed and analysed, as expressed by the different SMT members.

In School One, HOD1 raised concerns over the lack of feedback from the DBE with regard to their monthly analysis reports. HOD1 completed monthly curriculum reports, which were then submitted to the DBE. For HOD1, completing the official monthly curriculum reports is what she considered as analysing and assessing the curriculum. However, HOD1 expressed concern about the follow-up from the DBE after the monthly curriculum reports were completed. There seemed to be no follow-up/feedback on the part of the DBE. HOD1 expressed anger and frustration over the fruitless analysis process whereby there was no strategic planning to improve the NSC results of the school, even though the DBE was aware of the weak areas within this underperforming secondary school. The monthly curriculum reports are comprehensive spreadsheets that include each subject offered in the school with the percentage of tasks (or content) completed (or in the process of being completed). By using the monthly curriculum reports, HOD1 actively engaged in some form of assessing and analysing the curriculum. Concerned mostly about the DBE feedback, a frustrated HOD1 responded:

*We are sending monthly reports, so where is the feedback from the monthly reports? Whoever is dealing with this feedback, and analysing the forms, after the analysis there should be a report. Why isn't that report sent to us? Give us strategies to better what you have discovered about our school by analysing that monthly report. So where's the feedback for us now? You are monitoring us, but where's the support given from that?*

In School Two, HOD2 collected subject analysis statistics from the subject educators and then analysed the results to establish whether intervention is required or not. This strategy used by HOD2 was different as compared to HOD1 in that HOD2 considered analysing subject statistics (based on learner results) as part of analysing and assessing the curriculum. While what HOD2 was doing could be considered as analysing subject results rather than the curriculum, the task of analysing and assessing the subject results can eventually form the foundation for when there needs to be assessment and analysis of the whole curriculum. A strategy that HOD2 used required level one educators to re-assess the work of the learner if the desired results were not achieved. While this drill-type method towards written work may help or favour the learner, it may also impact negatively since the learner is still faced with the June, trial and final examinations. Under strict examination conditions, the learner only has one chance to answer the examination paper and the

learner does not have any resources to work with, like the work being re-assessed. This could also be another reason why despite trying so hard to give learners work to re-do, the NSC results are still below standard in School Two. On the issue of analysing and assessing the curriculum, HOD replied by outlining the process:

*Every educator has to complete an analysis for their subject(s) once a test or exam is complete. These statistics are then analysed to see if there has been any improvement or if intervention is needed. All schools use the SA SAMS computer programme for the capturing of marks, so I check all mark sheets before the term marks are captured. During the term all educators are encouraged to re-assess learners where they have gone wrong, so they can improve their marks, but they are not allowed to do this when it comes to examinations.*

In School One, DP1 related the analysis of the curriculum to personal goals, and the attainment of pass rate percentages required for improving the NSC pass rates in the school. DP1 desired a significant percentage improvement to attain the required minimum pass rates in the NSC examination. The response by DP1 also showed how personal it was for him to achieve the desirable pass rates:

*Last year we produced 38%, I want to be better than that 38%. If we get to 45%, some may say it is an improvement, for me, it is not good enough. Even 65%, yes it would be great to score 65% to be out of the NSLA Programme, but I suppose it's personal goals, my personal goals.*

In School One, P1 also delegated each educator the task of designing a SIP for a specific subject. P1 also ensured that the SIP was implemented by each educator. P1 exhibited positive and effective instructional leadership practices by assessing the curriculum based on the academic performance statistics and then carefully selected specialist educators to teach those subjects in which performance is poor. In doing this, P1 was making a significant contribution towards improving the NSC results of the school where educators, who are not performing well, based on their NSC results, were substituted with another educator in the hope of improving the learner academic performance. After analysing and assessing the performance statistics, if learners in a specific subject were not performing as well as should be, P1 then appointed another educator (who is also a subject specialist) to take over the teaching in that particular subject and assigned the previous educator to another subject and/or grade, in the hope of yielding better results. The substitution of these

educators was not punitive in any way, but merely a re-shuffle of educators to try to bring about (positive) change in learner academic performance. This is what P1 had to say:

*At the end of each examination cycle, I am presented with the analysis of the results for each grade and subject. If there are problems in our results, then I sit with the SMT, and we make changes to our curriculum for the following academic year. We identify teachers who may be stronger in certain areas to handle areas of weakness. I call parents and interview them regarding their child's poor performance and we work out ways in which the child's academic performance can be improved.*

In School Three, P3 played a direct role in analysing and assessing the curriculum and implemented a collaborative approach by including the entire staff in discussions, especially when it came to improvement strategies. When asked about analysing and assessing the curriculum, P3 said:

*I analyse the results of the various subjects, paying careful attention to our Grade 12 results because if these results are bad then our school will be underperforming again. When I have my staff meeting (with educators and the SMT including HODs and DP) after an examination, I would normally discuss each subject and the results, and we then proceed to our improvement strategies and interventions.*

In School Two, DP2 made attempts to include and make parents aware of the child's poor performance. DP2 considered analysing the various subject results as part of the process of assessing and analysing the curriculum. This is what DP2 had to say about analysing the curriculum:

*Even if a learner has achieved an overall pass according to the department requirements but has still got a red ring or two for a failed subject, I still call the parents. This is so the parents are aware of the weak areas of the learner, and we can move forward in improving the learner's mark in that particular subject.*

DP3 engaged in curriculum analysis and assessment similarly to the other SMT members. However, DP3 indicated that School Three may need to analyse their delivery of the curriculum to what they have done in the past. DP3 engaged in shared instructional leadership in which HODs gather information in the form of subject analyses from the educators. This information is then passed on from HODs to the DP and the principal. The subject analysis involved each educator collating the information on the percentage of learners who have passed and failed (also including the number of learners attaining

different percentage levels, e.g., 40-49%, 50-59% etc.) DP3 responded to the process of analysing and assessing the curriculum as follows:

*Each educator will do an analysis for the subject and grade that they teach. The HODs then collate this information and submit it to me as well as the principal. These statistics are submitted to the department (DBE) every term ending. I critically analyse the statistics and identify areas of weaknesses, and we work a little more with those subjects and educators in trying to improve those results. It is our first time that we are an underperforming school, so for me, it's a matter of analysing the results and trying to put things back in order that got us an above 60% pass rate in the past. I believe that the way we went about our teaching and learning worked in the past, so these learners just need a little more attention.*

HOD3 and P2 were actively engaged in the analysis process, specifically in the assessment mark allocations for learners in the different subjects. The responses of HOD3 and P2 indicated that they do not allow learners' marks to enter a danger zone, which would be along the percentage range of below 40%. HOD3 and P2 showed good anticipation when it came to assessing the mark range of learners and preventing them from achieving below minimum pass requirements. P2 also went to the extent of calling up SMT meetings to discuss areas of weakness. HOD3's response to the analysis and assessment of the curriculum was:

*I prefer taking an active role when it comes to analysing and assessing our curriculum, so what I do is ask educators to give me monthly updates as to how their learners are performing in the different subjects. The good thing about this method is both the educator and I know exactly when a learner is going to fall short in the promotion requirements. We can red flag learners, and we have time to do something about a failing learner, than rather wait for the last term when it is too late.*

When asked about analysing and assessing the curriculum, P2 responded:

*When I receive the mark sheets from the HODs, it has already been looked at and scrutinised by them, so I do a final check and make sure that there are no marks on the border, like about 2-3% more needed for a pass. I then meet with the HODs and the DP at an SMT meeting, and we highlight those subjects that have performed well and those that have performed poorly. The main problem areas are mostly Mathematics and English Home Language.*

All the participants in this study actively engaged in the analysis and assessment of the curriculum. They implemented strategies to improve learner academic performance when weaknesses were identified. The DBE, however, needs to offer feedback and possible remedial measures based on each underperforming secondary school's monthly report of learner academic performance as expressed by HOD1. Responses from participants like HOD1, P1, P3, DP2 and DP3 indicated that for these SMT members, assessing and analysing the curriculum is about engaging critically with learner academic performance (results). For the other SMT members like HOD2 and P2, completing the monthly curriculum reports for the DBE allowed them to assess and analyse the curriculum. A very significant observation that came out strongly in the participants' responses (as discussed above) was that they only limited their analysis and assessment of the curriculum to the test and examination pre-mark and post-mark submission processes. Thereafter, those marks are analysed and measures are put in place to improve areas of weakness, for example parents are called to school.

#### **4.7.1.4 Sub-theme: Encouraging professional development**

Professional development is a process of specialised training as a way of improving oneself, the staff, or organisation through various activities. Within the teaching profession in South Africa, educators are required to continually develop themselves professionally. Professional development ensures that educators gain the necessary skills, knowledge and other specialised acquisitions that will enable them to improve in the teaching profession. A system called Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) had been introduced in South Africa since 2007 to ensure ongoing teacher professional development. The CPTD system is currently managed by the South African Council of Educators (SACE) and the DBE. Professional development has the ability to contribute to significant improvements and is a process that educators should be actively engaged in all year round (Kennedy, 2016:945).

DeMonte (2013:2) asserts that professional development is an important link in "design and implementation" when trying to bring about education reform in schools. With DeMonte's (2013:2) assertion in mind, when addressing the research question on instructional leadership teaching and learning activities, I probed by asking participants the different professional development activities they initiated, that aimed to improve learner academic performance. To begin with, DP1 was an English educator who now only teaches one class of Grade 12 and tends to focus on the Languages Department. DP1 stated that professional development is done in the form of meetings with either the staff or the Languages

Department. This is what DP1 had to say about his attempts at initiating professional development:

*I meet with educators. I still have a fondness for the languages, that's where I come from, so I tend to meet with the languages department more than I meet with the rest of the team, so I still keep abreast of the developments in terms of languages. So I find that I am in this position (as DP) I think three, four months, so there's still a long way to go, but I get more of an opportunity now to meet with staff to nurture them, and the good thing is that the staff looks at me as a friend which is both good and bad.*

Ghavifekr and Ibrahim (2014:54) indicate that HODs (as instructional leaders) have a crucial role to play in initiating (and coordinating) professional development with the aim of improving learner academic performance. The responses from HOD1, HOD2 and HOD3 suggest that professional development activities mostly occur within the confines of the specialised subject department (within the school) or workshops (which are externally conducted). In view of the importance of the HOD's role in professional development, there seemed to be very little professional development that was initiated across all three schools in my study. The professional development activities initiated by HODs appear basic in its organisation and content, as incorporated in HOD2's response:

*Well, all of our educators attend workshops and orientation programmes related to their subject curriculum. The only professional development activities I would actually say I coordinate are the subject committee meetings, where educators meet to discuss ways in which they can improve their results. They also discuss strategies at these meetings and plan and prepare for the term or year ahead. We have quite a tight school schedule, so coordinating professional development activities are not always easy with all the administration and management duties I have to engage in.*

In School Three, HOD3 interpreted the agenda (matters discussed) of the subject committee meetings as part of professional development. Only speaking about professional development issues, as pointed out by HOD3, may not be sufficient for teacher knowledge or continuous life-long learning, which is the main area of professional development, given the underperforming status of School Three. HOD3's attempt at initiating professional development appeared to be ineffective, with little or no benefit to the educators who are being engaged. To support my claim, Feiman-Nemser (cited in Borko, Jacobs and Koellner, 2010:548) argues that in order for schools to engage their learners in powerful learning opportunities, powerful learning opportunities must be offered to educators. Borko *et al.* (2010:548) note that professional development opportunities must be based on the idea of a

life-long learner “grounded in a conception of learning to teach as a lifelong endeavour and designed around a continuum of teacher learning”. HOD3 also raised concerns about the DBE’s role in providing professional development, which appeared to be lacking at present. HOD3’s response to initiating professional development activities was as follows:

*I do speak about certain issues at our department or subject committee meetings, which we then take as professional development discussed and completed. I would like to see the Department (DBE) getting more involved in structured CPTD programmes like every month.*

SACE requires all educators to develop themselves professionally on an ongoing basis, however, HOD2 noted that time spent on administration and daily school activities do not allow them to initiate enough professional development activities. P1, P3 and DP3 initiated some professional development activities by sending their staff to DBE workshops. P1, P3 and DP3 allow their SMT members to attend the DBE professional development activities which are externally organised (and coordinated) outside of the confines of the school. In support of P1, P3 and DP3’s concession to allow members of staff to attend professional development workshops out of school, Borko *et al.* (2010:550) describe professional development activities and experiences as occurring in a multiple of contexts, whether it is within the school, or taking place outside the school. This was P3’s response to professional development:

*I send educators to professional development workshops and presentations that our school is invited to. I try to let them participate in as much professional development activities as possible. Sometimes at school I may conduct a small professional development workshop with the SMT on a particular topic like conducting examinations or classroom management.*

On a similar note, P1 responded:

*We do conduct some of our own professional development workshops internally. Sometimes we include topics based on certain circulars and correspondence we may have received from the department and use this to capacitate our teachers on these topics and issues. During the year teachers attend various professional development activities on sport, subject specialisations and co-curricular activities which are facilitated by the Department.*

P1 and P3 made some good attempts at promoting and initiating professional development activities. Both these principals also rely on the DBE to conduct professional development



activities, which they allow their educators to attend. P1 and P3 also develop their own topics for professional development, which also constitute good instructional leadership practices in line with Weber's (1996) element in which the instructional leader provides "professional development opportunities" for the staff. In School Two, DP3 informed me that the SMT organises professional development activities every month. Drawing on some of the topics for professional development highlighted by DP3 like "discipline" and "classroom management", Matherson and Windle (2017:28) caution against the use of "sit and get" professional development which does not support the engagement of critical higher-order thinking skills which can be applied across the curriculum. Matherson and Windle (2017:28) further note that if educators are expected to use methods that engage learners in higher order thinking skills, then the same must apply for the quality of professional development activities provided for educators. With regard to professional development, DP3 stated:

*Besides the department organised workshops, the SMT organises a professional development activity every month. The activities are normally based on educational issues and include topics like discipline, classroom management and teaching and learning strategies. Educators attend curriculum workshops in different subjects and are informed when these workshops are organised. Sometimes there are workshops, and sometimes there is none.*

In School Two, DP2 and P2 expressed concern over the time constraints that they are currently facing. Due to their already tight schedule for the Grade 12 learners, both DP2 and P2 were honest enough to indicate that they have been lacking in providing professional development activities for the staff. DP2 remarked honestly:

*Well, lately I haven't done any professional development activities with the staff because we were all engaged in departmental workshops for various subjects. The time just isn't enough for me or any other management members to conduct any professional development workshops. Everyone is aware of what is expected of them in order to improve our results, so there isn't a real need to conduct in-school professional development workshops because as it is educators are already exhausted with our intense Grade 12 programme to improve our results.*

DP2's opinion that professional development can be excluded due to educator exhaustion or familiarisation with educational issues, may not seem acceptable in an underperforming secondary school, given the fact that educators continuously need to develop themselves professionally for the sake of improving their NSC results. DP2's view that "everyone is aware of what is expected of them" in terms of professional development also does not

support some of the main ideas behind professional development activities as stated in literature, which states that professional development must be ongoing, sustainable, and provide educators with a cyclic opportunity for experimentation and reflection (Borko *et al.*, 2010:550). The fact that the educators of this school are not fully engaged in CPTD may mean that the educators are continuing to use the same methods or approaches to teaching and learning with no expanded opportunities for improvement.

P2 stressed the need for the DBE to organise professional development workshops targeted specifically at some of the issues affecting underperforming secondary schools. P2 also disseminates information obtained from principals' meetings that he feels are topics/aspects that can enhance professional development of the staff. This dissemination of professional development information is what Fiske and Ladd (2004:162) refer to as the "cascade model", where an individual who is trained, passes on the knowledge gained to other colleagues. In addition, Fiske and Ladd's (2004) cascade model on professional development can work effectively within the context of South African underperforming secondary schools since very few members can attend and cascade the information to the others, without compromising the basic functionality of the school. This would ensure that there is not a large percent of educators absent and the academic programme (timetable) can operate without disruptions and loss of instructional time. This is what P2 had to say about professional development:

*Whenever I attend a meeting, I come back and cover certain aspects which may be linked to professional development. I think that the department needs to arrange more professional development workshops during the year and address some of the main issues like poor performance or dealing with discipline problems.*

Although the SMT members seem to be initiating some professional development activities within their schools, there is still a need for specialised driven professional development activities which should come from within the school. The responses of the participants also indicated that time negatively impacted on their attempts at developing professional development activities. This was also due to the time spent by the SMT members and educators on the Grade 12 NSC intervention programmes which usually happen after school hours. The response from HOD3 suggests that more professional development needs to be offered (or initiated) by the DBE. DP2, P1 and P3 engaged in the few professional development activities that are offered by the DBE, which are mostly subject related.

#### 4.8 THEME 3 PRELIMINARY THEMES AND CODING

For the emergence of Theme 3, I followed a similar path of identifying the sub-themes across the data and then going into the detail of the different levels of the SMT (as expressed by the participants in the different schools). This process evolved as follows:

**Table 4.4: Theme 3 Sub-themes and coding**

THEME 3: CONSIDERATIONS OF NEGATIVE FACTORS IMPACTING ON INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP						
Sub-theme: Perceptions of Learner Discipline	Sub-theme: Learner Barriers to Instructional Leadership	Sub-theme: Lack of Parental Support	Sub-theme: Safety and Security	Sub-theme: Socio-Economic Context	Sub-theme: Substance Abuse	Sub-theme: Promotion and Progression Policy
<b>Codes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disrespect</li> <li>leads to educator resignation</li> <li>early retirement</li> <li>Reporting indiscipline to parents</li> <li>Negative learner attitudes</li> <li>Parents ignore indiscipline</li> <li>Non-submission of work</li> <li>No cooperation</li> <li>Work not done</li> <li>SBA non-submission</li> </ul>	<b>Codes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-submission of tasks</li> <li>Failure to complete homework</li> <li>Poor apathy</li> <li>Negative attitude</li> <li>Poor learner attendance</li> <li>Late-coming</li> <li>Language barrier</li> <li>Poor literacy and numeracy levels</li> <li>Lack of resources</li> </ul>	<b>Codes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of monitoring</li> <li>Poor parent apathy</li> <li>Lack of interest</li> <li>Poor/no attendance at parent meetings</li> <li>Lack of communication</li> <li>Lack of interest</li> </ul>	<b>Codes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Security guards</li> <li>Credibility of school security</li> <li>Safety of educators and learners</li> <li>Outside dangers</li> <li>DBE provided security</li> <li>Random searches</li> <li>Safety committees</li> <li>Access control</li> </ul>	<b>Codes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents show no concern</li> <li>Parents do not attend meetings</li> <li>Poor parental communication</li> <li>Unemployment</li> <li>Poverty</li> <li>Learners work to support families</li> <li>Learner absenteeism</li> <li>Dysfunctional families</li> <li>Social grants</li> <li>Informal settlements</li> <li>Non-payment of school fees</li> <li>Drug riddled community</li> </ul>	<b>Codes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learner Consuming illicit substances</li> <li>Drugs</li> <li>alcohol abuse</li> <li>Community problem</li> <li>Substance abuse on school premises</li> <li>Lack of concentration</li> <li>Impact on learner performance</li> <li>Start from young age</li> </ul>	<b>Codes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progressed learners</li> <li>Cannot fail twice</li> <li>Lack of basic skills</li> <li>Stems from primary school</li> <li>Intervention strategies</li> <li>Future of progressed learners</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor attendance</li> <li>• Late-coming</li> <li>• Petty reason absenteeism</li> <li>• Stalling the syllabus</li> <li>• Language barriers</li> <li>• Low literacy and numeracy levels</li> <li>• Apathy</li> </ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cigarettes is school the norm</li> <li>• Under the influence in the classroom</li> <li>• Parents ignore addiction</li> <li>• Prevalent problem</li> <li>• Substances at an early age</li> </ul>		
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#### 4.8.1 Discussion and interpretation of Theme 3 from the analysis

The discussion and interpretation of Theme 3 that follows is in response to the third research sub-question: *What are some of the factors that SMTs' consider as impacting negatively on their instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools?*

The research objective in relation to this research question was to identify those factors that SMT members consider impact negatively when engaging in their roles as instructional leaders in an underperforming secondary school.

##### 4.8.1.1 Sub-theme: perceptions of learner discipline

The responses from the participants indicated that many of them associated poor learner discipline with an indifferent attitude towards school work, which was problematic in their schools. Some of the offences described by the participants which learners were guilty of included: An indifferent attitude to their school work; disruptive behaviour; use of illicit substances; bunking; and refusal to submit assessments. Similar issues were also identified in an earlier study on underperforming secondary schools in South Africa by Louw, Bayat and Eigelaar-Meets (2011:73). Poor learner discipline surfaced strongly when I asked participants about whether there were any factors that they considered as negatively impacting on their instructional leadership practices. No matter how clichéd poor discipline may seem in the context of education, it is quite a significant factor that must be looked at within the context of an underperforming secondary school. Alongside the challenge of

underperformance, schools present learners with different needs, behaviours and contexts, which pose a challenge (McKay *et al.*, 2017:250).

In speaking about the learner discipline issues in School Two, DP2 described the situation as the “most stressful”. DP2 raised concerns about the learners they have been challenged with in recent times, and also attributed learner indiscipline to educator resignation and early retirements. This was a striking example of job dissatisfaction and low morale, to the extent of educators even exiting the system. The exiting of educators and SMT members places strain on the school, especially since many seasoned educators teach Grade 12 learners, which may also impact negatively on the NSC results. Mestry and Khumalo (2012:105) also caution that this type of rebellion and lack of learner discipline impacts negatively on teaching and learning. When I asked DP2 about those factors that were considered as negatively impacting on instructional leadership practices, DP2 responded strongly about learner indiscipline:

*The most stressful situation at the moment is learner discipline. I do not understand the type of young generation we have today. These learners have absolutely no respect for education and educators. It seems as if educators have had enough! We have had quite a few educators that have resigned and taken their early retirement packages because mainly of the discipline and poor attitude towards school work shown by our learners.*

In School Three, HOD3 shared an example of how learners’ indifferent attitude towards their school work was coupled with indiscipline. An “optimal learning environment” comprises of not only educators, but also the SMT, parents and learners (McKay *et al.*, 2017:250). What was noteworthy about HOD3’s response was an indication that parents were unaware of some of the acts of indiscipline committed by the learners. HOD3 came across as helpless in the situation in the face of learner defiance and truancy. The frustration of HOD3 is understandable taking into account that the NSC examination is the school exit examination and learners did not seem to be taking their Grade 12 academic year seriously enough. Furthermore, to add to this frustrating situation, HOD3 was also concerned about accountability to the DBE (for learner academic performance) taking into account the type of learners they have and the lack of discipline among some learners. In response to learner indiscipline, HOD3 said:

*I have made calls to parents and on occasions the parent did not even know that the child was not at school, but they had sent their child to school in the morning. So,*

*now you tell me what the school is supposed to do when we have kids like these that we have to teach and even answer to the department for their poor performance.*

Another pertinent issue raised by DP2 was the lack of parental involvement in enforcing learner discipline. Lumadi (2019:2) cites various authors (Castro, Expósito-Casa, López-Martin, Lizasoain, Navarro Asencio & Gaviria, 2015; Catsambis, 2011; Lloyd-Smith, 2008) who stress the role played by parents in enforcing and managing discipline to aid in improved learner academic performance. DP2's response expressed frustration from a management perspective when the school tried to communicate to parents the discipline problems that may have occurred. In contrast to what is stated in the literature (Lumadi 2019), according to DP2, some parents did not cooperate with the SMT in issues of indiscipline with the aim of developing the learner into a better person. Some parents found it difficult to accept their child's misconduct, which resulted in disagreements with the SMT and a poor relationship with the school. DP2 felt that in this way they place their child's education at risk, and he opined:

*Another problem for me personally is the parents. Instead of helping us, they sometimes want to come to school and fight against us. The parents even take their child's side over issues of discipline. I have had enough parents that have sat in my office and argued that their child could not have done what we claimed.*

Similarly, in School Three, P3 alluded to how poor discipline was a significant contributing factor to underperformance in the 2019 NSC examinations. P3's comparison of the previous academic years (prior to 2019) found that those learners did not exhibit discipline concerns and their NSC pass rates were up to standard. P3 then alluded to the 2019 learners, who were guilty of indiscipline and may have also attributed to the underperforming NSC pass rate for that year (2019). This response by P3 also confirms the claim made by Mestry and Khumalo (2012:105) that poor learner discipline can indeed impact negatively on teaching and learning processes. P3 said:

*Learner behaviour and discipline has impacted on our NSC pass rate. We were not an underperforming school in previous years and we noticed that the learners last year had discipline problems which contributed to the NSC poor pass rate.*

Apart from the discipline problems, learners' poor attitude towards their school work was indicated by the participants. DP3 did not have a problem with regard to learner discipline as such, but recognised the way in which an indifferent attitude towards school work was

affecting the NSC pass rates. DP3 stated the following about learner discipline in relation to academic performance:

*To be honest our learners don't really give us a discipline problem but their attitude towards their school work is just not enough to produce better results.*

Similarly, P2 also commented on learners' poor attitude towards their school work. P2 mentioned the importance of the Grade 12 academic year for learners exiting the school system. P2 also shared some shocking experiences of learners who were unfamiliar with their examination timetables and exhibited a negative attitude towards their work; some did not submit their assessment tasks, including oral tasks for languages. This is what P2 had to say:

*Learners' attitude to work is terribly bad. The learners have a 'don't care' attitude towards their work. I mean if you are in matric, your future should be the most important thing to you. I talk to learners' everyday about the importance of getting a matric certificate so they can get good jobs or even admission to universities. Some learners do not even know when their examination period begins or ends, which tells you their apathy towards school. The Grade 12 learners sometimes do not hand their practical tasks or complete their oral tasks for English or Afrikaans.*

Poor discipline and learners' indifferent attitude towards their school work featured in the participants' perspectives as playing a significant role in the underperformance of the three schools. The participants' responses for the most part indicate a lack of discipline and respect, and little or no interest in the academic programme of the school on the part of learners. However, Lumadi (2019:7) notes that educators also have a key role to play in motivating and managing learner behaviour to which no participant made reference. All the schools have their own discipline policies and measures in place according to their code of conduct. Although the schools in this study did not encounter any serious discipline problems where there was a need for structured disciplinary tribunals and suspensions, the participants showed concern about learner discipline and how this impacts on the SMT's instructional leadership practices.

#### **4.8.1.2 Learner barriers to instructional leadership**

HOD1, HOD2, HOD3, DP2, DP3, P1, P2 and P3 alluded to an emerging sub-theme which I have titled: 'Learner barriers to instructional leadership. This sub-theme focuses on the learner contributions to what is making instructional leadership (including teaching and

learning) increasingly difficult in the underperforming secondary schools in my study. My discussion and analysis that follows included examples of how direct learner related issues were impeding specifically the Grade 12 academic programme which was partly to blame (as expressed by participants) for the underperformance status of the school.

In School Two, DP2 explained how learners did not seem to be completing homework tasks. DP2 commented on the remediation of content in the form of homework and had this to say:

*I have given learners homework and many times they come with the work not done.*

Similarly, in School Three, DP3 encountered the same problem as DP2. Important to note is that learner failure to submit assessment tasks which jeopardised their chances of passing the NSC examinations since the School-Based Assessment (SBA) counts for 25% for some subjects, and even 50% in subjects where there is a Practical Assessment Task (PAT) to be completed (e.g., Tourism Studies, Hospitality Studies and Dramatic Arts). DP3 remarked the following about learner submission of tasks:

*The challenges we are facing with learners at the moment is non-submission of important assessment tasks in Grade 12. Many learners do not learn for tests and examinations and it's quite clear as you can see we are underperforming.*

Learner attendance and absenteeism was another sore point that participants referred to as a cause for concern. Simply put, if learners are not present at school, they will not gain an understanding of the content taught on that day. This places educators and SMT in a difficult situation of tracking the learner who has missed work. In view of this, HOD3 described how learner attendance had a negative impact on learners writing the final NSC examination:

*Learner attendance is another problem we are faced with. The irregular attendance by learners means that they have not learnt the content for that day or week and puts them in a very bad situation when it comes to the final examination.*

In School One, P1 described how learners lost the first lesson of the day due to late coming, but attributed this to the long distances that learners have to travel to get to school. P1 said:

*In most cases in our school, the first lesson is mostly missed out by the children because they travel far and wide.*

In School Two, P2 also experienced frequent absenteeism for “petty” reasons. Like HOD3, P2 was concerned about the impact that absenteeism had on the learning programme and



academic performance of the Grade 12 learners. P2 was also concerned about educators who try to go back in the syllabus to teach absentees and then fail to fulfil their ATP dates and schedules, as prescribed by the DBE. This was P2's response:

*Learners are absent quite a lot for petty reasons and then educators have to go back and re-teach which makes it very difficult for the educator and the learner. This also leads to educators falling behind in the syllabus, and then they have to play catch up because the department can question them about why their ATPs are not on track.*

HOD1, HOD2 and P3 commented on the literacy and numeracy levels in their schools. The language barrier to learning had been identified in early studies in South African schools. To cite one example, Engelbrecht (2006:127-128) indicates that educators found it very challenging to address the learning needs of Xhosa learners because of the language barrier, since lessons were in either English or Afrikaans. HOD2 informed me that the learners, who spoke English as a second language found the English Home language syllabus very difficult. Furthermore, HOD2 explained how second language learners affect the NSC pass rate. HOD2 opined:

*The language barrier is another factor that we struggle with. Many of the learners are second language speakers and sometimes struggle with the English Home Language syllabus. These learners contribute a lot to the NSC pass rate because if you fail English Home Language, you fail the whole exam.*

In School Three, P3 also attributed the poor academic performance in the NSC examinations to learners' poor reading and writing skills, which do not meet the demands of the NSC examinations. Englebrecht (2006:128) asserts that learners with language barriers should be provided with additional support. However, P3's response points to the concern of poor language proficiency even as late as Grade 12. The language barrier poses a real problem, given the standard of the NSC final examination papers, which require a firm command of the English language to answer questions. This was also evident in the findings of Bayat et al.'s (2014b:52) study in South African underperforming secondary schools, where second language learners struggled with English as a Home Language in Grade 12. This brings into question the calibre of Grade 12 learners waiting to write their final NSC examinations. P3 also explained that learners have difficulty in comprehending the questions in the examination papers, which also leads to poor learner academic performance and opined the following:

*I mean if you come and sit in a class you will see we have some Grade 10 to 12 learners that read and write poorly. That is why they are performing poorly; many cannot even understand the questions in the exam paper.*

In School One, HOD1, as a Mathematics HOD, related examples from her experiences with the learners during class time. Not only did learners demonstrate poor knowledge in her Mathematics classes, she also realised that the learners experienced literacy problems. This concurs with South African learners' poor performance in literacy and numeracy over the last decade, as indicated in Spaul's (2011) study of international benchmark examinations. HOD1 explained the literacy and numeracy challenges using the following example:

*We have children sitting in Grade 8, 9 and 10 that don't know basic multiplication, they don't know what's  $4 \times 9$ , and they don't know how to read a word of English for that matter. I have referred three learners to psychosocial services to get them into a special school because they cannot read a single word of English. Now the system is failing us because these learners are passed on to a high school and we cannot go back and do basic literacy and numeracy.*

HOD1 went further to describe her frustrations with some of the Grade 12 learners' attitudes towards the academic programme. HOD1's response was a feeling of helplessness towards the way in which learners approached their studies. HOD1 used the word "lazy" to describe the way in which learners went about their studies. This type of learner attitude was also identified in Engelbrecht's (2006:125) study, in which learners exhibited a lack of commitment and motivation to the learning process. HOD1 even mentioned an incident where an above-average learner boldly said that he/she had not even touched a book in preparation for the Mathematics examination. Statements like this made by learners indicate the type of apathy some learners exhibit and sometimes this sort of behaviour may spread to other learners. While it cannot be proved that other learners emulate such defiance as mentioned by HOD1, incidents like this further complicate the instructional leadership of the SMT. The SMT has to expend valuable time getting the so-called "lazy" learners to learn in order to pass the NSC examinations. A frustrated HOD1 further stated:

*If a child refuses to pick a book and learn because he is so lazy, how do we change that? I have had a child whom I said I was so disappointed with his math results, and he says, "Oh mam I got these results because I didn't even pick up a book and learn". So imagine the brighter kids saying: "I didn't even pick up a book and learn". How do we change that now?*

In School One, P1 attributed some of the learning barriers to personal resources that learners may not possess, which P1 thought could make a difference to learners' academic performance. This was P1's response:

*Our children don't possess study aids, internet, exposure to newspapers, and in some cases even a TV which is an important and integral part in a child's education.*

The learner barriers identified above such as absenteeism, late-coming, non-submission of important tasks, poor literacy and numeracy levels in higher grades, and dearth of various aids to learning, are all aspects which can possibly keep the schools in this study in their underperforming zones. Furthermore, these learner barriers create a challenge for instructional leaders who are trying to improve learner academic performance but have to now focus on the challenges identified in this section.

#### **4.8.1.3 Lack of parental support**

Parents (or, in some cases, the child's legal guardian) play a pivotal role in the learning process. Various studies (i.e., Bayat *et al.* 2014b; Engelbrecht, 2006; Taole, 2013) illustrate the importance of parental support between the school and parents for improved learner academic performance. As indicated in my discussion of accountability (Section 4.7.1.2), many participants felt that parents are responsible for the child's learning after the child has left the school and should take on some accountability for learner academic performance. This is what the participants referred to as "after-hours" learning. Participants expressed that the role played by parents should be to ensure, or at least to monitor, the remediation and consolidation of the work done in school. Seven out of the nine participants expressed their concern over the lack of support shown by parents. In some cases, the parents were also deemed to be a contributing factor (as expressed by the participants) towards poor academic performance and the underperformance in the NSC examinations. DP1 and DP2 expressed concern over the lack of interest shown by parents, particularly as they could function as *after-hour facilitators* in assisting or ensuring learners are doing their school work at home. For example, in School Two, DP2 opined:

*The parents have contributed a great deal to some of our underperformance statistics. The educators are doing what they supposed to do at school, but what are the parents doing after school hours? There is no monitoring or even care about what is happening in school. I have given learners homework and many times they*

*come with the work not done. I want to know if the parents are even checking the child's books when they go home.*

DP1 described the three support structures that are integral to teaching and learning in what he called a "tripartite alliance", referring to: 1) the learner; 2) the educator; and 3) the parent. DP1 recognised this important "tripartite alliance" partnership for the improvement of learner academic performance. DP1 also indicated that the learner is only in school until 14:20pm; thereafter the learner is in the custody of the parent, who then has an obligation to oversee the work of the child. To highlight the point of interest shown by parents, Taole's (2013:81) findings revealed that parents did not take interest in the learner's work nor made any attempts to report to the school to enquire about the child's progress. This is what DP1 had to say about parental involvement:

*I think a big factor is the apathy shown by parents across the board. Education for me is a tripartite alliance: student, teacher and parent. We can put measures in place, but the child leaves school at 14:20pm. What the child does outside of school is out of our control, but pupils need to be monitored.*

On the topic of discipline, HOD3 earlier commented on the apathy shown by parents, and shared examples where parents were well aware of what was going on in the child's life, but showed little or no interest in aligning the child with the academic programme of the school. With regard to parental involvement, HOD3 responded:

*Some of the learners put other things first, like playing soccer, or going to parties on the weekend. You have the parents to blame for this. Some parents do not even know what their children are doing at school.*

According to the participants in this study, all three schools have ensured that there is continuous communication between the school and the parents. Ezzani (2019:580) draws attention to how the school collaborated with parents through parent meetings, increased parent contact, and educating parents about the positive impact of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), in relation to the instructional programme. All three schools in my study host parent meetings where the parents can discuss the progress of the learner and the school has an opportunity to form a relationship with parents in order to find ways to assist the learner in improving academically. However, the attendance of parents in response to school invitations to parent meetings was highlighted as a matter of concern by HOD2, DP1, HOD1, P1 and P3. This was a clear indication that parents' failure to respond

to the school's invitations to address their child's academic performance was prevalent in all three schools in this study. HOD2's response in this regard was:

*Parents also do not come to the party. There is no support from the parents and the community. There is very poor attendance at matric parent meetings.*

Taole (2013:81) also noted with concern the lack of commitment shown by parents to attend school activities (like progress meetings or parent-teacher meetings). DP1, HOD1 and HOD2 spoke to me about the dismal attendance of parents at meetings and shared their statistics as an indication of their losing battle with parents. The figures given by the participants indicated that a large contingency of parents showed little or no interest in their child's academic performance. The parent meeting contact sessions were hosted to discuss the academic performance of the learner. These meetings also give the educator a one-on-one session with the parent to ascertain why a learner may not be performing. The poor attendance of parents at meetings in School One was a cause for concern, and it is something that the SMT in that school needs to address. DP1 shared the following parent meeting statistics:

*In our last matric parent meeting, we had six parents that pitched up. The total number of matric learners that we have is 68.*

HOD1 also shared some parent meeting statistics and had this to say:

*We have parent meetings and only five parents turn up, so where's the parent's responsibility in the child's education? In our community, we have parent apathy; parents are not involved in their child's education.*

P1 and P3 also expressed their concern over the poor attendance at parent meetings or parents' failure to communicate with the school regarding the learner's academic performance:

*Even our parent meetings record such low attendance rates, yet a large percentage of parents are from the neighbouring community which are flat schemes which are like literally next to the school.*

P3 also had this to say regarding parent involvement:

*Another major problem is the apathy of parents. Parents just don't seem to be interested in their child's education. Very few parents turn up for parent meetings to discuss their child's academic progress, neither do they make appointments to enquire why their child has performed poorly in an examination.*

Taking into account the responses from the participants regarding parental involvement, I then probed and asked the P1 and P3 about their attempts to get parents to cooperate with the demands and needs of the school to ensure the child achieves academically. P3 was very adamant that the school was doing everything in its power to include parents in their learning programme and stated that there should be a change in attitude from parents:

*We have done all the necessary work and communication in trying to get parents to assist us and visit the school. It is now up to the parents to change their way of thinking. The change has to now come from them.*

P1 tried numerous strategies to draw parents to the school. The difference, however, is that P1 still accepted accountability for the lack of partnership between the school and the parent. P1's response indicated a commitment to forging a partnership with the parents and this is what he had to say:

*We have tried changing the times of parent meetings to accommodate those that work during the week, but it did not help. We send a lot of letters and make special phone calls to parents but still the parents do not show up at school. We will keep on trying and even if we get 20% or 30% of parents on track it is a good start.*

The responses from the participants in this section indicated that there is a substantial lack of support and involvement of parents in the child's learning programme. Parents often fail to respond to the school when communication is sent, either in writing or telephonically. Attendance at parent meetings was dismally low, and this does not allow parents the opportunity to engage critically with the educators and SMT on possible solutions to assist the learner in developing his/her academic performance. The lack of parental support at home by way of monitoring the learner's work has a negative impact where important assessments or practical tasks are not submitted on time. However, Wilder (2014:377) cautions that the school should develop a relationship with parents in which parental involvement is about parental expectations for learner achievement and not just homework support at home. The consequences of poor parental support and involvement have also led to underperformance for some learners, as indicated in the responses of the participants.

Nevertheless, Taole (2013:81) stresses the need for parents to commit and dedicate themselves to their child's learning, which will also benefit the implementation of the curriculum.

#### **4.8.1.4 Safety and security**

School safety and security measures should be taken to ensure all learners and the staff are safe within the confines of the school, as well as from threats that may filter into the school from the outside. The paramount issue of safety was also researched by Louw *et al.* (2011:70) in their exploratory study of South African underperforming schools. Louw *et al.* (2011:70) allude to how outside school factors like violence and a disrupted social order can sometimes filter into the school, a phenomenon which their research team witnessed first-hand during their visit to a sample school. Similarly, the participants in my study were also concerned about outside dangers and its impact on staff and learners within the school. Unfortunately, the fear of learners' exposure to outside dangers was realised during my study when two learners (Grade 11 and 12) from one of my sample schools was brutally murdered in May and July 2021. These incidents were evidence of the harsh reality that this underperforming school was facing. During my conversation, all the participants highlighted the need for better security in the schools.

Bayat *et al.* (2014b:50) note with concern the difficult learning conditions educators have to endure as they have to deal with learner intimidation and violent behaviour. In School Two, a very concerned DP2 described how educators are caught in the middle of learner violence and alluded to the security service, which was little help in life-threatening situations in the school. With regard to safety and security, DP2 stated:

*To start off with, our school has only employed the services of a security company with two guards that merely control access into and out of the school. The guards cannot do anything when there is a large group of parents or learners that may get volatile. So, how safe is our school? Our educators are still in the middle of learner fights and that places them in a dangerous situation because there may be knives or serious physical altercations between learners. Our educators are not trained to handle violent situations.*

HOD3, P2 and P3 also echoed similar sentiments regarding security within their schools. Their main concern was the possibility of violence and threats coming into the school from the outside, which also included the local community. HOD3 mentioned a "watchman" type

security that schools employ. Due to depleting school finances on daily expenditure, as well as only a small percentage of parents paying school fees, schools cannot afford reliable security guards.

To further substantiate the financial woes of the DBE, Bayat *et al.* (2014b:50) make reference to the Safe Schools Project in the Western Cape, in response to addressing the safety and security needs in schools. The Safe Schools Project ensured that some schools have security cameras and secure razor fencing. However, like the problem experienced in KZN with financing (and funding) of state school security, the Safe Schools Project has also suffered a similar fate and cannot reach all schools. HOD3 said:

*For me, the only concern is the outside dangers. You will never know when criminals may enter the school because of expensive office equipment, or even worse the cars of educators. The department needs to beef up security in all schools, and I don't just mean the watchman type, probably armed security that can protect us in really dangerous situations.*

Similarly, P3 also expressed the need for better security and had this to say:

*We haven't really had a problem, but irrespective, the department must provide us with proper security.*

P2 went on to describe the security measures in place in School Two. P2's response was an indication of the security measures in place primarily for learners. In this regard, School Two takes an active approach to ensure learners do not stir up any trouble or become violent. This is how P2 described security in School Two:

*Our school has two security guards we hired from a security company. They monitor the gates and make sure no learners enter or leave illegally. During the day there is one guard that walks around the school which acts like a deterrent for learners that want to cause trouble.*

P1 and DP3 described some of the safety and security measures their schools have instated. The changes to the safety and security measures undertaken by School One was an indication that the Safety and Security Committee was meeting and considering ways to ensure a safe and secure school environment for all. The carrying out of random search and seizures by the school security was also in keeping with the guidelines on the regulations



relating to safety measures at public schools as legislated in the South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996:65). School One implemented changes based on some of their previous safety and security incidents. In trying to create a safe school for learners and educators, P1 had this to say:

*In the past, we did have safety problems, from learners fighting within the school, to parents entering the premises without permission. Over the last three years we have made changes like employing on-site guards and fencing our whole school. Our guards also do random searches on learners for dangerous weapons or illegal substances. So with those measures in place we seem to be fine for now.*

DP3 explained some of the safety measures School Three has put in place, according to their policies on safety and security:

*We have a Safety and Security Committee in place and our committee makes sure everyone in our school is safe at all times. We also have a lot of safety and security policies to help control things like who enters and leaves our school or when a parent takes leave for a child.*

As mentioned by DP2 and HOD3, the security personnel currently employed by the school may not be effective enough in very dangerous scenarios, either from outside or within the school. The participants' responses also indicated the need for the DBE to deploy credible security companies to schools, to assist in situations that may compromise the safety and security of all stakeholders within the school premises. However, it appears that finances and funding of school security is a serious impediment towards developing safe and secure schools. The responses from the participants in this section also signal safety and security concerns within the context of underperforming secondary schools in particular.

#### **4.8.1.5 Socio-economic context**

The participants' responses concerning learners and their socio-economic scenarios concur with the findings of Bayat *et al.* (2014a:193). Some of the similarities of my study in relation to Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a:193) study were: Large number of learners in underperforming secondary schools grew up in poor communities; large numbers in informal settlements; lack of basic services; unhygienic living conditions; domestic violence; no access to learning resources; unemployment; poverty; and substance abuse. The participants' responses indicated common socio-economic problems which somehow filtered into the school and

had an impact on the SMT members' instructional leadership practices. In School One, DP1 and P1 described some of the socio-economic problems they are currently facing. DP1 said:

*Unfortunately, we serve a community where there's a lot of unemployment. There are also those that are employed, that are labourers that start early, that finish late, that come home really tired.*

In School One, P1's response was an indication that although some of the socio-economic problems were being recognised, as the principal, he expressed concern over how this was impacting negatively on the child's education. P1 also alluded to how negative economic factors left learners without up-to-date learning resources like multimedia equipment, internet access and study guides, all of which are expensive to subscribe to nowadays, especially in cases where parents are unemployed. Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel and Tlale (2015:6) cite Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013), who are of the view that districts and schools must endeavour to provide educators and learners (who experience barriers to learning) with access to resources. However, this may be easier said than done in the South African school context, given the financial constraints of the DBE and schools. P1 also identified learners who do not live close to the school, were often late and sometimes missed the first lesson. Unfortunately, this was a problematic issue, since the parents chose to admit learners in School One even though they lived far away from the school. On this point, by law, the school cannot refuse the learner admission, and it is an issue that the SMT needs to address with the parents. This was P1's response to the socio-economic challenges:

*In most cases in our school, the first lesson is mostly missed out by the children because they travel far and wide. We even have children not coming to school because they don't have money for transport and so on. With regard to the community at large, our children don't possess study aids, internet, exposure to newspapers, and in some cases even a TV which is an important and integral part in a child's education.*

In School Two, DP2 and HOD2 echoed similar comments to those of P1 about how the learners' socio-economic situations have often impacted on their academic programme. DP2 expressed concern over how the socio-economic problems experienced by learners sometimes disrupted lessons, and counselling had to be offered to the affected learner. This type of *teacher-counsellor* role to resolve socio-economic problems of learners also interrupts the instructional time of both educators and SMT members who have to stop their

work and focus on the issue at hand. DP2 went on to state how the economic situation of the parents limited learners' access to certain extra and co-curricular activities within the school:

*It is important to understand that in our community we have many socio-economic problems ranging from broken families to substance abuse. These circumstances affect us eventually at school. We have to stop what we are doing and talk to them and try to help them. A lot of the parents collect social grant and cannot afford certain things for learners when it comes to special events like sports or excursions.*

In School Two, HOD2 and P2 were very empathetic towards the challenging economic situations of learners in their schools. Bayat *et al.* (2014a) lists various factors related to the challenging economic situation experienced by learners in underperforming secondary schools in the Western Cape of South Africa. Some of these included: A lack of basic housing services; hungry learners; poverty; and a lack of sustainable income due to unemployed breadwinners (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:189-194). While Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a) study described the various household level factors impacted by low-income households and unemployment of the parents (or guardians), my study revealed a startling finding. HOD2 pointed out that there were learners who took up jobs to assist their families financially, which have contributed to learner absenteeism. This resulted in the learner's absence from part of the day's lessons (due to absenteeism), which has a detrimental effect on the learner's final NSC examination results. This is what HOD2 had to say:

*A big factor is the poverty within the community. Many of the kids' parents are unemployed or earn very less. The learners take up small jobs to support their families. Because they are working to make money, they get absent from school and miss out on work, which results in poor performance.*

P2 acknowledged that not all learners were faced with socio-economic challenges. However, he highlighted the plight of some learners who reside in the informal settlements and the challenges they face with unemployment and poor living conditions. P2 said:

*We have some learners who come from very good homes and we have those learners that come from very troubled homes. Our school also serves learners from the informal settlements and many of those learners belong to households where there is no one working, or they have large families that live off one person's social grant. Some of these learners are very sickly as well because of their living*

*conditions. In the informal settlements you know it tends to get very cold on some days.*

In School Three, HOD3, DP3 and P3 all echoed similar sentiments as School One and School Two with regard to the socio-economic problems. The school finances were also strained, due to a large number of parents who cannot afford annual school fees. HOD3 mentioned how the poor economic situation has had an effect on the school finances. HOD3 responded:

*If you noticed when you were driving towards our school, you would have passed the low-cost housing developments. From that settlement alone, we have a large amount of learners who attend our school. Many of the learners do not pay school fees, or they are experiencing financial problems.*

In School Three, DP3 and P3 shared their views of how the negative socio-economic situation of parents, learners and the community resulted in a challenge for the school to develop a partnership with parents to drive improvement in learner academic performance. However, Bayat *et al.* (2014a:192) attribute the low educational level of breadwinners (or other members of the household) to the lack of educational support for homework tasks, which is particularly important for Grade 12 learners. DP3's response was as follows:

*Most of the learners in our community are exposed to drugs, and they come out of problematic socio-economic backgrounds. Some parents do not play any part in their lives, and this makes it difficult for us at school to try and make any changes.*

P3 also mentioned the informal settlement that the school services. P3 indicated that the staff assists when it comes to socio-economic scenarios that a learner may be facing, in order to ensure improved learner academic performance. P3 stated:

*Some of our learners come from the informal settlement, and they face many socio-economic problems. Sometimes the SMT and educators have to deal with some of these issues in school to assist learners' in improving their results.*

The participants' descriptions and sentiments regarding the challenging socio-economic situations of learners, their parents, and the communities, are an indication of the challenges prevalent in all three schools in my study which included: Unemployment; poverty; financial strains by parents (which result in non-payment of school fees); and illegal substances. Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a) study provides valuable insight within the context of underperforming secondary schools in South Africa. In addition, Bayat *et al.* (2014a)

attributes underperformance partly to the low educational levels in some households, a factor which was not raised by participants in my study, but is something worth noting for future research in underperforming secondary schools. Some socio-economic challenges faced by learners also filtered into the school and educators, and the SMT had no option but to try to resolve these issues for learners in the hope that it may assist the learner to focus and prevent them from performing poorly academically.

#### **4.8.1.6 Substance abuse**

Bayat *et al.*'s (2014a) study revealed that substance abuse was a challenge in underperforming secondary schools. All three schools in this study were shown to have learners who engaged in cigarette smoking, consuming alcohol and even using drugs. P1, HOD2, DP2, P2, HOD3 and DP3 all shared some of their views and experiences regarding substance abuse by learners in their schools. I now turn to some of the experiences shared by SMT members of the three schools. In School One, P1 linked the community to substance abuse and had this to say:

*Learners tend to smoke, drink and take drugs which are a huge problem in this community.*

In School Two, HOD2 explained how some learners even resort to criminal behaviour to support their bad habits. During my conversation, HOD2 mentioned that consuming substances like alcohol was common in the secondary school. This suggests a dangerous norm that the school is facing when it comes to substance abuse. This is what HOD2 had to say:

*Some learners even rob and steal just to support their bad habits. Some of the bad habits that learners have are the cigarette problem and smoking. We did have a few cases where learners came drunk to school or on excursions, but you know this is common in high school.*

In School Two, DP2 also expressed concern over the intoxicated state of some learners due to the use of illicit substances and the negative impact this has on the learner's academic performance. DP2 also commented on the leniency of parents who do not take action against their child even when they are abusing illegal substances. DP2 felt that parents were not strict enough in enforcing discipline with their children, which then had an impact on the management of discipline in the school because these learners felt that they can commit

offences and get away with it. DP2 had this to say about substance abuse and the role of the parent:

*Some learners come to school highly under the influence of illegal circumstances. When learners are in this state they can't concentrate in the class and that is another reason that leads to underperformance. Some of the learners know that they can do anything in school and get away with it because their parents will not tell them anything, or they just don't care.*

P2 also vented frustration over the abuse of substances, despite the economic challenges faced by some learners. P2 felt that although some learners experienced economic difficulty at home, they still engaged in different forms of substance abuse. P2 also indicated that the substance abuse is escalating and becoming problematic and stated the following:

*The boys are the ones that mostly annoy me because despite the financial situation being bad, they still want to smoke, drink and take drugs. I am also having this problem where substance abuse is starting to get out of hand.*

In School Three, HOD3 and DP3 commented on the early age at which learners start smoking, as well as the drug problems they face. The consumption of illegal substances from an early age can also be attributed to the negative neighbourhood factors experienced by learners. Many learners are exposed to illicit substances due to peer pressure and growing up in socially challenged communities where substance abuse is a problem (Bayat *et al.*, 2014a:193). In view of this, HOD3 said:

*When I am driving to school, I see a number of learners that are smoking and bunking. They start doing this from a young age and then bring it into high school.*

With regard to substance abuse, DP3 stated:

*There are a lot of drugs that these learners experience as well as alcohol abuse and broken families.*

Substance abuse was an escalating problem for all three schools in my study. The substance abuse exhibited by learners, according to the participants, was mainly as a result of the social problems faced in these communities. The learners also seemed very susceptible to peer-pressure and lacked the self-confidence or will-power to abstain from using illegal substances. The responses by the participants (as discussed in this section),

also indicated that despite the challenging economic situations faced by some learners, they still found a way to purchase substances like cigarettes, alcohol and even illicit drugs. Apart from the social challenge that substance abuse brings to the schools in this study, the SMTs are also left to deal with substance abuse when they experience it in school, which could negatively impact on their instructional leadership duties since they have to spend time resolving substance abuse issues.

#### **4.8.1.7 The promotion and progression policy**

The two main phases in a secondary school are the Senior Phase (Grade 8 & 9) and the FET Phase (Grade 10-12). There are two key policy concessions that exist for the Senior and FET Phase as stated in the National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grade R-12 (DBE, 2015). In the Senior Phase, the DBE (2015:25) states that a learner “may only be retained once in the Senior Phase in order to prevent the learner being retained in this phase for longer than four years”. The FET Phase states that a learner may “only be retained once in the Further Education and Training Phase in order to prevent the learner being retained in this phase for longer than four years” (DBE, 2015:37-38). The DBE’s (2015) promotion and progression policy was found to be a key factor towards underperformance of learners in Bayat *et al.*’s (2014b:46) study of underperforming secondary schools. The findings from my study concur with Bayat *et al.*’s (2014b) study when analysing the issue of the DBE’s (2015) promotion and progression policy. Below is a discussion of the different participants’ thoughts on this policy.

The two policy progression concessions discussed above were not easily accepted by some participants, who blamed them for their school’s underperformance. When I had asked participants about those factors that were negatively impacting their instructional leadership practices, HOD1, DP2, HOD2, DP3 and P3 expressed concern over the DBE’s (2015) promotion and progression policy. This sub-theme that emerged was probably a very significant piece of the puzzle (to solving underperformance), not only for the schools in my study, but probably all underperforming secondary schools that have progressed learners to Grade 12. All three schools in my study had progressed learners from Grade 11 to Grade 12, even though they had not met the minimum pass requirements to be promoted to Grade 12. I now turn to some of the views expressed by the HODs, DPs and principals.

In School Two, HOD2 spoke about the progression of learners from Grade 11 to Grade 12, despite the learner failing. HOD2 was more concerned about learners being progressed to

the next grade without attaining the previous grade's knowledge and skills. HOD2 also felt that learners who are progressed to Grade 12 without passing (on his/her own performance), contributed to the decrease in the NSC pass rate. This is what HOD2 had to say:

*Learners who have failed once in the phase cannot fail again, and that is why they are pushed into Grade after Grade until they reach Grade 12. These learners go into Grade 12 and some of them do not have the basic skills from the previous Grades to answer the NSC examination papers. These are the very same learners who do not pass the matric exams at the end of the year.*

In School Three, HOD3 also vented frustration over teaching learners in Grade 12 who were technically in Grade 11. Like HOD2, HOD3 indicated that a learner who had been progressed was not academically ready for Grade 12 subject content. A frustrated HOD3 responded:

*We have the progressed learners, who, by policy, ended up making it to Grade 12. This is such a sore point in our school. How do we teach learners, who on paper, did not even make it to Grade 12 in the first place? To be sitting in Grade 12 as a progressed learner means you couldn't even pass Grade 11, but now we must deal with you.*

HOD3 raised the issue of progressed learners, in relation to the South African labour force and tertiary study, even though the learners may have failed in their journey towards completing Grade 12. HOD3's final comments on the impact of the Promotion and Progression Policy were as follows:

*These are the very same learners who will eventually enter our country's workforce and tertiary institutions. My feeling is that if you cannot pass Grade 11 comfortably, wait until you can, and don't be moved to Grade 12 to be counted in our statistics because it will most definitely show a failed result.*

HOD1 had a different opinion of the progressed learners. HOD1 alluded to the (supposed) primary school's role in identifying learners with possible learning challenges and taking action at the primary school level. HOD1 also opposed the idea that the SMT is held accountable for poor learner academic performance, when the learners who perform poorly



come ill-prepared from the primary school and their poor skills are not an indigenous problem of the secondary school. HOD1 opined:

*Managers are being over burden with the Matric results, the whole focus of the school is the Matric results but let me tell you that the problem is in the primary school because you have attention deficit learners; you have slow learners and learners with barriers that are being passed on with no accountability at Grade7 level.*

In School Three, DP3 had put in measures to ensure the progressed learners are specially catered for. DP3 showed good leadership in trying to cater for the needs of the progressed Grade 12 learners. DP3 had also assumed accountability for the academic performance of the progressed learners to ensure that these learners do not affect the school's NSC pass rate, therefore focusing on the progressed learners and preparing them for the NSC examinations. DP3's response to progressed learners was as follows:

*I have put in place special classes for progressed learners. We have to ensure that the progressed learners pass because these learners did not meet the minimum requirements, but it is the school management's job to ensure these learners pass the Grade 12 examinations.*

In School Two, DP2 was yet another SMT member to raise the issue of the promotion and progression of learners. DP2 felt that the DBE's (2015) promotion and progression policy indeed impacted on teaching and learning and highlighted the discipline of the progressed learners. DP2 further expressed concern over the literacy levels of learners who were progressed and felt that progressed learners contributed to the decrease in NSC results, echoing the sentiments of DP3. DP2 opined:

*I found that there are learners who are sitting in Grade 12 that can't even read and write properly. Because of previous policies, some learners snuck their way through to Grade 12 and that is why we have seen this tremendous drop in results. These are the very same learners that have been progressed that show attitude and disrespect towards us.*

In School Three, P3 questioned the intentions of the DBE's (2015) promotion and progression policy in relation to improving the NSC pass rate. P3 raised the issue of the principal having to account for poor performance, despite the policy allowing learners to be progressed to the next grade, who, in actual fact, had failed the previous grade. P3's response was a clear indication that the DBE raised concerns about the NSC pass rate and

also held the principal and SMT accountable for poor NSC results, yet it is the DBE's (2015) promotion and progression policy which states that learners are to be progressed to the next grade. Being progressed from Grade 11 to Grade 12 has serious consequences for the learner, as well as the subject educator. With regard to the DBE's (2015) promotion and progression policy, P3 opined:

*How do we improve the Matric pass rate if the policy states that learners cannot fail a phase more than twice? That means that the learner will be progressed thereafter, every time the learner fails a grade. The department then questions the principal and SMT about poor performance, yet the promotion and progression policy puts them into Grade 12, even though they have failed.*

Overall, the participants' responses, as discussed in this section, indicate that the DBE's (2015) promotion and progression policy has a negative impact on the SMTs' instructional leadership practices. This was also found to be the case in Bayat *et al.*'s (2014:46) study, which indicated that the DBE's (2015) promotion and progression policy was a key factor related to underperformance. The policy progresses learners who are not academically ready for the next grade and the problem arose when learners are progressed from Grade 11 to Grade 12. These learners have to then meet the demands of the NSC examinations, which may be difficult for them since they have not met the minimum requirements in the previous grade. SMT members appeared frustrated of having to deal with learners who do not possess the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to pass the NSC examinations, which could possibly lead to failure in the NSC examinations and contributing to the underperformance of the school.

#### **4.9 THEME 4 PRELIMINARY THEMES AND CODING**

For the emergence of Theme 4, I followed a similar path of identifying the sub-themes across the data and then going into the detail of the different levels of the SMT (as expressed by the participants in the different schools). This process evolved as follows:

**Table 4.5: Theme 4 Sub-themes and coding**

<b>THEME 4: VIEWS CONCERNING INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP TO ENHANCE ACHIEVEMENT</b>	
<b>Sub-theme: Benefits of Instructional Leadership</b>	<b>Sub-theme: “A Sense of Vision” Towards Improving Performance</b>
<b>Codes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good form of leadership</li> <li>• Leads to improvement</li> <li>• Carry out tasks effectively</li> <li>• Focus on teaching and learning</li> <li>• Encourages teamwork</li> </ul>	<b>Codes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimism in achieving goals</li> <li>• Shared vision amongst whole staff</li> <li>• Improvement plans/strategies</li> <li>• Teamwork/collaboration</li> <li>• Commitment to achieving</li> </ul>

#### **4.9.1 Discussion and interpretation of Theme 4 from the analysis**

The discussion and interpretation of Theme 4 that follows is in response to the fourth research sub-question: *How do SMTs consider that their instructional leadership role can lead to improving learner academic performance?* The research objective in relation to this research question was to explore the SMTs’ views and considerations of their role as instructional leaders in improving learner academic performance.

##### **4.9.1.1 Sub-theme: Benefits of instructional leadership**

There is a corpus of literature that refers to the benefits of instructional leadership to improve learner academic performance even in the most challenging contexts (Chikoko *et al.*, 2015; Day *et al.*, 2016; Leithwood, 2016). Towards the end of my semi-structured interviews, I asked participants whether they thought instructional leadership could help them in improving the NSC results in their schools. The participants’ responses to this question were a development of our entire interview, which included their final thoughts on instructional leadership within the context of an underperforming secondary school. In this section, I also offer additional commentary in a detailed discussion which expresses the participants’ views about the benefits of instructional leadership, which took place during our follow-up interviews. Instructional leadership was welcomed by some of the participants (as discussed in this section) but with some recommendations as well (which I encouraged as part of the interview). I begin my discussion with the views, as expressed by the HODs, followed by the DPs and lastly the principals.

In all three schools, HODs favoured the idea of instructional leadership in order to improve learner academic performance. In School One, HOD1 considered that the role of the instructional leader in monitoring and supervising educators' and learners' work is one of the main instructional leadership tasks towards improving learner academic performance. HOD1 also considered that as an instructional leader, direct involvement in the teaching and learning programme was necessary for facilitating improvement strategies and initiatives in an underperforming secondary school. HOD1 remarked:

*The monitoring and supervision that HODs carry out is part of the development and improvement processes, and because we are so involved in the curriculum we are able to implement intervention strategies to improve the results.*

In School Two, HOD2 agreed that instructional leadership could help to improve the NSC results but regarded teamwork as key to making it work. HOD2's idea of teamwork (for instructional leadership) included a team comprising of the educators, HODs, DP and principal. The notion of teamwork, as proposed by HOD2, also signified shared leadership between the SMT and educators in trying to improve learner performances. HOD2's view about teamwork is sufficiently supported in instructional leadership literature in which tasks are shared between members of the SMT with the aim of improving learner academic performance ((Hallinger, 2007; Hopkins, 2013; Kaparou & Bush, 2015; Shatzer *et al.*, 2014). HOD2 was also of the opinion that for instructional leadership to improve the NSC results, the excessive administrative tasks for HODs needed to be reduced. When I asked about whether instructional leadership can help to improve learner academic performance, HOD2 opined:

*Yes, definitely. I think instructional leadership can help us to improve our Grade 12 results, provided all our managers work together as a team. Also, as I have said, the Department has to reduce the admin of HODs so that we can focus only on teaching and learning. This is the only way the results can improve.*

Direct instructional leadership focuses particularly on the curriculum for improving learner academic performance (Msila, 2013:81). The focus on the curriculum was an instructional leadership benefit highlighted by HOD3. In School Three, HOD3 was in support of instructional leadership, mainly because of the direct (more or less) relationship with the school curriculum. HOD3 also regarded instructional leadership as a preferable form of leadership associated with some of the specific duties of the HOD, like curriculum management, monitoring and evaluation (albeit the job description of the DP and principal is different in relation to instructional leadership and a detailed discussion of the various roles

of the SMT in relation to each other is discussed in Chapter 5). HOD3 responded in favour of the benefits of instructional leadership:

*I would definitely prefer instructional leadership because it has all the important aspects necessary for an SMT member, as stated in our job descriptions. Another thing I like about instructional leadership is the main focus, which is curriculum management. I mean if you can manage the curriculum in an acceptable manner, then your results will be quite good.*

I now turn to some of the views as expressed by the DPs about the benefits of instructional leadership. In School One, DP1 was in favour of instructional leadership for improving learner academic performance provided the DBE offered special training and that the SMT members were keen on implementing this type of leadership effectively. While the training of SMTs should be highly welcomed, the participants in Taole's (2013:80) study also noted that there was minimal training in instructional leadership for SMTs. Nevertheless, DP1 viewed instructional leadership as a positive way forward in improving learner academic performance, but suggested that only an actively engaged SMT (comprising of all SMT members) can successfully implement this form of leadership. DP1's consideration of the inclusion of the entire SMT also showed shared leadership amongst the SMT to carry out effective instructional leadership practices. DP1 further declared that the idea of instructional leadership is in line with the school's main focus of teaching and learning, again re-iterating the need for effective implementation through shared leadership. DP1 suggested:

*Instructional leadership sounds like a good form of leadership in an underperforming secondary school, but the department needs to step in and provide SMT with the specialised training, so we can carry out our tasks effectively. On paper, instructional leadership may sound like a solution to the problem, but we need active SMT members who can implement this type of concept in our school. Our main focus is the teaching and learning, so this concept will work for us if everyone implements it effectively.*

In School Two, DP2 considered the notion of shared instructional leadership among all SMT levels as the key to improving learner academic performance. DP2 reiterated the need for all SMT levels to work together as a team, in which each level can contribute in some positive way towards the efforts of improving learner academic performance. DP2 said:

*The HODs, DP and principal must all work together to achieve better results in the Grade 12 Examinations and to do this each SMT member must carry out their duties*

*effectively to overcome the many challenges of being underperforming so that in the end there will be all-round improvement.*

In School Three, DP3 also echoed sentiments of the need for teamwork. DP3 regarded teamwork as a concept which included the whole teaching staff (inclusive of the educators, HODs, DP and principal). Once again, DP3 hinted at the idea of shared leadership (which also included educators) as being a positive step forward in ensuring effective instructional leadership. (I later probed this further with all interviewees during the telephonic interviews and this led to a refinement of this sub-theme, as represented by the oval in Figure 4.4 entitled “Activating Potential for Shared Instructional Leadership”.)

DP3 also mentioned that all SMT members must work towards completing their allocated management tasks in their respective SMT levels. DP3 thought that there were some management tasks like supervision of educators and learners that should be done (more or less in the same way) by all SMT members. DP3 also found that a reduction of administration could lead to much more effective instructional leadership practices to enhance teaching and learning. DP3 was of the opinion that all SMT members, including the principal, should be working on the “same page” but also alluded to the administrative duties which take up teaching and learning time. This is what DP3 had to say:

*I think that this type of leadership is good for managers because you are constantly working with the educators and learners. The only problem is you can't have everyone doing things differently. All managers must be on the same page. It's no use if I am supervising regularly but HODs are not doing it at their level. It can make a difference but at the moment the department needs to take it easy on the admin submissions and let us concentrate only on teaching and learning.*

I now turn to some of the views as expressed by the principals regarding the benefits of instructional leadership. P1 regarded HODs as being the significant level of the SMT when engaging in instructional leadership of educators and learners. P1's response is in line with Leithwood's (2016:135) findings from a study on HODs, which indicated that HODs have a greater influence on and improvement of teaching and learning, due to their direct engagement in the curriculum rather than the principal. P1's view of the HODs, in promoting instructional leadership, also indicated that P1 may occupy an indirect instructional leadership role. Recognising the importance of HODs in instructional leadership was also a sign that P1 was (to some degree) sharing leadership with the HODs, with the aim of improving the NSC pass rates. This is what P1 had to say about the benefits of instructional leadership:

*I think that HODs are the most important people in driving instructional leadership at the learner and teacher level. This type of leadership will help a school like ours, where our NSC pass rate is low, and we need a strong focus on the management of the curriculum.*

In School Two, P2 also thought that instructional leadership can work but viewed parents as an important stakeholder in the implementation process, especially with regard to the curriculum. Parents can contribute to the success of schools by actively engaging in school activities and supervising learners' homework (Pretorius, 2014:355) and P2 felt that both parents and learners need to continue to maintain the effectiveness of the curriculum, even when they are at home. P2 regarded the work done by parents and learners after-school hours as integral to the success of instructional leadership. P2 said:

*Maybe instructional leadership will work, but like I said, we need the parents and learners to play their part as well. The curriculum is not only for the time that the learner is in school, after school it is the parent's duty to guide the child and ensure the work is done.*

In School Three, P3 regarded instructional leadership as effective not only for the improvement of the NSC results, but across the whole school. P3 also viewed instructional leadership as beneficial since it requires SMT members to be directly (more or less) involved with the curriculum. P3's view concurs with Msila's (2013:81) definition of direct instructional leadership, which focuses primarily on the curriculum (including quality of teaching and assessment) for improving learner academic performance. Furthermore, P3 felt that an active involvement in the curriculum and specifically the management of the curriculum was important to ensure the improvement of learner academic performance. This is what P3 suggested:

*Any engagement with the curriculum is good for improving results. The instructional programme is important to any school and because we have to focus on the management of the curriculum, we should be able to improve our results in almost any grade.*

While instructional leadership was considered as having the potential to bring change to the schools in this study, the participants' responses also indicated certain challenges that affect their instructional leadership practices. Some of the areas that the participants emphasised where change is needed for effective and successful instructional leadership to take place were: Administration; leadership training in relation to instructional leadership; teamwork

(among the SMT and educators); and a positive *school-parent* partnership. In Chapter 5, I delve further into the light that the participants (considered as a whole) shed in relation to existing literature on instructional leadership and in Chapter 6 I discuss some implications and recommendations for practice, especially within the South African context.

#### **4.9.1.2 A sense of vision towards improving performance**

One of the elements of Weber's (1996) model provides for the instructional leader to take the lead in developing a vision with school stakeholders in defining the school's mission (or goals). All the participants in my study alluded to a sense of vision that they had, but with a strong focus on improving learner academic performance. During the initial semi-structured interviews, which formed part of my first cycle of analysis, some participants also shed light on what they considered to be a shared vision that was being developed in the school through some activities and tasks they engaged in to improve learner academic performance. At first, I coded this sub-theme as "A Sense of vision Towards Improving Performance", but referring back to Phase 3 of Braun and Clarke's (2006:87) Framework for Thematic Analysis, and going back to the data in the second cycle of analysis, I realised that I needed more data on the participants' perceptions of shared instructional leadership which led to the refinement of a new sub-theme (indicated as an oval in Theme 4, Figure 4.4) titled "Activating Potential for Shared Instructional Leadership" emerging in the second cycle of analysis (and partly promoted by the telephonic interviews). The refined sub-theme "Activating Potential for Shared Instructional Leadership" is discussed in more detail in Section 4.11.8. The exploration of the manner in which participants expressed the importance of "vision" and how some of them referred to shared visioning also ties up with my version of an extended Weber's model, which provides for the notion of operating in terms of shared visions regarding instructional leadership. All three schools' vision and goals were focused on improving learner academic performance. Below I discuss a few of the participant's responses from each school which encapsulates the school's vision and goals – as linked to the main goal of improving performance.

In School One, the improvement of the NSC results was of paramount importance. HOD1, DP1 and P1 all alluded to this vision as set out in their planned improvement programmes. HOD1's vision was for the school to perform well and no longer be classified as an underperforming secondary school. HOD1 alluded to the whole staff sharing in the same vision, guided by their planned improvement programmes implemented by the whole staff. HOD1 had this to say:



*I hope we can achieve better results in the Grade 12 examinations and come out of the underperformance category. I think the whole staff wants the school to perform well, and we are working together to try to achieve this through our improvement plans and intervention classes.*

In School One, DP1 also lamented about how important the vision was of restoring the school to its reputable state for him and the rest of the staff. He implied that in order to “restore” the school back to its “glory days”, the staff needed a common vision and goal. With regard to the vision of the school, DP1 stated:

*The vision has always been there, even before my promotion and for those of us that are in the tail end of our careers. This was once a very proud institution that has produced doctors, lawyers, experts in the field of labour, and people that have made great contributions to the economy, so I think it's the vision, not just my vision, but the vision of everybody that is a part of this school to restore it to the glory days.*

According to DP1, the school made an attempt to develop a sense of vision towards improving their learner academic performance by using meetings as a collaborative approach to promote such a vision. In this regard P1 had this to say:

*I am sure everyone is on the same page because at our meetings we always reinforce our goal of improving our Matric results and the whole staff knows that's our key focus area.*

The responses above by DP1 alluded to promoting a “shared vision” which led to my creation of a refined theme which I called “A Sense of Vision towards Improving Performance” as part of my second cycle of analysis. (See Section 4.10.1.2.)

In School Two, the vision of the SMT as expressed by the various participants was also to achieve the minimum pass rate in the NSC examinations and to no longer be classified as an underperforming secondary school. Participants recounted that the vision and goals of the school are promoted to the other educators through specialised subject specific meetings. Although each subject department is different and have different goals based on the specific subject, he felt that the improvement of the NSC results is a common vision across all the subject departments. DP2 explained the vision of the school as follows:

*We want to ensure we achieve a pass rate of 60% and move out of being called an underperforming school. At our subject committee meetings we set our targets and*

*goals for improvement so that's where the other teachers would know what our intentions are.*

DP2's response above was yet another instance where a sense of "shared vision" was alluded to, which prompted me to further probe this concept during the telephonic interviews (which led to a refinement and a new oval in Section 4.10.1.2) and which also supplemented the participants' responses in the sub-theme called "A sense of vision towards improving performance". School Three's vision was best articulated in their SIP, which was directly focused on improving learner academic performance. Yet again, like School One, School Three also developed their common and shared vision through their improvement strategies which are expected to be implemented by the whole staff. P3 responded:

*We focus a lot on the academics and doing all the extra classes on weekends just to help learners to pass the final exams. We have strategies and plans in place which is compulsory, and I think everyone works towards improving the Grade 12 results because that's all we ever focus on.*

In relation to the vision of the school, DP3 further noted his interpretation of the school's vision and goal towards improving learner academic performance:

*The only thing on my mind is getting out of this underperformance, and our whole school is working towards that now. We have our weekend classes, holiday classes and afternoon classes. We have a schedule where we take turns to come to school and assist in the Grade 12 weekend classes.*

The responses from the participants above show that all three schools have a sense of vision tied to attaining the minimum pass rated in the NSC examination. Attaining this goal would also mean the school would no longer be classified as underperforming. The participants alluded to how the vision of the school is promoted through their many Grade 12 improvement strategies. I now move on to discuss the themes that emerged through a second cycle of analysis.

#### **4.10 A SECOND CYCLE OF ANALYSIS**

Having worked with the data in this way, and thus gained a sense of how the different players in each school were conceiving their roles in instructional leadership, I did some further analysis because I realised that in considering the different players' views (as coded, categorised and thematised) and comparing across schools, it was possible to note further issues arising. These were not highlighted in the literature, namely, the way in which across

all the schools all the SMTs' pointed to their feeling of lack of support by the DBE (albeit that different players stressed different ways in which they felt the DBE could support them more). I labelled this refined theme "SMT as lone rangers" in relation to the DBE (rather than what is stressed in some of the literature as the principal as a lone ranger in relation to other SMT members). This was a refinement which added substance to Theme 1, namely, "Experiences of Attempting to deal with Instructional Leadership Roles". A further refinement of Theme 1 led to another sub-theme I titled "Underperformance Stressors" as it evidently cut across all the schools where there were specific pressures that were felt due to classification to an underperforming school. I also decided that regarding all the SMTs' conceptions of the expectations/pressures on them, I could locate an additional sub-theme as pertinent, which I called "Beyond the Call of Duty", which was also a refinement of Theme 1. When again comparing responses from the various schools, I realised that I could identify a theme called "Creating a Positive Learning Environment". This expressed visions of what is possible as identified by some SMT members where they expressed additional agency, that is, creative ideas not in the form of following "expectations" but in the form of finding ways forward for enhanced instructional leadership in the school. This was a refinement of Theme 2, titled "Instructional Leaders' Engagement in Teaching and Learning Activities". I located a refined theme which I called "Initiating Change Activities" which was also a refinement of Theme 2. The views expressed by participants as impacting negatively on their instructional leadership practices signified feelings of unhappiness and poor job satisfaction which led me to locate a refined theme I called "Low Morale of the SMT", which was a refinement of Theme 3, namely, "Considerations of Negative Factors Impacting on Instructional Leadership". During my conversations with participants about "A Sense of Vision Towards Improving Performances", some alluded to *teamwork* in order to achieve the academic goals of the school, which led me to locate a refined theme called "Promoting Shared Vision", which was a refinement of Theme 4, namely, "Views Concerning Instructional Leadership to Enhance Improvement". Finally, I located a refined theme called "Activating Potential for Shared Instructional Leadership" which is a brief discussion on the concept of "shared instructional leadership" (explored in more detail in Chapter 5 which is based on the telephonic interviews with participants). I now delve into these refined themes that emerged.

#### **4.10.1 SMT as lone rangers**

The South African schooling system is made up of different levels of various role players and stakeholders. Each role player has a duty to fulfil in ensuring the delivery of quality education to the learner. The principal is seen to be accountable to the DBE at various levels which

include: The Circuit; District; Province; and National Departments. The participants in this study expressed feelings of isolation (at the level of the SMT) with regard to the lack of support received from different education office levels. Both the Circuit and District education offices have to provide support to schools that are attached to them by their location, which is a mandate that was passed from the DBE (Van Der Voort & Wood, 2016:1). The name given to this theme “SMT as lone rangers” comes from the participants expressing their concerns of trying to overcome underperformance all on their own and without any support from the DBE. I decided to label this as a separate category under Theme 1 called “Experiences of Attempting to Deal with Instructional Leadership Roles”. Even though the DBE receives various reports from the principal on all aspects of functionality, all the participants wanted the presence of the DBE at learner and classroom level to tackle the issue of underperformance. I now delve into some of the views expressed by the HODs, DPs and principals.

All three HODs stressed the importance of the DBE’s physical presence and support in underperforming secondary schools to tackle poor learner academic performance. In School One, HOD1 felt that DBE officials needed to avail themselves physically on the school plant. In support of HOD1’s response, an early study by Smyth (2008:136) offers an exceptional recommendation for education department visits to improve learner academic performance. Smyth (2008:136) recommended that a team of trained department officials visit schools and conduct classroom observations, monitor learners’ work, review learner assessments and interview school staff and learners. Likewise, HOD1 suggested that when DBE officials visit the school, they should speak to learners about poor academic performance:

*Firstly, I need for those department officials to be present at the school. Interview learners, speak to the learners, find out what is their problem and why are they not achieving.*

In School Two, HOD2 used the word “stranded” to describe the lack of support (and of a learning partnership) by the DBE. HOD2 felt that the DBE should intervene and assist underperforming secondary schools. HOD2 was of the opinion that improving the NSC results cannot be achieved solely by the school SMT. HOD2 opined:

*I personally think the Department should step in and help managers in underperforming high schools. We are left stranded when it comes to improving the NSC results. We need support from the department. We cannot do this alone.*

In School Three, HOD3's response indicated a sense of desperation and appeal to the DBE to avail themselves at the school. HOD3's response was also an indication that they have tried to a certain extent and have somewhat failed in improving the NSC results. From HOD3's response, it seemed that the underperforming secondary schools are yearning for the DBE to go into those schools and see for themselves what is really happening, especially now that methods to improve the NSC results appear exhausted. HOD3 also felt that receiving instructions from DBE on how to improve the NSC results was not as practical (and easier) than what the DBE expects. HOD3 had this to say:

*Maybe it is about time the department visits us and shows us how to improve the results instead of instructing us from the sidelines. It is easier said than done. Believe you me we have tried almost everything.*

The DPs also echoed similar sentiments as the three HODs in relation to working in isolation from the DBE. DP1 stated that School One had not been visited at all by the DBE. DP1 was also in doubt about whether the DBE was going to visit School One or not for the academic year. DP1 regarded School One as being "forgotten" by the DBE, suggesting that the SMT (and this DP in particular) were working on their own in trying to improve learner academic performance. DP1's response also showed that the school wanted the DBE to visit and see what was happening with regard to underperformance. When I asked about the support (if any) provided by the DBE to underperforming secondary schools, DP1 remarked:

*That's the funny thing, we have not been monitored, so sometimes I feel that when the big cheese sits together, you know this school and other areas, sometimes I get the impression that we are a forgotten entity.*

In School Three, DP3 was concerned over the lack of presence by the DBE and Subject Advisors in underperforming secondary schools. DP3 was also in favour of forming a partnership with the Subject Advisors who are important role players since they are specialists in various subjects, as well as the managers of the respective subjects in the Circuit. DP3 used the word "isolation" to describe the working relationship between SMT members and Subject Advisors, making the point that not only are they working alone, but there is sometimes very little, or no support offered by the Subject Advisors.

DP3's point is definitely valid in saying that the Subject Advisors are needed to improve the NSC results, taking into account the Subject Advisor's first-hand knowledge of what is expected in the NSC examinations. This is what DP3 had to say:

*For me, maybe the presence of the Department in our school can make a difference. If you look at other underperforming high schools, some of them are underperforming for over two years, so what is the Department doing to help those SMT members to improve the Grade 12 results. Personally, I think school managers cannot work in isolation from subject advisors and other Department officials if the goal is to improve the Matric results.*

In School One, P1 echoed the sentiments of HOD2 and DP3 about the lack of visibility of the DBE in the school. P1 shared a different perspective and expressed frustration over the DBE policing the SMT rather than offering them the solutions and support they need to improve their NSC results. P1 explained how the school had engaged in a Whole School Evaluation (WSE) exercise, which is a DBE activity to thoroughly evaluate all aspects of the school, ranging from academic work to everyday school functionality. P1 felt that the findings from the WSE should be able to provide the DBE with the data they need in order to provide constructive feedback for improving learner academic performance, but this did not seem to be happening. P1 said:

*The SMT are getting more frustrated every day. They boldly say in our SMT meetings that the Department must come to the school and see for themselves what is happening. We have had a Whole School Evaluation (WSE) done by the Department last year but they came more to find faults than fix our problems and with no feedback on how to improve as well given that we are underperforming for the fifth year now.*

In School Three, P3 accepted that the school has underperformed but raised concern over the support that was supposed to be offered by the DBE. The lack of support from the DBE also attributes to principals inability to provide support to educators (Bhengu *et al.* 2014:207). P3 felt strongly about the SMT and the DBE working together towards improving the NSC results. The willingness to work collaboratively was also an indication of shared instructional leadership, which in this case will comprise of the SMT fulfilling their role at the school level, while the DBE fulfils their role at the Circuit and District levels. However, the supportive and collaborative relationship between the school and the DBE appears to be lacking as expressed by the views of P3:

*My question to you is where is the Department of education in all of this? Ok, fine, we are underperforming and I accept we have failed, but the Department is supposed to provide underperforming secondary schools with support. It's as if they are separate to us and not in this battle with us to improve the matric results.*

All the participants' views discussed in this section indicated a need not only for the assistance from the DBE, but also the physical presence of the DBE in their underperforming secondary schools. Some views expressed by HOD1, HOD2, HOD3, DP1, DP3, P1 and P3 in this section indicated that these SMT members are working alone (within the confines of their underperforming schools) and are expected to improve learner performances at the school level without any intervention from the DBE. All the participants' responses discussed in this section suggest that there should be close collaboration between SMT members of underperforming secondary schools and the DBE. Some principals in Bhengu *et al.*'s (2014:207) study suggested that the DBE was unable to provide support because they did not understand the curriculum needs of the school; however, this was as an aspect that was not raised by the participants in my study. The type of collaboration that the participants in this study point towards is one where the DBE is physically present in these underperforming secondary schools and are directly interacting with learners and SMT members.

#### **4.10.2 Underperformance stressors**

Through my interactions with the participants in this study, I uncovered traces of stress stemming from the official designation of the school as underperforming. I realised at some point that this warranted a separate sub-theme under the theme of "Experiences of attempting to deal with instructional leadership roles". This is especially as my study was dealing with schools classified as underperforming. This therefore needed highlighting and I located areas in the data where participants had indicated that their instructional leadership practices encounter many stressful situations in their school contexts. There were various evidences of stress or pressurised situations that were uncovered during the interviews. The responses from participants concur with some of the stressors indicated in Frank, Reibel, Broderick, Cantrell and Metz's (2015:8) study which were: Increasing and diverse demands in learning abilities (or various barriers to learning); interacting with learners from low-economic backgrounds; the educators having a feeling of not being able to address learner indiscipline as they perceived it; and their identification of low school finances to support school resource materials. Frank *et al.* (2015:8) suggest that when school managers are confronted with these stressors on a daily basis, it can interrupt their ability to perform

effectively in the instructional programme. Such concerns were also expressed by many participants in my study, at all levels and across all the schools. In the three schools, HOD2, HOD3, DP1, DP3, P1 and P3 alluded to the stressful situations they were faced with as a result of the underperforming status of their schools. I now turn to some of the experiences shared by these SMT members in relation to school underperformance stressors.

In School Two, HOD2 conveyed feelings of worry about having to answer for educators' work which had to be monitored according to the DBE officials. HOD2's use of the words "keeps a close eye" also suggests that the school is being closely monitored by the DBE to check if the school is improving (or at least trying to improve) learner academic performance. HOD2 felt worried about DBE visits because when an educator's work is in question, the HOD responsible is held accountable and questioned. For this HOD, accounting to the DBE for educators' work (under auspices of the HODs respective department) created a stressful situation. This is what HOD2 had to say:

*The Department keeps a close eye on the school because of our underperforming results. Sometimes I get worried because when the Department officials attend school they call for the HOD and if something is not in order with an educator they began to question the HOD.*

In School Three, HOD3 regarded the requirement to return the school to a desirable learner academic performance as stressful. The stress of working in an underperforming secondary school motivated HOD3 to strive to achieve the desired academic goal of overcoming the underperforming status of the school. During my conversation, HOD3 expressed a personal leadership and management goal to overcome the stress of working in an underperforming school and wanted to be the change agent that makes the difference in the NSC results. HOD3's perspective about change was also identified by Bhengu *et al.* (2014:209) who indicated that a positive attitude and mind-set is needed to manage change, which are qualities exhibited by HOD3. In addition, a participant in Bhengu *et al.* (2014:209) argued that change is "an individual person's issue". I find this view to be profound with regard to HOD3's positive attitude in dealing with stress in the underperforming secondary school. In relating to stress and pressure of working in an underperforming secondary school and turning it around, HOD3 said:

*For some people, a NSLA (underperforming) school is a stressful place to be in, but for me, it is a challenge to try and take the school back into a safe zone with the Matric results and it is something that I enjoy working towards. I want to be able to*



*say that I made the difference, and it is through my leadership and management that got this school back on its feet, but the challenge is very stressful.*

The DBE, local community and school were sources that placed mounting pressure on SMT members in pursuit of improvement in the NSC examinations. For example, in School One, DP1's described the mounting pressure as a bombardment. DP1 also described a different kind of pressure whereas a manager he wanted the best for the school and in particular improving the NSC results. The only downfall DP1 alluded to was lack of acknowledgement for the commitments the school was making. He said:

*At an underperforming school there is pressure coming from various sides, from the department, from the community, and also being partly responsible for the institution that you serve brings its own pressure because you want to perform well, you want your school to do well, you want your learners to do well, but I think the added pressure comes from doing the best that we can do, and sometimes we feel like nobody is listening.*

In School Three, DP3 found the time on tasks to be a stressor. DP3 described how the DBE placed stress on them by requesting information (sometimes statistics) at short notices. DP3 said:

*The department always asks us for stats and information which we have to submit sometimes on short notice.*

In School One, P1 described the congested atmosphere created by the DBE when they conduct their school visits. P1 explained that the visits by the DBE were monitoring and not to support contact sessions. However, the DBE officials who visit P1 only conduct a functionality visit (mostly comprising of administrative tasks) and not individual educator monitoring, unless otherwise informed. This is what P1 had to say:

*Furthermore, the department does monitoring checks on the school almost every week. It's like the Department does not even give us a little space to breathe, I mean every week you have to be wondering if the Department is going to suddenly enter the school and start demanding certain documents and information. Sometimes the notice of visit is so short I have to then start running around and putting things in place.*

When I asked P3 about what a typical day was like in an underperforming secondary school, part of P3's response echoed the sentiments of HOD2 and P1 in relation to DBE visits and the negative impact these visits had on educators, especially the demands placed on the principal with regard to improving learner academic performance. P3 remarked:

*When you are the principal of an underperforming secondary school, the department hounds you about improving the NSC results and makes special visits to school. I think that these visits are supposed to support underperforming schools but the meetings and visits are more punitive and puts staff under pressure. This is not the right way going about improving the NSC results since our teachers are trying their best every day and the department official visits one day and makes an assumption about a teacher's level of work, I do not think this is fair.*

It is quite evident from the responses of the participants that the excessive administrative tasks have led to increased workloads among the HODS, DPs and principals in underperforming secondary schools. Furthermore, the overload of administrative tasks for these SMT members was partly due to the fact that the schools are underperforming. The DBE has an obligation to ensure that the NSC results of underperforming secondary schools are improved not only for the national statistics but in the interest of the learners who are destined for the workforce in South Africa or furthering their studies in tertiary institutions. The responses from the principals of School One and School Three suggest that the subtraction, or an ease of administrative tasks, may lead to more time committed to their instructional leadership and management duties, especially their time devoted to the curriculum of the school which in turn will yield to improved performance in the NSC examinations. The responses from HOD2, P1 and P3 (as discussed in this section) also highlighted the stress experienced by these SMT members related to the DBE monitoring visits to their schools.

#### **4.10.3 Beyond the call of duty**

My interaction with the participants in this study HOD2, DP3, P1 and P3 revealed that they sometimes work over and above the normal school hours. These SMT members (at different levels) shared this responsibility, so all of them spent equal additional hours monitoring the Grade 12 intervention classes. I decided in a further round of analysis to call this "Beyond the call of duty" under Theme 1 titled "Experiences of attempting to deal with instructional leadership roles". I also found this to be an example where the SMTs in this study use

shared instructional leadership while engaging in teaching and learning activities aimed at improving learner academic performance. Hence, this was important for the study.

The main aim of the Grade 12 intervention classes is to offer additional support for teaching and learning by including additional tuition classes on weekends and school holidays (Rault-Smith, 2006:231). The extra hours put in by the SMT members surfaced during my interviews with them stemming from a question about what their typical day was like in an underperforming secondary school, while some participants outlined it as a negative factor impacting on their instructional leadership practices.

The collective responses from the participants (HOD2, DP3, P1 and P3) revealed that the additional improvement classes are held during school vacations and an extra one hour of tuition to the existing timetable for Grade 12s. Classes are also held on Saturdays and Sundays. The reason for the proposed additional hours (to the official seven hours in a school day) is the DBEs suggested intervention method to improve the NSC results, where underperforming secondary schools provide extra lessons for learners. Later in my study (in March 2021), I learnt that the underperforming schools in my study were asked by the DBE to start school at 07:00am and finish at 16:00pm for Grade 12 learners. This was an attempt (or strategy) to bring about improvement in the NSC results.

In School Two, HOD2 commented on after-hours duty with an extra period every day. HOD2 was clearly not happy with the extra Grade 12 intervention classes and attributed the additional working hours to underperformance by Grade 12 learners. Nevertheless, HOD2 still devoted time to the intervention classes with the aim of improving the NSC results. HOD2 remarked:

*The one thing I don't like about being in an underperforming secondary school is the 'overtime.' By overtime, I mean the hours we have to work over and above our normal hours. I go home after about 3:30pm every day because we have an extended day for our Grade 12 learners due to our underperformance.*

While HOD2 did not show too much enthusiasm about the additional Grade 12 classes, DP3 shared a somewhat different perspective on additional classes. DP3 was of the opinion that the additional classes were in the best interests of the learner. Also taking into account that DP3 teaches in a school that has been declared underperforming for the first time (in 2019) in the school's existence, there is this drive towards attaining the required NSC pass rate:

*Managers finish late on some days because of matric classes. I don't have a problem with that because it is for the learner and I am all for improving our Matric results, so we can move out of this underperforming category that we are in right now.*

In School One, P1 regarded the management of the additional Grade 12 classes as a responsibility of the principal. P1 also indicated that there was no choice when it came to additional Grade 12 classes (including holidays and Saturdays) since the school was underperforming. P1 remarked:

*I have to be present at school for all our extra classes which may be an hour after school, during the school holidays and on Saturdays. I don't really have a choice because it is compulsory for all underperforming secondary schools to have these extra lessons.*

In School Three, P3 echoed the similar sentiments as P1 and also indicated the role of the principal to work additional hours in order to manage the Grade 12 intervention classes. P3 described his role in the additional Grade 12 intervention classes as follows:

*My job does not stop after 2:30pm like most educators. I have to stay until our additional classes are finished. We have a different subject every day for about half an hour extra, and during the holidays we classes until about 1pm and I have to be present, but my SMT also assists me with that.*

According to the responses above, the SMTs of underperforming secondary schools indeed work over and above the normal school hours. SMTs of underperforming secondary schools provide additional tuition classes to Grade 12 learners on weekends and during school holidays, as well as extra (after-hour) lessons between Monday and Friday. The after-hours intervention classes managed and conducted by the SMTs of these underperforming secondary schools is an indication that they are indeed working beyond the call of duty in order to improve learner academic performance in their schools.

#### **4.10.4 Creating a positive learning environment**

The creation of a positive learning environment was another category that I identified at some point as aptly encapsulating how the participants expressed that various stakeholders in the school can feel valued, respected and appreciated. I created this category under Theme 2, namely, "Instructional Leaders' Engagement in Teaching and Learning Activities". The SMT members in this study made various attempts at promoting what can be called a

positive learning environment amidst their underperforming contexts, thwarted by lack of resources, indiscipline and low morale among educators as mentioned by the participants during my conversation with them. The participants in this study shared their experiences and activities which they engaged in to create a positive learning environment with the aim of improving their learner academic performance. I now delve into some of the SMT member's experiences of creating a positive learning environment.

In School One, HOD1 described the *Learner Mentorship Programme* implemented for Grade 12 learners. I found this to be a positive strategy towards steering learners to improved learner academic performance in the NSC examinations. According to HOD1, all SMT members were engaged in the Learner Mentorship Programme. HOD1 did not only offer mentorship to Grade 12 learners, but also provided valuable support by evaluating learners' work progress and keeping records of learners' progress. This was HOD1's description of the Grade 12 Learner Mentorship Programme:

*We have mentorship programmes for matric. This is especially for every SMT member. Every SMT member is assigned eight to ten children. Our focus is that we need to monitor those children. So I'm checking on their progress, checking if they are studying, which is now recorded.*

In School Two, HOD2 alluded to classroom atmosphere and discipline as important contributors towards promoting a positive classroom environment. HOD2 seemed quite resilient, despite citing the lack of resources as posing a challenge. HOD2 ensured educators created a conducive classroom atmosphere by improving the aesthetics of the room using charts and keeping the rooms clean. Besides the creation of a physical (conducive classroom) positive learning environment, HOD2 also regarded the control of discipline as key to a positive learning environment. HOD2 showed good leadership and management by assisting educators with discipline problems they may encounter. This was HOD2's response to creating a positive learning environment:

*Due to lack of resources, there is only so much we can do. For now, I ensure all educators have a conducive classroom atmosphere. This is done by educators displaying charts and keeping the classrooms neat and tidy. We also ensure classrooms are painted and free of graffiti. As far as possible I try to control discipline and deal with major discipline problems that an educator may have.*

In School Three, HOD3 focused on the academic programme (lesson planning and presentation) in relation to creating a positive learning environment. HOD3 is a motivator of

stimulating types of lessons that reduce boredom in the classroom and promote learning opportunities. HOD3 encouraged educators to spend time preparing interesting lessons that attract learners to the class (in comparison to boring lessons that may lead learners to bunking classes). HOD3's advocacy for stimulating lessons could also assist in improving learner academic performance. This is how he expressed his views about lesson planning and preparation:

*I tell my educators to dedicate most of their time to their lesson preparations and presentation. Learners must want to run to your lessons, not run away from them. If educators' lessons are not interesting and learner-centred then learning becomes boring for these learners. Basically, I focus on lessons and teaching preparation so that learners enjoy the lessons and in turn they are equipped to pass the Grade 12 examinations or any assessment that they will undertake.*

In School One, DP1 created what he called a rapport with staff as well as students through effective communication. DP1 reflected on his childhood days when fear drove him to excel academically because education was important to succeed in life. In this regard, DP1 expressed sentiments about how the school is trying to educate learners about the value of education in response to negative socio-economic factors that they face. DP1 said:

*The rapport that I have with staff and that I have with the pupils is very important. Back in the day I produced because I was afraid and if I did not produce, then I would have to deal with my father. Here we try to get the pupils to understand the need for a decent education, for a proper education because it is the only means to get them out of the social economic mess they find themselves in.*

In School Two, DP2 was adamant that learners should not flaunt the school rules, especially in the classroom environment. DP2 was of the opinion that learners should not become an obstruction to the teaching and learning programme in the classroom and as manager he also ensured that the classroom is a place where educators do not become frustrated with discipline problems. This type of action and attitude displayed by DP2 towards the creation of a positive learning environment is significant within the context of an underperforming secondary school. DP2 responded:

*There are times when learners complain to me about a disruptive learner in the class and when I hear about this I take action immediately because I do not want learners to be disadvantaged by other disruptive learners. More importantly, I do not want educators to complain that their classrooms are difficult places to work in because of*

*a few unruly learners. To ensure both educators and learners are free to excel in the academic programme I take immediate action against cases of poor discipline.*

In School Three, DP3 tackled discipline problems by trying to create an atmosphere conducive to learning and also made sure educators and learners have sufficient textbooks for the lessons. DP3 also tried to promote a happy work ethic to ensure educator productivity and that there are no conflicts (between educators and the DP) During the follow-up interview DP3 clarified some of the conflicts that sometimes arise which can affect the learning environment which included allocation of subjects to certain educators, large class sizes and allocating Grade 12 subjects to certain educators (which educators are not in agreement with all the time). These approaches to ensure educators are happy was also an indication that DP3 was making an attempt to prevent educators from becoming demotivated and complacent given the circumstances and challenges faced within this underperforming secondary school. DP3 said:

*I assist educators with discipline issues and meet with parents. I ensure all classes have sufficient textbooks and teaching and learning goes on effectively. I ensure my educators are always happy in the work environment so that they can be productive in the classroom because conflict can negatively affect educators work performance.*

P1, P2 and P3, as principals, shared some of their attempts to create a fruitful learning environment. These principals included supply of textbooks, rewarding good learner academic performance, sport, policy implementation and a safe environment. P3 showed good leadership qualities by rewarding learners and refraining from using punitive measures through punishment. Rewarding excellent learner achievement was very motivating for an underperforming school and arguably will motivate other learners. (See also McKay *et al.*, 2017.) With regard to the creation of a positive learning environment, P3 responded:

*I order textbooks for learners and educators' and I make sure the school is safe for everyone and also clean. We reward learners by giving them awards when they perform well, which encourages them to do better and other learners to achieve as well. I also encourage teamwork by all staff members so we can function effectively.*

In School Two, P2 also regarded textbooks as being an important part of teaching and learning. P2 also resorted to improvising when it came to shortage of textbooks by allowing educators to duplicate worksheets for their lessons. However, P2 highlighted the problem of insufficient funds for purchasing whole school LTSM in every subject. When it comes to LTSM, School Two may be lacking in this regard. This is what P2 had to say:

*I make sure that our educators and learners have their textbooks and other LTSM for the different subjects. For those subjects where there is a shortage of LTSM the educators duplicate worksheets for learners. The department does give us an allocation for LTSM, but it's not enough to cover all the books for every learner in every subject.*

In addressing the challenge of indiscipline raised by many of the participants, P1 used sport to bring about change and discipline amongst learners. P1 also embarked on a renovation project to improve the physical environment of the classrooms to promote a conducive learning environment. Policy implementation was a significant step forward for bringing about positive change in School One. P1 said:

*I recently did some renovations where new windows were put up in all classrooms. I also arranged a part of the school where we turned it into a soccer field because our learners enjoy sport and we thought that maybe this will also keep them positive and disciplined. Classes received painting, and we removed all the graffiti from the walls. We have implemented many internal policies that keeps our school safe and clean and that have had a positive impact on our overall learning environment.*

The participants have focused on some key areas like discipline, LTSM for learners, effective communication, sport, stimulating lessons and mentorship in trying to create a positive learning environment. The SMT members are endeavouring to create a positive learning environment in their schools through various activities and processes discussed in this theme aimed at improving learner academic performance.

#### **4.10.5 Initiating “change” activities**

One of the many changes that educators in various parts of the globe are initiating and implementing involves innovative teaching strategies as well as re-structuring in different levels (even school level) to bring about “whole-school improvement” (Hargreaves *et al.*, 2014:2; Tlale, 2017:187). The participants in this study described activities that they developed for learners, in particular the Grade 12 learners, in their bid to improve their NSC results in their schools and bring about positive change. I labelled their various activities as “Initiating Change Activities” (a refinement of Theme 2, namely, “Instructional Leaders’ Engagement in Teaching and Learning Activities). While questioning participants about their engagement in teaching and learning activities, HOD1, HOD2, DP3, P1 and P3 informed me about some of the activities undertaken in their schools to bring about positive change in



learner academic performance. I now discuss some of the initiatives implemented by School One, Two and Three, as explained by the participants in this section.

In School One, HOD1 elaborated on the *School Mentorship Programme*. (See also Section 4.11.4.) School One focused on individual learner attention through a mentorship programme for their learners and a special “test” period every Friday which was introduced for the whole school. HOD1’s school engaged in internal school mentoring in which curriculum and subject matter are discussed with the learners (Orland-Barak & Hasin, 2009:428). The learner mentorship programme implemented in School One involves an SMT member (at all levels) taking ownership (as well as leadership and management) of a group of five to six Grade 12 learners. Within these groups, SMT members offer learners individualised mentorship in many aspects of their schooling including assistance and monitoring of assessment tasks, any social problems experienced by the learner as well as career guidance and methods to improve learner academic performance. HOD1 stated:

*We have many programmes like the mentorship programme; we have Saturday classes, which we have to monitor, afternoon classes which we have to monitor and weekend classes which we have to monitor.*

School One implemented intervention strategies from Grade 8 through to Grade 12 with the intention of bringing about change in their learner academic performance and taking the school out of their underperforming status. HOD1 highlighted some of School One’s change strategies which included a compulsory Friday testing programmes and additional afternoon classes which gives Grade 12 learners more hours of contact time (teaching and learning time) in subjects for improvement. This is how HOD1 described some of the school’s activities to bring about change and improve the NSC results:

*We have office tests every Friday we have a subject, e.g., if it is English from Grade 8 right up to Grade 12. Remember what we are trying to do is start from Grade 8 because no miracles can be done at Grade 12 level, so intervention has to start from Grade 8. The whole school on a Friday writes a test per subject. Then we have the afternoon classes and that is from Monday to Thursday, so every subject is being taught again in the afternoon.*

In School Two, HOD2 described some of the change initiatives undertaken. HOD2 highlighted the school’s extra classes for Grade 12, daily motivational talks to learners and specially arranged talks by guest speakers (from external organisations) to address learners.

HOD2 referred to the following initiatives and recognised that it is important to encourage a positive outlook for the school to be successful. HOD2 remarked:

*As far as I am concerned, we have tried almost everything. We do extra lessons in the afternoon and holidays. We talk to learners daily to keep them motivated. We invite people from different organisations to conduct activities with our learners to try and develop them.*

Noticeably, DP1 in School One discussed his goal and vision for whole school development. DP1 was of the opinion that a different approach should be undertaken to improve results. DP1 believed that underperformance should not be tackled in Grade 12, but learners should be attended to and tracked from the early stages in Grade 8 and 9. DP1's ideas about change were as follows:

*We are doing it all wrong, we are getting Grade 12 parents on board and we need to get the Grade 8 and 9 parents and put measures in place that will serve them when they come to Grade 12. We are trying to change them in Grade 12 and you are never going to, so next year that's a new initiative where we drive the Grade 8 and 9. We drive all the grades, but a strong focus must be on Grade 8 and 9 because that parent still has control over that child in most cases.*

DP1 focused on these activities as important to improve the learner academic performance, since only a limited scope of work can be covered during the normal teaching hours daily. School One in particular stands out from the other two schools in that they are now targeting learners from Grade 8 to Grade 12 (the whole school).

Like School Three, School One also has additional Grade 12 classes to improve NSC results. In School One, P1 included a lot more activities to develop the learner holistically. P1 focuses on learner nutrition and religion and enlists NGOs as additional resources outside the curriculum to bring about improvement in the NSC results. The efforts of P1 are resilient in trying to bring about change so that learners can improve their academic performance (and ensure learners develop holistically). P1 said:

*Besides intervention classes, we have the Chatsworth Anti-Drug Forum that does programmes with our learners. We also have a feeding scheme for our learners who cannot afford to buy food for lunch. I try and get in religious leaders from various faiths to speak to our learners on a weekly basis in the hope that spirituality may keep these learners focused.*

In School Three, P3 acknowledged that the educators and SMT work extra hours during additional Grade 12 classes. In a bid to bring about change, P3 implemented sporting initiatives where learners compete against learners from other schools. This is what P3 had to say:

*In an underperforming school, you work overtime. The Matric teachers have to meet with their learners and arrange special classes. We even have special sport programmes where our learners play other schools in various codes of sport.*

The participants' responses discussed in this section demonstrate a willingness to initiate change in the underperforming secondary schools through the various activities implemented (as discussed above). Mentoring learners, additional instructional time, motivational talks, improving learner academic performance and a focus on other grades (Grade 8-11) are all strategies and change activities the participants have alluded to in this section. Besides the activities mentioned by the participants, the SMT has also invested their time and effort in affecting change in their schools by going the extra mile to arrange these activities and even working additional hours.

#### **4.10.6 Low morale of the SMT**

During my interviews, participants spoke about some of their individual (or rather personal) feelings towards being a manager in an underperforming secondary school. Most of the participants' responses were indicators of the low morale of SMT members. In my second cycle of analysis, I decided to call this theme "Low morale of the SMT," a refinement of Theme 3, called "Considerations of negative factors impacting on instructional leadership". Swartout *et al.* (2015:18) describes issues of low morale as what he refers to as "deadly diseases". These deadly diseases are the starting point of reference for low morale amongst individuals in an organisation. Some of the examples that the participants described as stress related could also be considered as "deadly diseases" (Swarthout *et al.*, 2015) within each underperforming secondary school.

In all three schools HOD1, DP1, HOD2, DP2, P2, HOD3, DP3 and P3 expressed feelings of dissatisfaction with learners and in some instances with the DBE as well. DP1, P2 and P3 feelings about their morale did not surface when I asked participants about some of the negative factors they are experiencing, but these feelings surfaced when they referred to issues of accountability and to their daily lives in their management positions. The participants in this study were for the most part stressed and pressurised in their

underperforming environments. DP2's response indicated that he has exhausted all avenues in trying to get learners to improve their NSC results. DP2 did however mention that if the school used the original mark (raw score) obtained without any mark adjustment, they would have a potentially good class of Grade 12 learners at the point of progression. DP2 said:

*Day in day out it's like a losing battle here. As a manager, I have to answer for everything which is very unfair because learners do not tow the line. As a manager, I have tried everything, but I don't think the underperforming situation is going to change unless we use the raw scores of learners and only allow those who meet the NSC requirements to move to Grade 12.*

HOD3 attributed the stressful situation to the generation of learners that they are currently dealing with in the school. HOD3 also did not think that he should be held accountable by the DBE for learners who showed little or no interest in their Grade 12 academic year. HOD3 said:

*Learners have changed over the years, and it is becoming extremely stressful to teach in this underperforming school. Managing the Grade 12 learners who do not cooperate and have no interest in passing the Matric exams should not be my problem.*

In School Two, HOD2 and P2 were feeling very demotivated. This was mostly due to the number of years that the school has now been underperforming with no improvement to date. HOD2's response was:

*Because of the poor Matric results over the last three years, teachers, and school management are feeling very demotivated.*

Likewise, feelings of demotivation were also expressed by P3. P3 explained how DBE officials were potentially demotivating educators. P3 hinted that this might be due to the negative impression already created by the school's classification as underperforming. In describing negative factors experienced, P3 said:

*Our teachers are trying the best every day and the Department official visits one day and makes an assumption about a teacher's level of work, I do not think this is fair. It is also very demotivating.*

P2's morale was low, coupled with feelings of demotivation that the position of principal did not even matter. This suggests that P2 is not managing to steer the 'underperforming' ship in times of need. P2 admitted the following:

*I would rather be a normal level one educator and have nothing to worry about, just teach and go.*

P2's feelings of wanting to rather occupy a level one educator position instead of the high-stakes principal post invoked feelings of unhappiness. This unhappiness in a management position was again echoed by DP3. DP3 was fatigued by the demands of the Grade 12 intervention programme and classes and explained how these 'extra' management commitments were taking a toll on her and her teaching. DP3 said:

*For me personally I think it takes a lot out of me physically and mentally and instead of enjoying my weekends I have to sometimes come to school to supervise the Grade 12 classes. I think being a manager in an underperforming school has taken the joy away from teaching you know.*

In School One, HOD1 expressed feelings of pessimism towards the underperforming situation and the impact it has had on her leadership and management position. She briefed me on all the avenues that she had tried in order to bring about change and effect improvement in the NSC results. HOD1 explained how the school utilised the services of the DBE's Psycho-Social Department where psychologists visit the school (free of charge) to assist with challenging learners and also the extent the SMT has gone to motivate learners and mentor level one educators to boost the morale in the school. After going through the list of intervention strategies, HOD1's final remark signified pessimism as follows:

*We have got the right people coming in. We motivate them daily as I said we mentor educators now. We got the DBE psycho-social services coming in and trying to assist them, and if all of that can't change the learner, tell me what hope is there for us to be accountable.*

From the same school, DP1 had a completely contrasting view. DP1 spoke with optimism in the sense of a true instructional leader with a vision and also recalled the past successes of the school. The only challenge is that although DP1 was very enthusiastic and optimistic, he had to promote a shared vision amongst HOD1 as well as the other SMT members in order to effect major improvements. This is what DP1 had to say:

*This was once a very proud institution that has produced doctors, lawyers, experts in the field of labour and people that have made great contributions to the economy, so I think it's the vision, not just my vision, but the vision of everybody that is a part of this school to restore it to the glory days.*

These participants' responses indicate that the school managers are working under stressful working conditions within the context of underperforming secondary schools. Most participants attributed the stressful conditions to the poor attitude shown by the Grade 12 learners. The DBE was also named by many participants as playing a part in eroding motivation through their critique of seasoned educators during their monitoring and evaluation sessions.

#### **4.10.7 Promoting shared vision**

During my conversations with the participants, many of them alluded to the notion of "shared vision" through teamwork. I called this theme "Promotion of a Shared Vision" to distinguish it from the participants mentioning how they interpreted a "Sense of Vision" (a refinement of Theme 4, namely, "Views Concerning Instructional Leadership to Enhance Improvement") in gearing the school towards reaching the minimum pass requirements. (See also Section 4.10.1.2.) In my second cycle of analysis, I tried to locate how the participants variously considered that the promotion of a shared vision across the various SMT members, including the educators, could be accomplished.

Some SMT members felt that the vision may not be realisable given the promotion and progression policy, Nevertheless they tried to promote the idea that if they all worked together as instructional leaders, they could incorporate this common vision in various collaborative strategies. Some collaborative strategies they devised support Weber's idea that people can develop a common vision while collaborating.

For example, In School One, HOD1 mentioned how they are promoting a shared vision through activities like their improvement programmes. HOD1 alluded to the "whole staff" working together through teamwork to ensure the promotion of their shared vision, which focused on improving learner academic performance. HOD1 alluded to the whole staff sharing in the same vision guided by their planned improvement programmes in which the *whole staff* (referring to the SMT and educators) is involved. HOD stated the following with regard to working collaboratively as a part of a shared vision to improve learner academic performance.

*The whole staff wants the school to perform well and we are working together to try to achieve this through our improvement plans and intervention classes.*

In School One, P1 reiterated the positive impact teamwork can have on improving learner academic performance. P1's response pointed towards promoting shared vision, which included the level one educators and SMT working collaboratively to achieve their SIP goals. P1 alluded to promoting shared vision via the SIP and remarked:

*The SIP is only effective if all educators and SMT work together, which is what we try to do as far as possible.*

In School Two, HOD2 also alluded to the promotion of a shared vision through teamwork within the SMT, which in turn can help to improve learner academic performance, particularly in Grade 12. HOD2 opined:

*I think instructional leadership can help us to improve our Grade 12 results, provided all our managers work together as a team.*

DP3 reiterated the need for promoting a shared vision through teamwork for improving learner academic performance, as well as recognising the need to develop the staff professionally. DP3 opined the following:

*We have to work together as a team to improve our results and also to develop the staff.*

DP2 echoed the same sentiments as HOD2 and acknowledged the promotion of a shared vision required the different levels of the SMT working collaboratively through teamwork with the main focus on improving learner academic performance. DP2's response was an indication of promoting a shared vision where all SMTs work as a team effectively within their respective management roles. DP2 suggested:

*The HODs, DP and principal must all work together to achieve better results in the Grade 12 Examinations and to do this each SMT member must carry out their duties effectively to overcome the many challenges of being underperforming so that in the end there will be all-round improvement.*

The following responses by DP2 and P1 refer to a sense of shared vision to improve learner academic performance. DP2 alluded to a sense of shared vision that is promoted through their subject meetings, in which educators are made aware of the learner improvement

goals. These types of responses prompted me to further probe participants about shared instructional leadership. DP2 commented on a sense of shared vision follows:

*At our subject committee meetings we set our targets and goals for improvement so that's where the other teachers would know what our intentions are.*

Similarly, P1 also alluded to the staff's partial awareness of the shared vision that is promoted at their meetings where learner improvement goals of the school are discussed. P1 said:

*I am sure everyone is on the same page because at our meetings we always reinforce our goal of improving our Matric results and the whole staff knows that's our key focus area.*

#### **4.10.8 Activating potential for shared instructional leadership**

The creation of this theme "Activating the potential for shared instructional leadership" was a refinement of Theme 4, namely, "Views Concerning Instructional Leadership to Enhance Improvement" which formed part of my second cycle of analysis. This theme is only a brief indication that I have elaborated upon in Chapter 5 but for purposes of completing the full thematic analysis I have added this theme here – albeit with some brevity as more detail is provided in Chapter 5. In Section 4.7.1.1, I highlighted the managerial administrative overload of tasks that SMTs' are sometimes challenged with. One view expressed by HOD2 shows the way in which shared instructional leadership could help overcome managerial administrative overload by sharing (or distributing tasks). HOD2 suggested:

*Teaching and learning tasks need to be divided between all SMT members.*

In the telephonic conversations, I asked participants about their views concerning shared instructional leadership in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016) document. While most participants indicated that the PAM (DBE, 2016) does not provide for shared instructional leadership, there was some evidence of the SMTs working collaboratively through the distributed leadership of tasks. All three DPs were of the opinion that the PAM (2016:39) implicitly provides for shared instructional leadership, mostly due to the support they have to offer to the principal, as part of their main aim of their job description (and partly through their delegation of tasks which they considered to be sharing of leadership). This direct interaction between the DP and the principal in the tasks that they complete (or share) can be considered as activating potential for shared instructional leadership. DP2 felt that shared instructional leadership was indeed provided for in the PAM (DBE, 2016) and stated:



*There are some tasks the principal and I complete together or with the entire SMT.*

Some participants considered the delegation of tasks as part of shared instructional leadership, albeit with some oversight and accountability from the SMT. In School One, P1 confirmed that most tasks are shared between the HODs and the DP, while the principal takes accountability for ensuring that the tasks are completed. The following two responses encapsulate P1's statements about shared instructional leadership:

*Almost all tasks are shared amongst the HODs and the DP and I oversee that the tasks are completed on time.*

*I delegate tasks to the other SMT members, so I would say that tasks are being shared with the rest of the SMT.*

In School Three, DP3 indicated that in the role of the DP, she works collaboratively with the principal and shares leadership tasks but may complete some tasks on her own sometimes. DP3 stated:

*I receive various tasks from the principal and then I share or complete the tasks myself.*

As far as the principals in this study are concerned, all of them recognised that they share instructional leadership, albeit they differed in their personal approaches and interpretations of how leadership was shared but still showed attempts at activating potential for shared instructional leadership (see Section 5.10.4). The above responses are an indication of this sub-theme "Activating potential for shared instructional leadership", which briefly expressed the views of participants concerning shared instructional leadership. The notion of shared instructional leadership is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

#### **4.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

I introduced this chapter by explicating the data analysis framework used in this study. I indicated that Figures 4.1-4.4 offer a final summary diagrammatic representation of the substance of the four main themes that emerged: (1) Experiences of attempting to deal with instructional leadership roles; (2) Instructional leaders' engagement in teaching and learning activities; (3) Considerations of negative factors impacting on instructional leadership; and (4) Views concerning instructional leadership to enhance improvement. The rectangular blocks in the upper parts of Figures 4.1-4.4 depict what I called the preliminary data

analysis, while the ovals depict the *second* cycle of analysis, albeit that I qualified that the process of developing and enriching/refining the themes cannot be clearly divided in any linear fashion.

When discussing the preliminary data analysis in terms of the four themes, I started by focusing on the sub-themes represented by the rectangular blocks in the upper portions of Figures 4.1-4.4, which translated into the various tables that I created (Tables 4.2 – 4.5). Each table represents, in turn, a different theme, which offers my coding of the responses specific to each sub-theme categorised under the main theme. With reference to the tables, I offered a narrative account of how all the themes and sub-themes could be said to be instantiated in the expressions of the participants – by offering detailed quotations primarily from the first and follow-up interviews. I related their expressions to arguments developed in the literature as discussed in Chapter 2 and as further engaged with in Chapter 4, showing that there are no univocal views overall that can be gleaned regarding ways of implementing instructional leadership from the perspective of the various players. Nevertheless, I pinpointed that some of their comments refer to the potential to activate shared instructional leadership as a way of improving the school's performance – a notion as advanced by many proponents of such leadership in the literature. I indicated how this was conceived by participants as pertinent to their specific contexts as classified as underperforming. My detailed narrative discussion and analysis of the development of each theme and sub-theme is akin to an audit trail (as advised in the literature on methodology and as mentioned in Chapter 3, Section 3.9.4).

Apart from the emergent themes outlined above, I referred to a second cycle of analysis, which consisted of identifying the following eight refinements of themes: (1) SMT as lone rangers (Refinement of Theme 1, namely, Experiences of attempting to deal with instructional leadership roles); (2) Underperformance stressors (Also a refinement of Theme 1); (3) Beyond the call of duty (Another refinement of Theme 1); (4) Creating a positive learning environment (Refinement of Theme 2, namely, Instructional leaders' engagement in teaching and learning activities); (5) Initiating change activities (Also refinement of Theme 2); (6) Low morale of the SMT (Refinement of Theme 3, namely, Considerations of negative factors impacting on instructional leadership); (7) Promoting shared vision (Refinement of Theme 4, namely, Views concerning instructional leadership to enhance improvement); and (8) Activating potential for shared instructional leadership (Also a refinement of Theme 4) This second cycle of analysis was also presented in narrative form which outlines the refined themes which emanated from further issues arising from the three schools during my first and second interviews where I further probed the way in which the SMT members perceived their instructional leadership roles in relation to each other (section 4.7.2.1) and with some

reference to the document review session with participants where I also asked them some additional questions regarding their views concerning shared instructional leadership in the context of discussing with them the PAM (DBE, 2016) and SIP. In Chapter 5, I delve into the detail of the document review (telephonic interviews) pertaining to the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP, as well as providing the participants' perceptions with regard to the notion of shared instructional leadership in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016) document.

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS CONCERNING THE PAM (DBE, 2016) AND SIP DOCUMENTS REVIEW: TELEPHONIC INTERVIEWS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Upon reviewing my data and the analysis generated during the first and second interviews, I recognised that I still needed to consider how participants felt about the two documents reviewed in my study which was the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP, in order to gain the participants' insights from an instructional leadership standpoint. This constituted a third interaction (telephonic conversations) with all participants. As I wished the research to be participative so that it was not only *my* interpretation of the PAM (DBE, 2016) and SIP that would be offered in my document review, I wanted to discuss interpretations of key aspects of the documents (pertaining to instructional leadership) with the participants. This interaction took place between October and November 2020.

By then Covid-19 regulations were in force from the DBE, which prohibited individuals from visiting public schools, so I had to use a different communication approach. Therefore, the participants and I agreed to communicate telephonically in the interest of health safety and to ensure the Covid-19 regulations were followed. Bolderston (2012:72) cites various advantages of telephonic interviews (see also Chapter 3, Section 3.8), and I found the telephonic interviews to be a useful data collection technique within the challenging and unforeseen Covid-19 context I was faced with during my study. The telephonic conversations were of varying duration, depending on the interest of the participants and their time schedules. Most lasted about 15-20 minutes, and two interviews were 30 minutes. Participants were notified in advance about the nature of our discussion, that is, a review (and their perceptions) of the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP and asked if they could make themselves available for the telephonic interview. I now turn to the discussions that unfolded and how my analysis of the telephonic conversations regarding the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP transpired.

#### 5.2 THE PAM (DBE, 2016) AND SIP DOCUMENTS

The PAM (DBE, 2016) and SIP documents constitute important documents as far as instructional leadership is concerned. As I noted in Chapter 2 (Section 2.6.2), this document contains the core duties and responsibilities for educators (which includes all SMT members) from post level one to four. The post levels in the PAM (2016:18) are categorised

as follows: Post level one: educator; post level two: HOD; post level three: deputy principal; and post level four: principal. The SIP is a document that “forms the basis for continuous school improvement, as well as acting as a monitoring instrument to measure progress towards specific areas of whole-school development” (Van Der Voort & Wood, 2014:2).

As I also alluded to in Chapter 4, these documents form the basis for every SMT member’s core duties and responsibilities, as well as the necessary strategies for improving learner academic performance. I regarded the telephonic discussion as a possible learning encounter for the participants so we could co-explore interpretations of the documents and how these may be “applied”. During the conversations I did not try to focus on all aspects of the PAM (DBE, 2016) or SIP, but rather on the following key aspects: The participants’ job descriptions in the PAM (DBE, 2016) document in relation to their instructional leadership roles; their views concerning shared instructional leadership in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016); and their interpretation of the SIP as instructional leaders for improving learner academic performance. I relayed to the participants beforehand that it was these aspects that I wished to co-explore with them.

In the exposition below, I relate these findings to the themes developed in Chapter 4 and show how they add additional detail to the themes, but do not call for any “new” themes over and above those presented in my thematic diagrams (Figures 4.1-4.4). I concentrate on how the PAM (DBE, 2016) and SIP are interpreted, and I relate this to notions of shared instructional leadership as discussed in previous chapters. I now turn to the discussions that unfolded and how my analysis of the telephonic conversations regarding the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP transpired.

### **5.3 TELEPHONIC CONVERSATIONS WITH HODs, DPs AND PRINCIPALS ABOUT THE PAM (DBE, 2016)**

I engaged each level of the SMT (i.e., HODs, DPs and principals) in conversations surrounding their main job descriptions as stated in the PAM (DBE, 2016), in relation to their instructional leadership roles and practices. I begin my analysis of the PAM (DBE, 2016) with the HODs, followed by the DPs and lastly the principals.

#### **5.3.1 HODs’ review of the PAM (DBE, 2016) document**

The main aim of the job of the HOD is to “engage in class teaching, be responsible for the effective functioning of the department and to organise relevant/related extracurricular activities so as to ensure that the subject, learning area or phase and the education of the

learners is promoted in a proper manner” (DBE, 2016:36). Based on the aim of the HOD’s job description according to the PAM (DBE, 2016), I asked the HODs to discuss how they perceived (or interpreted) their instructional leadership roles in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016). At the end of each conversation I also asked HODs about their views on the notion of shared instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2007) in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016) document.

In School One, HOD1 thought that the PAM (DBE, 2016) was a “*good comprehensive description*” of the job title for HODs. When I asked HOD1 about the PAM (DBE, 2016) job description in relation to her instructional leadership role, HOD1 stated: “*The PAM speaks about the responsibility of the HOD in ensuring effective teaching and learning, so I think that this is a good policy document for instructional leaders like HODs*”. The response above appeared positive since HOD1 noted the value and importance of the PAM (DBE, 2016) for improving teaching and learning. HOD1’s response also acknowledged that the PAM (DBE, 2016) is a noteworthy policy from the perspective of an instructional leader. HOD1’s comment about the responsibility of the HOD to ensure effective teaching and learning, from the perspective of an instructional leader, is also well-supported in literature. For example, several studies (Ghavifekr & Ibrahim, 2014:45; Leithwood, 2016:117; Seobi & Wood, 2016:1) assert that HODs, through their engagement in teaching and learning activities as instructional leaders, can bring about positive changes in learner academic performance.

In School Two, HOD2 had a different opinion about the PAM (DBE, 2016). HOD2 argued that the PAM (DBE, 2016) did not work in favour of the job description of an HOD. HOD2 felt that the PAM (DBE, 2016) was too comprehensive for the role of the HOD; he highlighted the additional administrative and extracurricular activities as burdening the HOD’s instructional leadership role. HOD2 said that the PAM (DBE, 2016) for HODs “*should only cover aspects that are curriculum related to teaching and learning, not the administrative and extracurricular duties as well*”. HOD2’s concern over the administrative tasks is linked to the first sub-theme in Chapter 4, titled “Experience of managerial administrative overload”. (See Section 4.7.1.1.) In this sub-theme, HOD2, as well as all the other participants, alluded to the excessive administrative tasks that appear to be impeding their instructional leadership practices (Mestry, 2013:119). HOD2’s argument above about administrative task overload, in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016), was also congruent with his response from our first interview where he went on to describe various administrative tasks that take up most of the HOD’s time. HOD2 indicated that anything over and above the direct involvement in teaching and learning in the classroom was an “*overload of administrative duties*”. HOD2 also stated: “*In order to give off our best, HOD’s must focus only on improving learner*

*results, and educator and learner management and supervision*". Through the analysis and participants' perceptions about the PAM (DBE, 2016), I learnt that the SMT have to follow the (administrative) tasks as stipulated in the policy.

In School Three, HOD3 felt that the PAM (DBE, 2016) was both an advantage and disadvantage to underperforming secondary schools. HOD3 found the PAM (DBE, 2016) to be a good prescriptive document for managing educators and learners. On speaking about the job description advantage of the PAM (DBE, 2016), HOD3 remarked that the "*PAM is good in the sense that it gives HODs a clear guideline of what is expected of them as far as the management of the educators and learners are concerned*". In regard to this response by HOD3, the PAM (DBE, 2016) can be considered as contributing towards the vision and goals of the school as advocated in Weber's (1996) model of instructional leadership insofar as all HODs know what is expected of them to achieve the organisational goals. However, in identifying a disadvantage of the PAM (DBE, 2016), HOD3 argued that "*in an underperforming school, maybe the PAM document may require more from HODs who are already exhausted with trying to improve the Grade 12 results*". As noted in Chapter 4 (Section 4.11.3), some participants (HOD1, HOD2, DP3, P1 and P3) alluded to their involvement in Grade 12 intervention classes, mentorship programmes for learners and administrative tasks that are over and above the normal functionality due to the underperforming status of the school. The work that HOD's engage in that is over and above their job description was a theme I called "Beyond the Call of Duty" which emerged in a second cycle of analysis. (See Section 4.11.3.)

As far as shared instructional leadership is concerned, all three HODs believed that the PAM (DBE, 2016) does not allow for leadership to be shared. For example, HOD1 argued: "*The PAM document has more duties and responsibilities directed at HODs specifically, instead of the entire SMT*". In Chapter 4, I noted that this concern was raised by all three HODs during my follow-up interviews in which they expressed their views about their instructional leadership role in relation to the DPs and principals. (See Section 4.7.2.1.) A sense of frustration was expressed by all three HODs in relation to the excessive and unequal workloads, which according to them, caused stress. On this issue, Christie's (2010:704) argument holds weight in that the PAM (DBE, 2016) indeed focuses on management and administrative tasks with less reference to "professional leadership".

After careful review, I found that the PAM (DBE, 2016) does not specifically provide for the sharing of instructional leadership. Upon further analysing HOD1's response above, I found that HODs strictly followed the PAM (DBE, 2016) document as a job description policy guideline, albeit at times creating opportunities for shared instructional leadership. To

explicate this further, HOD1 (as well as HOD2 and HOD3) responded based on her knowledge of her job description according to the PAM (DBE, 2016). However, in Chapter 4 (Section 4.7.2.1), all three HODs alluded to their role in shared instructional leadership. This contradictory finding indicated that HODs are indeed sharing leadership tasks in practice and not working in isolation as indicated in the PAM (DBE, 2016). This is why I created a category entitled “Activating Potential for Shared Instructional Leadership” under Theme 4, as discussed in Chapter 4.

In School Two, HOD2 raised the issue of shared instructional leadership in a different context. During my analysis and discussion in Chapter 4 (Section 4.7.2.1), all the participants spoke about their involvement in shared instructional leadership within the SMT only. HOD2 now raised the issue of shared instructional leadership, but from the HOD level to the level one educators. HOD2 indicated that sharing of leadership is sometimes interpreted differently by level one educators and goes on to say that “*when you try to include other level one staff in leadership or management tasks, they feel as if you are passing the buck and not doing your own work*”. HOD2 shows good instructional leadership by sharing leadership and management tasks with level one educators but noted that the educators did not appear to be entirely accepting of working in this way. From an instructional leadership theoretical perspective, this type of disagreement would not be conducive to promoting a common (shared) vision through collaboration, as pointed out in Weber’s (1996) model. I suggested in Chapter 4 that we can conceptualise a distinction between “sense of vision” towards increasing school performance with “promoting of a shared vision” – and that different SMT members’ expressions showed different perspectives on the extent of collaboration within the SMT and also in relation to including educators in jointly developing the vision. (See Figure 4.4. and the discussion in Section 4.11.7 of my second cycle of analysis.)

My conversation with HOD3 ended with a pointed statement about shared instructional leadership in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016) when he stated that the “*PAM document does not say anything about shared instructional leadership*”. The comments of the HODs show their varied interpretations of their job descriptions as specified in the PAM (DBE, 2016), and all specifically stated that the document itself does not provide for shared leadership.

### **5.3.2 Deputy principals’ review of the PAM (DBE, 2016) document**

The aim of the job of the DP is to “assist the principal in managing the school and promoting the education of learners in a proper manner, and to maintain a total awareness of the administrative procedures across the total range of school activities and functions” (DBE,



2016:39). Like my conversations (and exploratory questioning process I followed) with the HODs, based on the aim of the DP's job description according to the PAM (DBE, 2016), I asked the DPs to discuss how they perceived (or interpreted) their instructional leadership roles. At the end of each conversation I also asked the DPs about their views on the notion of shared instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2007) in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016) document.

Upon careful review of the PAM (DBE, 2016) with the DPs, I found that the PAM (DBE, 2016) does not provide specifically for the sharing of instructional leadership. However, all three DPs alluded to the way in which they provide assistance and support to the SMT and what they considered to be shared instructional leadership with the tasks that appear to be individualised for each SMT member in the PAM (DBE, 2016). I now turn to some of the discussions about the PAM (DBE, 2016) as expressed by the DPs in my study.

In School One, DP1 appeared to be an enthusiastic team player within the SMT, fulfilling the aim of the job description of the DP as stated in the PAM (DBE, 2016). For example, DP1 said: *"I am the main support manager to my principal and I basically ensure the smooth running of the school"*. DP1's response was in line with the aim of the job description of the DP in the PAM (2016:39) which states that assistance must be offered to the principal in promoting the education of the learners. The support offered to the principal mentioned by DP1 is stated in the PAM (2016:39) and includes supporting the principal in general and administrative duties. DP1's approach to support the principal can be considered collaborative in nature, which implies that DP1 was assisting the principal in instructional leadership with oversight of the teaching and learning activities of the school (cf. Hoadley *et al.*, 2009:144). This also confirmed DP1's perception about the instructional leadership role of the DP in relation to the other SMT members, as discussed in Chapter 4 (Section 4.7.2.1). DP1's views expressed above about providing a supportive role to the principal are also consistent with his position from our follow-up interview where he described his role as a "senior management advisory role" to the principal. I consider his responses to my probing about shared instructional leadership in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016) document as indicative of "Activating Potential for Shared Instructional Leadership" (See Chapter 4, Section 4.11.8.)

In School Two, DP2 shared similar sentiments as DP1 and remarked: *"When it comes to academics and administration, I oversee everything in the school"*. DP2 was fulfilling his role in accordance with the aim of the job of the DP in the PAM (DBE, 2016) and stated: *"I assist the principal in terms of my job description"*. Again here like DP1, DP2 assists the principal, as stated in the PAM (2016:39), which is more of a collaborative relationship between the

DP and the principal. This also implies that DP2 and P2 indeed share some of their instructional leadership tasks. When I shifted the focus on instructional leadership in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016), DP2 positively noted that *“the PAM document has all the aspects that are related to instructional leadership like the monitoring of the curriculum and supervision of work for educators and learners”*.

However, DP2’s response as expressed above and the PAM (DBE, 2016) document do not explicitly state that instructional leadership should be shared amongst the entire SMT, but it is carried out between the deputy and the principal (in this case, DP2 and the principal). DP2’s response also confirmed that he is aware which tasks are related to instructional leadership in the PAM (DBE, 2016) and is engaged in these tasks through shared instructional leadership with the principal. This is an indication that DP2 and P2 are working as a team, even though the job descriptions in the PAM (DBE, 2016) tend to focus on the individual. The response from DP2 yet again confirmed that shared instructional leadership is being carried out in practice, although it is not specifically stated in the PAM (DBE, 2016). DP2 also felt that besides the principal and DP collaborating, the PAM (DBE, 2016) suggests that the DP can delegate certain instructional tasks to HODs – and he considered this also a form of encouraging shared leadership.

Another positive conversation, this time with DP3 in School Three, also indicated that the DPs are working collaboratively with the principals. DP3 said: *“I receive various tasks from the principal and then I share or complete the tasks myself”*. This points to a collaborative approach in regard to sharing leadership between the principal and DP and therefore can be said to be evidence of the notion of shared instruction leadership (Hallinger, 2007:5), which was an additional element I provided for in Weber’s model as part of my theoretical framework. (See Chapter 2, Section 2.18.3.) But more importantly, DP3 went on to state: *“There are some tasks the principal and I complete together or with the entire SMT”*. The PAM (DBE, 2016) does not provide for the sharing of leadership across the entire SMT; however, DP3 extracts tasks from the PAM (DBE, 2016) and shares these leadership tasks with all members of the staff, including with educators. I regard this as effective instructional leadership given that the PAM (DBE, 2016) does not provide for sharing of instructional leadership tasks, yet DP3 creates this collaborative environment in which everyone is given the opportunity to work as a team. In this way, as literature suggests, the leader can create a shared vision and facilitation of a collaborative approach that will enhance the performance of the SMT (Niqab *et al.*, 2014:81). In view of this, DP3 also alluded to working collaboratively and trying to activate what I have called in Chapter 4 “Activating the Potential

for Shared Instructional Leadership”, even though the PAM (DBE, 2016) does not focus on a shared instructional leadership role.

At this point, I decided to speak further to DP3 about shared instructional leadership based on the examples given by her. DP3 was very positive about the idea of shared instructional leadership and said, *“We have to work together as a team to improve our results and also to develop the staff”*. DP3’s response here is somewhat of a personal view about working as a team towards realising shared instructional leadership since this is not stated in the PAM (DBE, 2016). The idea of DP3 realising that the SMT has to work in a team also implies the idea of promoting a shared vision through teamwork, as she refers to a shared vision regarding the goals of improving results and developing the staff. The view of DP3 here is another strong support for (and example of) what is stated in literature (Hallinger, 2007:5; Niqab et al., 2014:81) about the notion of shared instructional leadership to improve learner academic performance with a focus on collaboration and a common vision, even though this is not provided for in the PAM (DBE, 2016) job descriptions.

On the topic of shared instructional leadership, DP1 too was a strong believer of shared leadership and teamwork stating, *“as the SMT we must help one another because at the end of the day all of us are accountable for the NSC results”*. DP1’s idea of helping one another and acknowledging accountability of the NSC results implies that he supports the notion of activating the potential for shared instructional leadership in the sense that *“at the end of the day all of us are accountable”*.

In School Two, DP2 found the role and tasks of the DP as already in line with characteristics of shared instructional leadership and said: *“The fact that the PAM says that the DP has to delegate certain tasks to the HOD means that we are sharing leadership duties within our SMT”*. DP2 interpreted the PAM (DBE, 2016) as providing for shared leadership and regarded the delegation of tasks as shared leadership tasks within the SMT. Some SMT members interpreted the PAM (DBE, 2016) as providing for shared instructional leadership through the various tasks specified in the document that should be fulfilled by each level of the SMT. This eventually is a collaborative effort, although each SMT member works individually during the task. Others recognised that shared instructional leadership was taking place in practice - like DP2.

### **5.3.3 Principals’ review of the PAM (DBE, 2016) document**

The aim of the job of the principal is to “ensure that the school is managed satisfactorily and in compliance with applicable legislation, regulations and personnel administration measures

as prescribed”, as well as to “ensure that the education of learners is promoted in a proper manner and in accordance with approved policies” (DBE, 2016:41). My telephonic conversations with the principals followed a similar process as the HODs and DPs. I asked the principals to share their views on two aspects: (1) How they perceived their instructional leadership role in relation to their job description in the PAM (DBE, 2016); and (2) their views concerning shared instructional leadership in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016).

All three principals appeared to be working in accordance with the aim of their job descriptions as stated in the PAM (DBE, 2016). For example, in School One, P1 firmly stated that *“the PAM is policy and has to be followed”*. Further into our conversation, P1 said: *“The PAM ensures that I perform my duties as a principal and manage the school in a way that shows we are improving. The PAM document is filled with instructional tasks that I have to carry out on a daily basis including providing professional support, monitoring, supervising and evaluating learner results which are a few that comes to mind”*. P1’s response in the extract above was an indication that he recognised those duties in the PAM (DBE, 2016) that are related to his instructional leadership role. In addition, the type of tasks indicated by P1 are considered as orientated towards instruction as pointed out by Bush and Glover (cited in Mestry, 2017:258), which engages the principal in the teaching and learning programme of the school. This finding is noteworthy in the light of a plethora of literature (Mestry, 2013:119; Mestry, 2017b:258; Seobi & Wood, 2016:1; Taole, 2013:78), which argues that principals spend more time on administrative duties than on instructional leadership practices.

With regard to the sharing of leadership, P1 remarked: *“Almost all tasks are shared amongst the HODs and the DP and I oversee that the tasks are completed on time”*. P1 was yet another participant who expressed that he engaged in shared instructional leadership in a joint team venture with the SMT though this is not provided for in the PAM (DBE, 2016) document. P1’s response also indicated that he has oversight of all tasks shared with the SMT. This implies that P1 sees himself as ultimately accountable for all shared leadership tasks, but that he has “oversight” of tasks shared with the SMT. The theme of “Accountability” in Chapter 4 (Section 4.7.1.2) also reiterates P1’s view, in which he fervently stated that he is ultimately the “accounting officer” who has to answer for underperformance and improvement plans. However, he qualified this somewhat by mentioning that he has to involve the SMT to fulfil this accountability. In Chapter 4 therefore in the second cycle of analysis I created a category springing from Theme 1, but also moving into Theme 4, regarding “Activating potential for shared instructional leadership” to improve performance.

In School Two, P2 found the PAM (DBE, 2016) document to be appropriate to the job description of the principal and said: *"It is a simple document that states a principal should lead and manage the school"*. In view of this, P2 suggests that he is ultimately responsible for the functioning of the school. However, when I enquired about shared instructional leadership in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016), P2 remarked: *"I delegate tasks to the other SMT members, so I would say that tasks are being shared with the rest of the SMT"*. P2 considered the delegation of tasks as translating to shared instructional leadership. Although rather unknowingly, P2 can be considered as indeed sharing instructional leadership tasks with the rest of the SMT considering that this is not provided for in the PAM (DBE, 2016) of the principal. Although P2 did not indicate if he is ultimately responsible for the delegated (or shared) tasks, he noted (see again my reference to this in Chapter 4) that as the principal, he is indeed accountable for the functionality and academic performance of the school.

In School Three, I did not find that P3 showed a very effective understanding of the PAM (DBE, 2016) in relation to his job description. P3 considered the PAM (DBE, 2016) to be a document to be used as a reference source of policies for learner improvement. P3 remarked: *"The PAM asks principals to follow policies so that we can improve results"*. When I probed about shared instructional leadership, P3 was of the opinion that the teaching and learning at the classroom level was a responsibility given to the HODs. In my previous conversations, P1 and P2 indicated that even though they share instructional leadership tasks with the other SMT members, they still assume responsibility for all tasks mentioned in the PAM (DBE, 2016). P3 was of the opinion that HODs have to be responsible for their (compulsory) instructional leadership tasks. While this could imply that P3 was not taking the necessary responsibility for working collaboratively with HODs as far as instructional leadership is concerned, it can also be interpreted as implying that there was no actual sharing of leadership tasks by P3. In this latter interpretation, HODs and DPs engaged with tasks that were specified in the PAM (DBE, 2016) for their individual roles, and did not receive tasks via shared leadership from P3. P3 stated the following about shared instructional leadership: *"My HODs supervise and manage teaching and learning which are compulsory tasks that they have to carry out"*. His statement suggests that he leaves it to HODs to handle the role of managing teaching and learning.

The responses from two principals, P1 and P2, suggest that they are fulfilling their instructional leadership roles according to their understandings of their job descriptions as stated in the PAM (DBE, 2016). This also alludes to their efforts of promoting shared instructional leadership, which led to me creating a refined theme called "Activating potential for shared instructional leadership" under Theme 4, titled, "Views concerning instructional

leadership to enhance improvement”. However, the response from my conversation with P3 indicates that there is some ambiguity as to who is ultimately accountable for the learner academic performance and improvement, given that he leaves supervision and management of teaching and learning solely to the HODs. This ambiguity identified, relates to the issue of accountability, as I detailed in Section 4.7.1.2, where I provide a narrative discussion on the different views of instructional leadership for improving learner academic performance under the sub-theme of “Accountability”. I also pointed out (with reference to the refined theme “Activating potential for shared instructional leadership” under Theme 4), that some principals’ references to collaborative efforts with HODs and DPs were also an indication that shared instructional leadership is taking place (to a certain extent) in their schools and that we can consider this under the banner of their activating potential for shared instructional leadership. I now move on to discuss the SIP which was another document that was analysed in my study.

#### **5.4 TELEPHONIC CONVERSATIONS WITH HODs, DPs AND PRINCIPALS ABOUT THE SIP**

The SIP is uniquely designed to suit the specific needs of each school. The SMT (including educators) design a SIP that is meant to ensure whole school improvement, with the most important aspect being learner academic performance. In each school, I asked the three SMT members (i.e., HODs, DPs and principals) what the SIP meant to them as instructional leaders and whether this document was improving learner academic performance. The SIP of all three schools in this study focused on improving learner academic performance but varied in the approaches and strategies to this end. (See Sections 5.4.1-5.4.3.) I now delve into some of the discussions and findings related to the SMTs’ responses regarding the SIP in each school. In this analysis, I include the responses of the SMT as a collective (i.e., the HOD, DP and principal) in each school since all school SIPs are different. My intention here was to understand how the HOD, DP and principal interpreted their own SIP, within the context of their underperforming school.

##### **5.4.1 SIP review in School One**

After careful review of School One’s SIP, I found that their SIP was specifically aimed at addressing underperformance of Grade 12 learners. During my discussions with the HOD, DP and principal of School One, we explored the effectiveness of the SIP in improving learner academic performance from the perspective of the SMT. HOD1 indicated that the SIP in School One highlighted their main intervention strategies for tackling

underperformance. HOD1 described School One's SIP as follows: *"Our improvement plan includes intervention classes, holiday classes, afternoon classes and even a programme where our Grade 11 educators work closely with progressed learners to prepare them for Grade 12"*. This was an extension of two sub-themes located in Chapter 4 in the second cycle of analysis, namely, "Beyond the Call of Duty" and "Initiating Change Activities", which include HOD1's allusions to the improvement strategies implemented in School One. School One's SIP with the various intervention classes shows that there is additional support in order to improve teaching and learning (in line also with Rault-Smith, 2006:231).

School One's SIP was uniquely designed to prepare Grade 11 progressed learners adequately for when they eventually reach Grade 12. This can be considered foresight on the part of the SMT and educators who designed this SIP. This proactive approach to addressing underperformance from Grade 11 is in direct resonance with the findings of Bayat *et al.* (2014b:46), which indicated that the DBE's (2015) promotion and progression policy was a key factor reinforcing underperformance. School One's SIP was a direct response to the DBE's (2015:37-38) promotion and progression policy where Grade 11 learners are automatically promoted to Grade 12 even if the learner does not meet the minimum pass requirements. (See also Chapter 2, Section 2.10.1.)

HOD1 regarded the SIP as a *"good guideline for school management that wants to improve the NSC results because the main focus is on the teaching and learning"*. HOD1 regarded the SIP as an effective tool for guiding teaching and learning. This shows that School One's main focus was on improving the NSC results and moving out of the underperformance category. In another conversation about the School One SIP, DP1 had a rather different opinion of the SIP with regard to learner improvement. DP1 felt that the SIP was difficult to implement in practice within the context of School One. DP1 argued that *"on paper the SIP seems very effective, but on the ground it is not that simple to implement"*. When I further probed and asked DP1 what possible challenges there may have been with the SIP, DP1 responded, *"We can have all the ways to improve our NSC results in our SIP, but the responsibility still lies with the learner to pass the exams"*. The response of DP1 was an indication that although strategies were in place to improve their learner academic performance, the learners still (partly) decide the outcome of whether the school is underperforming or not, which is determined by their NSC results. The above response by DP1 relates to the contention of accountability for improving the NSC results. Reflecting on the theme "Accountability" in Chapter 4 (Section 4.7.1.2), DP2 (as well as HOD1, HOD2 and DP3) alluded to the learners in Grade 12 as accountable for their NSC results. These

participants argued that shared accountability should include the learner as well, who may also be a contributor to the poor performance of the school.

During my last conversation in School One, P1 was of the opinion that their SIP was tailor-made for academic achievement. P1 said: *“Our SIP includes learner motivation through special assembly talks and also parent meeting sessions where we discuss individual learner progress with parents”*. The inclusion of motivational talks and parent meetings, as pointed out by P1, are critical steps in trying to improve learner academic performance. Despite several studies (Bayat *et al.* 2014b; Engelbrecht, 2006; Taole, 2013) suggesting that parental involvement is lacking in many schools, School One still made an attempt to bring parents on board in their improvement strategies. Also as I have mooted in Chapter 4 (Section 4.9.1.3), the collaboration between the school and the parent (or guardian) is vitally important for instructional leadership through the engagement of PLCs (Ezzani, 2019:580). Furthermore, the SIP of School One supports the view of Wilder (2014:377) who avers that the school-parent relationship should have a focus on learner achievement and not only support for tasks completed at home. This can be considered as a tactful way of sharing responsibility with parents (or guardians) through the SIP with the goal of improving learner academic performance.

As far as instructional leadership is concerned, P1 stated: *“There is a commitment to educator professional development in the SIP to improve teaching and learning”*. P1’s response confirms that the SIP engages the SMT and educators in Continuous Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) as noted in the sub-theme: “Encouraging Professional Development” in Chapter 4, Section 4.8.1.4. The response of P1 now suggests that through the SIP, professional development is encouraged in School One.

The provision of professional development for educators in the SIP of School One can be linked to Weber’s (1996) element on “Observing and Improving Instruction” through the use of professional development opportunities. In addition, the SIP of School One is designed to include level one educators as key role players in instructional leadership. The SIP of School One provides for collaborative engagement between the SMT and the educators in terms of fulfilling instructional leadership. In School One’s SIP, providing professional development opportunities for educators is a key finding for school improvement, as this would suggest that educators are encouraged to be actively engaged in professional activities on a continuous basis (see also Kennedy, 2016:945).

To sum up, P1 suggested: *“The SIP is only effective if all educators and SMT work together, which is what we try to do as far as possible”*. I felt that the closing remarks of P1 summed



up the conversation appropriately, indicating the need for collaboration, shared leadership and commitment in order for instructional leaders to implement the SIP effectively. In contrast to the PAM (DBE, 2016), which provides clearly stated job descriptions for *individual members* of the SMT, the responses from HOD1 and P1 suggest that School One's SIP is designed to provide for shared instructional leadership amongst educators and the SMT. The SIP of School One is also in line with my extension of Weber's (1996) model via Hallinger's (2007) argument for shared instructional leadership.

#### **5.4.2 SIP review in School Two**

Similar to School One, my analysis of School Two's SIP found a direct focus on improving learner academic performance, not only in Grade 12, but the whole school (i.e., also Grades 8 to 11). Some of the main aspects highlighted in the SIP of School Two were: Basic functionality (including a late arrival register for learners); focus on leadership, management and communication between SMT and educators; improvement of the quality of teaching and learning through professional development; school safety; and collaborating with parents about learners' progress. The areas of focus in School Two's SIP were, in fact, an extraction of the various duties of the different levels of the SMT from the PAM (DBE, 2016). The design of the SIP was very tactful in that it incorporated individual duties from the PAM (DBE, 2016) to promote a collaborative plan where everyone works as a team within the SMT. It appears that School Two's SIP was designed in accordance with the job descriptions of the different post levels in the PAM (DBE, 2016), while encouraging teamwork. In the design of their SIP, School Two does not lose focus on the main job descriptions; however, it is worth noting that this is not an absolute requirement of the SIP. In view of the underperformance status of School Two, their SIP includes strategies to bring about school improvement, with a special focus on learner achievement. School Two can be characterised as integrating their SIP with aspects from the PAM (DBE, 2016).

During my telephonic conversations with the SMT, I gained further insights about their SIP as they spoke to me about some of those aspects which they felt were salient to them as instructional leaders. For example, HOD2 highlighted the importance of parents and the community, which was included in the SIP. HOD2 remarked: *"The improvement of the Grade 12 results cannot be achieved without the support of the parents"*. When I asked HOD2 about the effectiveness of the SIP in improving learner academic performance, HOD2 was of the opinion that the SMT and educators can only do so much in school and stated: *"It is up to the parents to make sure learners are working at home. Learners have to use the time*

*they have at home to complete assessment tasks and learn, and parents have to make sure of this but it is not always happening”.*

The responses from HOD2 above contribute to the extension of two sub-themes in Chapter 4 viz., “Accountability” and “Parental support”. The issue of accountability was once again raised by HOD2, but with a focus on the parent (or guardian) at the fore of the argument. HOD2 was of the opinion that parents played a key role in the successful implementation of the SIP. A frustrated HOD2 lamented about how parents are supposed to be monitoring homework tasks. However, as I have alluded to in Chapter 4 (Section 4.9.1.3), Wilder (2014:377) cautions against the school forging a relation with parents in which the focus is solely on monitoring the completion of homework tasks. Within the context of underperforming secondary schools in South Africa, findings suggest that parental support in the completion of educational tasks at home is not always possible due to poor literacy levels of the parent (Bayat *et al.*, 2014b:191). In view of this, parental support remains a contentious issue for future research, specifically within the context of South African underperforming secondary schools.

In another conversation, DP2 highlighted the importance of professional development for improving learner academic performance. DP2 stated: *“Although our SIP mentions educator development, there is not much professional development workshops being held to help educators improve their teaching”*. DP2’s response was a clear indication that the DBE needs to implement more professional development workshops, specifically in specialist Grade 12 subjects, which can lead to effective classroom delivery of lessons, which in turn can improve learner academic performance. The concern about the lack of professional development workshops and training for SMT (and educators) was raised by most participants, as detailed in Chapter 4 (Section 4.8.1.4). As noted in Chapter 4, although some SMTs try to encourage professional development internally, the provision of professional development workshops and training offered by the DBE once again remained another contentious issue. However, from a theoretical perspective, Weber’s (1996:259) model refers to the role of the instructional leader in providing professional development opportunities for educators as a way of *“observing and improving instruction”*.

P2 felt strongly that the SIP was effective and just needed better implementation. P2 suggested: *“We have a comprehensive SIP which covers almost all aspects. Everyone needs to do their part to make sure the SIP works”*. When I asked P2 about the main role players in implementing the SIP, P2 said: *“The educators, learners as well as the SMT have a specific function to perform”*. P2’s response was an indication that as far as he was

concerned, School Two recognised that leadership can be shared right down to the level of the educators.

P2 alluded to the implementation of the SIP in School Two by indicating that “*everyone needs to do their part*” to make it work. The issue of implementation in practice was also raised by DP1 in School One. The focus on the various post levels to perform their specific functions relates to the notion of distributed leadership. The fact that P2 identifies the main role players as educators, learners and the SMT in the implementing of the SIP, suggests that he adopts a notion of shared responsibility for school improvement. As noted in Chapter 4, the theme on “Accountability” raised contentious arguments as to who is ultimately accountable for learner academic performance. The SIP of School Two provides for a sense of shared responsibility in which each stakeholder is accountable for their role in the final NSC examination results (including whole school learner performances). While the question of who is actually accountable for the final NSC results is still in limbo, for now, the notion of shared responsibility (and accountability), as outlined in School Two’s SIP, ensures everyone is encouraged to contribute to school improvement. The response of P2 was also an indication that on paper the SIP appeared to be very effective; however, collaboration and teamwork is needed for its successful implementation.

As far as instructional leadership is concerned, P2 referred me to the School Two SIP and alluded to the SMT meetings that take place weekly, as well as the feedback sessions between the SMT and educators to ensure everyone is working on the same page. I now move on to discuss my final conversations about the SIP in the case of School Three.

#### **5.4.3 SIP review in School Three**

School Three identified the following areas for improvement in their SIP: Punctuality of learners; learner discipline; completion of assessment tasks; and learner performance in examinations. All of the aspects in School Three’s SIP are aimed at improving learner academic performance. The areas identified for improvement in School Three’s SIP signals a move towards tackling challenging areas where learners partly contribute to poor performance. As identified in Chapter 4 (Section 4.9.1.1 to 4.9.1.7), School Three’s SIP is a direct response to those factors considered to be impacting negatively on instructional leadership practices. The two sub-themes that School Three’s SIP addresses are: 1) Learner Indiscipline; and 2) Learner Barriers to Instructional Leadership.

During my conversation about the SIP of School Three, HOD3 believed that it was imperative for the SIP to focus on improving the results of learners in the NSC examinations. HOD3 firmly remarked: *“It is clearly stated in our SIP that we want to ensure learners complete the assessment tasks on time”*. It is evident that the SIP of School Three focuses on the completion of assessment tasks. The non-submission of tasks came across as rather frustrating for DP3 (and as also indicated by DP2 in School Two), as noted in Chapter 4. (See Section 4.9.1.2.) My discussion on the structure of the NSC in Chapter 2 (Section 2.8.1) also indicated that the SBA accounted for a considerable percentage of marks that are added to the final examination mark. The focus of School Three’s SIP is accordingly directed to the improvement of learner academic performance. I also noticed that it was indicated on the School Three SIP that it was the responsibility of “all educators” to ensure learners complete their assessment tasks before the final examination.

HOD3 referred to Section 3 of their SIP, which states: *“Educators to provide necessary support and guidance – learners should never be insecure”*. It was quite clear that in School Three, the SMT had allocated the educators the task of ensuring learner assessments are submitted on time. This provision that they had made in Section 3 points to their understanding of shared instructional leadership, which is taken to the level of the classroom educator and shows their advocacy of good collaboration between the SMT and educators. Like School Two, the inclusion of “*all educators*” as instructional leaders in the SIP of School Three resonates with Ng’s (2019:5) view that the principal is moving away (in the literature and in practice) from the conceptualised role as the main leader. Notably, the SIP of School Three is designed to provide for the distributed leadership of tasks amongst all educators in the school without relying on the principal as the only key player in the school organisation (Ng, 2019:5).

School Three has also gone a step further in their SIP to include parents in monitoring the completion of learner assessments and states, *“contact the parent or guardian for support”* when dealing with non-compliance and non-submission of assessment tasks. Similar to School Two, the SIP of School Three shows a concerted attempt to curb the views concerning the lack of parental support identified in Chapter 4 (Section 4.9.1.3). With regard to parental support, the SIP of School Three is another example of tactful design for learner improvement. The mere act of communicating to the parent (or guardian) that the learner did not submit work can be considered as a constructive step towards getting parents involved in the academic programme of the learner.

In another conversation, DP3 noted the importance of the *“performance in examinations”* stated in their SIP. DP3 was also the coordinator of the school examination committee for the NSC examinations and alluded to the commitment required to ensure all learners pass the NSC examinations. To ensure improvement in the NSC results, DP3 said: *“If you refer to our SIP, you will find some of our strategies like team-teaching, extra lessons and remediation of content taught”*. All these strategies are directly linked with improving learner academic performance, especially the inclusion of *“team-teaching”*, which suggests that the educators and SMT are working collaboratively to improve their results. The aspect of *“team-teaching”* as referred to in the SIP is a strategy which provides learners an opportunity to experience different teaching approaches in the content taught by different educators. This strategy, like the others mentioned above, points to a commitment of the educators to drive learner improvement, taking into consideration these additional teaching initiatives are not even provided for in their PAM (DBE, 2016) job descriptions. These strategies implemented in the SIP also add substance to the sub-theme *“Beyond the Call of Duty”* that I introduced in Chapter 4 (Section 4.11.3) where many participants referred to their involvement in intervention classes after school hours in order to improve learner academic performance. (See Section 4.11.5.)

During my last conversation, P3 was to the point and firmly stated: *“We have a SIP like every other school and we try our best to implement our plans”*. P3’s response suggests that sometimes the implementation of the SIP may be lacking, but that the document still provides a framework for improvement. Also, the inclusion of all educators in the improvement plan with strategies like team-teaching at least indicates their advocacy for shared instructional leadership. When I probed a little further to gain an understanding of what P3 thought of the SIP as a document guiding instructional leadership, P3 responded: *“The level one educators, the SMT and the DP perform their duties of checking learners work and preparing them for the final examinations and I have to see that all of the aspects for improvement in our SIP are achieved”*. P3’s response points to the notion of shared responsibility where the educators and the SMT have a key role to play in the improvement of the results. Apart from the shared responsibility, P3 still assumed accountability for the overall activities targeted at improving learner results. This is in line with all three principals’ responses in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.7.1.2) which purported that the principal is ultimately accountable for learner academic performance.

## **5.5 SYNTHESIS OF THE PARTICIPANTS' VIEW IN RELATION TO THE PAM (DBE, 2016) AND SIP**

The PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP of each school were the two main documents reviewed in my study. A substantial body of material emerged during my telephonic conversations with participants in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP. My main reason for selecting the PAM (DBE, 2016) for document review was to gain insight about how the various members of the SMT perceived their instructional leadership roles in relation to what is stated in policy by the DBE (i.e., the PAM document). The views expressed by the participants in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016) also adds substance to one of the critical research questions in this study, which explores the way in which the SMTs perceive their instructional leadership role within the context of an underperforming secondary school. My choice of selecting the SIP was to gain an understanding about how the SMT perceived this improvement tool as instructional leaders. In addition, I also wanted to establish whether learner academic performance is improving or not, through the implementation of the SIP. This review of the SIP from the perspective of instructional leadership also guided me on a path of understanding whether underperforming secondary schools are improving their learner academic performance or not. I now move on to provide a synthesis of my findings in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP.

### **5.5.1 Synthesis of participants' views in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016)**

The first aspect I explored was how the SMT perceived their instructional leadership roles in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016). The PAM (DBE, 2016) prescribes the main duties and responsibilities of the HOD, DP and principal (DBE, 2016:27-32). However, these duties and responsibilities were translated rather differently when weighing the PAM (DBE, 2016) against the instructional leadership role of the SMTs. The PAM (DBE, 2016) was considered an effective guideline for instructional leadership, as expressed by the views of all the HODs. There were, however, some reservations about the allocation of tasks, as set out in the PAM (DBE, 2016). For instance, HOD2 thought the detailed job description in the PAM (DBE, 2016) was a rather good set of guidelines for an instructional leader. HOD1 said it was a “*good comprehensive description*” of the HOD’s job description. HOD2 interpreted the “comprehensive” nature of the PAM (DBE, 2016) differently and thought it demanded more from the (already exacerbated) role of the HOD, thereby creating a stressful situation. HOD2 raised concerns over the excessive administrative workload of HODs stated in the PAM (DBE, 2016) in relation to the DPs and principals. HOD2 said the PAM (DBE, 2016) “*should only cover aspects that are curriculum related to teaching and learning, not the*

*administrative and extracurricular duties as well*". The many administrative tasks allocated to HODs by the PAM (DBE, 2016), as pointed out by HOD2, suggests that they may spend less time on instructional leadership duties. To further reduce the time devoted to instructional leadership, all participants in this study engaged in time-consuming Grade 12 intervention classes aimed at improving the NSC results. HOD3 described the feeling of being "exhausted" having to engage in various Grade 12 intervention programmes and still meet the demands of the job description of the PAM (DBE, 2016). The feeling of exhaustion, as expressed by HOD1, was also an indication that the HOD's job description in the PAM (DBE, 2016) focuses on the individual work of an HOD and does not provide for any sharing of instructional leadership tasks with the DPs and principals. In view of this, the work of HODs can be overwhelming as they attend to managerial administrative work and still try to carry out their instructional leadership duties. This indicates that, as Mestry (2013:119) has averred, the many other administrative and management duties encountered, which makes carrying out instructional leadership tasks difficult.

In comparison to the HODs' responses that point to them working in an individual capacity in line with their job descriptions in the PAM (DBE, 2016), all three DPs claimed to be working in some way with the principal, as guided by the PAM (DBE, 2016). The DPs in all three schools strongly affirmed their supportive and collaborative relationship between the DP and the principal in their instructional leadership roles. To mention one example, DP1 stated: *"I am the main support manager to my principal and I basically ensure the smooth running of the school"*. DP3's view on supporting the principal was expressed through the sharing of tasks. DP3 remarked: *"I receive various tasks from the principal and then I share or complete the tasks myself"*. This pointed to collaboration between the DP, principal and HODs. However, the job descriptions in the PAM (DBE, 2016) do not tend to focus on the SMT working jointly as a team. Nevertheless, some attempt is made to share leadership tasks from the PAM (DBE, 2016), which indicates that instructional leaders are distributed in nature (Ng, 2019:5). The DPs considered their assistance to the principal, as stated in the PAM (DBE, 2016), to be part of their instructional leadership role.

All three principals indicated that the PAM (DBE, 2016) was a set of policy guidelines that principals had to adhere to. All the principals also alluded to their job description as prescribed in the PAM (DBE, 2016) as providing for them to act as instructional leaders. In School One, P1 highlighted some of the main duties in the PAM (DBE, 2016) as pointing towards an instructional leadership role. P1 stated the following about his job description in the PAM (DBE, 2016): *"The PAM document is filled with instructional tasks that I have to carry out on a daily basis including providing professional support, monitoring, supervising*

*and evaluating learner results*". Despite evidence in literature that suggests the principal is interrupted daily by administrative and managerial duties (Mestry, 2017:258; Taole, 2013:78), P1's engagement in what he considered instructional leadership duties (as stated above) mentioned in the PAM (DBE, 2016), are what some authors regard as effective instructional leadership engagement which could lead to improved learner academic performance (Bendikson *et al.*, 2012:3; Ntshoe & Selesho, 2014:482).

All three principals pointed to what they considered to be their instructional leadership role in all aspects of school functionality which included: Leadership; management; supervision; monitoring; professional development; and evaluating learner performances. However, no principal, in describing their instructional leadership role in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016), made any mention of the educators or other SMT members as key role players (team-players) in the execution of their duties as a principal. For example, P2 described the PAM (DBE, 2016) as a *"simple document that states a principal should lead and manage the school"*. He did not mention any collaboration between educators or even the SMT as part of his job description in the PAM (DBE, 2016). This then raises the contentious issue of accountability, which is interwoven throughout my thesis. The principals' (i.e., P1, P2 and P3) silence about HODs, DPs and educators in their PAM (DBE, 2016) job descriptions suggest that they consider themselves as ultimately accountable for whole school functionality including learner performance and improvement. On this issue, literature cautions principals about functioning as the key leader alone (or for schools to rely on the "power of one") when it comes to organisational change (Gronn in Ng, 2019:5). I now move on to discuss the participants' views about shared instructional leadership in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016).

After my personal interaction and review of the PAM (DBE, 2016), I realised that it does not provide for the notion of shared instructional leadership amongst the SMT (and educators), although the DPs and principals had varied interpretations of what they considered to be shared instructional leadership in accordance with the PAM (DBE, 2016). HODs echoed my sentiments and strongly believed that the PAM (DBE, 2016) does not allow HODs to share instructional leadership. Notably, the HODs in School One and School Two alluded with frustration to two aspects concerning shared instructional leadership (or lack of it) in the PAM (DBE, 2016): Firstly, in School One, HOD1 raised the issue of excessive amounts of duties for the HOD in the PAM (DBE, 2016) in relation to the DP and principal. HOD1's argument was that *"the PAM document has more duties and responsibilities directed at HODs specifically, instead of the entire SMT"*. This was also an impediment observed in Seobi and Wood's (2016:1) study, in which HODs could not focus on their instructional



leadership role because of a myriad of other tasks and duties assigned to them. This overwhelming feeling of task or work overload was alluded to by all participants in the theme named “Experience of Managerial Administrative Overload” in Chapter 4 (Section 4.7.1.1). It was evident that some of the administrative work overload was a result of the DBE’s almost daily requests for various statistics in relation to an underperforming secondary school. Based on HOD1’s view, this was a gap in the PAM’s (2016) policy structure to provide for a more distributive approach to workload on all levels of the SMT. HOD1’s view may also imply that at the level of the HOD, HODs are doing most of the work. Secondly, HOD2 expressed concern that educators may perceive the SMT as easing their (SMT) workload from the PAM (DBE, 2016) by passing it down to the educators in the guise of instructional leadership. My interaction with HOD2 suggested that the sharing of leadership tasks with educators was an endeavour to be an effective instructional leader by collaborating with the educators to promote teamwork. It turned out (based on HOD2’s response), that level one educators in School Two, do not embrace the notion of shared instructional leadership and were perceived by HOD2 as being resistant towards any sharing or distributing of leadership tasks from the SMT. However, this was only as perceived by HOD2’s response, as this study did not explore educators’ perceptions of the SMT’s instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools, which could prove valuable for future research in this field. In School Three, HOD3 responded in a rather straight forward manner and asserted: *“The PAM document does not say anything about shared instructional leadership”*.

While all the HODs’ views in my study identify the gap in the PAM (DBE, 2016) in regard to catering for shared instructional leadership, the DPs and principals interpreted it somewhat differently. To begin with, the DPs found their job description in the PAM (DBE, 2016) as at least providing some openings for shared instructional leadership. In view of this, all three DPs strongly believed they were engaging in shared instructional leadership in relation to their duties in the PAM (DBE, 2016), although it was apparent that the PAM (DBE, 2016) does not provide any guideline for the sharing of instructional leadership tasks. One such example was School Three, where DP3 elucidated the PAM (DBE, 2016) duties that are allocated by the principal to the DP, who then shares instructional leadership tasks with other SMT members. DP3 commented: *“There are some tasks the principal and I complete together or with the entire SMT”*. This indeed pointed to collaboration, however, the PAM (DBE, 2016) job descriptions tend to focus on individuals and not on their working as a team. In School Two, DP2 offered a rather different interpretation of shared instructional leadership in conjunction with the PAM (DBE, 2016). My interactions with the DPs revealed that although the PAM (DBE, 2016) does not provide for the sharing of instructional leadership tasks, they were, in fact, engaging in shared instructional leadership in practice. For

instance, DP2 interpreted shared instructional leadership somewhat differently. DP2 considered the delegation of tasks from the PAM (DBE, 2016) as pointing to the sharing of leadership. DP2 opined: “*The fact that the PAM says that the DP has to delegate certain tasks to the HOD means that we are sharing leadership duties within our SMT*”. The sharing of tasks within the members of the SMT was also found in Hoadley *et al.*'s (2009) study, particularly in the management of the curriculum to improve learner performance. Even though the PAM (DBE, 2016) does not provide for the sharing of instructional leadership tasks, the DPs in all three schools made attempts to include other SMT members (and educators) through the distribution of leadership tasks. In this regard, all three DPs created shared instructional leadership opportunities from a very limited scope according to the PAM (DBE, 2016) for instructional leaders. In addition, if shared instructional leadership were to be the main approach adopted by the DBE, then the PAM (DBE, 2016) should clearly outline how instructional leadership tasks are shared among all members of staff to avoid any negative perceptions about work distribution as encountered with the educators in School Two.

The principals in all three schools were confident about how they engaged in shared instructional leadership, but differed in their interpretations of how this was done in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016). Three key considerations emerged from the principals' interpretations of how they viewed sharing instructional leadership: (1) Accountability; (2) delegation; and (3) misinterpretation of *shared instructional leadership* in the PAM (DBE, 2016). In School One, P1 stated that most tasks are shared with HODs and DPs and that his role was to ensure all tasks are completed. P1 still sees himself as having the final responsibility, even when tasks are shared with the other SMT members. At this point, it became quite apparent to me that the question of accountability seems to possibly be a grey area in the PAM (DBE, 2016) and even more so from the perspective of shared instructional leadership. In School Two, P2 considered the delegation of tasks to be sharing of instructional leadership tasks with the other SMT members. The pattern of responses that emerged by HOD2, DP2 and P2 with regard to delegation as a form of shared instructional leadership was now quite evident that this was a common practice in School Two where tasks are delegated by the SMT (i.e., HODs, DPs and principal) to the educators. The sharing of instructional leadership tasks, as I understand it to be, would involve the principal dividing the tasks amongst HODs, DPs and educators and where everyone has shared responsibility in completing the tasks – such that together they fulfil the function of instructional leadership.

These various comments of the SMT members show varied interpretations of the PAM (DBE, 2016) regarding job responsibilities. Insofar as shared instructional leadership is concerned, the extent that they practice what they consider to be forms of shared leadership in the school lies outside the scope of the PAM. The PAM (DBE, 2016) document therefore could be said to be somewhat at odds with literature as discussed in Chapter 2 (cf. Hallinger, 2007:5; Ng, 2019:5) that points to the importance of providing theoretically and practically for sharing of leadership as a collaborative process and providing guidelines for this. I now delve into the discussions concerning the SIP in relation to instructional leadership and learner improvement.

### **5.5.2 Synthesis of participants' views In relation to the SIP**

During my discussions about the SIP, I focused on how the SMT (i.e., HOD, DP and principal) interpreted the SIP within the context of their school. The SIP of a school can focus on various aspects (as decided by the educators and SMT) that are regarded as integral to the improvement of the school and not solely on the academic programme. During my interviews and review of the SIP with participants, I was able to uncover the main aim of the design of the SIP in each school. The SIP of School One and School Two focused mainly on improving learner academic performance. The targeted grades for improvement in School One and School Two differ with compelling motivations from the participants. The main focus of School One's SIP was improving the NSC results of the Grade 12 learners. For example, HOD1 highlighted the following: *"Our improvement plan includes intervention classes, holiday classes, afternoon classes and even a programme where our Grade 11 educators work closely with progressed learners to prepare them for Grade 12"*. This strategy is noteworthy in that the NSC results determine whether the school is underperforming or not. However, there is also a special focus on the Grade 11 progressed learners and preparing them for Grade 12 the following academic year. This proactive approach to addressing underperformance from early as Grade 11 is a critical response to the DBE's (2015:37-38) promotion and progression policy. (See also Chapter 2, Section 2.10.1.) The SIP of School Two also focused on the improvement of learner performances but from Grade 8 right up to Grade 12. The SIP of School Two focuses on learner improvement in the whole school, whereas the SIP of School One pays more attention to intervention strategies only in Grade 12. School Three also focused their SIP on improving learner academic performance, but with the addition of learner punctuality and discipline to support their improvement strategy. The SIP of School Three also identifies and draws on two key participants who are also accountable to improve learner academic performance: educators and parents. As HOD3 pointed out, the SIP entrusted educators with ensuring

learners completed tasks on time which in a way, placed a degree of accountability on the educators for learner performance, as opposed to School One and School Two, where the main role-players in accountability for academic performances were the learners and parents respectively. The inclusion of parents in the SIP not only places them in an accountable position for completion of homework and tasks, especially those which form part of continuous assessment, but also to stress rapport between the school and the parent (or guardian) which could have a positive impact on learner academic performance. P3 highlighted what he considered effective strategies in the SIP to improve learner academic performance and remarked: *“The level one educators, SMT and the DP perform their duties of checking learners’ work and preparing them for the final examinations and I have to see that all of the aspects for improvement in our SIP are achieved”*. Noting P3’s response in relation to the SIP for improving learner performances, P3 still regarded himself as ultimately accountable for the overall implementation of the SIP.

As far as instructional leadership is concerned, HOD1 and DP1 expressed different views about the value of the SIP. HOD1 regarded the SIP as an effective document for an instructional leader since their SIP focused primarily on teaching and learning. HOD1’s view was that the SIP was a *“good guideline for school management that wants to improve the NSC results because the main focus is on the teaching, learning and supervision”*. HOD1’s view concurs with Bush and Glover (2016:6) who posit that teaching and learning improvements can be achieved through supervising educators, learners and the respective subjects. However, DP1 raised concern about the practicality of implementing the SIP for SMTs. DP1’s view was that the design of an effective SIP did not necessarily mean effective implementation in practice. DP1’s argument was as follows: *“On paper the SIP seems very effective, but on the ground it is not that simple to implement”*. DP1 raised the issue of accountability and felt that learners should take some responsibility for the outcome of the NSC results. DP2 remarked: *“We can have all the ways to improve our NSC results in our SIP, but the responsibility still lies with the learner to pass the exams”*. In School One, HOD1 felt that it was the parents (or guardians) that should be accountable for learner academic performance and considered them key role-players in ensuring learning and tasks are completed at home.

In School One and School Two, the importance of professional development in the SIP in relation to instructional leadership was noted by P1 and DP2. In School One, P1 alluded to the provision of professional development for educators in the SIP: *“There is a commitment to educator professional development in the SIP to improve teaching and learning”*. The inclusion of educators in the SIP is in line with Weber’s (1996) model, in which the

instructional leader makes instructional improvement by providing professional development opportunities. This shows the importance, as expressed by DeMonte (2013:2), of the important link between professional development in the “design and implementation” for education reform in a school.

The aspect of encouraging (and providing) professional development in the SIP indicated that the educators are prime players too in instructional leadership and that there is collaboration between SMT and educators in terms of improving learner academic performance. This collaboration was further elaborated by P1 when he mentioned the importance of teamwork between educators and the SMT in the effective implementation of the SIP. P1 cautiously reminded me that the *“SIP is only effective if all educators and SMT work together, which is what we try to do as far as possible”*. As far as their SIP was concerned, P1 and DP1 seemed to think that their SIP provided for shared instructional leadership.

While School One’s SIP encouraged professional development, in School Two, DP2 claimed that even though their SIP encouraged professional development, this did not seem to be happening in practice. DP2 noted with concern the lack of professional development workshops organised for educators to improve their teaching. DP2 admittedly said: *“Although our SIP mentions educator development, there is not much professional development workshops being held to help educators improve their teaching”*. DP2 was referring to the lack of externally organised professional development activities; however, School Two could still organise their own internal activities as Borko *et al.* (2010:550) points out that professional development can occur both internally and externally. In School Three P3 admitted that they try their best to implement their strategies in the SIP. P3 said: *“We have a SIP like every other school and we try our best to implement our plans”*. This was an indication that their SIP may not always be implemented, but at least through teamwork, all SMT levels and educators are encouraged to carry out their tasks assigned to them in accordance with the SIP. P3 mentioned examples in which the SMT and educators engage in the supervision of learners’ work to ensure that learners are well-prepared for the NSC examinations. This was an indication that shared instructional leadership is advocated in School Three through their SIP.

Although there was an advocacy for shared instructional leadership, P3 indicated that he was still ultimately accountable for all tasks in the SIP. This pointed back to an earlier assertion made by P3 (during our first interview) in which he regarded himself as the “accounting officer” of the school and the person who is responsible for the NSC results. Even though P3 regards himself as ultimately accountable for the NSC results, the sharing

of instructional leadership tasks (with educators and HODs), as noted by Costello (2015:4), helps to at least ease some of the pressure of taking responsibility for improving learner performance as the prime leader. HOD3 had a different view about the SIP from the perspective of an instructional leader. Although P3 seemed to think he was ultimately accountable for the NSC results, HOD3 alluded to the responsibility of educators in contributing to the improvement of learner academic performance. HOD3 asserted that, according to the SIP, “*all educators*” were responsible to ensure completion of assessment tasks that will be counted for the final examination mark.

My analysis and review of all three school’s SIPs indicated a strong focus on improving learner academic performance rather than on other areas like school finances, resources and infrastructure. This indicated the expressed commitment of these schools to improve their NSC results and be removed from the list of underperforming schools in the District. (This is what I labelled as a “Sense of Vision” in Chapter 4, as a sub-theme.) However, while the participants pointed to this commitment, there was still some ambiguity around the mechanisms which work towards being removed from the underperforming list in terms of the responsibilities of the different role players and their perceptions of each other’s roles.

## **5.6 SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR FINDINGS OF MY STUDY OVERALL IN RELATION TO THE THEORY AND LITERATURE**

Sections 5.3 and 5.4 above presented a data analysis and interpretation of the participants’ views about the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP, which were the two documents reviewed in this study via telephonic conversations. Thereafter, I provided a synthesis of the participants’ views in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP. In this section, I present the overall major findings of my study based on the data and analysis thereof presented in Chapter 4, as well as some of the key findings which followed through in this chapter. The major findings are presented thematically based on the source data from Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 in relation to the theory and literature on instructional leadership. Based on the key research findings in relation to the theory and literature, I substantiate how this study contributes towards a new body of existing knowledge and ongoing debates in the field of instructional leadership in underperforming secondary schools. The major findings of this study were in response to the main research question, which was further guided by four sub-questions.

### **The main research question was:**

What instructional leadership practices do SMTS engage in within underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi District in KZN?

### **The four sub-questions were:**

- How do SMT members perceive their instructional leadership roles in underperforming schools?
- What teaching and learning tasks do SMTs in underperforming schools engage in?
- What are some of the factors that SMT members consider to impact negatively on their instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools?
- How can instructional leadership assist SMTs in improving learner academic performance?

The summary of the major findings are presented thematically in relation to the four sub-questions of this study.

## **5.7 THEME 1 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS**

The summary of major findings that follow is in response to the first research sub-question: *How do SMTs perceive their instructional leadership roles in underperforming schools?* This is in relation to **Theme 1: Experiences of attempting to deal with instructional leadership roles.**

### **5.7.1 SMTs' perceptions of their instructional leadership roles (Instructional leadership vs administrative overload)**

The findings of this study revealed that all the participants were familiar with their instructional leadership roles and referred to their direct or indirect involvement in the teaching and learning programme. The engagement of instructional leadership practices like managing the curriculum, supervising and monitoring (of both learners and educators) was referred to by all three HODs in this study – as also highlighted by various authors (Bush & Glover, 2016:6, Trujillo, 2013:426). Findings further revealed that HODs carry out what they consider to be their instructional leadership tasks in accordance with the DBE's job description in the PAM (DBE, 2016) document. The findings revealed that the DPs provide a supportive and collaborative role to the principal, also in view of the particularly onerous administrative tasks of the principal. The DP's and principals engage in what they considered to be shared instructional leadership tasks of academic and administrative duties – at least between the DPs and principals. The collaborative approach between the DPs and the principals resonates with Hallinger's (2007:5) notion of shared instructional leadership, which was an extension of Weber's (1996) model, which this study also sought to explore.

Although it can be said that teamwork was evident between the DPs and principals, however, two of the principals (namely, P1 and P3) asserted that they were ultimately accountable for the overall learner academic performance of the school. Meanwhile, the notion of shared instructional leadership did not seem to resonate fully with the HODs: this could be partly as a result of their (as well as the other SMT members') job descriptions being individualised according to the PAM (DBE, 2016).

Although all the participants were familiar with their roles as instructional leaders, in the same breath, they expressed concern over the excessive administrative tasks (duties) that they have to carry out on a daily basis. For example, HOD1 summarised his concern: "*How is all that administration assisting us in improving our Matric results? We are filling in forms all the time, throughout the day*". Evidence from literature (Mestry, 2013:122; Seobi & Wood, 2016:1) highlights the challenge of SMTs having to balance their instructional leadership roles with their administrative duties.

### **5.7.2 SMT perceptions of accountability as instructional leaders**

Accountability for underperformance (especially in the NSC examinations) emerged as a contentious issue in this study. As a point of reference, the PAM (DBE, 2016) document, which was reviewed during the telephonic conversations, did not explicitly state that any level of the SMT was accountable for underperformance as instructional leaders. Most of the participants strongly believed that as instructional leaders, they should not be the only role players accountable for underperformance. The findings from the responses of HODs and DPs suggest that there should be *shared accountability* for learner academic performance (or underperformance). There was a strong belief that parents and learners should also be held accountable for underperformance. Wilder (2014:377) posits that parents in particular can make a significant contribution to improved learner academic performance by working collaboratively. HOD3 opined that shared accountability for underperformance is "*everyone's business*" and further remarked that the "*Grade 12 results are dependent on the learners themselves, the educators, parents, school management and even the SGB*". This sentiment was also echoed by DP3 while DP1 believed that the DBE should also be accountable for underperformance. The findings further revealed that there was a strong belief amongst the three principals that they were ultimately accountable for underperformance. P1 and P3 conceptualised their roles as "accounting officers" of the school and they, as the principals, are accountable for whole school functionality. Although there seems to be ambiguity about who is ultimately accountable for learner underperformance, Mohapi *et al.*, 2014:1224



suggest that accountability should lie with the principal who oversees the whole school curriculum.

### **5.7.3 Instructional leaders working over and above their normal hours**

The findings of this sub-theme emerged in a second cycle of analysis in Chapter 4. The PAM (2016:17) states that all educators should be at school for no less than seven hours per day. The findings, however, indicated that SMTs appear to be working beyond their normal hours as stipulated in the PAM (DBE, 2016). Four participants (HOD2, DP3, P1 and P3) brought to my attention the additional hours they devote to the instructional programme of the school (over and above their official working hours). HOD2 described the additional hours in labour terminology as “*overtime*” due mainly as a result of the underperformance status of the school. All four participants usually finished school one to two hours later than normal school closure, and even worked on Saturdays and during school vacations.

The additional classes, however, were focused on the Grade 12 learners only because the status of whether the school is underperforming or not is determined from the final Grade 12 NSC results. The dedication and commitment by the SMT to provide additional “after-hours” support in the interest of learners was evident in the response of DP3, who resiliently stated: “*Managers finish late on some days because of matric classes. I don’t have a problem with it because it is for the learner and I am all for improving our Matric results, so we can move out of this underperforming category that we are in right now*”. The findings revealed that all three schools engaged in additional Grade 12 intervention classes on Saturday’s, after school, as well as on school vacations, which are support strategies that advocate improvement of learner performances in Grade 12 (Rault-Smith, 2006:231).

### **5.7.4 Lack of support for instructional leaders**

These findings are in relation to the sub-theme which I named “SMT as lone rangers” which emerged during my second cycle of analysis where the majority of participants expressed concern over the lack of support provided by the DBE to SMTs of underperforming secondary schools. The participants felt as if they were working in isolation as they were trying desperately to improve their NSC results and move out of the category of underperforming schools. Three participants (HOD1, HOD3 and DP3) motivated for the physical presence of the DBE in their schools to address the issue of underperformance in a much more direct approach by talking to learners and providing ways to improve learner

academic performance. The following excerpts illustrate the lack of support by the DBE as mentioned by the participants:

*“I personally think the Department should step in and help managers in underperforming high schools. We are left stranded when it comes to improving the NSC results”.* (HOD2)

*“Maybe it is about time the department visits us and shows us how to improve the results instead of instructing us from the sidelines”.* (HOD3)

*“Sometimes I get the impression that we are a forgotten entity”.* (DP1)

Drawing from the above utterances, it is evident that the SMTs felt as if they are working on their own with little or no support from the DBE. The findings further revealed that when the DBE does visit the school, the focus is more on identifying problem areas that are contributing to underperformance, with no remediation strategies or support to deal with the challenge of underperformance. While it is not known why there seems to be a lack of support by the DBE to underperforming secondary schools, the DBE has an important role to play in providing support through their Circuit and District offices to schools (Van der Voort & Wood, 2016:1). In conclusion, the views of the participants indicate a need for the DBE to engage directly with the school in order to understand and address the challenges related to underperformance. In addition, the participants reiterated the need for the DBE to offer support to improve learner academic performance, rather than acknowledging and highlighting poor performance with no solutions for improvement.

#### **5.7.5 Stress experienced by instructional leaders in an underperforming secondary school**

The interviews manifest that most participants experienced undue stress as a result of their schools being classified as underperforming. For instance, DP1 commented on the various pressures experienced in an underperforming secondary school as follows: *“At an underperforming school there is pressure coming from various sides, from the department, from the community, and also being partly responsible for the institution that you serve brings its own pressure”.* Evidently, most participants described a sense of worry and concern with regard to DBE visits, which appeared to elevate the stress levels of the SMT. One such response that captured the sense of worry about DBE visits was expressed by HOD2:

*Sometimes I get worried because when the Department Officials attend school they call for the HOD and if something is not in order with an educator they began to question the HOD.*

DP3 mentioned the statistics and other administrative submissions that are usually requested by the DBE on short notice. This finding indicates that SMTs' instructional leadership tasks have to be put on hold in order to complete urgent statistics which have to be submitted to the DBE. This indeed creates a stressful situation since SMTs have to juggle their instructional leadership duties with (administrative) DBE submissions. The findings also revealed that the DBE sometimes visit schools on short notice and requests various documents and work related to underperforming secondary schools. The stress is mostly created by SMTs assembling the DBE's requested information in a short space of time. P3 described the DBE visits as stressful since some of the DBE visits are punitive and fault-finding sessions rather than supportive.

#### **5.7.6 SMT perceptions of their instructional leadership roles in relation to each other**

The HODs, DPs and principals conveyed different interpretations of how they understood their instructional leadership roles in relation to each other in their respective SMT level positions. The findings revealed that all three HODs perceived their instructional leadership roles to be challenging due to the excessive administrative tasks they are faced with. Further findings revealed that the HODs, in relation to the DPs and principals, carry out numerous instructional leadership duties like curriculum management, managing large subject departments, monitoring and supervising (Ghavifekr & Ibrahim, 2014; Mestry & Pillay, 2013). In addition, HODs directly engage with educators, learners and parents while still reporting on school issues to the DPs and principals which seemed a bit overwhelming in addition to their instructional leadership tasks. All HODs in this study welcomed the idea of distributing leadership tasks between all levels of the SMT and considered that shared instructional leadership could help ease the workload of the HODs.

All three DPs pointed to instructional leadership support offered to the principal. The findings revealed that the DPs and principals in all three schools support each other in administrative, management and instructional leadership tasks (DBE, 2016:39). All three DPs in this study engaged in monitoring and supervising the work of HODs as a delegate of the principal in the process. Further findings revealed that there was sharing of instructional leadership tasks between the DPs and the principals and they worked collaboratively to complete tasks.

All three principals acknowledged the support they receive from HODs and DPs in administrative, curriculum and instructional leadership tasks. This finding was considered by the principals as a form of sharing of leadership tasks within the SMT to overcome the challenges that principals face in an underperforming secondary school. This finding was also significant in that the three principals in this study recognise that the functioning of the school cannot rely on their leadership alone, but the teamwork of the entire SMT in realising their educational goals. The principals in this study have demonstrated, and as also expressed by Mestry (2013:122), that they can strike a balance between their administrative and managerial duties in order to create time for instructional leadership duties. Further findings revealed that although the principals engaged in what they considered to be shared leadership, they still maintained that they were ultimately accountable (unlike HODs and DPs) for the functionality of the school, especially learner academic performance and the Grade 12 NSC results.

## **5.8 THEME 2 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS**

The summary of major findings that follow is in response to the second research sub-question: *What teaching and learning tasks do SMTs in underperforming schools engage in?* This is in relation to the **Theme 2: Instructional leaders' engagement in teaching and learning activities.**

### **5.8.1 The instructional leader's role in managing the curriculum**

The findings revealed that all participants engaged in curriculum management as instructional leaders. Their role in managing the curriculum is also an element in Weber's (1996) model, which forms part of the theoretical lens for this study. The participants' role in managing the curriculum through various planned activities among the SMT, educators and learners emerged during the interviews. All participants expressed that they engaged in some form of curriculum monitoring or tracking by checking the work of educators and learners. The findings suggest that SMTs considered the monitoring of educators' and learners' work as key to determining if the curriculum goals were satisfied. It came to my attention that the DBE gives schools a special curriculum tracking form which is completed and submitted every term. HOD2 and DP3 gave an account of how they used the DBE curriculum tracking forms as a control measure to ensure the learners' work was aligned to the work done by the educator. Some participants also mentioned the process of checking the ATP, which has planned activities for each week, which they verified against the learner's book to see if the dates correspond.

During all my interactions regarding curriculum management activities, no participant mentioned any form of disciplinary action or negative comments about the educators' work checked. In fact, further findings revealed that some participants were very understanding and compassionate to the educators, taking into account the context of the underperforming school they are working in. For example, a calm HOD3 described his style of managing the curriculum of educators as follows: *"I am a bit casual in checking the educators' work and I give them sufficient time to get all their stuff ready because as it is, they are already stressed being in an underperforming school"*. This type of approach was also echoed by DP1, who conducted the checking of the curriculum on casual walks and visits to classrooms. These personal (and somewhat casual) approaches to managing the curriculum could also help alleviate the stress of working in an underperforming secondary school. DP2 and P1's engagement in curriculum management was more indirect, as they entrusted HODs with the task of managing the curriculum at the level of the educators and learners. This too can be regarded as an indication of shared instructional leadership practices taking place in the management of the curriculum. Contrary to this finding, P3 expressed a more direct role in curriculum management and indicated that it is his responsibility to ensure all educators are delivering an effective curriculum. Bush and Glover (cited in Mestry, 2017b:258) identified principals as *whole school curriculum managers*, which is directly related to instructional leadership practices.

### **5.8.2 Monitoring and evaluation**

One of the elements of Weber's (1996) model requires instructional leaders to *observe and improve instruction*. Within the context of an underperforming secondary school, the instructional leader's role in monitoring and evaluating the curriculum can enhance learner academic performance (Trujillo, 2013:426). The findings revealed that all the SMT members were involved in systematic monitoring and evaluation, but at different levels within the school. For instance, School One used a hierarchical process of monitoring and evaluation. P1 described the process as follows: *"We start off with HODs checking the educators, then the deputy principal monitors the work of the HODs, and lastly I monitor the work checked by the deputy principal"*. The participants alluded to the monitoring and evaluation process in which the key focus was on monitoring learner subject books and educator portfolios. The ATP's of educators were monitored, which I also alluded to in the previous section of curriculum management.

A significant finding in all three schools was that the principals worked collaboratively through teamwork with HODs and DPs in the monitoring and evaluation process. This, as

expressed by Hallinger (2007:5), implies that they were activating the notion of shared instructional leadership within the SMT. As alluded to in Chapter 2 (Section 2.18.3), shared instructional leadership was an additional element in what I referred to as the extended model developed by Weber (1996). The sharing of instructional leadership tasks like monitoring and evaluation was an important finding in this study since it showed evidence that the SMTs are working as a team in some of their instructional leadership practices and a move away from the conceptualised role of the principal as the main leader of the school (Ng, 2019:5). Some participants mentioned their involvement in classroom visits and lesson observations when engaging in monitoring and evaluation. The findings further revealed references to an audit trail of records, files and documentation related to the monitoring and evaluation process in all three schools. To conclude, in all three schools there was reportedly a high frequency of monitoring and evaluation as an instructional leadership practice with control mechanisms at all SMT levels to try to ensure effective teaching and learning for improved learner academic performance.

### **5.8.3 Instructional leaders' role in assessing and analysing the curriculum**

Evidently, the SMTs' role in assessing and analysing the curriculum was in line Weber's (1996) element of instructional leader's involvement in *assessing the instructional programme*. The findings revealed that the different SMT members expressed different interpretations of how they assessed and analysed the effectiveness of the curriculum. Most participants considered the process of analysing academic performance data through statistics, mark sheets and performance reports, as their contribution to assessing and analysing the curriculum. The findings revealed that a statistical analysis of learner academic performance was a compulsory activity completed every school term across all three schools. The SMTs used the analyses as a feedback tool to map the way towards improvement of learner academic performance. For instance, P1 and P3 used the feedback to assess and analyse the strengths and weaknesses in their curriculum and then implement changes to bring about improvement. One such strategy implemented in School One was where the assessment and analysis of the instructional programme allowed the principal to identify (in a non-punitive way) "*teachers who may be stronger in certain areas to handle area of weakness*". As evident in School One and School Two, assessing and analysing the curriculum helped them to identify learners who performed poorly, which followed through with communication to parents about the learner's poor performance.

Three participants acknowledged their involvement in very carefully analysing learner academic performance to allow learners to bring their marks up to the minimum requirement

through re-assessment of classroom-based tasks. School Two allowed learners to be re-assessed before their final marks were captured and locked on the school administration computer system. Important to note is that the re-assessments were only done for classroom-based tasks (e.g., projects, oral presentations), but not tests and examinations. While all three schools showed effective processes of analysing and assessing the curriculum internally, HOD1 raised concerns about the role of the DBE in following up on the curriculum reports submitted by the school. A frustrated HOD1 remarked: *“Give us strategies to better what you have discovered about our school by analysing that monthly report. So where’s the feedback for us now? You are monitoring us but where’s the support given from that”*. HOD1’s response indicates, and as I have stated in Chapter 4 (Section 4.11.1), there seemed to be a lack of support by the DBE even after the school had submitted performance statistics after assessing and analysing their curriculum.

#### **5.8.4 Encouraging professional development**

Several studies (DeMonte, 2013:2; Ghavifekr & Ibrahim, 2014:54; Kennedy, 2016:945) advocate the importance of continuous professional development for educators, so they will be equipped with the skills, knowledge and expertise to bring about positive learning changes. The role of the instructional leader, as advocated by Weber (1996) is to provide professional development opportunities to improve instruction. The findings of my study revealed that the SMTs encourage professional development opportunities for educators, although these activities seemed to be very limited in all three schools. Most participants mentioned that educators participate in the DBE organised professional development workshops; however, they noted that these types of workshops take place infrequently. Despite the scarcity of DBE professional development workshops, HOD2, HOD3 and DP1 initiated professional development opportunities within their specialised departments. These three SMT members stated that they engaged educators in some form of professional development at their Subject Committee meetings aimed at developing strategies to improve teaching.

In School Two, DP2 admitted that he did not initiate any professional development activities due to time constraints, citing the time devoted to the Grade 12 intervention programme, but acknowledged that the educators engage in the DBE workshops. Contrary to this finding, P1 and DP3 took it upon themselves to encourage professional development by organising their own internal workshops to capacitate educators. School One capacitated educators on educational issues extracted from DBE circulars and correspondence, while School Two’s SMT organised a professional development activity every month on pertinent educational

topics like discipline. The findings revealed that in School Two, P2 used Fiske and Ladd's (2004:162) "cascade model" to disseminate and empower the staff through the issues discussed at the principals' meetings that he attended, which he thought could make for good professional development opportunities. All participants alluded to their efforts of trying to encourage professional development despite the challenges they encountered as instructional leaders in underperforming secondary schools (e.g., overload of administrative duties). The findings further revealed that the commitment of the DBE to provide sufficient professional development opportunities were minimal and not enough to promote ongoing educator development.

### **5.8.5 Creation of a positive learning environment**

McKay *et al.* (2017:250) posit that effective teaching and learning is dependent on the educator's role in providing a "well-functioning classroom environment". The status of being an underperforming secondary school is fraught with many challenges (see Chapter 4, Sections 4.9.1.1 to 4.9.1.7). Differential needs of learners, their behaviours, and the varied contexts that exist in a school are indeed challenging (McKay *et al.*, 2017:250). McKay *et al.* (2017:250) note that an "optimal learning environment" is dependent on a number of key role players and the SMT is one that is mentioned. Despite some of the challenges experienced in the three sample schools, the findings revealed that the participants endeavoured to create an environment that was conducive for teaching and learning through the many strategies they implemented. The findings revealed that the participants, as instructional leaders, created a positive learning environment for educators and learners to promote effective teaching and learning. For instance, in School One, HOD1 gave an account of how the SMTs' involvement in the Learner Mentorship Programme assisted them in tracking learner academic performance. In another example of the creation of a positive learning environment, HOD2 and P1 focused on the aesthetic appearance of the classroom through visual aids (e.g., charts), removal of graffiti from walls, encouraging sport and the implementation of policies for a clean and safe school.

HOD3's focus was on effective lesson planning and presentation to enhance teaching and learning, so learners will be motivated to attend those lessons. Communication, as expressed by DP1, through maintaining rapport with educators and learners, was viewed as key to promoting a positive learning environment. McKay *et al.* (2017:254) recognise that the functioning of an effective school environment is in some way related to addressing learner discipline. The findings revealed that HOD2, DP2 and DP3 focused their attention on resolving learner discipline issues to help create conducive teaching and learning environments for both educators and learners. In School Three, P3 awarded academic



achievement as a form of motivation and reiterated the importance of teamwork among the staff. In School Two, P2 provided LTSM for the various subjects and allowed educators to duplicate worksheets in subjects where there may be a shortfall of LTSM. P2 considered this as contributing to a positive learning environment with a focus on providing resources towards the academic programme. These examples of creating a positive learning environment, also noted by Weber (1996), are key to developing a supportive work environment.

#### **5.8.6 Instructional leaders' commitment to the improvement strategies**

The findings of this refined theme emerged from a second cycle of analysis in Chapter 4 (Section 4.11.5). As instructional leaders, the participants indicated that they contributed to teaching and learning activities with the goal of improving learner academic performance. Specifically, they plan, organise and coordinate Grade 12 intervention classes to offer learners additional learning support in order to prepare them for all assessment including the NSC final examination. The SMTs in School One mentioned their involvement in an initiative they called the Learner Mentorship Programme. Through this initiative, all levels of the SMT had an opportunity to work closely with the Grade 12 learners, mentor them and provide support in all aspects of their schooling.

Further findings revealed that School One also focused on whole school improvement by incorporating a test period every week in which every grade (Grade 8-12) in the school engaged in practice tests at the same time. In the same spirit, DP1 supported the idea of focusing improvement from Grade 8 because he had a strong belief that in the lower grades (Grade 8 & 9) parents are still able to control the learner's behaviour in terms of discipline and monitoring their school work. These initiatives in School One also formed part of their SIP to improve learner academic performance. This again indicated the commitment of the SMT insofar as they realise the need for continuous school improvement so they can monitor the academic progress of learners (Van Der Voort & Wood, 2014:2).

The views as expressed by HOD2, P2 and P3 indicated that all three schools implemented extracurricular initiatives in their quest to improve learner academic performance. For instance, School Two conducted motivational talks internally and also invited organisations to speak to the learners to develop them as better individuals. P3 mentioned the sporting initiative implemented in School Three where learners participate in various codes of sport as a way of channelling their energy in a positive way. The findings related to the SMTs' role in implementing initiatives to bring about positive change was provided for in the SIP of all

three schools. This suggests that all three schools, through the instructional leadership of the SMTs, were implementing their SIP strategies with the goal of improving learners.

## **5.9 THEME 3 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS**

The summary of major findings that follows is in response to the third research sub-question: *What are some of the factors that SMTs consider as impacting negatively on their instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools?* This is in relation to **Theme 3: Considerations of negative factors impacting on instructional leadership.**

### **5.9.1 Instructional leaders' perceptions of learner indiscipline**

In a South African study, Louw *et al.* (2011:73) found that that learner indiscipline was a contributing factor to poor academic performances in underperforming secondary schools. In the same light, five participants in my study acknowledged the negative impact that learner indiscipline had on the instructional programme of the school and learner academic performance. DP2 described learner discipline and the “poor attitude towards school work” as the “most stressful situation” which led to educators exiting the school system through resignations and early retirements. HOD3 indicated, with concern, that learners truant school and parents are not even aware that their children are not in school. This yet again reiterated the role played by parents in enforcing learner discipline with the aim of improving learner academic performance (Lumadi, 2019:2). The findings revealed that parents did not always cooperate with the SMT when dealing with incidents of learner indiscipline (Lumadi, 2019:2). DP2 accentuated the lack of concern shown by parents as follows:

*Another problem for me personally, is the parents. Instead of helping us, they sometimes want to come to school and fight against us. The parents even take their child's side over issues of discipline.*

The principals of School Two and School Three expressed concern over some of the learners' indifferent attitude towards their school work, which impacted on the NSC results of the school. To support this claim, P3 drew a comparison between underperformance in 2019 as compared to previous years. P3 alerted me to their acceptable NSC pass rates prior to 2019, which he believed was as a result of a well-disciplined group of learners as compared to the underperforming class of 2019 that exhibited discipline concerns. P2 made a similar point, pointing towards learners' poor attitude to school work and indiscipline, as a key contributing factor towards underperformance. The findings are indicative that poor

discipline, parent apathy and learners' indifferent attitude to their school work were prevalent in these underperforming secondary schools. In view of the findings above, McKay *et al.* (2017:255) cite McKay and Romm (1995), who make the assumption that various factors must be taken into account when dealing with perceived discipline problems.

### **5.9.2 Substance abuse**

The findings revealed that substance abuse was prevalent in all three underperforming secondary schools in this study. Similar patterns were observed in Bayat *et al.*'s (2014b:193) study in which substance abuse, as a neighbourhood factor, impacted negatively in the context of underperforming secondary schools in the Western Cape. Similarly, in School One, P1 noted with concern the substance abuse problem in the school as follows: "*Learners tend to smoke, drink and take drugs which are a huge problem in this community*". Further findings in School Two revealed that some learners attend classes under the influence of alcohol and even illicit substances like drugs. HOD2 and P2 also mentioned that, due to poverty, some learners resort to criminal behaviour to get money to purchase illicit substances. DP2's concern was that those learners who were under the influence of illicit substances in school found it difficult to concentrate during lessons, which he considered as a negative factors that impacted on learner academic performance. In the same breath, P2 also mentioned with frustration that learners who engage in substance abuse in school are aware that their parents show little or no interest even if they are caught. Further findings revealed that due to the socio-economic plight of the communities in my study, learners engage in substance abuse from a young age and they belong to broken families which could also be a contributing factor towards substance abuse.

### **5.9.3 Barriers to instructional leadership**

Evidence from the data shows that the learners created several barriers to learning which the participants considered as impacting negatively on their instructional leadership practices. Two DPs showed dissatisfaction in relation to learner non-submission of work. This included learners' non-compliance to submit work in respect of homework and formal assessments. DP2 also noted with concern that most learners seemed to show no evidence of learning for tests which attributed to learner underperformance. The non-submission of formal assessment tasks is a key factor in relation to underperformance since 25-50% (depending on the NSC subject) of the formal assessment marks are added to the final NSC marks. Findings indicate that learner absenteeism was prevalent in all three schools. With regard to learner absenteeism, the participants alluded to the strain placed on the scheduled

ATP of educators who have to now re-teach topics to learners who were absent from class. The challenge for educators was re-teaching content for those learners who were absent, especially if this was the final examination preparation. The late-coming of learners was also indicated as a barrier to learning since many learners lost instructional time by missing the first lesson in the morning and the learner had to catch up the content taught. Further findings revealed that literacy and numeracy were two areas of concern in all three schools. HOD2 mentioned that the language barrier was one of the key contributors to underperformance. To justify this claim, English is LoLT in all three schools, and if a learner fails the English Home Language examination, then that learner has failed the entire NSC examination, thereby possibly contributing to the overall underperformance of the school (Bayat et al., 2014b:52).

Three participants (i.e., HOD1, HOD2 and P3) expressed that some learners lacked the basic literacy and numeracy levels required for the demanding secondary school syllabus. Another barrier mentioned by HOD1 was learners' apathy to learning, indicating that some learners do not want to learn, which creates further challenges for the SMT. In School One, P1 attributed the learners' lack of access to resources as causing a barrier to learning. Many learners in the school do not have access to internet and readily available resources like study manuals, newspapers and television.

#### **5.9.4 Lack of parental support**

According to Taole's (2013:81) research, the interest and dedication shown by parents (or the guardian) is important to the child's education and it can also assist educators and SMTs in the implementation of the curriculum. However, the findings of my study suggest that parents in all three schools purportedly showed little interest in the child's education. SMT members suggested that parents offered little or no support to the SMTs in their improvement initiatives to improve learner academic performance. Most participants alluded to the parents' reluctance to attend important parent-teacher meetings to discuss academic progress. Contrary to the view of Ezzani (2019:580), the findings revealed that there was a dismal parent attendance at these academic progress meetings. DP1 shared School One's parent meeting statistics as follows: *"In our Matric parent meeting, the last Matric parent meeting, we had six parents that pitched up. The total number of Matric learners that we have is 68"*. In School One, P1 indicated that they even made alternate day and time arrangements to accommodate all parents, but this was still not successful. Most of the participants attributed learner underperformance as a result of parent apathy and failure to monitor the learner's education at home with regard to homework, learning and completion

of assessment tasks. This sentiment was echoed by DP1 who stressed the importance of what he referred to as a “tripartite” alliance in education which includes the *learner, educator and parent*, all working collaboratively to improve and develop the learner.

### **5.9.5 The standard of safety and security in underperforming secondary schools**

Several South African studies (Bayat *et al.*, 2014b; Louw *et al.*, 2011; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2014) acknowledge the negative impact that school violence can have on the teaching and learning programme of the school. The findings revealed that school safety and security was very basic and minimal in all three schools. Four participants described the security personnel’s role as merely controlling access in and out of the school but lacked the capability to deal with violent incidents. Another concern raised by HOD3 was that the security guards would prove to be ineffective against “outside dangers”, referring to the volatile and violent situations arising from the community. To justify the concern over school safety and security in relation to the community, two learners from School Two were murdered in the community during the course of this study in separate incidents which headlined the community newspapers. It was established that educators’ safety is sometimes compromised in volatile situations due learner fights which they are unable to break up. Further findings revealed that insufficient school finances had also impacted on the employment of credible security companies. In view of this, P3 proposed that the DBE provide schools with proper security; however, the DBE is also experiencing financial difficulty and cannot procure credible security companies to every school. It was established that all three schools in this study pay for their own security or watchmen. All three schools in this study implemented some form of safety measures to ensure the learners and staff were protected in some way. Some measures included: A patrolling guard during instructional time; access control; secure fencing; and random search and seizures of dangerous weapons and drugs. DP3 acknowledged the role of the School Safety and Security Committee in ensuring a safe school through the implementation of various policies that promote a safe and secure school.

### **5.9.6 Impact of the promotion and progression policy on instructional leadership**

The DBE’s (2015) promotion and progression policy emerged prominently as one of the key negative factors that the participants considered to be impacting on their instructional leadership practices and their endeavours to improve learner academic performance in the NSC final examinations. The findings revealed that the DBE’s (2015:37-38) concession that allows learners to be progressed to the next grade if they have already failed once, resulted

in groups of learners moving through to Grade 12, even though they had not met the minimum promotion requirements in Grade 10 and/or 11. Five participants indicated that these progressed learners contributed to the underperformance rate achieved in the NSC examinations. The progressed learners lacked the basic skills and knowledge to meet the demands of the NSC final examination papers, which was a key contributing factor towards underperformance (as also observed by Bayat *et al.*, 2014b:46). The progressed learners created a challenge for both educators and the SMTs who had to now focus on trying to get learners on par with the syllabus of the grade they were promoted to since they did not meet the minimum standards of the previous grade. Most participants blamed the DBE's (2015) promotion and progression policy for the poor NSC pass rates and considered it as one of the main reasons that the school was underperforming.

#### **5.9.7 Instructional leaders' low morale**

Most participants exhibited feelings of low morale as a result of working within the context of an underperforming secondary school. Findings revealed (and as also expressed by DP2 and HOD3), that the low morale amongst the SMTs was as a result of all three schools being categorised as underperforming for more than three consecutive years. DP2 described working in an underperforming secondary as a daily "losing battle". Further findings suggest that learner apathy and non-cooperation created an extremely challenging work environment, which resulted in the school attaining an underperformance status. P3 alluded to DBE visits which appeared to be more of a fault-finding session rather than offering support to help improve learner academic performance. Two participants further mentioned how the additional Grade 12 intervention classes after school, weekends and holidays left them mentally and physically fatigued which partly contributed to a decline in their passion for teaching, with P2 remarking: "*I would rather be a normal level one educator and have nothing to worry about, just teach and go*". Swartout *et al.*'s (2015:18) study also found that low morale in an organisation was a key contributor to work-related stress, as noted with most participants in this study.

#### **5.9.8 Lack of support by the DBE**

The lack of support offered by the DBE to the SMTs of all three underperforming secondary schools emerged prominently in my study. Most participants claimed that the DBE did not offer effective strategies to improve learner academic performance in all three underperforming secondary schools. The findings revealed that the DBE visits to schools consisted of *monitoring* the work of the SMTs, educators, and in some instances, a sample

of learners' books as well. In view of this, P2, for instance, made the point that there was confusion with regard to the purpose of the DBE visits, indicating that there was more monitoring than *support* offered to improve learner academic performance. That is, in relation to the monthly performance data reports submitted, there was often no feedback or support for improvement. In School One, DP1 likewise noted with concern that no DBE official had visited the school in respect of underperforming subjects, despite the school's email communications to the DBE. HOD3 and P3 raised the issue of financial support from the DBE aimed at improving teaching and learning in the underperforming secondary school. They mentioned that DBE financial support would help in procuring teaching and learning resources and the appointment of additional educators to ease the teaching hours of the already exhausted staff.

#### **5.10 THEME 4 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS**

The summary of major findings that follow is in response to the fourth research sub-question: *How do SMTs consider that their instructional leadership role can lead to improving learner academic performance?* This is in relation to **Theme 4: Views concerning instructional leadership to enhance improvement.**

##### **5.10.1 The benefits of instructional leadership to improve learner academic performance**

All the participants acknowledged the importance of their instructional leadership roles in improving learner academic performance, with varied interpretations. Most participants alluded to their direct instructional leadership role while engaging with the curriculum to improve learner academic performance (Msila, 2013:81). HOD1 considered the instructional leader's role in monitoring and supervising the work of educators and learners as an important task towards improving learner academic performance that will enable the SMT to observe and implement the necessary improvement strategies. In the same spirit, HOD3 also regarded the instructional leader's role in curriculum management as an important factor in improving learner academic performance and stated: *"If you can manage the curriculum in an acceptable manner, then your results will be quite good"*. Although DP1 was in favour of instructional leadership for improving learner academic performance, he mentioned that the DBE should provide training for SMTs to enable them to enact their instructional leadership roles effectively. Some participants mentioned (implicitly or explicitly) the importance of shared instructional leadership, as proposed also by Hallinger (2007:5), which will strengthen the efforts of the SMT in improving learner academic performance,

rather than each level of the SMT working in isolation. (I take this up further in Section 4.11.8 when referring to “Activating the potential for shared instructional leadership”.)

In School One, P1 regarded the instructional leadership role of HODs as the main level of SMT due to their direct involvement in the curriculum with educators and learners. Nevertheless, both P1 and P3 felt that they were ultimately the “accounting officers” responsible in some way for improving overall instructional leadership in the school as a way of enhancing school performance. To conclude, the findings revealed that all the participants considered their specific roles as instructional leaders as key to improving learner academic performance because of the strong focus on their managing of the curriculum and the nature of sharing of instructional leadership tasks which does not put pressure on any particular SMT member, but ideally makes provision for shared accountability of learner results in the final examinations.

### **5.10.2 A sense of vision towards improving performance**

Many participants used the word “vision” when discussing the need for the school to advance by way of improving school performance. Although they lamented that one of the reasons for being classified as underperforming was the DBE’s (2011) promotion and progression policy, which they held as partly responsible for the poor NSC pass rates and the fact that the school was underperforming (see Section 4.9.1.7), they conceded that a vision of how to improve performance would go some way towards realising this in practice. Among others, they pointed out the importance of a forward-looking “vision”. For example, DP1 stated: *“We always reinforce our goal of improving our Matric results and the whole staff knows that’s our key focus area”*, and in School Three P3 stated: *“We have strategies and plans in place which is compulsory and I think everyone works towards improving the Grade 12 results because that’s all we ever focus on”*. It was apparent from all the participant expressions that they were frustrated with being classified as an underperforming secondary school for several years, hence their articulated vision of performing above the minimum NSC pass requirements. HOD1’s remark captured this thought effectively: *“I hope we can achieve better results in the Grade 12 examinations and come out of the underperformance category”*. In all these various expressions of this “hope”, they expressed a sense of their own vision (and implied that this could become part of the school’s vision as a whole). Some of them referred explicitly to promoting a shared vision – and in the next section I elaborate on this.



### **5.10.3 Promoting a shared vision**

The findings suggest, as expressed by the views of the participants, that the vision that can be said to be common among all the SMT members was the improvement of learner academic performance, especially in the NSC final examination. Some participants (namely DP2) referred to how the promotion of a shared vision was done through staff meetings and subject committee meetings. DP2's response shed light on the school's effort to promote shared vision through subject meetings: *"At our subject committee meetings we set our targets and goals for improvement so that's where the other teachers would know what our intentions are"*.

For some participants like DP1, the promotion of a shared vision was a focus on restoring the school back to its "glory days" when the academic performance minimum pass rates were attained. Further findings revealed that all three principals articulated the importance of a shared vision for improving learner academic performance through their staff meetings which also created a collaborative environment amongst the staff (including the SMT). The findings indicate that the SMTs, through their planned intervention strategies for improvement, are endeavouring to meet the curriculum goals of the school, seen as a shared vision for improvement. This finding is also consistent with Ramango and Naicker's (2022:98) assertion that "visionary leaders consider what is best for the entire school, including its staff, learners and parents". The implementation of all improvement intervention programmes in all three schools also can be taken as signifying that the staff (together with the SMT) is working towards one common vision, which is to improve learner academic performance.

### **5.10.4 Activating potential for shared instructional leadership**

Finally, in my second cycle of analysis, and partly inspired by the conversations in the telephonic interviews where various ideas for activating the potential for shared instructional leadership were expressed, I created a category with this label as a sub-theme in Theme 4. Some participants mentioned the aspect of shared instructional leadership (before the telephonic conversation), but the conversations in which I asked them to comment explicitly on this, brought to light that many felt that there was potential for activating shared instructional leadership. For example, P1 pointed out that tasks are shared within all levels of the SMT; however, he still sees himself as ultimately accountable for the allocated tasks through his oversight role. P1's remark captured the activation of potential for shared instructional leadership in School One: *"Almost all tasks are shared amongst the HODs and the DP and I oversee that the tasks are completed on time"*.

Although the participants recognised that there was potential for activating shared instructional leadership, they felt that the PAM (DBE, 2016) does not focus on this, and many participants re-worked the documents to show how shared instructional leadership can be activated and offered some examples of how they thought they were implementing this in practice. For example, P1 stated: *“I delegate tasks to the other SMT members, so I would say that tasks are being shared with the rest of the SMT”*. In line with P1’s response, Taole (2013:75) asserts that delegation of managerial tasks to the other SMT members allows the principal to create “free” time to become directly involved in the instructional programme of the school. The delegation, or what P1 considers to be “sharing” of tasks amongst the SMT, is what Hallinger (2007:5) regards as “shared instructional leadership” in which the principal does not function alone in the leadership function. Another example was DP3, who stated: *“I receive various tasks from the principal and then I share or complete the tasks myself”*. This approach of sharing (distributing) of leadership tasks is iterated by Williams (2011:191) and Ng (2019:5) when they note that a distributed approach to leadership tasks (as mentioned by P1 and DP3) can include many people (other SMT members). This would activate the potential for shared instructional leadership. The above responses by P1 and DP3 suggest that shared instructional leadership was already being activated to some extent, in that they felt their roles were interrelated and interdependent in terms of fulfilling “instructional leadership” in the school. P3 considered the design of the SIP as also activating potential for shared instructional leadership. Regarding the SIP, P3 had a different vision of what it might mean to engage in a collaboration as far as shared instructional leadership is concerned but still expressed a potential for this: *“The level one educators, the SMT and the DP perform their duties of checking learners work and preparing them for the final examinations and I have to see that all of the aspects for improvement in our SIP are achieved”*. This was an indication that they work collaboratively via shared responsibility to activate the potential for shared instructional leadership, but with P3 still admitting ultimate accountability as the principal. Another example that captured an indirect role played by the principal in shared instructional leadership is when P1 stated: *“Almost all tasks are shared amongst the HODs and the DP and I oversee that the tasks are completed on time”*. This finding is an indication that everyone is accountable in some way and instructional leadership tasks are shared, allowing people to take co-responsibility or what Louis and Murphy (2018:172) call collective responsibility. Many of the participants seemed to take this line, for example when P1 remarked: *“My HODs supervise and manage teaching and learning which are compulsory tasks that they have to carry out”* despite the PAM (DBE, 2016) which does not offer advice on possible ways of fulfilling or activating shared instructional leadership.

## 5.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

I introduced this chapter by explicating my use of the telephonic conversations as a data collection method. The conversations with participants in the telephonic interviews shed light on their perceptions and interpretations of the PAM (DBE, 2016) in relation to their instructional leadership roles. The participants also shared their thoughts on their specific duties and responsibilities in relation to the other levels of the SMT. My conversations with all the participants regarding each school's SIP showed that all the SMT members highlighted the importance of the improvement of learner academic performance as the main focus of their school's SIPs. Furthermore, there was evidence of shared leadership (to some extent) of tasks between educators and the SMT to achieve the school goal of improving learner academic performance. I then proceeded to provide a synthesis of the participants' views in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP. Thereafter, a summary of the major findings of my study overall was presented, also in relation to the theory and literature on instructional leadership, with special reference to application in the context of the multiple case study and comparing the views of participants within and among the three schools in relation to themes identified. The summary of the major findings was thus presented thematically and in response to the main research questions in this study. I now move on to Chapter 6 where I provide the recommendations for practice and the conclusion.

## CHAPTER 6

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter comprised my analysis, discussion and synthesis of the telephonic conversations I had with participants concerning the PAM (DBE, 2016) and SIP which was part of the document review followed by my presentation of the major findings of this study. This chapter provides pertinent recommendations for practice, delimitations and limitations of the study with some implications for further research, followed by my contributions to new knowledge. Thereafter, I present the conclusions of my study, followed by a synopsis of the organisation of the entire thesis.

#### 6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

In Chapter 4 I presented the data analysis and discussions based on my first encounter semi-structured interviews and second encounter follow-up interviews. Thereafter, in Chapter 5, I proceeded to provide a data analysis of my telephonic conversations with participants concerning the PAM (DBE, 2016) and SIP as part of the document review process. In Chapter 5 I also presented a summary of the major findings of my whole study. The summary of major findings was based on my data analysis from Chapter 4 (semi-structured and follow-up interviews) and Chapter 5 (telephonic conversations pertaining to document review). Based on the findings in Chapters 4 and 5, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. The excessive administrative workload of the SMTs in all three schools has emerged prominently in this study. These additional managerial and administrative tasks are mostly decided amongst the SMT, as to which level (i.e., HOD, DP or principal) is going to complete the task. In light of the literature (Mestry, 2013:119) which suggests that the daily managerial and administrative tasks make instructional leadership tasks difficult to carry out, I recommend, in line with Hallinger's (2007:5) view, that SMTs engage in *shared leadership* to ease their workloads. In addition, to overcome the administrative workload of the SMT, the level one educators should also be included in a collaborative approach where administrative tasks can be distributed/shared to the entire staff. The sharing or distributing of tasks amongst the entire staff should be based on: 1) Post-level appropriateness for the assigned task; 2) individual expertise; and 3) opportunities for professional development. This recommendation is also in line with recent literature (Ng, 2019:5), which proposes that

leadership is a distributed task and does not rest solely with the principal. I also suggest that the shared and distributed tasks be expanded to level one educators as well as the SGB with the aim of enhancing teaching and learning.

Furthermore, the DBE is urged to continue the state employment of the Educational Assistants through the Basic Education Employment Initiative which was implemented in 2020 and 2021 where over 300 000 youth were employed to assist schools in South Africa with administrative duties. This youth employment initiative provides the SMT with an opportunity to focus mostly on their instructional leadership roles, while the Educational Assistants can dispense off the daily administrative tasks that are normally assigned to the SMT.

2. Findings revealed that the SMT members (at all levels) engage in monitoring and evaluation. The purpose of the monitoring and evaluation process is to ensure that there are effective internal control measures with regards to policy implementation and curriculum (Moshwana & Thaba-Nkadimene, 2016:249). However, it was established that the different levels of the SMT work in isolation from each other when it comes to monitoring and evaluation. The common process for monitoring and evaluation, as expressed by the participants, is as follows: HODs monitor the work of educators and learners; the DPs monitor the work of the HODs; and the principals monitor the work of HODs and DPs. It is therefore recommended that the process of monitoring and evaluation engages the entire SMT as a team-orientated process with clearly defined roles for each SMT member. In addition, as opposed to any level of SMT merely sampling five to ten learner books (as expressed by most participants), I suggest that the monitoring and evaluating process follow a planned (or scheduled) process and all members of staff (i.e., educators and SMT) receive constructive feedback via monitoring reports, which would inform them about learner academic performance.

3. Educators should be engaged in CPTD throughout the year (Kennedy, 2016:945). The ongoing CPTD of educators and the SMT can have a positive impact on school improvement (DeMonte, 2013:2). Findings of my study revealed that although the participants were aware that ongoing professional development should be initiated and engaged throughout the year, this did not seem to happen. According to the participants, the DBE does not provide enough professional development opportunities throughout the year. Borko *et al.* (2010:550) note that teacher professional development can occur in multiple contexts (internal or external) which should be a sustainable, ongoing process on which educators can reflect. In line with Borko *et al.*'s (2010) view, and instead of waiting for DBE professional development activities to be provided, I therefore recommend that the SMT

initiate and provide professional development activities for the entire staff, which is also in line with Weber's (1996) element of an effective instructional leader. The professional development opportunities should be planned internal or external activities aimed at driving quality teaching and learning. The SMT, as the main drivers of professional development, should enlist the services and partnership of tertiary institutions (especially teacher training campuses), Non-Governmental Organisations, as well as the network with high-achieving secondary schools. The inclusion of the above-mentioned stakeholders will enhance teaching and learning practices, as well as give underperforming secondary schools a chance to engage critically with educators and SMTs of high-achieving schools about the best practices for attaining above average NSC results and whole school improvement.

4. One of the findings, as expressed by the views of the participants, was the concern over the indifferent attitude to school work exhibited by learners, which resulted in non-submission of important assessment tasks, especially in Grade 12. In view of this, I recommend that all stakeholders (i.e., the SMT, educators and SGB) develop a comprehensive School-Based Assessment (SBA) policy to tackle issues of non-submission of assessment tasks. This policy would be crucial in the school's endeavours to improve learner academic performance, since a substantial percentage of the learner's final promotion mark constitutes the SBA mark from tasks submitted during the academic year. The SBA policy would ensure every learner submits assessment tasks on time and is guaranteed at least a portion of marks towards their promotion marks, thereby increasing the learner's chance of passing at the end of the year. In addition, completion of the SBA tasks during the year, as stipulated in the policy, would also develop the learner's knowledge and skills in the content taught, thus preparing them for the end of year examinations.

5. All the participants alluded to the lack of support from the DBE offered to underperforming secondary schools. The findings revealed that the SMTs are "*lone rangers*" and often work in isolation from the DBE. I therefore recommend that the DBE provide on-site support (as also expressed by most participants) for SMTs and educators of underperforming secondary schools. The support offered to the SMT and educators of underperforming secondary schools should also comprise of measures to tackle underperformance based on the performance statistics submitted by the principals to the DBE every academic term. I also recommend professional peer support in the form of organised PLCs consisting of the SMT, DBE officials, Subject Advisors and level one educators to critically engage in ways to improve learner academic performance in underperforming secondary schools. To implement this recommendation, after the successful examination of this thesis (which amounts to an external validation of my findings), a meeting will be arranged with the Circuit Managers of underperforming secondary schools, where I will seek their permission to

present my findings and recommendations of this study at their Grade 12 orientation meeting for underperforming secondary schools.

6. Based on my conversations with participants, all of them indicated that they have not received any formal leadership and management training, particularly as instructional leaders. I suggest that the DBE conduct special leadership and management training of all SMT levels in underperforming secondary schools, with a special focus on instructional leadership, and particularly the way in which SMTs can share and distribute leadership tasks between the SMT and educators in order to achieve the organisational goals of the school through teamwork.

7. The lack of parental support featured prominently in the findings of this study. All the participants alluded to poor attendance at parent meetings and the lack of interest shown by parents with regard to learners' work and discipline. It is therefore recommended that all three schools form PLCs which should engage the following stakeholders: 1) The school staff comprising of the SMT and educators; 2) the SGB; 3) parents; and 4) the learners. The integration of all of the above stakeholders is much needed with a collaborative approach in which parents are educated about the effectiveness of PLCs in relation to the instructional programme of the school as pointed out by Ezzani (2019:580).

8. The findings of this study indicated that parents did not report to school on the SMT's request, and calls to parents sometimes failed. I therefore recommend that the three schools implement an effective communication network system for school-parent correspondence and communication. I suggest that the school introduce data network systems like the D6 Communicator, which sends information to the whole school community via email. Furthermore, schools can also liaise with their network service providers regarding the Short Messaging Service (SMS) system that is able to reach all parents by SMS (which is also cost-effective since no data are required for the parent).

### **6.3 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

The findings of my study are located within the context of three underperforming secondary schools in Chatsworth, within the Karanja and Burlington circuits of the Umlazi District in KZN. The boundary of my research was therefore restricted to these three underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi District. Only SMT members from three officially classified underperforming secondary schools within the Karanja and Burlington circuits in Chatsworth were selected, which was the boundary for my study.

## 6.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Since this case study research was limited to three underperforming secondary schools, the choice of participants and the context of the schools were carefully scrutinised to ensure rich data to make meaning of the phenomenon under study. Semi-structured interviews might have posed a problem with confidentiality and anonymity when working with a small group of SMT members, since each school in this study has only one principal and deputy principal. To mitigate this problem, ground rules were set with all participants to abide by a code of ethics within the research process (as explained in Chapter 3, Section 3.10).

Because only three underperforming schools were used in this study with nine SMT members, the results cannot be generalised. Nevertheless, as in all qualitative research, I believe that readers reading the research, who are familiar with other underperforming schools, may consider that the findings (or some of them) resonate with their experiences. This is what Lincoln and Guba (1985:119-122) call *naturalistic generalisation*, where the task falls upon readers to consider the extent to which the findings apply in other contexts. This is explained well by Melrose (2010:91) when she notes that “as readers ... find descriptions that resonate with their experiences, they consider whether their situations are similar enough to warrant generalisations”. (In qualitative research this process also called transferability, as explained in Section 3.9.2 in Chapter 3 – hence the limitations of the research in terms of exploring only three underperforming school were arguably compensated for by the provision of the rich descriptions and analyses which allow readers to assess extent of transferability.)

SMTs in underperforming schools are engaged in additional administrative tasks after hours which affected some of the interview dates and times which then had to be rescheduled. This led to certain delays in my data collection time-frames. In this regard, meetings were set up with participants according to their availability and time-frames. I also gave participants the opportunity to re-schedule interview meetings if they had to engage in urgent school management duties or responsibilities. Meetings were also conducted after-school hours and participants also informed me which days were not viable to meet, according to their school management plan. One important limitation that I encountered in my study was the unforeseen Covid-19 pandemic, which restricted me freely visiting and engaging with the participants at the stage when I wished to conduct (additional) interviews regarding their interpretations of the SIP and PAM. Fortunately, the participants agreed to avail themselves telephonically, thus mitigating somewhat against this limitation.



## **6.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

My thesis focused on the instructional leadership practices of SMTs in three underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi District. As mentioned above (Section 6.4), this study comprised of a small number of SMT participants. Therefore, I suggest that future studies on instructional leadership focus on a larger sample size, which should include more underperforming secondary schools along with additional SMT participants. Moreover, I suggest that for future research, a wide variety of contexts of underperforming secondary schools must be considered, some of which could include: Demographics; rural underperforming secondary schools; challenging socio-economic areas; and research across different education districts. My study included HODs, DPs and principals; therefore, I suggest that future researchers also include level one educators to gain insight about how they perceive the SMTs' instructional leadership practices with a strong focus on exploring the question of shared and distributed leadership between the SMT and educators. Meanwhile, during the study itself, I discussed with the SMT participants the issues associated with generating more shared leadership amongst the SMT team and including also educators along with the School Governing Body. Many of the participants variously expressed openness to the idea of embracing sharedness as an inclusive process. Overall, through my continued involvement as a professional in meetings with SMT members in various underperforming schools, I have the opportunity to share the message of the thesis.

## **6.6 CONTRIBUTION OF NEW KNOWLEDGE**

Traditionally, instructional leadership focused mainly on the principal's leadership in the teaching and learning (instructional) programme of the school with the aim of improving learner achievement (Bendikson *et al.*, 2012; Goddard, 2012; Ntshoe & Selesho, 2014; Yasser & Al Mahdy, 2015). While there is a plethora of literature which has explored the instructional leadership practices of the principal as the key leader, my study shed new light on instructional leadership by also including the instructional leadership practices (and perspectives) of HODs and DPs in underperforming secondary schools. My inclusion of HODs stems from Leithwood's (2016:117) view that HODs are often an underutilised form of management when it comes to instructional leadership for improving learner academic performance. My study went a step further to address a potential gap in literature which did not seem to take into account the instructional leadership practices of DPs. In view of this, my sample of the SMT participants included HODs, DPs and principals, which constituted the entire composition of the SMT in each school. My justification for selecting the entire SMT was based on the paucity of literature and studies that have taken into account the

instructional leadership practices of the entire SMT, specifically within the context of an underperforming secondary school. Therefore, my study can be regarded as providing a small, yet significant new body of knowledge in the field of instructional leadership.

In addition, from a theoretical perspective, there have been a number of models of instructional leadership (Hallinger & Lee, 2014; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Murphy, 1990; Weber, 1996) that have emerged over the years. In Chapter 2, (Section 2.18.3) I justified my selection of utilising Weber's (1996) model of instructional leadership. However, I also provided an additional element to Weber's model, which focused on Hallinger's (2007) notion of *shared instructional leadership*. The extended Weber's model shed new light on instructional leadership by exploring the extent to which the different levels of the SMT share their instructional leadership tasks in order to meet the daily demands and challenges in the South African schooling system.

Therefore, my version of Weber's extended model with the additional element of shared instructional leadership does not only provide a new theoretical lens for instructional leadership, but also provides SMTs of underperforming secondary schools with insight about how to improve learner academic performance, based on the experiences and views from the participants in this study.

## **6.7 CONCLUSION**

As a key research aim, this study sought to explore the instructional leadership practices of SMTs in underperforming secondary schools. One of the most prominent challenges facing the SMTs of underperforming secondary schools is the excessive administrative tasks that they have to carry out on a daily basis. The findings revealed that these administrative tasks result in the SMTs devoting less time to their instructional leadership obligations, which has a direct impact on the teaching and learning programme of the school. This in turn could have dire consequences in the context of the three sample schools in this study, since the main focus is to improve learner academic performance in the NSC examinations and no longer be classified as underperforming. This study also concluded that the effective instructional leadership of all levels of the SMT is reliant on *shared instructional leadership* practices. This, as Ng (2019:5) notes, is a move away from the conceptualised role of the principal as the prime leader of the school.

The three sample schools in this study have all been underperforming for more than three consecutive years. A myriad of factors were considered by the participants as impacting negatively on their instructional leadership practices, yet the SMTs in this study appear

resilient through their commitment and involvement in numerous intervention programmes and strategies aimed at improving learner academic performance (which are detailed in their specific SIPs which guide the entire teaching staff and SMT). The SMTs in this study engage in monitoring and evaluation processes of educators and learners to ensure effective teaching and learning is taking place in their goal of improving learner academic performance.

While the different levels of the SMT perceived their instructional leadership roles as somewhat different from each other according to their job descriptions in the PAM (DBE, 2016), each level of the SMT still purportedly carry out their instructional leadership tasks diligently, and they remain positive about the notion of shared instructional leadership, provided tasks are shared or distributed methodically amongst the SMT and educators. It was apparent in all three schools that SMTs understand that instructional leadership, which focuses mainly on the instructional programme (teaching and learning activities), can be especially beneficial towards improving learner academic performance in underperforming secondary schools.

## **6.8 SYNOPSIS OF THE ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY**

This study comprised of six chapters. Chapter 1 was an orientation to the study. This chapter presented the following: The background and rationale for the study; the specification of the key research questions, followed by the aims and objectives of this study; a brief outline of the theoretical framework; a discussion of the research design and methodology; a definition of the key concepts; and the chapter outline of the entire study. The chapter ended with a chapter summary.

Chapter 2 provided an in-depth literature review on instructional leadership and offered a discussion and justification of the theoretical framework which formed the lens of this study. Research on instructional leadership theory and practice across the globe was engaged within this chapter, with a view to locating gaps in the literature. A gap identified was to explore the leadership instructional practices not only of principals but also of other SMT members in the practice of instructional leadership, with specific reference to their specific challenges that they may be encountering in schools classed as underperforming in South Africa.

Chapter 3 was introduced with my rationale for empirical research, followed by a detailed discussion of the research approach as a qualitative approach set within a constructivist paradigm, and my choice of a multiple case study design and attendant methodology. The

sampling, data collection tools and measures to ensure trustworthiness were detailed, followed by the ethical considerations taken on board in this study.

Chapter 4 offered a presentation of data analysis and interpretation from my first encounter semi-structured interviews and second encounter follow-up (member-checking) interviews. A trail of the way in which I developed the (emerging) themes and sub-themes was provided, and I linked the data analysis under each theme to some of the literature as offered in Chapter 2 and to an expanded reference to certain additional literature introduced in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 presented the data analysis and interpretations of the telephonic conversations concerning the document review, followed by a synthesis of the findings of the PAM (DBE, 2016) and the SIP documents that were reviewed with participants. Thereafter, a summary of the major findings of the study were presented. Again, links to relevant literature, with a focus on what this study contributes to ongoing debates in the literature, were made.

Chapter 6 presented the practical recommendations of the study, along with an indication also of its theoretical contribution to new knowledge in the domain of instructional leadership. The delimitation of the study was specified and its limitations (and attempt to mitigate against these) were also accounted for. Suggestions for further research were proffered. The chapter concluded with some final conclusions concerning prominent challenges facing the SMTs of underperforming secondary schools and how distributive leadership can constitute a solution towards improving learner academic performance in underperforming secondary schools. This was followed by a synopsis of the organisation of the entire thesis.

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## **APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR HEAD OF DEPARTMENTS (HODS)**

1. Please tell me what a typical day in the life of a school manager in an underperforming secondary school is like.

2. What are some of your daily tasks as a school manager?

3. What are some of the specific teaching and learning tasks that you engage with as a school manager?

4. Your school has been officially declared as underperforming by the Department of Basic Education. Can you please tell me what life is like for a school manager in an underperforming secondary school?

**Probing question:** *Is the functionality the same as a secondary school that has met the National minimum requirements for Grade 12? Please elaborate.*

5. As we know, your school is classified as underperforming based on the Grade 12 results, and often the school manager has to answer for the outcome of the academic results in either written formats or face-to-face meetings with the Department of Basic Education. What are your thoughts on this issue of accountability? Should you be held accountable for poor learner academic performance in your school? Do you think this is a shared responsibility and how can shared responsibility be assumed do you think?

6. What are some of the negative factors that you have experienced as a school manager?

**Probing question related to learner academic performance:** *Briefly comment on the following: Parental support, learner absenteeism/late-coming, teacher absenteeism, school safety and security, community involvement, pupil vs teacher ratio, literacy and numeracy levels and socio-economic impact on the school.*

7. How do these negative factors that you have mentioned impact on your instructional leadership practices that you engage with as a school manager?

8. What support (if any) has the Department of Basic Education provided to you as a school manager in an underperforming secondary school?

9. What formal training (if any) have you received to empower and equip you as an instructional leader in the school?

10. Please explain how educational policies have impacted on your role as an instructional leader.

**Probing question:** *How has policies implemented by the Department of Basic Education impacted on learner academic performance?*

11. Taking into account that your school is classified as underperforming based on the Grade 12 NCS Examination results, what are some of the strategies that could be implemented to help improve learner academic performance in your school?

12. What can be done at the school, Circuit, District, Provincial and National levels of education to help improve learner academic performance in secondary schools?

13. What can be done specifically for you as a manager in an underperforming secondary school to assist you in becoming an effective instructional leader?

## APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR DEPUTY PRINCIPALS

1. Please tell me what a typical day in the life of a Deputy Principal in an underperforming secondary school is like.

2. What are some of your daily tasks as a Deputy Principal?

3. What are some of the specific teaching and learning tasks that you engage with as a Deputy Principal?

4. Your school has been officially declared as underperforming by the Department of Basic Education. Can you please tell me what life is like for a Deputy Principal in an underperforming secondary school?

**Probing question:** *Is the functionality the same as a secondary school that has met the National minimum requirements for Grade 12? Please elaborate.*

5. As we know, your school is classified as underperforming based on the Grade 12 results, and often the school manager has to answer for the outcome of the academic results in either written formats or face-to-face meetings with the Department of Basic Education. What are your thoughts on this issue of accountability? Should you be held accountable for poor learner academic performance in your school? Do you think this is a shared responsibility and how can shared responsibility be assumed do you think?

6. What are some of the negative factors that you have experienced as a school manager?

**Probing question related to learner academic performance:** *Briefly comment on the following: Parental support, learner absenteeism/late-coming, teacher absenteeism, school safety and security, community involvement, pupil vs teacher ratio, literacy and numeracy levels and socio-economic impact on the school.*

7. How do these negative factors that you have mentioned impact on your instructional leadership practices that you engage with as a school manager?

8. What support (if any) has the Department of Basic Education provided to you as a school manager in an underperforming secondary school?

9. What formal training (if any) have you received to empower and equip you as an instructional leader in the school?

10. Please explain how educational policies have impacted on your role as an instructional leader.

**Probing question:** *How have policies implemented by the Department of Basic Education impacted on learner academic performance?*

11. Taking into account that your school is classified as underperforming based on the Grade 12 NCS Examination results, what are some of the strategies that could be implemented to help improve learner academic performance in your school?



12. What can be done at the school, Circuit, District, Provincial and National levels of education to help improve learner academic performance in secondary schools?

13. What can be done specifically for you as a Deputy Principal in an underperforming secondary school to assist you in becoming an effective instructional leader?

## APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PRINCIPALS

1. Please tell me what a typical day in the life of a Principal in an underperforming secondary school is like.

2. What are some of your daily tasks as a school Principal?

3. What are some of the specific teaching and learning tasks that you engage with as a Principal?

4. Your school has been officially declared as underperforming by the Department of Basic Education. Can you please tell me what life is like for a Principal in an underperforming secondary school?

**Probing question:** *Is the functionality the same as a secondary school that has met the National minimum requirements for Grade 12? Please elaborate.*

5. As we know, your school is classified as underperforming based on the Grade 12 results, and often the school manager has to answer for the outcome of the academic results in either written formats or face-to-face meetings with the Department of Basic Education. What are your thoughts on this issue of accountability for the Principal of an underperforming secondary school?

6. What are some of the negative factors that you have experienced as a Principal?

**Probing question related to learner academic performance:** *Briefly comment on the following: Parental support, learner absenteeism/late-coming, teacher absenteeism, school safety and security, community involvement, pupil vs teacher ratio, literacy and numeracy levels and socio-economic impact on the school.*

7. How do these negative factors that you have mentioned impact on your instructional leadership practices that you engage with as a Principal?

8. What support (if any) has the Department of Basic Education provided to you as a Principal in an underperforming secondary school?

9. What formal training (if any) have you received to empower and equip you as an instructional leader in the school?

10. Please explain how educational policies have impacted on your role as an instructional leader.

**Probing question:** *How have policies implemented by the Department of Basic Education impacted on learner academic performance?*

11. Taking into account that your school is classified as underperforming based on the Grade 12 NCS Examination results, what are some of the strategies that could be implemented to help improve learner academic performance in your school?

12. What can be done at the school, Circuit, District, Provincial and National levels of education to help improve learner academic performance in secondary schools?

13. What can be done specifically for you as a manager in an underperforming secondary school to assist you in becoming an effective instructional leader?

## APPENDIX D: FOLLOW-UP AND MEMBER-CHECKING INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### *The same questions were asked to HODs, DPs and principals*

*The following (brief) follow-up questions were asked to all participants during the member checking/follow-up interview. The interview served three functions: to check the transcript; to allow participants to make input into my analysis; and to allow me to probe a few additional issues that had arisen for me while I was becoming immersed in the data from the first set of interviews. These questions were:*

1. How do you (i.e., HOD, DP or principal) perceive your role as an instructional leader in relation to the other levels of SMT?
2. Do you think instructional leadership can lead to the progress or regress of learner academic performance in underperforming secondary schools?
3. Would you like to discuss and/or comment about any issue/topic arising during the study which you felt strongly about or would have liked to comment further on?

**APPENDIX E: DOCUMENTS REVIEW INTERVIEW SCHEDULE GUIDE**  
**TELEPHONIC CONVERSATION INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR HODs, DPs AND**  
**PRINCIPALS**

*The same questions regarding the PAM (DBE, 2016) and SIP were asked to HODs,  
DPs and principals*

1. How do you perceive (or interpret) your instructional leadership role in relation to the PAM (DBE, 2016) document?
2. What are your views about the notion of shared instructional leadership in relation to your specific job description in the PAM (DBE, 2016) document?
3. How do you perceive the SIP of your school as an instructional leader?
4. How has the SIP helped to improve learner academic performance in your school?

**APPENDIX F: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN KWAZULU-NATAL SCHOOLS  
(THE FOLLOWING LETTER WAS SENT TO THE DBE RESEARCH UNIT VIA EMAIL)**

**Research title: Exploring instructional leadership practices of School Management Teams in underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi district**

***Approved amended title as at 19/04/2022: Exploring instructional leadership practices of School Management Teams in underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi District***

Date: 5 May 2019

TO: XXXXXXXXX  
DEPARTMENT: OFFICE OF THE HOD: KZN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
(RESEARCH UNIT)  
CONTACT DETAILS: Tel: 033 392 1004

Dear, XXXXXXXXX

I, Preshaan Subramoney, am doing research under supervision of Professor Norma Romm, a Professor in the Department of Adult Education and Youth Development towards a Doctor of Philosophy Degree at the University of South Africa. I am inviting three KZN schools (Glenover Secondary, Westcliff Secondary and Asoka Secondary) to participate in a study entitled *Progressing or regressing? Instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi district*.

The aims of this study are: (1) To explore school managers' perceptions of their instructional leadership roles in underperforming secondary schools (2) to establish the specific teaching and learning tasks that school managers in underperforming schools engage in (3) to identify those factors that are experienced as impacting negatively on instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools and (4) to establish ways in which instructional leadership can assist school managers in improving learner academic performance.

These three schools have been purposively selected amongst the underperforming secondary schools in the Karanja and Burlington Circuits in Chatsworth, located within the Umlazi District. The purpose of my research is to investigate the instructional leadership practices that school managers (i.e., Head of Departments - HODs, Deputy Principals and Principals) engage in within the context of underperforming secondary schools. This study will entail interviewing HODs, Deputy Principals and Principals in order to explore how they perceive their instructional leadership roles and to establish the factors that they experience as negatively contributing to underperformance, and also to provide recommendations for the improvement of learner academic performance.

It is hoped that this research study will benefit both the school management and the present and future Grade 12 learners who determine whether the school is categorised as underperforming or not. This study will also inform school management of those factors that may be impacting on poor learner academic performance and provide recommendations for improvement at School, Circuit, District and Provincial levels.

There are no identified risks for the institution or participants being involved in this research. Participation in the study is voluntary and withdrawal from the study may take place without penalty. Participants will receive no compensation for participating in this research. Participant's names will be kept confidential and will be used only for the purpose of this research. Participants will be assigned a code that will be used in all my notes and data generated. If participants agree that the interview can be audiotaped, they will obtain a transcribed copy of their interviews; otherwise my notes will be made available for you to comment upon. Participants, including Principals, will also receive a summary of my draft findings, which you can comment on. The results of the study, as a feedback, will be communicated to the institutions in soft copy using email or hard copy.

If you have any questions regarding my project, feel free to contact me on my mobile phone at 081 3877 465 or e-mail: [preshaansub@gmail.com](mailto:preshaansub@gmail.com). If you have questions regarding your rights as research subjects or if problems arise which you do not wish to discuss with me you can contact my supervisor: Professor Norma Romm at 082 4060 585 or [rommnra@unisa.ac.za](mailto:rommnra@unisa.ac.za) or [norma.romm@gmail.com](mailto:norma.romm@gmail.com)

Yours sincerely,

PRESHAAN SUBRAMONEY  
THE RESEARCHER  
CELL: 081 3877 465  
EMAIL: [preshaansub@gmail.com](mailto:preshaansub@gmail.com)  
UNISA Student No. 46277889

## APPENDIX G: DBE APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN KZN SCHOOLS



education

Department:  
Education  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1063

Ref.:2/4/8/1791

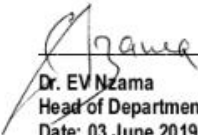
Mr P Subramoney  
22 Jesters Avenue  
Chatsworth  
4092

Dear Mr Subramoney

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "**PROGRESSING OR REGRESSING? INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF SCHOOL MANAGER'S IN UNDERPERFORMING SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE KWAZULU-NATAL UMLAZI DISTRICT**", in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 03 June 2019 to 04 January 2022.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

  
Dr. EV Nzama  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 03 June 2019

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Postal Address: Private Bag X9137 • Pietermaritzburg • 3200 • Republic of South Africa  
Physical Address: 247 Burger Street • Anton Lembede Building • Pietermaritzburg • 3201  
Tel.: +27 33 392 1063 • Fax.: +27 033 392 1203 • Email: Phindile.Duma@kzndoe.gov.za • Web: www.kzndoe.gov.za  
Facebook: KZNDOE... Twitter: @DBE\_KZN... Instagram: kzn\_education... Youtube: kzndoe

...Championing Quality Education - Creating and Securing a Brighter Future



## APPENDIX H: UNISA ETHICS APPROVAL



### UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2019/03/13

Ref: **2019/03/13/46177889/11/MC**

Dear Mr Subramoney

Name: Mr P Subramoney

Student: 46177889

**Decision:** Ethics Approval from  
2019/03/13 to 2024/03/13

**Researcher(s):** Name: Mr P Subramoney  
E-mail address: www.preshaansub@gmail.com  
Telephone: +27 81 387 7465

**Supervisor(s):** Name: Prof N Romm  
E-mail address: rommnra@unisa.ac.za  
Telephone: +27 82 406 0585

**Title of research:**

**Progressing or Regressing? Instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi district**

**Qualification:** PhD in Educational Leadership and Management

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2019/03/13 to 2024/03/13.

*The **low risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2019/03/13 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.



University of South Africa  
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane  
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa  
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150  
www.unisa.ac.za

2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2024/03/13**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

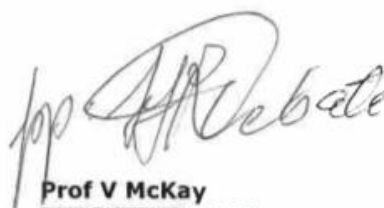
*Note:*

*The reference number **2019/03/13/46177889/11/MC** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,



**Prof AT Motlhabane**  
**CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC**  
motlhat@unisa.ac.za



**Prof V McKay**  
**EXECUTIVE DEAN**  
Mckayvi@unisa.ac.za

Approved - decision template – updated 16 Feb 2017

University of South Africa  
Pretorius Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane  
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Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150  
[www.unisa.ac.za](http://www.unisa.ac.za)

## **APPENDIX I: INFORMED PERMISSION FORM SENT TO PRINCIPALS**

***Research title: Progressing or regressing? Instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi district***

***Approved amended title as at 19/04/2022: Exploring instructional leadership practices of School Management Teams in underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi District***

Date:

TO: THE PRINCIPAL

DEPARTMENT: KZN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

CONTACT DETAILS:

Dear, XXXXXXXXX

I, Preshaan Subramoney, am doing research under supervision of Professor Norma Romm, a Professor in the Department of Adult Education and Youth Development towards a Doctor of Philosophy Degree at the University of South Africa. I am inviting your institution to participate in a study entitled *Progressing or regressing? Instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi district*.

The aims of this study are: (1) To explore school managers' perceptions of their instructional leadership roles in underperforming secondary schools (2) to establish the specific teaching and learning tasks that school managers in underperforming schools engage in (3) to identify those factors that are experienced as impacting negatively on instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools and (4) to establish ways in which instructional leadership can assist school managers in improving learner academic performance.

Your school has been purposively selected amongst the underperforming secondary schools in the Karanja and Burlington Circuits in Chatsworth, located within the Umlazi District. The purpose of my research is to investigate the instructional leadership practices that school managers (i.e., Head of Departments - HODs, Deputy Principals and Principals) engage in within the context of underperforming secondary schools. This study will entail interviewing HODs, Deputy Principals and Principals in order to explore how they perceive their instructional leadership roles and to establish the factors that they experience as negatively contributing to underperformance, and also to provide recommendations for the improvement of learner academic performance.

It is hoped that this research study will benefit both the school management and the present and future Grade 12 learners who determine whether the school is categorised as underperforming or not. This study will also inform school management of those factors that may be impacting on poor learner academic performance and provide recommendations for improvement at School, Circuit, District and Provincial levels.

There are no identified risks for the institution or participants being involved in this research. Participation in the study is voluntary and withdrawal from the study may take place without penalty. You will receive no compensation for participating in this research. Your name will be kept confidential and will be used only for the purpose of this research. You will be assigned a code that will be used in all my notes and data generated. If you agree that the interview can be audiotaped, you will obtain a transcribed copy of your interview; otherwise my notes will be made available for you to comment upon. You (and the other participants) will also receive a summary of my draft findings, which you can comment on. The results of the study, as a feedback, will be communicated to your institution in soft copy using email or hard copy.

If you have any questions regarding my project, feel free to contact me on my mobile phone at 081 3877 465 or e-mail: [preshaansub@gmail.com](mailto:preshaansub@gmail.com). If you have questions regarding your rights as research subjects or if problems arise which you do not wish to discuss with me you can contact my supervisor: Professor Norma Romm at 082 4060 585 or [rommnra@unisa.ac.za](mailto:rommnra@unisa.ac.za) or [norma.romm@gmail.com](mailto:norma.romm@gmail.com)

Yours sincerely,  
**PRESHAAN SUBRAMONEY**

Please sign this letter as a written consent that you have read and understood the contents of this letter and you agree/do not agree to voluntarily participate in the research project. Your immediate response will greatly contribute positively to this study.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, of \_\_\_\_\_ confirm that I have read and understood the conditions of my participation in this research project. My participation is voluntary and therefore do not expect any remuneration. I am at liberty to decline to answer questions that I am not comfortable with and that I can terminate my participation without giving reason.

Indicate by ticking (✓) next to your relevant choice

<b>I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>I DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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\_\_\_\_\_ (Participants Name and Surname)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Participants Signature) Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (Researcher's Name and Surname)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Researcher's Signature) Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX J: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, \_\_\_\_\_(participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the audio recording of the semi-structured interview. Please tick below:

YES	NO	UNDECIDED
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I have received a copy of the informed consent agreement.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name & Surname (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Name & Surname (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **APPENDIX K: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

***Title: Progressing or Regressing? Instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi district***

***Approved amended title as at 19/04/2022: Exploring instructional leadership practices of School Management Teams in underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi District***

### **DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT**

I, Preshaan Subramoney, am doing research under supervision of Professor Norma Romm, a Professor in the Department of Adult Education and Youth Development towards a Doctor of Philosophy Degree at the University of South Africa. I am inviting your institution to participate in a study entitled *Progressing or regressing? Instructional leadership practices in underperforming secondary schools in the Umlazi district*.

This study is expected to collect important information regarding the ways in which school managers perceive their instructional leadership roles in underperforming secondary schools. This study will also establish the specific teaching and learning tasks that school managers in underperforming schools engage in, and the factors that may impact negatively when carrying out their instructional leadership roles. More importantly, this study will establish ways in which school managers may improve learner academic performance to improve their Grade 12 NSC results.

You are invited because of your management position that you currently hold in your school. I obtained your contact details from the Principal of the school. Your school has been chosen to participate in this study since it is in close proximity to where I reside and the school where I am an educator. I will be interviewing nine school managers (3 HODs, 3 Deputy Principals and 3 Principals) from the Karanja and Burlington Circuits in Chatsworth within the Umlazi District.

The study involves conducting a semi-structured interview with school managers. The interview will be audio taped (with your permission) and transcribed into data that will be used to understand the phenomenon taking place within the identified context of the school. The duration of the interview for all school managers will be approximately 45 minutes for all school managers. The main questions that will be asked during the semi-structured interview will be related to your instructional leadership practices that you engage with on a daily basis. Some of the questions that will be asked in the semi-structured interview are:

- What are some of the instructional leadership practices do you engage in as a school manager in an underperforming secondary school?
- What teaching and learning tasks do you engage in on a daily basis as a school manager?

- What are some of the factors that impact negatively on your role as an instructional leader in an underperforming secondary school?
- How can learner academic performance be improved in your school?
- How can school managers be assisted in executing their instructional leadership practices in an underperforming secondary school?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

This study has long lasting benefits for the participant and the school in helping to achieve the National minimum requirements in the Grade 12 NSC Examinations. Furthermore, this study will greatly benefit the participating school managers in establishing their instructional leadership practices that they engage in on a daily basis or even if those instructional leadership practices are being carried out. Participants will also identify those factors that impact negatively in their instructional leadership practices and more importantly; this study will provide recommendations to the participants that will hopefully improve learner academic performance, especially in the Grade 12 NSC Examinations. The school will also receive a copy of this study which will be of assistance to the Principal in driving academic improvement strategies and initiatives.

Participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a written consent form. You are at liberty to decline to answer any or all questions and free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. There are no identified risks for you from participating in this research. There may be risks that are not anticipated. However, every effort will be made to minimise any risks.

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

The identity of both the school and the principal will be kept confidential. No one apart from the researcher will know about your involvement in this research. The data from the interviews will only be used for research purposes and if this research project is published, individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report. You will receive no compensation for participating in this research. Please take note that your participation is voluntary.

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard in a storeroom for future research or academic purposes. All electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. After five years, hard copies of data will be shredded and electronic copies permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer throughout the use of a relevant software programme.

This study has received written approval from the Research Review Committee of the UNISA College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact the researcher, Preshaan Subramoney on 081 3877 465 or email [preshaansub@gmail.com](mailto:preshaansub@gmail.com). Once the findings and recommendations have been made it will be made available to you if you would like to be informed of the findings. Should you require any further information or want to contact me about any aspect of this study, please feel free to contact me at the number and email address provided above, or to contact my supervisor, Professor Norma Romm on 082 4060 585 or [rommnra@unisa.ac.za](mailto:rommnra@unisa.ac.za) or [norma.romm@gmail.com](mailto:norma.romm@gmail.com)

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet.

Thank you.

---

Preshaan Subramoney  
The Researcher  
Cell: 081 3877 465  
Email: [preshaansub@gmail.com](mailto:preshaansub@gmail.com)  
UNISA student no. 46277889