

**Role of principals' leadership styles in promoting grade-12 learner
performance in Western Cape township high schools**

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DECLARATION

I, Thobani Ngxiki, declare that the contents of this thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the roles of principals' leadership styles in improving grade-12 learner performance in high-performing quintile 1-3 schools in impoverished Western Cape townships, South Africa. Despite facing numerous socio-economic issues, these schools have sustained an average grade-12 pass rate of 70% or above over the past five years.

This qualitative multi-case study used a purposive sample of eight principals from purposefully selected schools. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews and documents in the form of minutes of meetings were used to collect data on the roles of principals' leadership styles in improving grade-12 learner performance. Data was analysed using colour-coding and emergent themes. The interviews focused on the challenges that mitigated against grade-12 learners' high performance, participants' leadership styles, and the roles that their leadership styles played in improving grade-12 learner performance.

The results revealed three factors that mitigated against high grade-12 learner performance. Results also demonstrated that the decisions and actions participants took to mitigate the challenges affecting grade-12 learner performance hinged on and were heavily influenced by their leadership styles. Moreover, it was found that participants exhibited different leadership styles and that whereas some participants' styles were constant, representing a uniform approach to mitigating the challenges they encountered, other participants' styles were eclectic, suggesting that the ways in which they mitigated the challenges differed according to those styles. There was no style that could be defined as having played a better role than the other, although it was possible that for some schools, high learner performance could have happened by chance rather than by design. These results have serious implications for the role that principals' leadership styles play in schools in general, but in impoverished schools specifically, as they show that if matched with a clear mission and vision, schools can go a long way in improving learner performance.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late mother, Nothobani Ngxiki, who left this world when I was just two years old, and to my father, Zamikhaya Ngxiki, who raised me with unwavering love and strength. Though I never had the chance to know my mother, her spirit has always been a source of inspiration to my life. To my father, your dedication and belief in me have shaped my journey and made this accomplishment possible. Together, you both have instilled in me the values of perseverance and resilience, and this work stands as a testament to your enduring influence. Thank you for believing in me.

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ACRONYMS

CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
NNSSF	National Norms and Standards for School Funding
SES	Socio-Economic Status
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The pivotal role of school principals' leadership styles in fostering the academic performance of grade-12 learners cannot be overstated. Many people hold the belief that management and leadership are important factors in establishing the quality of teaching and learning in schools, colleges, and the larger education system (Mincu, 2022). This indicates that effective teaching and learning cannot be separated from effective school leadership. Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2020) contend that there is mounting proof about the influence of leadership on academic performance. Evidently, as managers and leaders, principals are at the centre of driving the direction of their schools. Whether the school is striving for excellence, or whether the outcomes are not what is anticipated, the principal is always held accountable (Parag, 2014). It is therefore imperative to examine and understand how the role of principals' leadership style in general, but in impoverished schools specifically, influences high performance among learners and help them to manage the challenges that impede learners' performance. Since the principal is accountable for the educational quality of a school, his or her role in improving learner performance is undeniable (Moleko, 2021).

In the context of this study, impoverished schools are schools that lack adequate resources, funding, and support, particularly in socio-economically challenged communities (Cockerill et al., 2021). These schools are often characterised by overcrowded classrooms, and teachers are overworked, often forced to teach multiple subjects to compensate for staffing shortages. The schools' budget constraints mean there are few extracurricular activities or enrichment programmes available to learners (Cockerill et al., 2021). In South Africa, these schools are classified as quintile 1-3 or no-fee schools. Learners in these schools do not pay tuition fees. All the costs are the responsibility of the Department of Basic Education.

There are many factors that contribute to high learner performance (Moleko, 2021). One of them is the quality of the principal's leadership (Stronge & Xu, 2021). The other factor is parental involvement. There is research to support the fact that a close cooperation between family and schools, including impoverished schools, coupled with the support of students by parents, lead to high learner performance (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017; Epstein, 2009; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). The financial health of the school is also perceived as a factor that contributes to high learner performance (Naicker et al., 2020; White & Van Dyk, 2019). It is therefore clear that the principals or their leadership qualities, are not the sole factors that improve the performance of learners.

In 2007, Donald Grant, the then Minister of Education in the Western Cape Province from 2009 to 2014 established a Ministerial Committee to investigate several factors that influenced overall school performance. The findings of this investigation indicated that students' socio-economic status (SES) was a contributing factor in the low pass rates, with poorer schools having lower pass rates and vice versa (Christie et al., 2011). Despite this, some of the impoverished schools outperformed their competitors in terms of performance regardless of their SES (Christie et al., 2011). While these schools serve the same communities, it is unclear what daily tasks principals carry out or what role their leadership styles play in creating this situation. Based on this notion, this study sought to understand the role of these principals' leadership styles in influencing high learner performance and to possibly provide recommendations for struggling township schools so that they can improve their academic results.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Principals in impoverished schools are faced with undesirable situations where they must perform optimally, often in conditions that are not conducive to effective teaching and learning. According to George, Heystek, and Chasara (2021), principals should mentor learners to make the school a competitive learning environment and to foster an achievement-oriented culture for all learners. Having this understanding in mind, it then becomes a challenge for the principals to deliver the best education, because material conditions are not necessarily conducive to delivering the expected standards.

Studies on factors associated with high school learner performance provide a broad overview of the role of school principals in impoverished high schools, but they often lack a detailed examination of specific leadership styles and strategies employed by principals to address learner challenges (Memela & Ramrathan, 2022; Qureshi et al., 2023; Kika & Kotze, 2019). Although some studies such as Klar and Brewer's (2013), on the examination of core leadership practices enacted in challenging contexts have looked at how principals lead in socio-economically challenged communities, most have concentrated on more affluent schools or have only offered a cursory understanding of the difficulties faced by principals in high-poverty schools (Copeland & Neeley, 2013). A study by the International School Leadership Development network on leading high needs schools in Mexico (Torres-Arcadia, Rodríguez-Uribe & Mora, 2018) concentrated on social challenges of the schools, and not the leadership styles of the principals in these schools. A study conducted by Allie (2014) focuses exclusively on the influence of principals' leadership styles on school effectiveness, neglecting to examine the impact of these leadership styles on the academic performance of grade-12 learners in no-fee schools. As can be seen, there is limited literature on how the roles of principals' leadership styles in impoverished township high schools improve grade-12 learner performance.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the roles of principals' leadership styles in improving the performance of grade-12 learners in high performing quintile 1-3 schools located in the Western Cape province. These schools have maintained an average pass percentage of 70% and above in the past five years.

1.4 OBJECTIVES

The following were identified as specific objectives of this study:

- To analyse the roles that principals' leadership styles play in promoting grade-12 learners' academic performance.
- To determine the role that principals' leadership styles play to mitigate funding challenges that impede on grade-12 learners' academic performance.
- To establish how the roles of principals' leadership styles enhance parental involvement, ultimately contributing to the improvement of grade 12 learner performance.

1.5 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

This study aims to offer evidence-based suggestions and perspectives that can guide practice and policy, ultimately promoting fair and efficient learning environments for learners in marginalised communities. The researcher intends to provide leadership styles that are best suited to manage and improve performance of grade-12 learners in impoverished high schools.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Considering the above background, this is the main research question investigated by this study: *How do the roles of principals' leadership styles contribute to the improvement of grade-12 learner performance in Western Cape impoverished township high schools?*

1.6.1 Sub-questions:

- 1.6.1.1 What are principals' leadership styles, and what role do these styles play in promoting grade-12 learners' performance?
- 1.6.1.2 How do the roles of principals' leadership styles mitigate funding challenges that impede on grade-12 learners' academic performance?
- 1.6.1.3 How do the roles of principals' leadership styles enhance parental support to improve grade-12 learner performance?

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A detailed presentation of the research methodology is provided in Chapter Three. In this introductory chapter, a synopsis of the methodology is provided in order to orientate the reader.

1.7.1 Qualitative approach

This study employs a qualitative approach, where the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection through in-depth interviews. As outlined by Alam (2021), qualitative research aims to provide a detailed, comprehensive description of phenomena, allowing for a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives. In contrast to quantitative research, which focuses on numerical data and objective measurements (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018), qualitative methods prioritise lived experiences and open-ended exploration of issues. Ramchander (2018) emphasises that qualitative research enables interaction with participants to capture their views on practice and policy.

In this study, the qualitative approach facilitated the exploration of high school principals' leadership styles in managing schools within impoverished contexts. This approach was effective because it allowed for the investigation of how principals navigate the socio-economic challenges faced by their schools. It also provided the flexibility to ask open-ended questions, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the complex realities of school leadership in these environments (Savin-Baden et al., 2023).

1.7.2 Research design

A case study design was employed, focusing on high schools in impoverished township communities in the Western Cape Province. As defined by Remenyi (2022), case studies offer a detailed examination of specific processes or events within a particular context. Hancock, Algozzine, and Lim (2021) highlight the value of case studies in describing complex phenomena, which aligns with the study's objective of understanding how principals' leadership styles impact grade-12 learner performance. The study used a multiple case study of eight high-performing schools situated in impoverished communities in the Metro East Education District of the Western Cape province. According to Yin (2018), case studies are particularly useful for exploring real-life situations in-depth, making them suitable for examining the leadership challenges faced by these principals.

1.7.3 Data collection

Data was collected using two research instruments: semi-structured, open-ended interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide a flexible but focused method for data collection (Brown & Danaher, 2019). The interviews included pre-determined questions with the option of asking follow-up questions based on

participants' responses, providing both structure and adaptability during the interview process. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to delve deeper into topics of interest while still allowing participants to express themselves freely (Galletta & Cross, 2013). In this study, eight high school principals from economically disadvantaged communities were interviewed to determine the role of their leadership styles on the academic performance of their grade-12 learners.

The semi-structured format included open-ended questions because they can produce detailed and nuanced data. This adaptability is helpful when examining intricate social phenomena, such as leadership and academic achievement, as each principal may have different experiences and viewpoints. According to Brinkmann (2022), open-ended interviews provide rich qualitative data and the chance to explore previously unexplored areas by allowing interviewees to share detailed accounts of their experiences. These interviews were open-ended, which allowed for a high level of participant engagement and allowed the researcher to record both factual and subjective information.

Document analysis entailed systematically reviewing relevant documents, such as the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) and schools' minutes of meetings pertaining to grade-12 academic performance. The NNSSF was chosen because it outlines key funding policies and resource allocations that can influence school leadership decisions and academic outcomes, particularly in economically disadvantaged communities, because schools in these communities depend solely on the NNSSF to function. Understanding the funding context was critical to investigating how principals balance financial constraints and academic performance.

According to Morgan (2022), document analysis supplements interview data by providing a more comprehensive, multifaceted view of the research problem. The minutes included those for grade-12 teacher meetings, school-governing body (SGB) meetings, and parents' meetings. The minutes were examined to capture discussions about strategies, challenges, and decisions on improving grade-12 results. These minutes provided information about how leadership styles influenced and contributed to day-to-day decision-making and resource management. Document analysis helped to triangulate data obtained from interviews, by providing additional layers of context and concrete examples of leadership styles.

1.7.4 Sampling procedure

Purposive sampling was used to select eight no-fee high schools in impoverished townships within the Metro East Education District, Western Cape Province. This district, known for its socio-economic challenges, was chosen because it consistently underperforms, compared to

the other seven districts in the province (DBE, 2022). Schools in this Metro East district provided ideal cases for exploring how leadership styles impact academic performance, despite facing significant challenges.

These economically disadvantaged schools that consistently improve their performance compared to other schools in the Metro East district, present a unique environment where the role of leadership styles is often tested by external constraints such as limited resources and socio-economic pressures. As a result, they serve as an important example for understanding how leadership style can either mitigate or exacerbate challenges. By selecting schools that face significant socio-economic difficulties but continue to produce high grade-12 academic performance, the study aimed to uncover the specific leadership style behaviours that contribute to academic success in environments where academic outcomes are hard to achieve, as well as the roles that these styles play in achieving these outcomes.

These schools, therefore, were not selected because they represent typical or average cases, but rather because their extreme conditions provide a clear lens through which to analyse the role of leadership styles in shaping academic performance. In this sense, they serve as relevant cases (Yin, 2018) where the role of leadership styles is more pronounced, offering valuable insights that may not be as easily observable in more advantaged or better-performing districts.

1.7.4.1 Site selection

Schools were selected based on their location in economically disadvantaged areas, providing a rich context for studying the impact of leadership on grade-12 learner performance. The schools were specifically chosen because despite being located in economically disadvantaged areas where principals often face heightened challenges related to resource constraints, high dropout rates, and socio-economic issues that directly affect learner performance, they (schools) continue to excel and obtain the pass percentage of 70% and above. These conditions make the schools ideal for investigating how leadership styles influence grade-12 performance in a context where success is hard to achieve. Schools in such environments frequently operate under significant pressure, and the leadership styles adopted by principals can play a critical role in either mitigating or exacerbating these challenges. By selecting schools in these areas, the study aimed to explore how leadership styles can potentially contribute to improved academic performance despite external barriers, offering insights that may not be as visible in affluent or better-resourced schools.

1.7.4.2 Participant selection

Only high school principals were included in the study, as they were deemed the most suitable participants for providing insights into leadership and academic performance of grade-12 learners. Purposive sampling ensured that principals with relevant experiences and characteristics that included among others, good grade-12 performance despite the socio-economic conditions in and around the school, were selected. Purposive sampling ensures that the sample reflects the diverse perspectives needed to explore complex phenomena (Adeoye, 2023).

1.7.5 Data analysis

Data analysis in this study involved qualitative techniques, including coding, categorising, and identifying patterns within the interview transcripts. Saldana (2021) emphasises the importance of coding as a process of assigning meaning to data. Microanalysis, involving a word-by-word examination, was used to ensure a thorough interpretation of the data (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022). This method allowed for the identification of themes related to leadership styles and their role in improving learner performance.

1.7.6 Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation was used by employing multiple data collection methods—interviews, and document analysis. This approach increased the study's credibility, as it allowed for cross-verification of data (Lobe, Morgan, & Hoffman, 2020). Participants were given the opportunity to review the data and findings, ensuring transparency and validating the conclusions (Trochim, 2021).

1.7.7 Ethical considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the research process and their rights. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymising participant data and using secure storage methods (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Ethical clearance was granted by the CPUT Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, and permission to conduct research was obtained from the Western Cape Department of Education and the participating schools.

1.8 RESEARCHER'S POSITION

In qualitative research, the position of the researcher plays a critical role in ensuring that the study is conducted with transparency and rigor. The researcher must remain aware of their own biases and how these may influence the research process and outcomes. This involves a reflexive approach to data collection, interpretation, and interaction with participants (Liang, 2019). In this study, the researcher took steps to maintain objectivity by acting solely as a data

collector, avoiding undue influence on the eight high school principals involved. Additionally, since the research was conducted in a different education district from where the researcher works, it helped ensure participants viewed the researcher as a student rather than a colleague, fostering a more neutral and open interaction.

1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

According to Bryman and Ferguson (2012), the study's use of a qualitative methodology hindered its ability to generalise its findings and to be transparent. Only one province and one education district, out of the nine provinces and eight districts in the Western Cape Province were included in the study's sample. With comparable traits of high school principals in disadvantaged areas, a plethora of other schools nationwide could have been included in the sample. Limiting the study to only principals was another limitation of the study, as learners and teachers could have also provided another perspective about principal leadership styles. Therefore, generalising the findings of this study is not possible.

1.10 THESIS LAYOUT

This thesis is divided into five main chapters, each serving a distinct purpose in the overall structure and coherence of the research.

Chapter One: Overview of the study

Chapter One provides an overview of the research topic, outlining the problem statement, research questions, objectives, and significance of the study. It sets the context by offering background information and a rationale for the study, ensuring the reader understands the relevance and scope of the research. This chapter lays the groundwork for the subsequent chapters by introducing the key concepts and the limitations of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Two delves into existing literature related to the research topic. This chapter critically examines previous studies, theories, and findings that are relevant to the research question. The literature review helps to identify gaps in the current knowledge, justify the research questions, and provide a conceptual framework for the study. It ensures that the research is grounded in existing knowledge and contributes to the ongoing academic conversation.

Chapter Three: Research design and methodology

Chapter Three outlines the research design and methodology used in the study. It describes the research approach, data collection methods, sampling techniques, and data analysis procedures. This chapter is crucial as it provides a detailed account of how the research was conducted, ensuring transparency and replicability. It further discusses ethical considerations

and the rationale behind the chosen methods, demonstrating the rigor and reliability of the research process.

Chapter Four: Data presentation and analysis

Chapter Four presents the collected data and provides a thorough analysis of the findings. This chapter is the core of the thesis, where the data is systematically organised, interpreted, and linked to the research questions and objectives.

Chapter Five: Discussion, recommendations and conclusion

Chapter Five concludes the thesis by summarising the key findings and their implications. It provides answers to the research questions and suggests areas for future research. This chapter also offers practical recommendations based on the research findings, addressing how the insights gained can be applied in real-world contexts. It ties together the entire research, emphasising its significance and potential impact.

Each of these chapters plays a vital role in structuring the thesis, ensuring a logical flow of information and a comprehensive understanding of the research undertaken.

1.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the study. The problem statement was presented, highlighting the challenges faced by principals in impoverished communities. The purpose, objectives, and rationale for the study were also discussed in detail. The research questions aimed to explore the roles of principals' leadership styles in promoting Grade-12 learners' academic performance, mitigating funding challenges, and enhancing parental involvement to improve learner outcomes were outlined. A synopsis of the research methodology was presented, highlighting the qualitative methodology employed in the study, the research design, the research approach, the research instruments, the sampling procedure, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, the researcher's position, as well as the limitations of the study. Furthermore, this chapter provided an outline of the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two presents the Conceptual framework of leadership, which addresses pertinent literature on the different leadership styles of school principals. The literature review also includes the conceptual definition of the national quintile system and its implications for impoverished schools.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A summary of this dissertation was provided in Chapter One. The literature review in this chapter is centred around the research problem that was outlined in Chapter One. The specific question raised by the research topic was whether the leadership styles of principals in underprivileged schools affected the academic performance of grade-12 learners. This chapter draws on three areas of the literature. First, the researcher reviewed literature that defines leadership and leadership styles. This is followed by an examination of the core roles and responsibilities of a principal, and lastly, the concept of impoverished schools. The literature review's components are divided as follows:

- 2.2 Conceptual framework
- 2.3 Role and responsibilities of principals
- 2.4 Concept of quintiles and impoverished schools
- 2.5 Leadership styles
- 2.6 Principal Leadership styles

2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study used leadership as its conceptual framework. Martin (2019) defines leadership as the ability to persuade and guide subordinates or group members toward a shared objective. The ability to inspire, encourage, and guide individuals or groups towards the achievement of common goals is the broad definition of leadership. It covers a variety of strategies, traits, and behaviours that effective leaders employ to motivate and direct their staff members (Northouse, 2018). One of the scholarly definitions of leadership can be found in the work of Yukl (2010), a prominent researcher in leadership studies. Yukl (2010:36) defines leadership as "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives."

The concept of leadership is sometimes confused with management. Tanase (2020) alludes that leadership is primarily associated with setting a vision, inspiring and motivating individuals, and fostering innovation to achieve long-term goals, while management tends to concentrate on planning, organising, and controlling day-to-day tasks to ensure efficiency and achieve specific objectives (Kabeyi, 2019). Higgs and Rowland (2010) emphasise the notion that leadership tends to concentrate more on people, relationships, and fostering innovation. Leaders empower individuals, encourage creativity, and focus on long-term goals. In contrast,

management is often associated with maintaining control, ensuring efficiency, and achieving short-term objectives (Putra & Ali, 2022). Mintzberg (2009) further describes management as working in the system and focusing on day-to-day operations. Leadership as a conceptual framework encompasses a diverse array of theories, models, and perspectives that aim to understand and explain the complexities of leadership. It involves analysing the various factors, traits, behaviours, and contexts that contribute to effective leadership (Putra & Ali, 2022).

2.3 CORE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PRINCIPAL

Heystek (2014) mentioned that in 2010, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) introduced accountability measures targeting principals and their deputies in response to subpar learner performance in schools. The DBE, operating under the minister of basic education, holds the national mandate to implement education policies that govern the schooling system, as outlined in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 and the National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 (Reddy, Juan, Isdale & Fongwa, 2019). These accountability measures were intended to improve learner performance across the country and ensure that principals achieved the high-quality results expected of their roles. However, the measures were rejected due to resistance from principals, their deputies, and union support, who viewed them as demoralising and an attempt to push them out of office (Moleko, 2021). In response to this, the DBE introduced Government Gazette No. 39684 on 12 February 2016, which updated the Personnel Administration Measures (PAM) document. This revision aimed to bridge the gap between the DBE's expectations of principals and the rejection of the 2010 accountability measures. Annexure A.7 of the PAM outlines the following seven core roles and responsibilities of a principal. These are explained in the following section.

2.3.1 General administration

The principals are responsible for the professional management of a public school as contemplated in section 16A (3) of South African Schools Act (SASA). The role of a principal in an educational institution is multifaceted and crucial to the overall functioning and success of the school (Mincu, 2022). As an administrator, the principal carries out a variety of responsibilities that are generally managerial duties. These duties include, but not limited to:

Resource management: Principals are responsible for effectively managing the human, financial, and physical resources of the school. This includes budgeting, staffing, and facilities management.

Policy implementation: Principals ensure that school policies, regulations, and procedures are effectively communicated and implemented throughout the school community.

Organisational development: Principals are responsible to oversee the development and implementation of organisational structures and systems to promote efficiency and effectiveness within the school.

In a study by Leithwood, Sun, and Schumacker (2020) the authors emphasise the significance of proper administrative structures in improving learner performance. Principals who prioritise their administrative functions engage in activities such as curriculum development, instructional support, and professional development for teachers. This approach fosters a culture of continuous improvement and enhances teaching and learning practices within the school (Leithwood et al., 2020).

2.3.2 Personnel

The principal is required to provide professional leadership for the school by developing the school vision and mission of the school, ensuring that they align with the schools' educational goals and fostering a positive learning environment. Principals lead by managing staff, implementing policies, and making decisions that directly impact both teaching quality and learner performance. The principal is also responsible for supervising and providing professional advice on the work and performance of all staff in the school, as well as discussing and writing or countersigning reports on teaching, support, non-teaching, and other staff, and ensuring that work is distributed equitably among staff (DBE, 2016).

A study by Kumar and Suhail (2021) on the principal's role and responsibilities regarding personnel management underscores their importance in fostering a positive work environment and supporting staff development. The study shed light on various aspects of this role:

Recruitment and selection: The principal, as leader and manager, as well as a member of the School Governing Body (SGB) is involved in the recruitment and selection process for hiring teachers and support staff. According to a study by Shengnan and Hallinger (2021), effective principals prioritise hiring practices that align with the school's mission and values. They actively participate in screening candidates, conducting interviews, and nominating for appointment, individuals who demonstrate the skills and qualities needed to contribute to the school community.

Professional development: Principals play a crucial role in providing opportunities for professional growth and development among staff members. Research by Spillane et al. (2022) emphasises the importance of principals' support and facilitation of ongoing professional learning. Principals organise and attend workshops, seminars, and training

sessions to help teachers enhance their instructional practices, stay updated on educational trends, and address specific areas of need.

Performance evaluation: Performance evaluation is another key responsibility of principals in personnel management. A study conducted in Chicago on teacher quality by Rutledge, Harris, and Ingle (2010), highlights the significance of fair and objective evaluation processes. Principals conduct regular performance reviews, provide constructive feedback, and identify areas for improvement to support staff effectiveness and professional growth.

Conflict resolution and support: Principals are often called upon to address conflicts and provide support to staff members facing challenges. Research by Leithwood et al. (2023) emphasises the importance of principals' role in fostering a positive school culture and resolving interpersonal conflicts. Principals promote open communication, mediate disputes, and offer guidance and resources to support staff well-being and collaboration. Effective principal's leadership style prioritises building a supportive work environment and fostering the growth and success of all staff members (Leithwood et al., 2023).

2.3.3 Academic performance of the school

The role of a principal's leadership style in shaping a school's academic performance is substantial. Different leadership styles can have varying effects on teachers, learners, and overall school culture, all of which contribute to academic outcomes. In terms of section 58B of SASA, the principal of a public school must, annually, at the beginning of the year, prepare a plan setting out how academic performance at the school will be improved (DBE, 2016). The academic improvement plan must be presented to the Head of Education or his delegate on a date determined by him and tabled at an SGB meeting (DBE, 2016).

Principals play a critical role in providing leadership by setting high expectations, supporting teachers in implementing effective teaching strategies, and monitoring learners' progress (Shengnan et al., 2021). A study on the impact of principals on student achievement by Harrison and Ashley (2021) demonstrated that principals who fostered a positive school climate had a positive impact on learner academic achievement. Additionally, Foster (2021) emphasised the role of principals in building a supportive and inclusive school culture that enhances learner performance. Furthermore, Biag and Sherer (2021) emphasised the role of principals' data-driven decision-making processes in driving improvements in learner achievement. According to Biag et al. (2021) principals use data to assess learner progress, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions to enhance teaching and learning strategies. The school principal has a dedicated role to enhance the school's success

through encouraging learners and teachers, collaboration, communication, and ongoing motivation. Therefore, the principal holds the key to the success of the learners.

2.3.4 Teaching

It is expected of the principal to engage in classroom teaching as per the workload of the relevant post level and the needs of the school. The principal as a subject teacher in a school can have a significant impact on academic performance and the overall school environment. Principals who also serve as subject teachers can model effective teaching practices, demonstrate subject expertise, and inspire other teachers. A study on the relationship between professional development and school principals' leadership practices by Bellibas, Gumus and Liu (2021) found that principals who actively teach subjects contribute to a culture of continuous learning and professional growth among the teaching staff. Principals teaching subjects can ensure alignment between curriculum objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment practices, promoting coherence and consistency in teaching and learning (Bellibas et al., 2021). A study by Steed (2021) discussed how principals' involvement in subject teaching contributes to curriculum coherence and learner achievement and one of the highlights is the positive impact of principal-led subject teaching on teacher development and instructional improvement.

2.3.5 Extra- and co-curricular programmes

The role of a principal in promoting extra- and co-curricular activities is crucial for providing learners with a well-rounded education and fostering holistic development. The DBE mandates that principals prepare important school events, actively promote extracurricular and co-curricular activities, and encourage learners' voluntary involvement in community-organised athletic, educational, and cultural events (DBE, 2016).

Here is how principals contribute to and promote these activities:

Creating a supportive environment: Principals set the tone for a school's culture and values. By actively promoting and supporting extra- and co-curricular activities, they signal to learners, teachers, and parents the importance of holistic development beyond academics (Yunas, Qureshi, Shakoor & Nawaz, 2021).

Collaborating with teachers and staff: Principals work collaboratively with teachers and staff to identify, plan, and implement a variety of extra- and co-curricular programmes that align with the school's goals and interests of learners. Anderson (2021) highlights the impact of principal-led collaboration in expanding and diversifying extracurricular offerings to meet student needs

and interests and alludes that extra and after school programmes contribute positively to teamwork among teachers.

Allocating resources: Principals allocate resources such as funding, facilities, equipment, and personnel to support extra- and co-curricular activities. They ensure that these activities are well-resourced and accessible to all learners.

Promoting learner engagement: Principals play a key role in promoting student engagement in extra- and co-curricular activities by encouraging participation, recognising achievements, and celebrating successes. Research by Kim et al. (2020) emphasised the positive impact of principal involvement in promoting learner engagement and motivation through extracurricular activities.

Fostering community partnerships: Principals collaborate with community organisations, businesses, and volunteers to enhance extra- and co-curricular opportunities for learners. These partnerships enrich the variety and quality of activities available to learners.

A study by Yunas et al. (2021) highlighted the role of principals in fostering community partnerships to expand extracurricular offerings and provide unique learning experiences for students. The research suggested that by actively promoting and supporting extra- and co-curricular activities, principals contribute to a vibrant school culture, promote learner engagement and well-being, and enhance the overall educational experience for learners (Anderson, 2021).

2.3.6 Interaction with stakeholders

Effective interaction with stakeholders is a critical role for school principals, as it fosters a collaborative environment essential for learner success. Studies highlight that principals who engage regularly with teachers, parents, the broader SGB, and community members tend to build stronger, more supportive school cultures (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020). Ongoing interactions with stakeholders enable principals to address concerns, gather diverse perspectives, and implement strategies that reflect the community's needs (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Furthermore, proactive communication with stakeholders can lead to improved learner performance by creating a shared vision and enhancing trust and cooperation among all parties involved in the educational process (Qin, 2019). Therefore, principals must prioritise stakeholder engagement to ensure a thriving educational environment.

2.3.7 Communication

Effective communication is a fundamental role of school principals, pivotal in fostering a cohesive and productive educational environment. Kilag, Sasan, and Pansacala (2024) emphasise that principals who excel in communication skills positively impact school climate, teacher satisfaction, and learner achievement. Transparent and consistent communication with staff, learners, and parents ensures that everyone is informed and aligned with the school's goals and policies (Knecht, 2019). Furthermore, the ability to listen actively and respond empathetically to concerns and feedback enhances trust and collaboration among all stakeholders (Robinson, 2019). In an era where educational challenges are increasingly complex, principals must utilise diverse communication channels, including digital platforms, to maintain engagement and adapt to evolving circumstances (Mhlomi, 2023). Therefore, mastering communication is essential for principals to lead effectively and drive school success.

The multifaceted role of school principals encompasses these seven key job descriptions that collectively contribute to improving academic performance. Principals across the country, are expected to perform all the above functions, without fail. That expectation comes without looking at the material conditions in which some of the principals' work, conditions such as under resourced schools, serving poverty-stricken communities with high levels of crime and substance abuse.

Engaging with the school community, including parents and local organisations, enhances support systems and enriches the educational environment (Warren, 2022). Notwithstanding this important fact, principals in impoverished townships find it difficult to convene parents' meetings, due to a poor level of parental involvement in school activities. Lastly, maintaining a safe and conducive learning environment ensures that learners and staff can focus on educational activities without distractions, leading to better academic outcomes (Anderson, 2021). It is an unfortunate reality that, township schools are sometimes characterised by poor, unsafe, and in some areas and schools, deteriorating academic performance.

2.4 THE CONCEPT OF QUINTILES AND IMPOVERISHED SCHOOLS

The South African education sector has undergone a major reform since 1994, propelled by the government's initiatives to achieve equity and remedy historical injustices. This goal is illustrated by several educational policies, such as the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) policy (Mestry, 2020). Todes and Turok (2018) also assert that in addition to reorganising and reshaping education, the new democracy also brought with it, the creation and application of a policy framework intended to address and redress historical

injustices and ensure that education is fair, relevant, and of high quality across all racial demographic groups.

Encouraged by the South African Schools Act (DOE, 1996), which requires public schools to be funded by the government, the NNSSF policy (DOE, 1998) provides a quintile rating system to ensure equity in schools. As a result of their classification as destitute schools, Quintile 1, 2, and 3 schools are free of charge, and as a result, they get greater financial aid from the government than Quintile 4 and 5 schools, which are considered affluent schools. Based on a predetermined formula, each school's poverty score places it in a quintile rank that determines how much financing each public school receives. This mechanism, which assigns each school a poverty score, is therefore pro-poor. The least poor schools are shown in quintile 5, and most impoverished schools are represented in quintile 1 (Mestry, 2020).

One may argue that the NNSSF's implementation of the quintile poverty ranking system was a commendable effort to lessen the financial burden of school fees for the underprivileged. Notwithstanding the pros of introducing the quintile system, several studies such as UNESCO (2008) indicate that the NNSSF only gives the schools in quintile 1, 2 and 3 funding and does not offer any form of support to the schools in terms of managing and administering the funds for better learning outcomes.

The funding strategy for education was, in theory, focused on fairness and redress to balance out any disparities. The literature has demonstrated that the implementation's outcomes do not align with the desired outcomes of the policy (White & Van Dyk, 2019). The funding model ensures that schools in lower quintiles receive higher per-learner funding from the government compared to those in higher quintiles. However, the effectiveness of the quintile system has been a subject of debate.

Spaull et al. (2020) argues that while the system has increased resource allocation to poorer schools, disparities in educational outcomes persist. Factors such as the quality of teaching, school management, and community involvement play significant roles in educational success, and funding alone cannot address these issues. Impoverished schools often face a multitude of challenges that hinder educational outcomes. These challenges include inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching materials, high learner-to-teacher ratios, and underqualified teachers.

According to a study by Mestry (2022), impoverished schools struggle with issues such as food insecurity, which impacts learner concentration and performance. Research indicates that schools in lower quintiles frequently experience higher dropout rates and lower academic

performance compared to their higher quintile counterparts (Perry et al., 2022). This can be attributed to both the direct effects of poverty on learners' lives and the compounded disadvantages faced by schools in impoverished areas. Despite its well-intentioned goals, the system has faced significant criticism and challenges. This literature review explored the current state of the quintile system and its impact on impoverished schools, with studies highlighting the issues and suggesting potential reforms. A study by Naicker et al. (2020) has found that the funding provided to no-fee schools is often insufficient to meet their needs.

Wealthier schools in higher quintiles can charge fees and attract additional funds through donations and fundraising activities, allowing them to maintain better facilities and offer higher-quality education. In contrast, no-fee schools rely solely on government allocations, which are often delayed and inadequate, exacerbating the resource gap between rich and poor schools (Maistry & Africa, 2020). Principals of schools in lower quintiles report significant financial difficulties, including late disbursement of funds and insufficient budgets to cover basic operational costs. These financial constraints lead to a decline in the quality of education and the inability to maintain necessary infrastructure, further disadvantaging learners in these schools (Naicker et al., 2020).

The quintile system in South Africa represents a significant effort to address educational inequalities by providing more resources to impoverished schools. While the quintile system has achieved some success in increasing access and improving conditions, numerous challenges remain. Accurate classification, effective resource management, and holistic support are essential for maximising the system's impact and ensuring that all learners receive quality education. Continued research and policy adjustments are necessary to address the evolving needs of impoverished schools and create a more equitable educational landscape.

2.5 LEADERSHIP STYLES

The intention of this literature review was to aggregate the most recent local and international research on how principals' leadership styles affect learner performance in impoverished communities. To change the educational climate of underprivileged high schools, effective leadership styles and techniques are essential (Ogina, 2021). The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) on international education policies concludes that successful school leadership is a function of structure and culture, supported by strategic thinking and analysis and no single leadership strategy is helpful for enhancing learner outcomes across all schools (Bush, 2021). According to Mphale (2016), there is no consensus by researchers on the number of leadership styles that exist, hence for the purpose of this research, the researcher focused on leadership styles that can be easily linked to the role of school principals.

Leithwood and Sun (2012:403) argue that "improvement requires leaders to enact a wide range of practices". School principals should ensure they have a thorough awareness of the conditions of their school before determining the leadership styles and techniques they will use for development. Based on this justification and for the purpose of this literature review, the researcher focused mainly on six leadership styles that a school principal could employ to improve learner performance.

2.6 PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP STYLES

2.6.1 Situational leadership style

Developed by Hersey and Blanchard in the late 1960s, cited in Johnson (2008), situational leadership is a philosophy of leadership (Bush, 2021). It suggests that the degree of preparation or maturity of followers or subordinates in a certain circumstance determines the effective leadership style. As per Northouse's (2018) theory, effective leadership results need leaders to modify their approach based on the followers' competency and commitment levels. Situational leadership theory, as proposed by Hersey and Blanchard, (Johnson, 2008), indicates that effective leaders adapt their style based on the level of experience or readiness of their subordinates for a given task. A dynamic approach, situational leadership highlights the value of adaptability and flexibility in leadership techniques (Tintoré, 2019). The situational leadership style proposes that leaders should modify their approach to fit the demands and developmental stages of their followers in various circumstances rather than blindly adhering to a single leadership style (Ryba, 2018).

School principals use situational leadership, which entails modifying their approaches to leadership according to the preparedness of their staff, teachers, and learners in a variety of learning environments (Moleko, 2021). This approach aims to effectively address diverse needs, encourage growth, and optimise educational outcomes (Shan, 2018). Effective principals assess situations, adjust leadership styles, accordingly, provide support, offer guidance, and foster an environment conducive to learning and growth (Shan, 2018). By utilising situational leadership, principals can enhance teacher professional development, encourage learner-centred learning approaches, and facilitate a positive school culture that supports the diverse needs of the educational community (Moleko, 2021).

2.6.1.2 Advantages and disadvantages of situational leadership

Situational leadership allows principals to adapt their leadership style to meet the diverse needs of their teachers and staff, promoting a supportive and effective school environment (Atasoy, 2020). Stronge and Xu (2021) alludes that by adjusting their approach based on the individual competencies and needs of their teachers, principals can enhance professional development and improve overall teacher performance. Hallinger (2022) also argues that

principals who practice situational leadership are better equipped to handle change effectively, which is a critical skill in the constantly evolving landscape of education. Tamadoni, Hosseingholizadeh and Bellibas (2024) argue that the need to constantly adapt leadership styles may lead to perceptions of inconsistency, potentially causing confusion and reducing trust among staff. Situational leadership in the school context also comes with the risk that principals may over-rely on certain leadership styles that they are more comfortable with, rather than truly adapting to the needs of the situation. Implementing situational leadership can be complex and time-consuming, as it requires continuous assessment of staff needs and situational factors (Westberry, 2020).

2.6.2 Laissez-faire leadership style

According to Northouse (2021), laissez-faire leadership entails the leader interfering little, letting team members handle duties and make choices independently. A leader that practices laissez-faire leadership adopts a minimum approach to task delegation and decision-making, making them hands-off or non-directive (Norris, Ghahremani & Lemoine, 2021). In this approach, leaders provide little guidance or supervision, allowing team members or subordinates considerable freedom to make decisions, solve problems, and complete tasks on their own (Asad et al., 2022).

Donkor and Zhou (2020) assert that laissez-faire leadership style fosters self-governance and self-regulation among team members. As suggested by Northouse (2018), laissez-faire leadership encourages accountability and self-sufficiency among team members. Laissez-faire leadership may boost team members' creativity, inventiveness, and personal development, among other positive aspects, but there may be negative aspects as well (Norris et al., 2021). Insufficient direction might leave team members feeling unclear about goals or expectations, which can cause disarray or misalignment (Norris et al., 2021). According to Ombati and Ondieki (2023), laissez-faire principals provide staff members and teachers more freedom to make their own decisions. Teachers may feel more independent and responsible as a result, which may motivate them to be proactive and creative. Principals can foster an environment where teachers feel empowered to experiment with innovative teaching strategies and techniques that are customised to meet the needs of their learners by giving them greater freedom as Laissez-fare proposes (Sarwar, Tariq & Yong, 2022).

2.6.2.1 Advantages and disadvantages of laissez-faire leadership

An atmosphere where workers feel free to express their thoughts and innovation is fostered by laissez-faire leadership (Sarwar et al., 2022). This autonomy can lead to innovative solutions and a more dynamic workplace. Research on leadership and management effectiveness by Mehraein (2023), suggests that creative sectors, where autonomy is valued, might benefit

greatly from this leadership approach. By granting employees the freedom to make decisions, laissez-faire leaders empower their teams, leading to higher job satisfaction and motivation. The study by Mehraein (2023) also found that employees who perceived their leaders as empowering reported greater job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Employees under laissez-faire leadership often develop their leadership and decision-making skills, as they are given the responsibility to lead projects and make important decisions. This can be beneficial for succession planning and organisational growth (Kamal, Ridwan & Kesuma, 2024). Laissez-faire leadership provides flexibility, allowing employees to adapt quickly to changing circumstances. This can be particularly advantageous in fast-paced industries where quick decision-making is crucial (Wilson, 2024).

One of the primary criticisms of laissez-faire leadership is the potential for a lack of direction and accountability (Lloyd, 2021). Without clear guidance, employees may become uncertain about their roles and responsibilities, leading to decreased productivity and effectiveness (Kamal et al., 2024). In times of crisis or high pressure, laissez-faire leadership can be detrimental. The absence of strong leadership can result in chaos and confusion, as employees may lack the direction needed to navigate challenging situations (Richardson, 2024).

Employees who require more guidance and structure may struggle under laissez-faire leadership, leading to poor performance and dissatisfaction. A study by Richardson (2024) found that employees with low self-efficacy were less productive and more stressed under laissez-faire leaders. The hands-off approach of laissez-faire leadership can lead to inefficiencies and delays, particularly if employees are not proactive or lack the necessary skills to manage their tasks independently. This can result in missed deadlines and subpar work quality (Lloyd, 2021).

2.6.3 Transformational leadership

The transformational leadership approach was first introduced by James Burns (1978) and has since become a widely studied and practiced concept in the field of leadership and organisational behaviour. According to Asad et al. (2022), transformational leadership is focused on creating a school's culture and vision to improve the organisation's performance, people's development, and educational standards. The goals of a transformational school leader are clearly defined and communicated, they foster a culture of learning, leading by example, and assist staff members in their pursuit of professional development.

Asad et al. (2022) provides four main foci of transformational leadership theory as inspiring motivation, individual consideration, idealised influence, and intellectual stimulation. Bogler

(2022) maintains that focusing on people management has a good impact on teachers' attitudes and satisfaction, as well as the school atmosphere. Although transformational leadership can have a significant favourable impact on teachers, some studies, such as Ryba's (2018) study on the connection between collective teacher effectiveness and transformational leadership techniques, these advantages have a far smaller effect on learners' academic performance. This means that principals must use and apply more than one leadership style to see positive outcomes. Ariyani and Hidayati (2018) contend that it is generally necessary to use different leadership styles for different circumstances.

The charismatic leadership style was frequently used to refer to the transformational leadership style (Tintoré, 2019), because charismatic leaders have a way of inspiring their followers to work harder and accomplish the desired shared objective. Therefore, Elliott (2018) defined transformational leadership as leaders who foster a culture of giving back to others and influencing others to achieve organisational goals or who concentrate on the interests of their staff, encourage employee acceptance of the group's mission, and incite employees to look beyond themselves and toward a shared goal.

2.6.3.1 Advantages and disadvantages of transformational leadership

Transformational leaders inspire and motivate their staff, leading to enhanced performance and commitment. A study by Rizkie and Suriansyah (2022) found that teachers working under transformational principals reported higher levels of motivation and job satisfaction, resulting in improved learner outcomes. Transformational principals foster a positive and inclusive school culture. They emphasise collaboration, professional development, and a shared vision, which can lead to a more cohesive and supportive school environment (Rizkie et al., 2022).

Transformational leaders invest in the growth and development of their staff. They encourage continuous learning and provide opportunities for professional development, which can improve teaching practices and learner achievement (Alzoraiki et al., 2024). Transformational principals are often more adaptable and open to innovative practices. They encourage creative problem-solving and are willing to implement new strategies to enhance school performance. This adaptability is crucial in responding to the rapidly changing educational landscape (Vermeulen & Evers, 2022).

While transformational leadership is motivating, it can also lead to increased expectations and pressure on staff, potentially resulting in burnout. A study by Taylor (2023) highlighted that the high demands of transformational leaders could lead to stress and burnout among teachers if not managed properly. Schools led by transformational principals may become overly dependent on their leader's vision and charisma. This dependence can be problematic if the

principal leaves or is unable to maintain their high level of engagement, leading to potential instability (Ozgenel, 2020).

Implementing transformational leadership can be challenging, particularly in schools with entrenched cultures or resistant staff (Rizkie et al., 2022). Transformational change requires significant effort and time, and not all principals may be equipped with the necessary skills to overcome these challenges (Taylor, 2023). Transformational leaders are often visionary, but there is a risk of overemphasising vision at the expense of practicalities. A focus on long-term goals may sometimes overlook immediate needs and operational issues, which can affect the school's day-to-day functioning (Humphrey, 2020). While transformational leadership promotes a shared vision, there is a risk that the principal's vision may not fully encompass the diverse needs and perspectives of all learners and staff (Taylor, 2023). Ensuring that the vision is inclusive and equitable requires careful consideration and effort (Alzoraiki et al., 2024).

2.6.4 Transactional leadership

The administration and supervision of employees through a system of rewards and punishments is the focus of transactional leadership (Ashley-Osuzoka, 2024). The major goal of this strategy is to maintain the status quo by making sure that tasks are carried out effectively and in accordance with established protocols. It is frequently employed when exact job execution is required, and it is useful in some circumstances. According to Udin, Dananjoyo, and Isalman (2022), transactional behaviours are based on an exchange process where leaders give rewards in exchange for the staff members' completed task. Transactional leadership, as described by Wahyuni, Purwandari and Syah (2020) is the exchanging of goals and rewards between leaders and their employees or subordinates.

Facilitating academic success for learners is the main goal of transactional leadership. The aforementioned main areas underscore the importance of developing clear learning objectives, developing the curriculum, and evaluating the quality of teachers and their teaching abilities. This model suggests that principals concentrate their efforts on elevating the bar for classroom teaching and learning and supporting improved learner outcomes (Keiler, 2018). Three primary duties of transactional leadership include defining the goals of the school, supervising the curriculum, and cultivating a positive learning environment (Udin et al., 2022). According to studies on transactional leadership, such as Asad et al. (2022), transactional leadership can improve teacher work environments and school cultures, which can have an impact on learner accomplishment.

Impoverished high schools frequently struggle with issues of learner discipline and behaviour amongst other things, and a controlled and tidy workplace can be maintained with the aid of

transactional leadership (Watson, 2021). Clear norms and consequences can be established, and leaders can continuously watch for and correct behavioural infractions. Learners can have a more favourable learning environment by enforcing discipline. Researchers such as Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) argue that when there are indications that a learner is falling behind in their schoolwork, transactional leaders can closely monitor their progress and offer prompt solutions. This can entail identifying learners who need extra assistance and providing them with it in the form of tutoring, mentoring, or study groups so they can catch up (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

2.6.4.1 Advantages and disadvantages of transactional leadership

Transactional leadership provides a clear structure and sets specific expectations for teachers and staff. This clarity can lead to improved performance and efficiency as everyone knows what is expected of them (Chukwukelu, 2023). By using rewards and punishments, transactional principals can effectively manage performance. This can lead to higher accountability and a focus on achieving specific outcomes, which is beneficial for maintaining high standards (Ashley-Osuzoka, 2024).

Transactional leadership promotes consistency and stability within the school environment. Clear rules and procedures ensure that everyone is treated equally, which can contribute to a fair and stable working environment (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021). In a transactional leadership framework, decision-making processes are often quicker due to the straightforward nature of the leader-follower transactions. This can be advantageous in situations where prompt action is needed (Chukwukelu, 2023). Transactional leadership is effective in achieving short-term goals and immediate results. This focus can be particularly useful for school principals when addressing specific issues or improving certain areas of school performance in the short term (Kim & Weiner, 2022).

The rigid structure and focus on rules and rewards in transactional leadership can stifle creativity and innovation (Ashley-Osuzoka, 2024). Teachers and staff may feel constrained and less likely to experiment with new teaching methods or approaches (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021). Transactional leadership often emphasises extrinsic rewards, which can undermine intrinsic motivation. Teachers may become more focused on rewards and less passionate about teaching for its own sake, which can impact their overall job satisfaction (Alzoraiki et al., 2024). The strict and reward-based nature of transactional leadership may lead to high turnover rates among staff who feel unappreciated or overly controlled. This can create instability and disrupt the learning environment (Ashley-Osuzoka, 2024).

Transactional leadership's focus on established procedures and rules can make it inflexible in adapting to changing circumstances. This rigidity can be problematic in the dynamic and ever-evolving field of education (Kim & Weiner, 2022). While transactional leadership is effective for short-term goals, it often lacks a long-term vision. Principals may focus on immediate results rather than developing a strategic plan for the school's future, which can limit long-term growth and development (Lashley, 2023).

2.6.5 Autocratic leadership

Autocratic leadership, characterised by individual control over decision-making with little input from group members, is a leadership style that has been both praised and criticised within educational settings (Ocheme, 2023). Autocratic leadership enables swift decision-making, which can be particularly advantageous in crisis situations where immediate action is required (Mulawarman & Komariyah, 2021). The principal's ability to make unilateral decisions can expedite processes and prevent delays that often accompany democratic decision-making processes (Mulawarman et al., 2021). This can be crucial during emergencies or when implementing new policies quickly.

Principals who adopt an autocratic leadership style provide clear direction and maintain strict control over school activities. This can lead to a well-organised school environment where roles and expectations are clearly defined, reducing ambiguity and increasing efficiency (Thaher, Sala & Nastase, 2022). A clear hierarchy can help ensure that tasks are completed as intended without deviation. Autocratic leadership also ensures consistency in decision-making and policy implementation, as all decisions stem from a single authority. This uniformity can be beneficial in maintaining a consistent educational environment, ensuring that all students and staff adhere to the same standards and procedures (Ocheme, 2023).

One significant drawback of autocratic leadership is the potential for decreased staff motivation and engagement. When teachers and staff are not involved in the decision-making process, they may feel undervalued and less invested in the school's success. This can lead to lower job satisfaction and higher turnover rates (Okoro, 2022). The top-down approach of autocratic leadership can stifle innovation and creativity among staff and students. By not encouraging input and collaboration, principals may miss out on valuable ideas and solutions that could improve the school's functioning. This can result in a stagnant educational environment that is resistant to change (Okoro, 2022).

The pressure of maintaining control and making all decisions can lead to high stress and burnout for autocratic leaders. Additionally, the lack of support and input from staff can exacerbate this stress, making it difficult for principals to sustain their effectiveness over time

(Thaher et al., 2022). This can ultimately impact their ability to lead effectively and maintain a positive school culture. Autocratic leadership can create a negative school climate characterised by fear, resentment, and low morale. When staff and students feel that their opinions are not valued, it can lead to a lack of trust and respect for the principal. This can undermine the overall effectiveness of the school and hinder the development of a supportive and collaborative learning environment (Wagbara & Amaewhule, 2020). While autocratic leadership has its place, especially in situations requiring quick and decisive action, many scholars advocate for a balanced approach that incorporates elements of democratic and transformational leadership. By doing so, principals can leverage the strengths of autocratic leadership while mitigating its drawbacks. Encouraging some level of staff involvement in decision-making can enhance motivation and innovation, leading to a more dynamic and resilient educational environment (Wagbara et al., 2020).

2.6.5.1 Advantage and disadvantage of autocratic leadership

Autocratic leadership ensures clear and decisive decision-making. School principals can make quick decisions without needing to consult with others, which can be advantageous in urgent situations (Cejudo, 2024). This leadership style provides strong control and discipline within the school environment. Clear rules and expectations can lead to a well-organised and orderly school atmosphere, which is particularly beneficial in schools with significant disciplinary issues (Jackson, 2022). Autocratic principals can efficiently implement policies and procedures as there is no need for extensive discussion or consensus. This can lead to faster execution of school initiatives and programmes (Cejudo, 2024).

Autocratic leadership ensures consistency and uniformity in decision-making and policy enforcement (Okuyo, 2024). This can create a stable and predictable environment for both teachers and learners, which can enhance the overall functioning of the school (Okuyo, 2024). By maintaining tight control over school operations, autocratic leaders can drive high productivity. Teachers and staff are often clear about their roles and responsibilities, which can lead to efficient task completion (Thaher et al., 2022).

The lack of input and participation in decision-making can lead to reduced morale among teachers. They may feel undervalued and disengaged, which can negatively impact their performance and job satisfaction (Trinh, 2021). Autocratic leadership can result in high turnover rates as teachers and staff may feel overly controlled and restricted. This can create a disruptive environment and lead to a constant need for recruitment and training (Trinh, 2021).

The top-down approach of autocratic leadership can stifle creativity and innovation. Teachers and staff may be less likely to propose new ideas or take initiative, leading to a stagnant and

less dynamic school environment (Jackson, 2022). Schools led by autocratic principals may develop a dependency on the leader's authority (Ashley-Osuzoka, 2024). This can be problematic if the principal is absent or leaves the school, as staff may struggle to function independently (Thaher et al., 2022). The authoritative nature of autocratic leadership can lead to resentment and conflict among staff. The lack of collaboration and open communication can create a hostile work environment, affecting overall school performance (Alzoraiki et al., 2024).

2.6.6 Democratic leadership

Participatory leadership, another name for democratic leadership, is involving team members in decision-making procedures (Shore & Chung, 2022). In educational settings, this approach emphasises collaboration, shared responsibility, and inclusivity among school staff and stakeholders. By including employees in decision-making processes, democratic leadership encourages a sense of accountability and ownership among employees. This inclusivity leads to increased motivation, job satisfaction, and engagement, as teachers and staff feel valued and heard (Shore & Chung, 2022).

When staff members participate in shaping school policies and practices, they are more likely to be committed to implementing them effectively. By encouraging input from diverse perspectives, democratic leadership promotes innovation and creativity. Teachers and staff are often closer to the day-to-day challenges and opportunities within the school environment and can provide valuable insights and solutions (Shore & Chung, 2022). This collaborative approach can lead to the development of more effective and innovative teaching methods and school programmes.

Democratic leadership contributes to a positive school climate by fostering a culture of trust, respect, and collaboration. When principals engage with staff, students, and parents in decision-making, it builds a supportive and inclusive community. This positive environment enhances student outcomes and overall school performance (Roberson & Perry, 2022). Decisions made through democratic processes tend to be of higher quality because they incorporate a wider range of perspectives and expertise. This collective problem-solving approach can result in more comprehensive and well-rounded decisions that are better suited to address the needs of the school community (Courtney, Gunter, Niesche & Trujillo, 2021).

One of the primary drawbacks of democratic leadership is the time required to reach consensus. The process of consulting with various stakeholders, gathering input, and achieving agreement can be slow, potentially delaying the implementation of important decisions (Courtney et al., 2021). In situations requiring urgent action, this delay can be detrimental to the school's operations. The inclusive nature of democratic leadership can

sometimes lead to conflicts and disagreements among staff members. Differing opinions and interests can create friction and make it challenging to reach a consensus. Effective conflict resolution skills are essential for principals to manage these situations and maintain a collaborative environment (Roberson & Perry, 2022).

Democratic leadership can be perceived as weak or indecisive if not managed effectively. Principals need to balance inclusivity with assertiveness to avoid appearing hesitant or lacking direction. Without clear guidance and boundaries, the decision-making process can become chaotic and unproductive (Mehraein, 2023). Achieving broad consensus on decisions does not guarantee smooth implementation. Differences in interpretation and commitment levels among staff can lead to inconsistent application of policies and practices. Principals must ensure that all team members are aligned and committed to the decisions made collectively (Shore & Chung, 2022).

While democratic leadership has many benefits, it is most effective when balanced with other leadership styles. Situational leadership, where principals adapt their approach based on the context and needs of the moment, can help mitigate the disadvantages of a purely democratic approach. For instance, combining democratic principles with elements of transformational leadership can enhance motivation and drive while ensuring clear direction and vision (Roberson & Perry, 2022).

2.6.6.1 Advantages and disadvantages of democratic leadership

Democratic leadership can significantly boost teacher morale and motivation. By involving teachers in decision-making processes, principals can create a sense of ownership and responsibility among staff, leading to higher job satisfaction and motivation (Agustin, Hidayatulloh & Muhammad, 2022). Including diverse perspectives in the decision-making process can lead to more well-rounded and effective decisions. The research by Agustin et al. (2022) indicates that schools led by democratic principals benefit from the collective expertise and experience of their staff, resulting in better problem-solving and innovation.

Democratic leadership fosters a collaborative and inclusive school culture. Teachers and staff feel valued and respected, which can enhance teamwork and communication within the school community (Lopez-Roca & Marti, 2023). By promoting a participative environment, democratic leaders encourage continuous professional development. Teachers are more likely to seek out professional growth opportunities and share their knowledge with colleagues, leading to a more dynamic and evolving educational environment (Lopez-Roca & Marti, 2023). Democratic leadership can positively impact learner engagement and achievement. A study about equitable school leadership in Toronto by Leithwood (2021) found that schools with democratic

principals reported higher levels of learner involvement and academic success, as the inclusive atmosphere extends to learners, encouraging their active participation in their own learning.

The time commitment involved in democratic leadership is one of its primary disadvantages. Making decisions in an emergency can be hampered by the time it takes to communicate with staff and get to an agreement (Briggs, 2023). Staff disputes and conflicts can occasionally result from democratic leadership, particularly when there are divergent viewpoints and interests. Managing these conflicts can be challenging and time-consuming for school principals (Kishimbo, 2022).

The participative nature of democratic leadership can lead to inefficiencies if not managed properly. Without clear direction, discussions can become unfocused, and decision-making processes can drag on, affecting the overall efficiency of school operations (Briggs, 2023). Democratic leadership relies heavily on the willingness and engagement of staff members. If teachers and staff are not actively participating or contributing, the effectiveness of this leadership style can be significantly diminished (Morris, Lummis, Lock, Ferguson, Hill & Nykiel, 2020). Maintaining the balance between inclusivity and authority can be challenging for democratic principals. While it is important to consider input from all stakeholders, there are times when decisive action is necessary, and finding this balance can be difficult (Morris et al., 2020).

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter Two presented the conceptual framework of leadership which underpins this study. The discussion focused on the roles and responsibilities of principals and examined the quintile system for school funding. Various leadership styles commonly employed by principals were explored, along with an analysis of their advantages and disadvantages. The next chapter discusses the research design and methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Two provided a literature review pertinent to this study. This chapter presents the research methodology used in this study. The main aspects presented in this chapter are the research paradigm and research design, sampling procedure, data collection and analysis, ethics, and trustworthiness. According to Barkhuizen and Consoli (2021), research methodology encompasses not only the techniques used to acquire data but also the guiding concepts, philosophies, and ideals that bolster the research approach. The procedure of gathering data is explained in detail in this chapter.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

It is crucial for academic researchers to understand research paradigms, since they offer a fundamental structure that directs their methodologies, interpretations, and overall study strategy (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Research paradigms include the underlying presumptions and views about reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and the most appropriate methodology for the investigation (methodology) (Paudel, 2024). Research questions, techniques, and interpretation of findings are all influenced by these paradigms. Due to its effect on the validity and reliability of research outputs, choosing a suitable research paradigm has been of utmost importance (Zina, 2021).

Various research paradigms provide distinct perspectives for examining and analysing occurrences. For example, the positivist paradigm, which is based on the idea that reality is measurable and objective, frequently uses quantitative techniques to test theories and forecast results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological paradigm, on the other hand, favours qualitative methods to investigate intricate, context-bound phenomena by focusing on individuals' lived experiences and their subjective interpretations of reality (Fuyane, 2021). The selection of one of these paradigms has a substantial impact on the procedures of data collecting, analysis, and research design, which in turn impacts the findings and ramifications of the study.

This study, which sought to understand how the roles of principals' leadership styles impact grade-12 learner performance in impoverished township high schools, employed the phenomenological paradigm, due to its focus on understanding the lived experiences and subjective realities of participants (Muhammad et al., 2023). As a research paradigm, phenomenology emphasises the essence of individual experiences, asserting that reality is shaped through personal perceptions and consciousness (Urcia, 2021). The phenomenological paradigm seeks to explore how individuals make sense of their

experiences, allowing for a deeper understanding of the meanings attached to their roles and actions (Stolz, 2020).

Phenomenological research offers rich, detailed insights into participants' lived experiences, which is one of its primary strengths (Fouracres & van Nieuwerburgh, 2020). Unlike positivist methods that aim to generalise findings, phenomenology focuses on understanding phenomena in their specific context by examining participants' personal narratives and reflections. According to Williams (2021), the phenomenological paradigm highlights the importance of individual perception and subjective experience, which results in a more complex and nuanced understanding of the study subject. In this study, the phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to explore how principals experience and respond to the specific challenges within their schools, and how their leadership styles influence grade-12 learner performance in these contexts.

Although phenomenology offers many advantages, it also presents challenges. One significant limitation is the difficulty in maintaining objectivity, as phenomenological research inherently involves subjective interpretations of participants' experiences (Lim, 2024). The reliance on personal narratives can introduce researcher bias, and ensuring the authenticity of the findings requires careful reflexivity (Hersey et al., 2008). Furthermore, because phenomenological research is deeply context-specific, the conclusions drawn may not always be applicable to other settings or situations, limiting the generalisability of the findings (Fischer & Guzel, 2023). Despite these challenges, the phenomenological paradigm was the most appropriate method for this research, as it allowed the study to capture the diversity and depth of human experiences, offering insights into the principals' leadership styles that a more positivist approach may overlook.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

The qualitative approach was used in this study. According to Lim (2024), the qualitative research approach seeks to provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of a phenomenon, with the researcher serving as the primary data collector through methods such as interviews. According to Lichtman (2023), qualitative research can be summed up as the process of gathering data through in-person interactions with various people to comprehend their perspectives on practice and policy. The qualitative research approach is renowned for its ability to provide deep, rich, and nuanced insights into human behaviour, social phenomena, and complex issues (Rose & Johnson, 2020). The emphasis that qualitative research has on meaning and context is one of its main advantages. The qualitative approach enables researchers to investigate how people make sense of the environment and interpret their experiences, which results in a more thorough understanding of the research subject

(Mohajan, 2018). Qualitative research is flexible and adaptable (Busetto et al., 2020). An emergent design, which enables researchers to modify their strategies and emphasis when new insights and questions develop throughout the data gathering process, is frequently used in qualitative investigations (Maxwell, 2021). Because of this flexibility, researchers can study unanticipated parts of the research problem and follow intriguing leads that may produce more significant and relevant discoveries. Besides being more participant-centred, qualitative research also gives voice to people who could be ignored or disenfranchised in other research methodologies (Chilisa, 2019).

3.3.1 Disadvantages of Qualitative research

One of the primary criticisms of qualitative research is the issue of subjectivity and researcher bias (Alam, 2021). Since qualitative research involves close interaction between the researcher and participants, it can be challenging to maintain objectivity, and the findings may be influenced by the researcher's perspectives and preconceptions (Yilmaz, 2013). This subjectivity can raise questions about the reliability and validity of the results, particularly in terms of replicability and generalisability. The laborious and time-consuming process of gathering and analysing data is another drawback of qualitative research (Anis & Olisa, 2024). It can take time to collect comprehensive qualitative data through observations, interviews, or document analysis. Processing this data involves cautious theming, coding, and interpretation (Naeem et al., 2023). For this reason, compared to quantitative methods, qualitative research requires more resources. Moreover, the richness and complexity of qualitative data can lead to challenges in presenting and communicating the findings in a clear and concise manner, which can be a barrier to the broader dissemination and application of the research results (DeCarlo, 2023).

3.3.2 Suitability of Qualitative approach

Considering the purpose of this research aimed at determining the role of principals' leadership styles, including the strategies they employ to improve the performance of grade-12 learners in impoverished Western Cape schools, as well as how they manage the challenges that may hinder the learners' performance, the qualitative approach enabled the researcher to interact directly with principals of impoverished high schools. It enabled the researcher to get an understanding of their lived experiences, as well as how they manage the everyday challenges posed by the socio-economic context under which they operate. The qualitative approach facilitated an understanding and interpretation of different contexts, as it offered the researcher the ability to ask open-ended and follow-up questions.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The researcher used a multiple-case design of eight high schools serving impoverished township communities in the Western Cape Province. Remenyi (2022:283) describes the case study as “an observation of a process, activity, event, programme or individual within a certain time or place.” According to Tomaszewski et al. (2020), the case study helps the researcher learn more about the topic of investigation. A case study may comprise interviews, documentation, or in-depth case descriptions, among other things (Treiblmaier, 2020). According to Hancock, Algozzine, and Lim (2021), the advantage of a case study lies in its ability to offer concerted descriptions of the complex phenomena being investigated. Gray (2021) describes a case study as the most useful design when you want to understand real-life phenomenon in depth, especially when such understanding encompasses important contextual conditions. Taking the research question of this study into account, a multiple case study was the most suitable research design, because it gives an in-depth understanding of principals’ perspectives of the role of their leadership styles in promoting grade-12 performance.

Experience is always influenced by contiguous factors (Kim & Weiner, 2022). Hence, the research was conducted with principals leading high performing schools, averaging above 70% in grade-12, in socio-economically challenged communities. Furthermore, when placing the main research question (How do the roles of principals’ leadership styles contribute to the improvement of grade-12 learner performance in Western Cape impoverished township high schools) at the centre of this study, the benefit of using multiple case studies is that they are flexible, when compared with any other type of research design. They allow the researcher to ascertain and explore as the research advances (Yin, 2018). Case studies emphasise in-depth understanding of the situation, since data is collected in a natural setting and context.

Priya (2021) asserts that despite their benefits, case studies also have some drawbacks related to the uniqueness of data, which typically implies it cannot be duplicated. Additionally, case studies involve some subjectivity, and the study may be skewed toward the issue under investigation (Schoch, 2020). For the purposes of this study, the multiple case studies provided a comprehensive, narrative explanation and description of the lived experiences of principals in their various contexts, notwithstanding its shortcomings.

A multiple case study aims to provide a solution to the research question using several lenses, allowing for the discovery and explanation of multiple phenomena (Halkias & Neubert, 2020). Additionally, this research study is rooted in the phenomenological paradigm advocated by van Manen (2020), which holds that reality is shaped by individuals’ lived experiences and their subjective interpretations of those experiences in relation to their environment (Pilarska, 2021).

3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

For this study, the researcher used two research instruments to collect data, namely, semi-structured, open-ended interviews and document analysis. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the principals' perspectives on the roles played by their leadership styles in promoting the academic performance of their grade-12 learners, semi-structured, open-ended interviews were carried out with the principals of eight high schools located in economically disadvantaged communities. Moreover, documents in the form of minutes of the meetings held at the schools regarding grade-12 learner performance and the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NSSF) policy were used to collect data.

3.5.1 Semi-structured, open-ended interviews

Interviews are aimed at eliciting participants' accounts of their experiences, and knowledge of their interpretations of the meanings of the described phenomena (Ivey, 2023). Abualsaud (2019) notes that open-ended interviews are long-term discussions between partners, with the goal of obtaining "in-depth information" on a certain topic or issue. This allows for the interpretation of a phenomenon based on the meaning that the interviewers assign to it.

Open-ended interviews enabled the researcher to gather not only hard and factual data, but to generate passionate data from the participants to understand how their leadership styles impact on the performance of their grade-12 learners. This method of data generation allowed an engagement with the participants according to their individual experiences and understandings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Using open-ended interviews, the researcher was able to ask follow up questions and expand on the depth of participants' responses, providing an opportunity to clarify and explore nuanced aspects of their (participants) leadership styles and how these relate to the academic performance of Grade-12 learners. This method was particularly valuable as it encouraged a more flexible, conversational approach, allowing participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in their own words.

In qualitative research, open-ended interviews have become an effective method of gathering data because they provide a distinct way to record participants' rich, complex, and nuanced experiences (Brinkmann, 2022). In this instance, the approach enabled participants to narrate their stories in their own words, offering insights into their individual experiences, convictions, and perspectives regarding the ways in which their role of their leadership styles influences the academic achievement of their grade-12 learners (Clandinin, 2022). By focusing on the narratives that participants construct, the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of human experience and the meanings that individuals attach to their life events.

One of the key advantages of using open-ended interviews is their ability to reveal the temporal and contextual dimensions of participants' experiences (Shackleton et al., 2021). Unlike other qualitative methods that may focus on isolated incidents or behaviours, open-ended interviews encourage participants to provide a chronological account of their experiences, highlighting how their perceptions and actions have evolved over time (Savin-Baden & Major, 2023).

Since not every piece of information can be documented in writing, audio recording of the interviews was done for this study to ensure an accurate account of the discussions and prevent data loss. Eleven questions were posed to the participants; two concerned the background information of the principals, and nine focused on the leadership styles of principals and how they impact the academic performance of grade-12 learners. However, it is worth noting that one principal declined to do the oral interview and opted to provide written responses to the interview questions citing that he did not have time for the open-ended interview questions.

Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative research method that blends the structure of predetermined questions with the flexibility to explore participants' responses in depth (Ahlin, 2019). According to Aurini et al. (2021), semi-structured interviews allow for a balance between the researcher's agenda and the participant's perspective, ensuring that key questions are covered while also permitting the exploration of unanticipated themes. Muzari et al. (2022) emphasises that semi-structured interviews are particularly useful in studies where understanding the meanings and interpretations that participants assign to their experiences is paramount. In the context of this study, semi-structured interviews were employed to gather data on principals' leadership styles and the methods they employ to improve the performance of their grade-12 learners.

Each interview followed a flexible yet guided approach, ensuring consistency across all participants while allowing for personalized responses based on the individual experiences of the principals. The principal's office was selected as the interview venue due to its accessibility, privacy, and familiarity to the participants, which created a comfortable environment conducive to open discussion. It also minimized potential distractions, ensuring that the focus remained on the conversation and the in-depth exploration of the topic.

The interviews were conducted between July and September 2024, a period selected due to the timing of the academic year, which provided principals with the necessary distance from the busy start-of-year activities and a clearer perspective on how their leadership styles were influencing learner outcomes. This timing also allowed the participants to reflect on the end-of-

year academic performance and the challenges they faced in maintaining or improving these results. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

The semi-structured interview format provided an opportunity for the participants to share their insights freely while still addressing the research objectives. As noted by Brett (2021), semi-structured interviews allow researchers to adjust the sequence and wording of questions based on the flow of the conversation, making it a powerful tool for delving into participants' experiences. Furthermore, as Hugh-Jones and Gibson (2012) suggest, semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to probe deeper into specific areas, clarifying responses or uncovering hidden meanings. The semi-structured interviews proved effective in this study by fostering a dynamic conversation that revealed how the role of leadership styles influence grade-12 learner performance and how principals adapt their leadership styles to various school conditions.

3.5.2 Document analysis

According to Morgan (2022:10), "a document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents which requires data to be examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge." The ability of document analysis to produce consistent, unobtrusive data unaffected by the study process itself is one of its main advantages (Sayed et al., 2020). Documents are non-reactive and exist without the researcher's participation, in contrast to interviews or observations, which may be impacted by the researcher's presence (Hader, 2022). This characteristic of document analysis makes it possible to gather reliable and impartial data that will strengthen the validity and trustworthiness of the study.

Furthermore, documents provide a wealth of information that might not be available through direct observation or contact and shed light on the sociocultural and historical background of the research (Bowen, 2009). However, document analysis also presents challenges, such as the potential for bias in the selection and interpretation of documents, and the need for researchers to critically assess the authenticity, credibility, and representativeness of the documents used (Singh et al., 2021). Document analysis was crucial in this research as it highlights the framework that governs state funding for schools, and ultimately how this funding impacts on the daily running of impoverished schools in townships.

The National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) (DOE, 1998) and minutes of meetings were the primary documents that were analysed for the purposes of this study. The NNSF policy offers a framework that aims to rectify past injustices and guarantee that education is just, first-rate, and relevant. The NNSSF policy provides a statutory basis for

school funding because schools are now classified into wealth quintiles and funded accordingly. The policy also tackles several important topics pertaining to schools, such as schools that do not charge fees, post-provisioning standards, teacher rationalisation and redistribution, exemptions from school fees, and the financial responsibilities assigned to principals and school governing bodies (Ndimande, 2023). Document analysis was particularly useful in this research, where the NNSSF document served as one of the primary sources of data.

The minutes of meetings are a valuable data collection instrument, particularly in qualitative research, as they provide a structured record of discussions, decisions, and reflections made during formal or informal meetings (Clark et al., 2021). The minutes of the meeting offer insights into the dynamics of decision-making processes, participants' perspectives, and organisational contexts (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). In the context of this research, the minutes of the meetings captured discussions around school leadership, governance, and policy implementation, which are often central to understanding leadership styles and their impact on school performance. By analysing the minutes of the meetings, researchers can track the evolution of ideas and the alignment or misalignment between stated goals and actual practice (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

The researcher was granted permission to peruse the minutes of the meetings of the participating schools but was not permitted to make copies. This access was arranged with the consent of the principals, ensuring adherence to the ethical guidelines regarding privacy and confidentiality. The researcher focused on extracting relevant excerpts from the meeting minutes rather than reviewing the entire documents, as the excerpts contained the most pertinent information related to leadership decisions, strategies, and discussions on Grade-12 learner performance. The decision to use excerpts was made to streamline the analysis and ensure that the data extracted was directly related to the research questions, avoiding unnecessary information that might not contribute to the study's focus.

According to Young et al. (2021), using minutes as data source reduces the potential for bias introduced by participant observation or interviews, as the content reflects real-time interactions and decisions made by participants themselves. Using minutes also enhances the authenticity and reliability of the data, providing a more accurate representation of organisational dynamics. In addition, the minutes of meetings allow for triangulation with other data sources, such as interviews, strengthening the validity of the research findings (Santos et al., 2020). In the context of this study, the analysis of minutes revealed how leadership decisions are influenced by external factors, such as parental support and financial constraints, which were further explored through interviews with the participants. As noted by Bazeley

(2021), triangulating data from different sources allows researchers to develop a more nuanced understanding of complex phenomena, ensuring that the conclusions drawn are robust and well-supported by evidence.

To mitigate bias, the researcher employed several strategies. First, he triangulated the data by cross-referencing information from multiple document sources, ensuring that no single perspective dominated the analysis (Paltridge, 2019). Additionally, the researcher engaged in reflexivity throughout the research, continuously reflecting on potential biases and how they might influence the interpretation of the documents, thereby promoting a more balanced and critical approach (Kroger, 2021).

3.6 SAMPLING PROCEDURE

3.6.1 Site selection

The research used purposive sampling. According to Chary (2024), purposeful sampling is a non-probability sampling technique wherein participants are chosen based on attributes, expertise, or experiences that are pertinent to the study goals. To make sure that the data gathered answers the main research questions, the researcher purposefully selects people or groups who are most likely to provide insightful information (Tracy, 2024). This study required the use of purposeful sampling to select principals who had demonstrated good leadership and the ability to produce excellent grade-12 results in the face of difficult circumstances. Given that the research aimed to explore how principals' leadership styles influence grade-12 academic performance, it was essential to gather data from individuals who had a deep understanding of this dynamic.

This study used a sample of eight high schools from the 'no-fee' quintile categories in the Metro East Education District in the Western Cape Province. These schools were selected from three impoverished townships of the Metro East Education District. These townships are defined by severe economic deprivation, limited access to resources, and poor infrastructure as compared to their affluent counterparts in the same education district. The DBE School Performance Report (2022) revealed that Metro East District is a struggling district on its own, when looking at the history of district performance in grade-12 results (DBE, 2022).

This made both the Metro East district and the schools from impoverished townships in the district ideal sources for data collection, because the district itself is lagging when compared to the other seven districts in the province, and the schools are thriving through challenges. However, the selected eight schools are performing above average of 70% regardless of the socio-economic context in which they operate. The research was aimed at drawing on how

roles of principals' leadership styles in impoverished township high schools' impact on grade-12 learner performance.

3.6.2 Participants selection

Purposive sampling, according to Sarker and AL-Muaalemi (2022), is a non-probability sampling strategy used in research to pick people or instances based on certain attributes or features that correspond with the purpose of the study. Purposive sampling is about selecting participants based on their experiences or characteristics that are relevant to the research question. In the same vein, Maxwell (2021) points out that sampling entails the deliberate selection of participants according to certain standards pertinent to the study goals, as opposed to random sampling, which gives every member of the population an equal chance of being chosen (Sarker & AL-Muaalemi, 2022).

The participants included only high school principals because the research focused on grade-12 learner performance. By using the purposive sampling technique, the researcher was able to focus on high school principals who could offer rich and insightful information about the study. Case studies and phenomenology are examples of qualitative research approaches that frequently include purposeful sampling (Schreier, 2018). The sample consisted of eight principals from each of the selected schools in the mainly black impoverished townships of the Metro East District. The selected schools were ranking as best performing schools in these townships and the research focused on determining the role of principals' leadership styles in improving the performance of grade-12 learners in impoverished schools.

Effective participant selection in qualitative research is pivotal to ensuring comprehensive data collection and rich insight (Maxwell, 2021). For the purposes of this research, principals were the only participants who were deemed able to provide rich insight into their own leadership styles and how they impacted their grade-12 learners' performance. According to Hallinger and Heck (2010), a key element in deciding whether schools succeed, or fail is the performance of its leaders.

Table 3.1: Biographical information of participants

No	Participant	Gender	Experience as principal	School	Quintile Grading	Average % over the past five years
1	Principal	Male	3 years, 7 months	School A	3	90,9
2	Principal	Male	2 years, 7 months	School B	1	83,9
3	Principal	Male	16 years	School C	2	82,6
4	Principal	Male	14 years	School D	3	75,5
5	Principal	Female	9 years	School E	3	84,8
6	Acting Principal	Male	1 year, 6 months	School F	1	75,3
7	Principal	Male	7 years	School G	3	71,7
8	Principal	Male	21 years	School H	2	75,2

3.6.3 Data analysis

The processes of qualitative data analysis include working with data, organising it, breaking it down into manageable parts, synthesising it, searching for patterns, deciding what is important or needs to be learnt (Bergin, 2018). The most suitable interview data analysis method for this investigation was qualitative. The qualitative approach entailed tying together, categorising, contrasting, and comparing the main themes and categories found in the transcripts. O'Donoghue (2018) asserts that qualitative analysis can give a dispassionate description of incidents, themes, and problems that the reader might not swiftly understand. However, Russell and Slater (2022) contend that there is no one correct method for analysing the data. Data was gathered and simultaneously analysed, seeking all potential interpretations (Allie, 2014). Using specific coding techniques is necessary to achieve this comprehensiveness. Data naming and classification comprise coding (Allie, 2014). According to Saldana (2021), coding comprises giving meaning to transcripts that are pertinent to the study inquiry. Coding by microanalysis, involves breaking down the meaning of a word or collection of words into codes by analysing the data word-by-word (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022).

The researcher manually analyzed the data obtained from both the interviews and the documents to ensure a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the participants' responses and the documents' content. This approach was chosen because the researcher wanted to

engage with the data directly, which allowed for a more flexible, iterative process where he could constantly refine his understanding of the emerging themes and patterns.

The transcription process began immediately after the interviews were completed. The researcher transcribed all recordings verbatim to preserve the integrity and authenticity of the participants' responses. This was crucial for ensuring that the nuances of the answers were captured accurately. Once the transcriptions were completed, the researcher began the process of coding. The researcher used open coding, where he identified key words, phrases, and concepts from the interview transcripts that were related to the research questions. These codes were applied consistently across all interviews and allowed the researcher to break down the data into manageable pieces for further analysis.

After the initial coding, the researcher categorized the codes into broader themes based on their similarities and relevance to the study's objectives. For example, codes related to leadership styles, academic performance, and the challenges faced by principals in impoverished schools were grouped into thematic categories. This process helped to uncover the underlying patterns and relationships within the data, which provided valuable insights into how principals' leadership styles impacted Grade-12 learner performance.

The same process was applied to the meeting minutes obtained through document analysis. The researcher identified key excerpts that related to leadership decisions and learner outcomes, applying the same coding and categorization technique. The data from both the interviews and documents were then compared and triangulated to identify consistent themes and discrepancies, which strengthened the validity of the study's findings.

3.6.4 Trustworthiness

Credibility is the most important factor or standard in evaluating trustworthiness (Daniel, 2019). This is because the researcher needs to make a connection between the conclusion of the research study and actual events to demonstrate the veracity of the findings. Triangulation was employed in this study to ensure credibility. To increase the credibility of the study, the researcher used more than one data collection instrument, namely, open-ended interviews and document analysis. According to Lobe, Morgan and Hoffman (2020), using more than one data collection instrument enhances the credibility of the study by providing the researcher with a chance to address any significant discrepancies with the participants, thereby enhancing the rigor, scope, and complexity of the study. Open-ended interviews enabled participants to make their intentions clear, correct mistakes, and sometimes add further details. The purpose of sharing the conclusions of the study with the participants once data collecting and analysis are finished is to establish the trustworthiness of the study (Trochim, 2021).

3.6.5 The researcher's position

According to Liang (2019), the primary responsibility of a researcher conducting qualitative research is to enable the systematic gathering, examination, and understanding of data in a manner that is transparent, thorough, and considerate to participants. Along with being aware of their personal prejudices, researchers need to consider how they could affect the course of their work and its outcomes (Barrett, Kajamaa & Johnston, 2020). Accordingly, the processes of conducting research, making observations, and interpreting information are essential to producing data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The positionality of the researcher comprises multiple components, such as their reflexivity, ontological and epistemological attitude, role as an instrument, and interaction with participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Ravitch and Carl (2019) further argue that in qualitative research, the researcher's position is a multifaceted term that includes reflexivity, ontological and epistemological attitude, role as an instrument, and relationship with participants. To ensure that the research generates and adds to the body of knowledge, the researcher was always cognisant of these crucial components, which are necessary for carrying out rigorous and moral qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The researcher was the main tool used to collect data for this qualitative study; he was in direct contact with the participants, which are in this case, principals of the eight high schools. The researcher upheld the integrity of the study by ensuring that he was not biased. The researcher maintained his position as a data collector and did not exert any undue influence whatsoever on the participants. He maintained a high level of professionalism and ensured that he did not at any point jeopardise the credibility of this research. The researcher did not conduct the research in the Education District where he was working, aiming to ensure that the participants saw a student in the researcher and not a colleague.

3.6.6 Ethical considerations

All ethical research principles were observed. Permission to conduct research in schools was solicited and granted by the Western Cape Department of Education. Furthermore, permission was solicited from the participating schools and respondents to partake in this research project. Ethical clearance, with ethics approval number (EFEC 01-05/2024) was obtained from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Participants were further informed that all data and information collected would be treated confidentially and that it would only be used for the purposes of this study. Participants were also informed that their responses would be kept anonymous and only used for this study.

As stated by Fleming and Zegwaard (2018:6), the concept of research ethics pertains to the ethical framework that guides investigations into morality and decency among researchers. The researcher made sure that participants in this study were informed about the entirety of the research concept and the requirements for participation. An informed consent form requested written agreement from participants to engage in the study. Participants provided written consent that was explicit. Permission was sought from participants to record the interviews on tape for use exclusively in the research.

The goal of the study, the expectations placed on participants, and the way the data would be used were all explained in advance. The understanding of their rights to see their data and to withdraw from the research at any time was part of the consent. According to Bassey (2002, cited in Saneka and de Witt, 2019) the closer one gets to the subjects of a study, the more crucial it is to make sure that participants are willing to be researched and that whatever they say or do is recorded in a way that is not detrimental to their best interests. The researcher pledged to keep all participants' thoughts and opinions private and anonymous.

The research included employing coding systems to anonymise participants' names and school identities (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018) and storing data in encrypted formats on secure password-protected devices (Trochim, 2021). Participants were informed that data will be retained for the required period as per institutional guidelines until 30 June 2027 when the ethical clearance for this research expires, after which the data will be destroyed through verified methods such as data shredding or secure erasure (Trochim, 2021). Names of principals that participated in this research were not mentioned throughout the research. Principals were named as participant 1 to participant 8 to protect their identity and their confidentiality was prioritised. Schools were given alphabet codes from A to H to identify them.

3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the research design and methodology that guided this study, focusing on the phenomenological paradigm and a qualitative research approach. Through the adoption of a multiple case study design, the research was able to delve deeply into the lived experiences of principals in impoverished township schools. By using purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, the research captured the complexities of how leadership styles influence grade-12 learner performance. Moreover, the integration of ethical considerations ensured that the research was conducted with respect for participant confidentiality and consent. The triangulation of data from various sources, including meeting minutes and policy documents, bolstered the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Despite the inherent limitations of qualitative research, such as potential biases and challenges

in generalisability, the methodological choices in this study were well-suited to address the research questions. The next chapter presents the research results.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Three provided a detailed overview of the research design and methodology used in this study. The primary aim of Chapter Four is to present the results of the study that flow from the analysis of data obtained from participants through the interviews, minutes of meetings and document analysis. The data presented in this chapter addresses the following main research question: How do the roles of principals' leadership styles contribute to the improvement of grade-12 learner performance in Western Cape impoverished township high schools?

This chapter includes the following themes that emerged during the data analysis, which are presented in the next section: (i) Principals' perceptions of the roles of their leadership styles in promoting grade-12 learner performance, (ii) The role of principals' leadership styles in mitigating the effects of financial burden on grade-12 learners' performance, and (iii) The role of principals' leadership style in minimising the effect of poor parental involvement on grade-12 learner performance.

4.2 PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF THEIR LEADERSHIP STYLES IN PROMOTING GRADE-12 LEARNER PERFORMANCE

This section addresses the participants' description of the roles that their leadership styles play in promoting grade-12 learner performance. According to the participants, their leadership styles played a significant role in improving the performance of learners, and of grade-12 learners specifically. Participants perceived the roles of their leadership styles as the force behind high learner performance. They believed that the reactions of their co-workers to their leadership styles made a big difference in the lives of their grade-12 learners. In defining the role that his leadership style played in promoting grade-12 learner performance, Participant 3, a principal in school C, stated as follows:

My leadership style is influenced by my belief that a leader leads and others follow. Therefore, as a leader with this style, I make the rules that my staff should adhere to. This is the least favoured leadership style because educators not dedicated to the call of teaching dislike it. As a leader, I set rules about the expected grade-12 learner performance. My staff knows that I expect nothing less than a hundred percent pass rate. Grade-12 teachers understand that this goal is non-negotiable. The expectation is for them to offer afternoon classes

and Saturday classes. This rule contributes immensely to our high grade-12 learner performance.

Based on the description of his style, one can deduce that this principal's leadership style is autocratic. He is a leader who does not enter negotiations with his staff. According to Ochame (2023), an autocratic leader is characterised by individual control over decision-making with little input from team members. In contrast, Participant 2, a principal of school B, expressed a different view, defining his leadership styles as follows:

I am a people's person. I like to negotiate things with my staff because I believe hard work must come from within. As staff, we sit down and plan about the grade-12 pass rate that we want at the end of the year and how we are going to achieve this goal. I often find that educators are resourceful and dedicated, which often leads to our excellent grade-12 pass rate.

The minutes of the meeting that Participant 2 had held with the departmental heads (HODs) and grade-12 teachers in February 2024 confirmed these assertions. In the minutes, the contributions of grade-12 educators were recorded as follows:

Grade-12 educators decided that they will hold after school classes on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 15h00 until 17h00, and Saturday classes from 09h00 to 13h00. Classes will continue during the June and September holidays as well.

From Participant 2's description, it was clear that he used a democratic leadership style. Participant 5, a principal of School E, appeared to adopt the same leadership style as Participant 2. She described how she let her grade-12 staff and HODs decide on how they would achieve a clean pass for all learners, adding that the educators and HODs were aware of the high expectations placed on them. She explained that she did not want to get involved in their decision-making processes, expressing high confidence in her staff. She described her leadership style in this manner:

I have immense confidence in my grade-12 educators and HODs. They are a highly disciplined and dedicated bunch of people. My leadership style is very much influenced by my positive belief in them. I never get involved in what grade-12 educators and HODs decide they will do to promote our learners' performance, because I know whatever they decide will work. I can't say I have one leadership style. My style is flexible and is influenced by the context in

which I find myself. I have a very dedicated staff, which makes my style relaxed. The role of this leadership style is huge. Educators and HODs make it work for the school, learners, and the community. By letting them make decisions, they feel obligated, empowered, and accountable to all the stakeholders. The excellent results of our grade-12 learners speak to the good decisions these educators and HODs make.

Participant 5's leadership style, like Participant 2's, can be described as democratic. According to Shore and Chung (2022), the democratic leadership style involves a leader who fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among staff members by involving them in decision-making processes. Ogunode (2023) define democratic leadership as a style where the leader encourages team involvement in the decision-making process, values input from all members and retains the final authority while fostering collaboration and commitment to team goals.

Although Participant 5 explained that she did not get involved in the decision-making process of grade-12 educators and HODs, she explained that she still held her staff accountable, as shown by her utterance "because I know whatever they decide will work." This statement might be an indication that the decisions that the staff took were binding to them and that they were answerable to them.

Participant 8 of School H, on the other hand, mentioned that he let the team make decisions and reach a consensus. He reported that he always attended those decision-making sessions and made inputs when necessary. His view was that:

Even though the HODs and grade-12 educators are committed to the same vision for our grade-12 learner performance, I always attend the decision-making meetings about how to boost our learner performance. I do not abdicate my responsibilities because, in the end, I will be the one held liable for the outcome. My staff appreciates my presence and my input.

Similar to the other two participants, Participant 8 appeared to also hold a democratic leadership style. Caillier (2020) defines democratic leadership as a style that fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among staff members by involving them in decision-making processes. However, not all participants were able to describe their leadership styles. Consequently, they could not define the role of their leadership styles either. This was a source of concern because it might have meant that things happened haphazardly in their schools, as well as that there might be no systemic plans in place for the improvement of grade-12 learner performance. This situation might also have pointed to the lack of visionary leadership at some

schools. An example was that of Participant 4, who was the principal of School D, who mentioned that:

I cannot say for a fact that this or that is my leadership style. Grade-12 teachers are the ones who know their learners and their needs. What I can vouch for is that our grade-12 learners pass with flying colours every year. I also give incentives for outstanding grade-12 performance.

Although Participant 4 could not define his leadership style or even explain that he had one, it was evident from his utterances that his style was a mixture of laissez-faire and transactional leadership style. According to him, since the teachers knew the learners' needs, he left it to them to make decisions but also gave incentives. Udin, Dananjoyo and Isalman (2022) define transactional leadership style as when a leader gives rewards in exchange for the staff members' completed task, whereas Ahsan and Khalid (2024) hold that laissez-faire style is a hands-off management style characterised by minimal guidance and control. The latter style grants employees high autonomy and freedom to make decisions while often resulting in poorly defined roles and potential conflicts among team members. Be that as it may, the laissez-faire style appears to have worked in School D, although this could be by chance and not by design. This section has demonstrated that participants held a wide range of leadership styles, and that the roles of their styles contributed to the high performance of their grade-12 learners, regardless of whether they (participants) held autocratic, democratic, transactional or laissez-faire leadership styles. The next section presents the financial burden of no-fee schools and the role of principal's leadership styles in improving grade-12 learner performance despite these challenges.

4.3 THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP STYLES IN MITIGATING THE EFFECTS OF THE FINANCIAL BURDEN ON GRADE-12 LEARNERS' PERFORMANCE

Principals in no-fee schools face underfunding as a primary challenge. They are required to balance the financial challenges imposed by underfunding while still striving to improve learner performance. This balancing act largely depends on their leadership styles. This section addresses how the roles of the principals' leadership styles interacted with the financial burden that affected grade-12 learner performance in no-fee schools, and the pivotal role that these styles played in mitigating these challenges and in addressing this deficit to promote learner performance.

Participant 8, the principal of School H, emphasised that underfunding due to the inadequacies of the National Norms and Standards for School Funding policy hindered the school's ability to

run critical grade-12 support programmes. His leadership style involved acknowledging the financial limitations but taking the initiative to do something about it to minimise its negative impact on grade-12 learner performance. He described the situation as follows:

The Norms & Standards policy is a dismal failure of the government. Being a no-fee school, what the department allocates to us is insufficient, leaving us with no resources to run essential grade-12 support programmes, such as paying for external tutors. However, as the principal of the school, I make means to turn the situation around and look for funding outside so that our 12th grade extra classes are not impacted by lack of funds.

Sub-section 96 of the National Norms and Standards for School Funding Policy provides explicit guidelines for the utilisation of allocated funds by schools. According to this policy, schools are required to adhere strictly to its directives regarding financial allocations. Specifically, the policy states that:

Twenty-five percent (25%) of the funds must be designated for learning and teaching support materials, such as textbooks, while another 25% is allocated for municipal services, including water and electricity. Additionally, 25% is earmarked for the maintenance of school infrastructure, with the remaining 25% divided between local purchases (15%), such as cleaning supplies, and IT-related support materials (10%).

This rigid allocation of funds by the Department of Basic Education restricts the ability of schools to finance additional programmes, such as grade-12 extra-support classes. The policy is highly prescriptive in defining allowable expenditures, and unfortunately, extra-support programmes fall outside the scope of what is covered by the NNSF Policy. This could explain why Participant 8 described the funding policy as a complete failure.

From the description of the role of his leadership style, one can deduce that Participant 8's style is transformational. The role of his style influences him to turn the situation around, from lacking funding for grade-12 support programmes to a positive atmosphere by going beyond school boundaries and looking for funds to support grade-12. Transformational leaders are known for their turnaround strategies for the good of the organisation (Tintoré, 2019).

Participant 1, a principal of School A, echoed the frustration expressed by Participant 8 by noting a disconnect between government expectations for grade-12 results and the financial constraints that negatively impacted the achievement of these results.

The department expects results despite poor financial support. Funding remains a key obstacle to achieving grade-12 performance goals. Over the years I realised that I must use a consultative approach and involve the business sector so that they can contribute funds to lessen the financial burden.

Participant 1's leadership style involved him getting out of his comfort zone and reach out to the business sector seeking donations to help obviate the financial burden his school faced. From his description, one could conclude that he used transformational leadership. Manu (2022) describes transformational leaders as leaders who implement innovative solutions to improve performance and achieve organisational goals.

What could have driven Participant 1 to reach out to the business sector might have been the constraints of the Norms and Standards policy, which fails to stipulate how quintile 1-3 schools should get funds to improve learner results, even though good results for grade-12 primarily rely on financial resources (Shapule, Tsebe & Mahlapahlapana, 2023). This might be an indication that the NNESSF policy does not adequately address the needs of impoverished schools in raising the bar for grade-12 learners. To confirm Participant 1's assertion, the NNESSF policy states that:

The school allocation is intended to finance key inputs other than personnel in the education process. Key examples of inputs for which the school allocation is intended are textbooks, stationery and non-educational items such as cleaning materials and electricity. Such inputs are necessary if educators and other personnel in schools are to perform their functions properly.

Evidently, the inputs mentioned in this policy have no bearing on the improvement of grade-12 performance but are only about the functioning of the schools.

Participant 2, the principal of School B, emphasised that he involved the entire staff in the budgeting processes and school fundraising initiatives to mitigate some of the challenges posed by underfunding. He explained that:

Our school is fully reliant on Norms and Standards funding. With efficient financial management, we can run extra classes for grade-12 learners. It's not about how much money we get but how we budget and set our priorities. Grade-12 academic improvement plans are at the core of our priority list. Moreover, I make sure that everyone is involved in the budgeting process so that we can all own the initiatives.

Involving everyone in decision-making processes and prioritising grade-12 demonstrates that his democratic leadership style makes it possible to achieve good results despite being underfunded. A study on school effectiveness conducted by Agustin et al. (2022) indicates that schools led by democratic principals' benefit from the collective expertise and experience of their staff, resulting in better problem-solving and innovation. Nonetheless, it is not clear how Participant 2 tapped into NNSSF funds that are meant for other school functions, as alluded to by the policy itself and other participants.

In contrast, Participant 3, a principal of School C outlined a totally different approach from Participant 1 that showed the lack of sharing power with staff. He described his role in mitigating financial challenges as follows:

I am the chief accounting officer in the school and therefore have the sole mandate to dictate how school money is spent. I always divert the largest chunk of my budget to grade-12 academic-related activities. My school results speak for themselves, one can even doubt that we are underfunded. I exercise my power as principal for the betterment of our academic results.

Participant 3's authoritative tone could be an indication that he uses an autocratic leadership style and an authoritative approach in driving his budget processes to largely benefit grade-12 performance. Cejudo (2024) claims that autocratic leadership provides strong control and discipline within the school environment.

The principal of School G, Participant 7, linked his school's financial burden to the funding policy failure, arguing that it was a far cry from what it claimed to be. He argued that:

The Norms and Standards policy is nothing closer to what it aims to be to the school's needs. We are struggling with funding grade-12, and the department does not want us to charge fees because we are classified as a no-fee school. We are only surviving because my learners' parents pay a voluntary contribution that we use to support our grade-12 academic improvement programmes.

The NNSSF policy is explicit in the fact that no-fee schools may not charge fees. Subsection 156 of the NNSSF policy states that:

If a school is a no-fee school, compulsory school fees may consequently not be charged in the school.

Yet, Participant 7 argued, paragraph 92 of the National Norms and Standards policy states that:

The National Norms and Standards are a major innovation in South African school funding both in terms of financing systems and pro-poor resourcing.

Participant 7's words appear to suggest that he was not convinced that the NNSSF policy was the 'innovation' it claimed to be. Despite the good intentions of the NNSSF policy, Participant 7's comments reveal that the goals of the policy fall short of addressing the realities faced by poor schools, even though it is designed to benefit them. It could be assumed that School G survives only because of the role that the principal's democratic leadership style plays in garnering support from parents as stakeholders in a consultative process. According to Agustin et al. (2022), democratic leadership fosters a collaborative and inclusive school culture.

Participant 4, a principal of School D made it clear that there was no straightforward solution to the issue of underfunding. However, as a school principal, he reported that his mitigation plan depended highly on what the grade-12 team suggested. She argued that:

Grade-12 is very challenging for both teachers and learners. I therefore ensure that I give the team that runs grade-12 space to work without interference. All I do is ensure that money is set aside for whenever they knock on my office door for finance-related assistance. Otherwise, grade-12 is their own baby, and I trust them.

The 'letting them do' style of Participant 4 speaks to his laissez-faire leadership style, and the 'giving the team space without interference' seems to imply a mixture of democratic and laissez-faire style. The principal gives the grade-12 teachers space, trusts them, and ensures that there are funds available whenever required for grade-12 academic support programmes. From this analysis, it appears that Participant 4 embraces a combination of laissez-faire and democratic style. According to Asad et al. (2022), laissez-faire leaders provide little guidance or supervision, allowing team members or subordinates considerable freedom to make decisions, solve problems, and complete tasks on their own. Although this style has disadvantages, such as lack of direction and accountability, it seemed to have worked for Participant 4 when combined with the democratic style.

This section has demonstrated how the financial burdens of no-fee schools are closely intertwined with the roles of the principals' leadership styles. The roles of principals in mitigating limited financial resources that potentially adversely affected grade-12 learners' performance

appear to have been influenced by different leadership styles, including transformational, democratic, autocratic and a combination of laissez-faire and democratic leadership styles. The next section presents the role of the principals' leadership styles in encouraging grade-12 parental support.

4.4 THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP STYLE IN MINIMISING THE EFFECT OF POOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ON GRADE12 LEARNER PERFORMANCE

This section addresses the role of the participants' leadership styles in encouraging grade-12 parental involvement. Earlier, it was established that parental involvement plays an important role in the high performance of learners. The participants reiterated this point, highlighting the integral role played by parental support in improving grade-12 learner performance, as well as how it augmented but was also influenced by principals' leadership styles. They expressed the view that the success of matriculants or grade-12 learners involves many stakeholders and does not solely depend on the role of principals' leadership styles, albeit the latter is crucial. In defining the influence of his leadership style on increasing grade-12 parental involvement, Participant 3, principal of School C, stated that:

My grade-12 parents know that it is mandatory to attend parent-teacher meetings and mass parent meetings. This approach is yielding positive results because even grade-12 learners know that if they cross the line, their parents will be sanctioned the following day. My teachers focus on teaching grade-12 learners whereas my responsibility is to ensure that we have parents backing our grade-12 academic improvement support programmes.

Based on the definition of his parental involvement approach, one can conclude that this principal's approach speaks to the role of his autocratic leadership style. He showed that he does not negotiate the involvement of parents and, therefore, the parents of his grade-12 learners have no choice but to support programmes that are aimed at improving grade-12 learner performance. Jackson (2022) points out that autocratic leaders set clear rules and expectations, which can lead to a well-organised and orderly school atmosphere, as appears to be the case in School C.

The minutes of a parents' meeting that was held at the school in February 2024 confirmed the principal's assertion. The minutes read as follows:

The principal required that all grade-12 parents sign a pledge to the school for the year. He further emphasised that the pledge is commitment and obligation

to support the school, and deviation from the signed pledge will lead to dire consequences.

On the contrary, Participant 5, a principal of School E, expressed a different leadership approach, describing her role in parental involvement as:

Engaging parents requires a strategic approach, as they are adults with diverse perspectives. To secure their support for school programmes, I schedule the first grade-12 meeting while their children are still in grade-11, typically around November of each year. During this initial meeting, I outline clearly the expectations so that by the time we hold the official grade-12 meeting, everyone understands fully the importance of their attendance and the crucial role they are expected to play in supporting their children's academic performance.

The minutes of the meeting that Participant 5 had held with the parents and grade-12 teachers in November 2023 confirmed these assertions. In the minutes, the contributions of the parents were recorded as follows:

Parents value receiving meeting notices along with the agenda well in advance. They also appreciate being included in the decision-making process for grade-12 academic support programmes. Many have pledged their ongoing support to both the school and the teachers throughout the grade-12 year.

It is safe to assume that the democratic leadership style of Participant 5 encourages parents to feel comfortable visiting the school and monitoring their grade-12 children's academic progress. Involving parents in decision-making also fosters a sense of ownership (MacPhee, 2021), making it easier for them to support the grade-12 academic improvement plans. When stakeholders participate in shaping policies and practices, they are more likely to be committed to implementing them effectively (Shore & Chung, 2022).

Participant 2, principal of School B, pointed out that he had built relations with parents through on-going academic progress parent-teaching meetings. At the end of each quarter, parents are invited to a parents meeting, wherein individual grade-12 learner performance is discussed. He explained that:

At the end of each quarter, I organise a parent meeting where class teachers distribute progress reports for grade-12 learners. During these meetings, parents receive updates on their children's academic performance. We also

take this opportunity to encourage parents to discuss potential subject changes with their children, such as switching from Mathematics to Mathematical Literacy. These subject changes significantly impact learners' results, and as the principal, it is my responsibility to actively engage with parents, offering guidance and recommending subject changes for learners who are struggling.

The minutes of the meeting that Participant 2 held with the parents and grade-12 teachers on the 4th of April 2024 confirmed these assertions. In the minutes, the contributions of the parents were recorded as follows:

Parents appreciate the individualised discussions with teachers, as these sessions offer a supportive environment where teachers can openly address any concerns affecting their grade-12 children. Many parents have expressed that these meetings provide them with the insight needed to make informed decisions about their children's academic progress, particularly when considering subject changes.

Participant 2's approach to keeping parents informed about the academic progress of their grade-12 learners reflects a democratic leadership style. He engages parents in discussions about subject changes. Experience in this school has shown that learners often perform better after switching to new subjects. The principal noted that transitioning from subjects like Accounting to Tourism, or from Physical Science to either History or Business Studies, has positively impacted the school's overall grade-12 performance. Rizkie et al. (2022) posits that democratic leaders, such as Participant 2, prioritise collaboration, inclusivity, and shared decision-making within their teams or organisations.

Regarding Participant 6, the principal of School F, he shared that when he first became principal, there was little to no parental involvement at the school. However, through his leadership style, which entails improving the communication mode with parents, he has successfully changed this dynamic. He reported that parents of grade-12 learners were now actively involved in every decision related to academic improvement for grade-12. He explained that:

Since becoming principal, I have had to implement measures such as improved communication through various communication channels to increase the involvement of grade-12 parents in the decision-making process. It is undeniable that there is a strong correlation between parental support and grade-12 learner performance. The introduction of grade-12 WhatsApp group

with parents has improved their engagement with the school, and we now see more parents getting involved and showing interest in their children's education. Since enhancing parental involvement, we have seen a substantial improvement in the overall performance of our grade-12 learners.

Participant 6's success in transforming the situation from a lack of parental involvement to active parent participation in grade-12 initiatives highlights his transformational leadership qualities. Transformational leaders are recognised for their ability to inspire and motivate change, and encouraging stakeholders to become actively engaged in the success of the organisation (Asad et al., 2022).

The principal of School A, participant 1, mentioned that he relied heavily on the relationship between the school and the School Governing Body (SGB). He mentioned that the parental support starts at the SGB level and is encouraged by members of the SGB. The minutes of the SGB meeting held on 18 February 2024 stated that:

The Chairperson of the SGB urged all parents in the SGB to avail themselves and attend parents' meetings to set an example for the rest of the parents. The Chairperson further promised to address parents in the next meeting about the importance of their involvement in the grade-12 school programmes.

Participant 1's democratic leadership helps him to build strong relationships with the parental component of the school community. The fact that he allows space for the chairperson of the SGB to address meetings at his school speaks to characteristics of a democratic leadership style. According to Kilicoglu (2018), democratic leaders foster an inclusive environment, valuing input from all stakeholders.

This section showed how the different principals' leadership styles impact their role of promoting parental involvement for the sake of improving grade-12 performance. Results revealed that the principals' leadership styles played different roles in improving parental involvement. The key takeaway is that a principal's leadership style is crucial in getting parents involved, which in turn helps improve grade-12 learner performance.

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter Four has shown that despite varied leadership styles, the common thread is that principals' leadership styles play an integral role in promoting grade-12 learner achievement despite the financial challenges their schools deal with. The principals' leadership styles appear to influence their roles ranging from negotiating with their staff, external stakeholders

such as business people, and SGB to enforcing rules strictly and not negotiating without making any negotiations. The effectiveness of some of these leaderships styles underscores the pivotal role of leadership in shaping educational success and overcoming obstacles such as underfunding and limited parental engagement. Chapter Five presents the discussion, recommendations and conclusion of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Five presents the discussion, recommendations, and conclusion, which summarise the research findings and place them within the larger context of educational leadership. In the discussion, the researcher interprets the findings in light of the pertinent literature, with a special focus on the role of principals' leadership styles on grade-12 learner performance in no-fee schools. This examination was aimed at shedding light on the distinctive challenges that no-fee schools face, as well as the strategies and/or roles that have been found to be effective in mitigating the challenges, as informed and heavily influenced by participants' leadership styles. Following the discussion, the recommendations outline directions for future research, emphasising the significance of this work in advancing an understanding of educational leadership in impoverished schools. Finally, the conclusion summarises the key findings of the study.

5.2 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the roles that the principals' leadership styles play in promoting grade-12 learner performance. A purposive sample of eight participants was selected from purposely selected quintile 1-3 high schools situated in impoverished townships in the Western Cape province. The results of this study revealed that the decisions, actions, and roles that the principals took to promote grade-12 learner performance, mitigate the financial burden, and increase parental involvement were heavily influenced by their leadership styles. Therefore, the participants' leadership styles played a key role in influencing the decisions and actions taken, who took those decisions, as well as the contributions made by the stakeholders to improve grade-12 learner performance. Besides the school principals, other stakeholders were grade-12 teachers, heads of departments, parents, and SGBs. The results revealed that the principals' leadership styles determined who made the decisions that helped to mitigate the challenges that impacted on grade-12 learner performance. For example, in schools where principals advocated an autocratic leadership style, only the principals had a say on what needed to be done. In schools where the principals' leadership style was democratic, the stakeholders contributed meaningfully to the decisions and actions taken. Therefore, the principals' leadership styles played a significant role in the decisions and actions taken to improve grade-12 learner performance. The roles are also observable in the contexts where the principals held transformative, transactional, and laissez faire leadership styles.

One of the features of the principals' styles was that some of them were constant across two or three emergent themes. For example, Participant 2's leadership style remained democratic across all the three themes, including Theme 1 - role of principals' leadership styles on learner performance, Theme 2 - role of principals' leadership styles in mitigating the financial burden, and Theme 3 - role of principal's leadership styles in increasing parental involvement. Because of Participant 2's democratic style, he was able to negotiate the terms with staff, use a consultative approach with parents and engage collective expertise in managing the budget. His style is likely to have played an empowering role to his co-workers and parents, which might in turn have given them the human agency, or the initiative to take action (Bandura, 2006; Semedo et al., 2022) and self-efficacy (a belief in their capacity to take corrective action (Bandura, 2006; Semedo et al., 2022)). The same could be said about Participant 5 who presented a democratic leadership style in Theme 1 (role of principal's leadership style in learner performance) and Theme 2 (role of principal's leadership style in mitigating the financial burden). Participant 7 also presented a democratic leadership style in Theme 3 on parental involvement.

Leaders with a democratic leadership style embrace shared leadership and responsibility (Kilicoglu, 2018). In the context of this study, the advantage of a democratic leadership style is that it eases the life of the principals who hold it. As can be seen in the results, the role of this style is that it allows democracy to prevail. Democracy derives from the Greek word *dēmokratia*, which was coined from *dēmos* ("people") and *kratos* ("rule"/ "power") (Cammack, 2019). The role of a principal with a democratic leadership style is that he rules with the people and power is shared, as seen in Participant 2 and 5's utterances. The role of this style is that it liberates the participants from the burden of underfunding that plagues their schools, thereby promoting grade-12 learners' performance. This style results in a win-win situation where the principal, co-workers, parents, and grade-12 learners become winners, with the learners' performance continuing to improve.

On the contrary, Participant 3's roles in the decisions and actions taken appear to be influenced by his autocratic leadership style, as shown across the three themes. Participant 3 appears to rule with an iron fist. He set rules on how things should be done and sticks to the decisions he has made without consultation with the other stakeholders. His word is final, and he does not shy away from expressing that he is in charge. Although the roles of his leadership style appear to work well in promoting grade-12 learner performance in School C, this style is not sustainable, as it may not necessarily work equally well in other contexts if the co-workers feel aggrieved and become rebellious. That is the disadvantage of Participant 3's leadership style. Its role can have devastating effects that may end up adversely affecting the grade-12 learner performance they were meant to improve. According to Smith (2023) autocratic leaders stifle

creativity and innovation among team members and the potential decline in overall morale and motivation, which can hinder collaboration and engagement in the learning environment (Rizkie et al., 2022). Participant 3 might have to consider moderating his leadership style to accommodate the views and expertise of other stakeholders for the benefit of grade-12 learners' performance.

The findings also revealed that the participants' leadership styles are not consistent across the themes. Of all the participants, Participant 4 has the most eclectic leadership style which appears to be a combination of the laissez-faire, transactional and democratic styles. Even though his description of his style appears to be democratic, it leans more heavily on the laissez-faire style than the democratic style. By adding the transactional style of rewarding teachers who perform well to his already problematic laissez faire style, he exacerbates the situation, because the practice of rewarding teachers is neither sustainable, reliable, nor effective. While receiving rewards may be influencing teachers to do better, the role of this leadership style is, like the laissez-faire style is not sustainable. It is the researcher's contention that the teachers' good performance must not be driven by external rewards, but it must come from within the teachers. In other words, the teachers' good performance must be intrinsic (Andriani et al., 2018) and not be influenced by the role of the principal's transactional style. In the context of this participant's mixed leadership style, the success of grade-12 learners hangs in a balance and might possibly be influenced by other external factors other than the role of the principal's leadership style. The participant's laissez-faire leadership style might play a minimal role in promoting grade-12 learners' performance, seeing that the principal does not appear to plan or strategise how the school should achieve the goal of high grade-12 performance. Without a clear mission, vision, or strategy, the role of a principal's laissez-faire and transactional leadership styles might fail to contribute to grade-12 high performance. According to Northouse (2021), laissez-faire leaders often provide minimal guidance, which can lead to confusion and a lack of focus among team members. This style can result in unclear responsibilities, leading to a lack of accountability and potential underperformance (Smith, 2023). Transactional leadership on the one hand, often emphasises immediate results and compliance, potentially neglecting long-term development and growth of team members (Yukl, 2010). It is, therefore, surprising that School D's grade-12 learners' performance has maintained the high performance over the past five years. One can only believe that this situation is by chance and not because of the role of this participant's leadership styles.

Participants 1 and 2 reflect a combination of a democratic and transformative style. The combination of these styles promises to play a significant role in retaining high performance among grade-12 learners. Both styles are healthy and effective, and combining them has an immense potential to strengthen the role that these styles play in mitigating financial

constraints, improving grade-12 learner performance, and enhancing parental involvement, which are factors that this study investigated. Democratic leadership, on the one hand, fosters a collaborative environment where team members feel valued and heard, leading to higher levels of engagement and commitment (Wilson, 2020). Transformational leadership style, on the other hand, promotes an environment of creativity and innovation, encouraging team members to think outside the box and pursue new ideas (Owusu-Agyeman, 2021). It is no wonder that Schools 1 and 2 continue the upward trend of maintaining high grade-12 learner performance. These participants' leadership styles motivate them to be change agents who transform situations for the sake of retaining high performance among learners. These leaders are visionary, and their styles make it comfortable for them to go out of their comfort zone to transform the status quo for the sake of grade-12 learners' performance in the socio-economically challenging quintile 1-3 school contexts.

Principals who combine democratic and transformational leadership styles are the most successful in fostering excellent learner achievement (Ibrahim & Al-Taneiji, 2013). These leadership styles are defined by their flexibility, capacity to uplift and encourage both teachers, and learners, and dedication to ongoing development. Specifically, democratic leaders are collaborative, inclusive, participatory, and empowering, creating a strong school culture where academic excellence is expected, and teachers and learners are encouraged to meet these standards (Atsebeha, 2016). Conversely, transformational leadership enables principals to customise their strategy to the unique requirements of their schools, changing their tactics as needed.

The issue of the participant who could not describe his leadership style is a source of concern. It is one thing to have more than one style, but to be unable to identify your leadership style as a principal raises red flags and might point to a lack of vision and mission for the school in general, and for the grade-12 learners' performance specifically. This might mean that things happen by chance without any systematic planning.

The NSSF policy, as it currently stands, raises serious concerns. Being silent on the most important issue of the financial support for grade-12 learners is a gap that the Department of Basic Education needs to address. Tutoring and after school classes are the backbone of learner success (Johnson, 2020). The funding policy should build in some flexibility to allow schools to use a certain percentage of their funding allocation on learner development. It is no wonder that some participants reported to be violating the rules and using NSSF funding for grade-12 learner development programmes, with a potential possibility for serious trouble with participants' accountability.

It is worth noting that the leadership styles of participants appear to have fostered the involvement of teachers, SGBs, and parents, but not the learners. A question should be asked about how, in the context of this study, the principals' leadership styles play a role in encouraging grade-12 learners to assert their voices and take charge of their academic performance. Not a single participant mentioned how his or her leadership style fosters the inputs of grade-12 learners. The exclusion of these learners in the discourse of their performance may need to be addressed. The researcher argues that the principals' leadership styles should assert the voices and agency of grade-12 learners in the discourse of their performance, as these learners are in the coalface of their performance. Perceived this way, grade-12 learners should have featured prominently in the responses of the participants.

The context appears to have influenced the roles that the participants' leadership styles played in this study. For example, it was worth noting that participants who trusted the expertise of their co-workers and believed in their capacities and problem-solving capabilities tended to hold democratic leadership styles which in turn might have influenced the participants to delegate responsibilities and decision-making to those co-workers. Nonetheless, those participants also indicated that they attended the meetings so as not to be seen as abdicating their responsibilities. This is different from participants with laissez faire leadership styles who left all the responsibility to their heads of departments or grade-12 teachers, thereby abdicating their responsibilities as leaders. Therefore, it is vital for principals to understand the profiles and strengths of their co-workers and cautiously utilise them for the benefit of the learners.

In the context of this study, one lingering question is whether the principals' leadership styles played a significant role in the improvement of grade-12 learner performance? The answer is yes and no. In the bigger scheme of things, one can agree that the principals' leadership styles played an integral role in mitigating factors that threaten grade-12 learner performance, such as limited funding for quintile 1-3 schools and limited parental involvement. At least at face value, the leadership styles played a significant role. However, on a deeper level, some of the leadership styles raise issues about the sustainable contribution they could make in improving grade-12 learners' performance. The latter include the autocratic, laissez faire and transactional leadership styles.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations could be made from the results of this study:

The results have revealed that quintile 1-3 schools face challenges associated with the failure of the NSSF policy to cater to the financial needs of providing tutoring and extra classes for grade-12 learners. The researcher recommends that the DBE should revise the NSSF policy

and make provision for grade-12 performance-related provisions to ease the burden of limited funding on the stakeholders. This would help the principals to focus on providing effective learning and teaching for the learners and teachers instead of spending time raising funds and consulting with potential funders. This applies to the teachers as well.

In the literature, there are many factors that affect grade-12 learner performance. These factors include leadership styles of principals (Bush, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2020), availability of funds (Mestry, 2020; Van der Berg, 2015), and parental involvement (Epstein, 2009). Therefore, the role of the principals' leadership styles cannot be the only resource on which to rely to achieve this goal. The researcher recommends that all the stakeholders, including the SGBs, parents, teachers, learners, and local businesspeople must also play a role in assisting quintile 1-3 schools in their efforts to improve grade-12 learner performance.

The results of this study have shown that the roles of principals' leadership styles include only the parents, businesspeople, teachers, HODs, and the principals themselves. No mention was made of the inclusion of learners in these roles. The researcher recommends that learners must be placed at the centre of the initiatives that are meant to improve their performance. It is therefore important to ask questions on how principals perceive the inclusion of grade-12 learners as stakeholders in the roles or contributions that their (principals') leadership styles play in improving grade-12 learner performance. In existing literature and in this study, the role of learners as custodians and agents of their own learning is missing.

5.3.1 Recommendations for future research

The following suggestions for additional research are put forth in light of the findings and discussion that have been presented:

1. Investigation of the Effects of Various Leadership Styles on Learners'? Future research endeavours should delve into the ways in which various leadership styles affect the self-efficacy and agency of grade-12 learners. Deeper insights into efficient leadership styles may be obtained by comprehending the learners' viewpoints and how they contribute to their academic success.
2. Effectiveness of different leadership styles across quintiles. This study could investigate contextual elements that affect effectiveness of leadership styles in a range of socioeconomic contexts.
3. Examination of the effect of funding policies on learner achievement. This study could make a policy analysis on the current funding mechanisms. The potential for financial flexibility to improve academic performance in impoverished schools should be investigated in such research.

4. Teacher perspectives on principals' leadership styles: To find out the ways that various principals' leadership styles impact teachers' performance. An understanding of this connection can help identify factors that influence learner achievement across all school grades.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to investigate the roles of principals' leadership styles in improving grade-12 learner performance in high-performing quintile 1-3 schools situated in Western Cape disadvantaged townships. The results revealed that principals' leadership styles play a huge role in contributing to the high performance of grade-12 learners. The results of this study have advanced the knowledge and understanding of the roles and contributions of leadership styles to the performance of learners in educational settings where major socio-economic issues such as limited funding, abject poverty, and poor infrastructure and facilities are present. Notwithstanding these obstacles, during the previous five years, the selected schools have consistently maintained the grade-12 pass rate of 70% and higher, demonstrating the vital role that the principals' leadership style and other related factors play in promoting academic achievement.

One important conclusion of this research is that some participants presented leadership as a dynamic process that changes in response to the changing conditions rather than as a static function. Their schools encounter particular issues such as limited funding and lack of parental involvement, both of which affect grade-12 learner performance. Learning environments are more successfully fostered by principals who are able to switch between different leadership styles, depending on the context and whether participatory decision-making, directive leadership, or a more supporting, coaching approach is needed.

Furthermore, the results emphasised the importance of community involvement in these schools' success. Principals that brought the community and parents into the school's daily operations were able to enlist more financial and moral support, which enhanced learner outcomes. Some principals indicated that they collaborated extensively with the community, e.g., businesspeople, parents, and SGBs to obtain funding and develop grade-12 learning opportunities. This community-based strategy represents a more inclusive, wide-ranging view of leadership that goes beyond the boundaries of the school.

The study highlighted the structural issues that still exist in the larger educational setting, even though the roles of leadership styles is unquestionably a major contributor to these schools' success. Lack of resources, poor facilities, and low finance are still major issues for all the schools in this study, as shown by their quintile 1-3 category. Policymakers and education

authorities must take specific action to address inequalities that exist among schools, especially those situated in impoverished contexts. Enhancing principals' leadership skills need to be a top goal, but it has to go hand in hand with more extensive initiatives to upgrade school facilities, boost financing, and give teachers in impoverished communities more assistance.

This study has demonstrated that the principals' leadership styles contribute meaningfully to the improvement of grade-12 learner performance in underprivileged township schools. Visionary principals who exhibit flexible, community-focused leadership styles and are committed to building a positive, solid, and encouraging school culture are the ones who are in good stead to maintain high standards of learner performance. Through the integration of transformational and democratic leadership styles, these principals can effectively surmount numerous obstacles commonly linked to functioning in underprivileged environments.

The results of this study have important implications for policymakers and school districts. Leadership development courses should be designed to equip the principals with the knowledge and skills of using their leadership styles to the benefit of the schools and all the stakeholders. In addition, principals must be provided with the skills of formulating strategic plans to make their missions and visions clear especially in relation to learner performance and quality teaching and learning. Such skills are likely to better equip principals to manage the unique difficulties presented by their quintile 1-3 schools. The results of this study have highlighted the necessity of principals receiving continual professional development, especially in the fields of resource management, staff development, and community participation. The results further advocate for legislative changes that would target the structural problems quintile 1-3 schools face, such as the need for more financing and better facilities.

This study emphasises how crucial strong and flexible leadership is to raise educational standards in underprivileged communities. Even in the most challenging situations, academic greatness can be attained with strong leadership, as seen in the success of the schools in this study, despite the plethora of intricate obstacles they face. Principals have a pivotal role not just as administrative leaders, but also as change agents, to greatly influence the future opportunities for educators and learners in the poorest communities in South Africa.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOL

19 Colneus Street
Kuilsriver
7580

03 July 2024

The Principal
XXX Secondary School

RE: Request for Permission to conduct research with the Principal

Dear Principal

I hope this letter finds you well.

My name is Thobani Ngxiki, and I am currently pursuing a Master's degree at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). I am writing to request your permission to conduct research at XXX Secondary School.

The research is part of my thesis project, titled **Role of principals' leadership styles in promoting grade-12 learners' performance in Western Cape Province township schools**, which intends to determine the role of the principals' leadership styles, including the strategies they employ to improve the performance of grade-12 learners and how they manage the challenges that may hinder the learners' performance. I am particularly interested in interviewing only you as the principal of the school.

I assure you that this study will be conducted with the highest ethical standards, and I will ensure that the confidentiality and privacy of all participants are maintained. Participation will be entirely voluntary.

I am happy to provide further details about the study and discuss any questions or concerns you may have. I have also attached a copy of my research approval letter from CPUT as well as permission letter conduct research in schools from the WCED for your review.

Could you please provide me with a date and time, that fits within your busy schedule, wherein we can spend approximately 1 Hour 30 minutes on the attached research questions, within term 3 of this academic year.

I am hopeful that you will consider my request favorably.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your positive response.

Sincerely,



Thobani Ngxiki
Cape Peninsula University of Technology
064 229 1132

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL



Private Bag X8, Wellington, 7654
Jan van Riebeeck Street, Wellington, 7654
Tel: +27 21 864 5200

P.O. Box 652, Cape Town, 8000
Highbury Road, Mowbray
Tel: +27 21 680 1500

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

On the 9th of June 2024 the Acting Chairperson of the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology granted ethics approval (EFEC 01-05/2024) to Thobani Ngxiki for research activities related to a staff project / degree project)

Title:	Role of principals' leadership styles in promoting grade-12 learners' performance in Western Cape Province township schools
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Comments:

The EFEC unconditionally grants ethical clearance for this study. This clearance is valid until 30th June 2027. Permission is granted to conduct research within the Faculty of Education only. Research activities are restricted to those details in the research project as outlined by the Ethics application. Any changes wrought to the described study must be reported to the Ethics committee immediately.

A black and white image of a handwritten signature, likely belonging to Prof P Boer.

Date: 9 June 2024

Prof P Boer

Acting Chair

EFEC

APPENDIX D: WCED PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



Directorate: Research

meshack.kanzi@westerncape.gov.za

Tel: +27 021 467 2350

Fax: 086 590 2282

Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000
wced.wcape.gov.za

REFERENCE: 3A66553110000039-20240609

ENQUIRIES: Mr M Kanzi

Mr Thobani Ngxiki
19 Colneus Street, Vredelust
Kuilsriver
Cape Town
7580

Dear Thobani Ngxiki,

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: ROLE OF PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP STYLES IN PROMOTING GRADE-12 LEARNERS' PERFORMANCE IN WESTERN CAPE PROVINCE TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS.

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **24 June 2024 till 30 September 2025**.
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Mr M Kanzi at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

**The Director: Research Services
Western Cape Education Department
Private Bag X9114
CAPE TOWN
8000**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards,
Meshack Kanzi
Directorate: Research
DATE: 24 June 2024

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Meshack Kanzi', written over a horizontal line.

APPENDIX E: EDITING CERTIFICATE

NERESHNEE GOVENDER COMMUNICATIONS (PTY) LTD

REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2016/369223/07

DR NERESHNEE GOVENDER (PhD)

neresh@ngcommunications.co.za

0847022553

WRITING PRACTITIONER • EDITOR • COPYWRITER • TRAINER

PhD-Management Sciences: Marketing (gender and media); PG DIP - Higher Education - Academic Developers (Cum laude); M-Tech Public Relations; B-Tech Public Relations (Cum laude); B-Tech Journalism (Cum laude); N-Dip Journalism

05/11/2024

THOBANI NGXIKI

Student number: 210020938

Master of Education

CPUT

Supervisor: Prof Lungi Sosibo

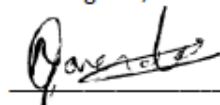
RE: EDITING CERTIFICATE

FOCUS AREA: ROLE OF PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP STYLES IN PROMOTING GRADE-12 LEARNER PERFORMANCE IN WESTERN CAPE TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOLS

Thesis submitted in fulfilment the requirements for the degree - Master of Education in the
Faculty of Education at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology

This serves to confirm that this research has been edited for clarity, language and layout.

Kind regards,



Nereshnee Govender (PhD)