

**Educators' leadership and management experiences in  
supporting learners' transition from the Foundation Phase to  
the Intermediate Phase in primary schools in the uMlazi  
District: A multiple case study**

**By**

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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**October 2022**

**Durban, South Africa**

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## **DECLARATION**

I, Sandile Caiphas Shabalala, declare that

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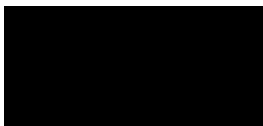
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## STATEMENT BY SUPERVISORS

This thesis has been submitted with/~~without~~ our approval.



23 October 2022

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Supervisor Dr B.N.C.K. Mkhize

Date



28 October 2022

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17 May 2018

Mr Sendile Calphas Shabalala (216077074)  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Shabalala,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0335/0180

Project Title: Exploring educators' experiences of phase transition in primary schools: A case of uMlazi District

**Approval Notification – Expedited Application**

In response to your application received 21 February 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

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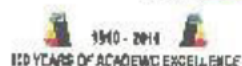
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## **DEDICATION**

First and foremost, I dedicate this thesis to God, Almighty for His continuous favour and grace, my Ancestors for their guidance, direction and protection. Without God's grace and their protection, I would have not have been able to complete this PhD thesis.

I also dedicate this thesis to my late mother, Gladys Gcinekile Shabalala and my late father, Samson Khakhi Shabalala, for their passion about education and the inspiration they instilled in me to achieve in life generally, and in the field of education in particular.

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Primary school educators play a pivotal role in building a solid foundation for learners to be able to succeed academically throughout their entire school journey. However, some educators in the primary schools, traverse through a rough patch when learners have to transition from one phase to another phase. Little is known about how these educators deal with teaching and learning during this critical stage of transition. But more importantly, little is known about how educators support these learners to adapt to and cope with phase transition. This study explored educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners' transition from Foundation to Intermediate Phase in primary schools in the uMlazi District. The participating primary schools were located in rural, semi-rural and in the township. In this research, I adopted a qualitative multiple case study within interpretivist paradigm. Twelve Fourth Grade educators from three primary schools from the uMlazi District were purposefully selected for this study.

The study is underpinned by Adaptive Leadership Theory by Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009), and Hallinger' (2011) synthesised model of leadership. Semi-structures were used to generate qualitative data. Thematic data analysis was used to analyse the data. What emerges from the data was that learners in the fourth grade are encountered numerous challenges which complicated their journey as they progress from Grade Three to Grade Four. The findings also show that educators involved did their best to counteract the negative effects of the hostile environment to support these Grade Four learners cope with new teaching and learning environment.

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### Abbreviations

KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
DBE	Department of Basic Education
SASA	South African Schools Act
EEA	Educators Employment Act
SAPA	South African Principals Association
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
SMT	School Management Team
LiEP	The Language in Education Policy
FP	Foundation Phase
IP	Intermediate Phase
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
FAL	First Additional Language
SAL	Second Additional Language
HL	Home Language



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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This study explored educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners' transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools in the uMlazi District. Phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in the South African context occurs when learners in Grade Three progress to Grade Four. This is one critical schooling transitional landmark that either disorients or empowers Grade Four learners (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011a; Pretorius, 2014). This phase transition is associated with changes that directly affect the learners, the teaching staff and the family due to transitional learning gap which is an issue that cannot be underestimated (Bell, 2011; Murasi, 2014). Learners are continuously experiencing a number of changes in the fourth grade, and these include the change of the language of learning from mother tongue to English language (DBE, 2011; Robertson, 2015), an increase in the number of subjects offered and learning hours (DBE, 2011), the increased workload and increased class size (Marais, 2016; Nthulana, 2016; Steyn, 2017). These changes have resulted in various challenges and complexities. Numerous researchers have concluded that these changes have implications for the effectiveness of educators in providing quality education, and learners' poor academic performance (Ballam, Perry & Garpelin, 2017; Pretorius 2014). The transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase poses a strain for educators in terms of the curriculum changed focus and emphasis. Educators have to frequently adapt their practices to ensure quality teaching and learning for these learners (Gordon, Peterson, Gdula & Klingbeil, 2011; Mkwanazi, 2014; Pretorius, 2014). Therefore, there is a need to understand how this transition is managed and how educators who manage it experience doing it. Very little is known about this issue in the context of South Africa.

There is an abundance of scholarship on formal school leadership and management (Beauchamp, Hulme, Clarke, Hamilton & Harvey, 2021; Bush, 2008, 2013, 2016, 2018; Bush & Glover, 2016; Bush & Ng, 2019; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2020; Montecinos, Bush & Aravena, 2018; Rivera-McCutchen, 2021; van Schaik, Volman, Admiraal & Schenke, 2020). However, too much

has now been written around informal forms of leadership, especially on teacher leadership, their leadership and management experience (Crawford, Dawkins, Martin & Lewis, 2020; Grant, 2019).

In this study, I explored educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting phase transition of learners as they deal with this change from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools. In this chapter, I provide an orientation which sets the scene for the discussion of fundamental matters undergirding the study. I then provide a background to the study, followed by a formal statement of the problem. I also present other important items including the purpose and the significance of the study, as well as the three critical research questions that directed the study. Furthermore, in this chapter I provide an elucidation of key concepts, my own positionality, the scope and location of the study. I conclude this chapter by providing an outline of the whole thesis.

## **1. 2 Background to the problem**

In South Africa, the transition of learners from Grade Three to Grade Four in primary schools is a national concern which is also a concern amongst the international community as well (Sibanda, 2014). Although the phases are labelled differently in different countries around the world, there is a general acknowledgement of their significant impact on future learning of the learners who transition from Grade Three to Grade Four (Lesnick, Goerge, Smithgall & Gwynne, 2010). Primary school phase transition is regarded as a journey of intensity and uncertainty for the learners, where elements of familiarity cease to exist, giving rise to momentary gaps in grasping content knowledge and skills (Lesnick et al., 2010). This phase transition affects learners' ability to adapt to new contexts, new interpersonal relationships, new cultures, new mates, new roles and new rules (Jindal-Snape, 2010). The transition process may involve experiences of advancement and educational momentum or moments of risk and exclusion (Sierra, 2018).

I do acknowledge that the main emphasis of this study is not on primary schools' context *per se*, but that it is limited to the Intermediate Phase in which Grade Four belongs. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that South Africa has schools that are located in different contexts such as Quintiles 1 to Quintile 3, and affluent schools that are located in Quintile 4 and Quintile 5 respectively.

There are also schools that are located in rural and township communities, as well as schools in poverty-stricken communities. Schools that are located in rural communities usually belong to Quintiles 1 and Quintile 3. What is important to note is the fact that all these contexts affect the manner in which educators discharge their functions and tasks in the schools (Bhengu, 2021). Most of the challenges that are associated with deprived school contexts in South African schools are experienced in rural and township schools (Bhengu, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2014; Myende & Chikoko, 2014; Myende & Bhengu, 2015). Similarly, the challenges that relate to the transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase are experienced in these contexts. Because of this reality, this multiple case study explored educators' experiences in managing the learners' transition from Foundation to Intermediate Phase in rural, semi-rural and township primary schools. This was done based on the assumption that the nature of the context matters. In other words, the challenges faced by the educators in rural and those faced by educators in township schools are not the same. Therefore, the location of schools might be another important element enabling or constraining practice (Bellei, Vanni, Valenzuela & Contreras 2016). In the next few paragraphs, I get into deeper details about the contexts of different schools with a view to contextualising the problem which I formally state in the section that follows the background to the study.

As I have indicated in the previous paragraphs, the context matters and the education system in South Africa is complex, differentiated and consists, broadly of two systems in one. In describing the South African education contexts, Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane (2015) state that South African education landscape has a sad mixture of first and third world institutions. These scholars further argue that at one end of the continuum there are top schools which can compare with the best in the first world countries in terms of resources and learner performance, while on the other end of the continuum, there are schools that are dysfunctional and the culture of teaching and learning is non-existence (Chikoko et al., 2015). There are also few schools that are along the continuum which, despite being located in the third world institutions, they are sustainable, resilient and perform at levels comparable to those in the first-class category of schools in terms of learner pass rate (Chikoko et al., 2015). This view is also shared by Bhengu (2021) when arguing about how different circumstances of schools have shaped their responses to COVID-19 demands in terms of providing effective teaching and learning despite the stringent health safety protocols.

Consistent with the analogy of Chikoko et al. (2015), there seems to be sufficient empirical evidence to suggest that most schools that have poor learner achievement are located in challenging contexts (Chapman, 2004; Crichton, 2014; Harris, 2002; Westraad, 2011) or in multiple deprived communities (Lumby, 2015; Maringe & Moletsane, 2015).

While that argument and debate persists, of interest to this study is the understanding of educators' leadership and management experiences in managing and/or supporting the learners in transition in the context of rural, semi-rural and township primary schools who share similar contextual realities alluded by the researchers above. In South Africa, educators are characteristically faced with challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, assessment of learners with varying learning abilities, a lack of physical and human resources, vandalism and crime. Most primary school in semi-rural, rural and townships area are not immune to these challenges (Boshoff, Potgieter, Ellis, Mentz & Malan, 2018). Successful learners' transition in schools is very important in the learners' lives (Marais, 2016; Nthulana, 2016). These contextual factors in my view have an effect on the education of the learners in the fourth grade in primary schools. It is therefore, imperative that we understand how educators support these learners traverse this critical passage from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase under different school contexts. I believe that these contexts are intricately linked to learners' future success of learners and overall development (OECD, 2018).

In South Africa learners experience a number of challenges in the fourth grade, which includes the change of language of learning from mother tongue to English Language, increased number of subjects, increased learning hours and increased class size. When the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) changes, it becomes an impediment in understanding lessons (Marais, 2016; Nthulana, 2016; Steyn, 2017). If learner do not understand the lesson, teaching and learning becomes a challenge. Besides the above, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (DBE, 2012) stipulates that learners in the fourth grade must be able to do work on their own and think on their own. It encourages critical thinking; learners must discover things by themselves (DBE, 2011, 2012; Pretorius, 2014). For effective teaching and learning to take place in schools, management is tasked to facilitate that process, and educators are managers in their own right. They have to manage whatever challenge that may crop up during the process of teaching and learning in the classroom; hence, the need to understand if educators do provide support for the



learners in the transition. We need to learn from the way in which they support the learners during the transition. However, for now, the question remains as to how the educators deal with teaching and learning under these complex conditions.

Linked to the issue of the change of LoLT in the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase highlighted above, is the increased number of subjects and learning hours that also impact on teaching and learning in the fourth grade (Department of Basic Education, 2011; Steyn, 2017). The increase in the number of subjects from four to six means that the learners suddenly, transition from being taught by one teacher to being taught by four or five specialist subject educator. This also implies that learner have to adapt to various pedagogical approaches, and this disadvantages many learners in the fourth grade who find it challenges to adapt (Ballam, Perry & Garpelin, 2017; Spaul, 2016). Conversely, learners have to adjust to an increased volume of work in the varying nature of classwork and homework. Furthermore, learners are expected to be more attuned to subject-based learning; adjusting to a more structured daily school routine; becoming progressively accustomed to new learning experiences and assessment methods, including revision, dictation, tests, examinations, spelling and sentence writing (Department of Basic Education, 2011, 2012; Pretorius, 2014). The discussions have tended to focus on the context of the learners' learning.

The purpose of this is to highlight the enormity of the challenges they face. However, that is not the focus of this study. The focus of this study is on understanding how the teachers or educators, handle these changes in the lives of the learners. The rationale for this is simply that it is the duty of the educators to help the learners through these difficult times of transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. All these changes translate to a complex education disposition which constrains educators in providing effective teaching and learners' learning (Mkwanazi, 2014; Pretorius, 2014; Sibanda, 2017). To keep up with the schooling standards, it calls for educators to create an enabling environment by adopting the values of mutual respect and care and accommodate diversity and to advance teaching practices, in supporting learners to adapt and cope well with phase transition challenges (Malebese, 2016). To support learners requires educators who are ready to deal with the phase transition issues. It needs educators who use an adaptive leadership style of leadership and management to help learners navigate phase transition different

challenges (Litz & Scott, 2017). Each school functions at a different level in terms of its leadership and management practices and context (Litz & Scott, 2017).

The challenge of phase transition of learners experienced by educators and learners are compounded by the increased learning hours in the fourth grade from four to six. The changes include the re-organisation of teaching and learning time which is less flexible in terms of structure with fewer learning opportunities, to a more controlled learning (Castro, Ezquerra & Argos, 2012; Cubillos Padilla, Borjas & Rodríguez Torres, 2017). This means for example, that learners must be more familiar with recording homework, school regulations and school mottoes. There is more formal teaching and learning and the teaching of conceptual concepts is less concrete; there is less learning through play and less interaction, and thus, abandoning games as a key methodology which seems to have lost its pedagogical value (Argos, Ezquerra, & Castro, 2011; Karila & Rantavuori, 2014; Tamayo, 2014). Learners have to become familiar with the new timetabling, lunch arrangements, personal hygiene, packing school bags, using learning packages, exercise books and textbooks. Furthermore, they have to be familiar with school assembly schedules, and extracurricular activities; learners are taught by male educators and more than one teacher (Steyn, 2017). In all this, teachers have to be fully involved in supporting the learners.

The complexity involved in the form of fourth grade transition is further exacerbated by the increased class size and learners-teacher ratio which results in classrooms being less conducive for learning. There are fewer wall charts, references and different class arrangement, for example, desks are arranged in rows, and not in group format (Chan, 2010; Lehrer, 2018). Also, teaching takes place in different classrooms which is a challenge to the learners (DBE, 2015; Taylor, Van der Berg & Mabogoane, 2013). This transition imposes particular competence needs on the learners, whose satisfaction determines the extent to which subsequent learning and attainment is constrained or expedited. Where the transition is too complex for learners, they hardly recover (Sibanda, 2017). It is the responsibility of educators to make this transition as smooth as possible for learners. Given all the realities presented above, it is important that as researchers, we establish whether teachers are aware of their role in this regard, and if they are, we need to understand how they manage the transition.

On the issue of language change in the fourth grade, it is important to note that before 1994, English and Afrikaans were used as the official languages all over South Africa. Learners who benefited were those with Afrikaans and English as their mother tongue (Tshotlo, 2013). Most of the people in South Africa speak an African Language as a home language and when they get to school the LoLT is not the language that they speak at home; it switches to English in the fourth grade (Tshotlo, 2013). The change of language of learning in the fourth grade is promulgated by the South Africa's new Language in Education Policy LiEP (Department of Education, 1997). This is the policy that is concerned with portraying democratic principles, and it offers schools the right to select which of the country's eleven official languages they want to use as their language of learning and teaching in the Foundation Phase (Robertson, 2015).

The language in Education Policy stipulates that the home language of learners, which is the medium of instruction in the Foundation Phase, become a subject in the Intermediate Phase while learners are immersed in an instructional language in which they are less competent (Lenyai, 2011; Sibanda, 2014). The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 however, makes provision for schools to select the language of teaching and learning (LoLT) (Department of Basic Education, 2010). In most cases, the selected LoLT by the majority of the schools in rural and township areas is Home Language Schooling in the Foundation Phase (Grade R-Three) before transitioning to English in Grade Four (Sibanda & Graven, 2018). The majority of learners (over 80%) are taught in an African language in the Foundation Phase, but at the fourth grade in the Intermediate Phase, learners learn through the medium of English, which enjoys less than 10% among native speaker population (Howie, Venter, Van Staden, Zimmerman, Long, Du Toit, Sherman & Archer, 2008). Prinsloo (2007) posits that the sudden transition from using an African language in the Foundation Phase (FP) to using English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in the fourth-grade sets learners up for failure. This underscores the need for learner competence in English by end of Grade Three to effectively learn in the language at the fourth-grade.

Conversely, Hoadley (2018); Prediger, Prediger, Erath and Moser Opitz (2019); Sibanda and Graven (2018); Van der Berg (2011) observe that learners from schools that adopt a "Straight-for-English" approach differ systematically on all sorts of observable and unobservable characteristics with learners from schools that transition from First Language to English in the fourth grade. This

means that educators in Grade Four need to devise strategies to manage this mismatch between the languages. Learners are affected as they struggle to reach beyond the confines of their home language and into a new language, new subjects, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling and acting. Total commitment, total involvement, a total physical, intellectual and emotional response is necessary to successfully send and receive messages in a second language (Hoadley, 2018; Prediger et al. 2019; Sibanda & Graven, 2018; Van der Berg, 2011).

Linked to the problems of the change of language as indicated above, Rosenberg (2010) avers that learners who hail from linguistically rich backgrounds and English language proficiency enjoy a head start offer of the linguistic capital compatible with the school system's literacy forms and practices in and beyond the Foundation Phase. Similarly, Sibanda and Graven (2018) note that access to meaningful teaching and learning and successful interpretation of assessments depends to a large degree on understanding the language of learning, teaching and assessment. Language education in South Africa is a complex issue. My view is that curriculum management which is the focus of this study, faces similar systemic complexities as those of language education. Language education is affected by various interacting dynamics regarding the language experiences of both learners and educators that have an influence on the performance of the learners. The language shifts in the fourth grade requires Grade Four educators to exercise their pedagogic knowledge and experiences of teaching and learning to support learners to quickly adapt to this change and acquire the language of teaching and learning. Managing the efforts of educators in the classroom is the mandate of school leaders and managers, as well as that of the educators themselves as they too are leaders and managers of curriculum at school level.

The second factor of phase transition in the fourth grade is the increased number of subjects (Department of Basic Education, 2011). In the fourth grade, the child's workload increases substantially from four subjects in the Foundation Phase (Home language, Mathematics, Life Skills and First Additional Language), changing to six subjects in the Intermediate Phase (Home language, First Additional language, Mathematics, Natural Science & Technology, Social Science and Life Skills). To address the challenge of phase transition, Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) which was introduced in 2010 came up with one unique aspect, the minimum or maximum language time allocation or provisioning (Department of Basic Education, 2011c).

This grants schools the opportunity for more flexibility regarding language time allocation to suit the needs of their learners (Steyn, 2017). Furthermore, the number of learning hours increase in the fourth grade causes an added change that Grade Four learners endure.

The third factor of phase transition is the increased learning hours. According to Tucker (2022), longer school days could result in attention deficit and fatigue, making the extra class time ineffective. When learners are too tired or mentally exhausted to concentrate, the last hour of the day becomes useless. Most learners in the fourth grade suffer from post-lunch attention deficit syndrome and are not mentally prepared to take on an additional hour of classwork (Tucker, 2022). Young students might feel fatigue or fall asleep during class time if they are too tired to concentrate or perform. This makes teaching and learning very difficult for educators.

The fourth factor of phase transition is the increased class size. According to Emmanuel (2013), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2011) and Skelton (2014), school infrastructure and the LER have a great impact on the quality of education, and are some of the most influential factors when considering increasing academic performance in Grade Four classrooms. Overcrowded classrooms are also believed by Van Wyk (2008) to be a contributing factor to poor learning conditions in the fourth grade because of the lack of space, fresh air and high noise levels that could lead to a lack of attention and even create stress within learners. Educators have a very limited time to be able to support Grade Four learners. An article by Hoadley (2015) asserts that there is no room in the curriculum for an additional subject. The educators do not have enough time for teaching the existing subjects in the curriculum. In fact, more time needs to be allocated to current subjects in order to deal with the backlog that is evident in the outcomes of multiple tests that assess learners' competency in the fourth grade (Hoadley, 2015). When reflecting on the problem of limited time to assist Grade Four learners, one must consider that the Department of Education (2008) accentuated the importance of the central role played by parent in supporting their child's education. This assumes that parents have the education to do so, unfortunately, in the present context in rural schools, that is a pie in the sky. Linked to the problem of limited time, as indicated above, educators need to reach out to the parents for their support. Conversely, the lack of a variety of teaching strategies could pose a challenge for Grade Four learners to adjust to the transition. There is overwhelming evidence

corroborating the fact that provinces are resource-constrained (Hoadley, 2015). At the end, the country is faced with high percentages of poor results in the level of academic underachievement in the fourth grade.

### **1.3 Statement of the research problem**

Educators have the responsibility to make certain that learners are armed with specific skills that are mostly appropriate for the grade they are in. This is in line with the following policy framework; namely, the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (Department of Education, 1997), in terms of Section 3(4)(m) of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996a); the Norms and Standards Regarding Language Policy published in terms of Section 6(1) of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996b); the Draft Policy for the Incremental Introduction of African Languages in South African Schools (Department of Basic Education, 2013); the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2011a); the National Protocol for Assessment Grades R–12 (Department of Basic Education, 2011b); the Annual National Assessments (ANAs) (Department of Basic Education, 2014) and the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit National Report (NEEDU, 2012).

This imperative requires that educators need to rethink how best to exercise their pedagogic experiences of teaching and learning so as to equip learners' acquisition of these skills effectively and efficiently. Large-scale studies (e.g. Department of Basic Education, 2015; Taylor, Van der Berg & Mabogoane, 2013) have found that Grade Four educators struggle to implement the curriculum in the manner specified by the guidelines. This may not be entirely due to language problems but also may be due to poor teaching methodologies (Hoadley, 2012, 2016; Jordaan, 2011). Other issues include excessive class sizes at primary level (Reeves, Heugh & Prinsloo, 2008; Spaul, 2016), slow pace of teaching (Hoadley, 2016; Taylor et al., 2013), and inadequate teacher content and pedagogical knowledge (NEEDU, 2012; Reeves et al., 2008; Taylor, Van der Berg & Mabogoane, 2013). With these challenges, dynamics and complexities of phase transition in primary schools, the question which arises is how then do Grade Four educators equip learners with specific skills that are relevant for the grade? For the last decade, the spotlight has always

been on formal leadership and management in schools. The concept of formal leadership and management refers to leaders and managers that are officially appointed at an educational institution to lead and manage it (Bush, 2010). There is an abundance of scholarship on formal school leadership (Beauchamp et al., 2021; Bush, 2018; Bush & Ng, 2019; Leithwood et al., 2020; Montecinos et al., 2018; Rivera-McCutchen, 2021). However, not much has been written around informal forms of leadership, notably leadership and management enacted by subject educators in their spaces (Grant, 2012; Monametsi, 2015; Naicker & Somdut, 2014).

Schools need teacher leaders who can contribute to the quality of education and the implementation of educational innovations (Ketelaar, Beijgaard, Boshuizen & Den Brok, 2012; King & Stevenson, 2017; Van der Heijden et al. 2018). Teacher leadership is often connected to experienced or expert educators as it is assumed that a certain level of knowledge and experience is needed to effectively improve the quality of teaching. All these factors mentioned above constitute and are embedded in the phase transition. However, the main problem is that learners have challenges of the high demands of phase transition in the fourth grade, and educators are struggling to support Grade Four learners to adapt to changes. These transition demands and challenges have a significant impact on learners' performance which ultimately affects academic results in Grade Four. Studies have not attempted to unravel leadership and management constraints that, for example, Grade Four educators face as they try to support learners adapt to the new context of teaching and learning.

The well documented decline in learners' academic performance in Grade Four, which is designated Grade Four slump (Spaull, 2016), speaks to the sensitivity of this transition. The practices of teaching that is documented in some classroom observations research and other people (Collier & Thomas, 2017; Heugh, 2017; Robertson & Graven, 2019) are reasons enough for some pessimism over whether the educators are equal to the task of helping learners navigate learners phase transition challenges in the fourth grade. This research (e.g. Department of Basic Education, 2015; Hoadley, 2016, Taylor, Van der Berg & Mabogoane, 2013) has provided in-depth evidence about the complexities of phase transition which affects learners' performance in the fourth grade. What is missing, which I considered as a gap in the literature, is the understanding from educators' experiences about how they support learner phase transition in primary schools.

## **1.4 Rationale of the study**

The rationale for undertaking this study has personal (experiential), professional (practical) and academic (theoretical) dimensions, and these are briefly discussed next.

### **1.4.1 Personal dimension**

Anecdotal evidence based on my informal and personal observations shows that there are different challenges facing Grade Four educators that impacts on the teaching and learning. Consequently, this realisation motivated me to explore this matter in the fourth grade; hence, I decided to undertake this study which explored educators' leadership and management experiences of phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. How Grade Four educators navigate the impact of phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary school on teaching is known in the context of South Africa; hence, the main focus of this study is on this important issue.

I have observed with grave concern the deterioration of quality teaching and learning in the fourth grade in my school. Grade Four educators in my school are quick to blame the changes of phase transition for the decline of academic performance of Grade Four learners. It is even more concerning when educators that I interacted with declared that Grade Four learners from schools in the townships cannot compete academically with other Grade Four learners receiving instructions in English from Grade One. They argue that certain sections of the population in South Africa enjoy an unfair advantage because the changes in the fourth grade have been minimised by the fact that they receive instructions in English from Grade One until matric, while previously disadvantaged section of the population goes through a traumatic experience of the changes. The situation is aggravated by the change of language of instruction which is highly disruptive and negatively affects teaching and learning of the less privileged learners in the townships and in the rural areas. This study is not contesting the use of mother tongue in the Foundation Phase as a language of teaching and learning in primary schools. However, educators with whom I work, strongly believe that the two groups of learners do not have the same academic preparation in their



academic journey, but are expected to embrace change in the fourth grade and also compete at the same cognitive level at the later stage, which seems unfair. Understanding how educators in this phase could assist in providing new insights on this topic is crucial.

#### **1.4.2 Professional dimension**

My passion to explore educators' leadership and management experiences of learners' phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in this study arose from my personal encounter as a deputy principal in the school where I work. My core duties apart from teaching, includes curriculum management, in particular, I co-ordinate curriculum coverage in the whole school. I observe and monitor learners' performance and progress which I realise through analysing and acting on learners' achievement using formative and summative assessment, and through direct knowledge of teaching practices, learning standards and classroom dynamics (Bush, 2013). Constant decline in the quality of results in the fourth grade was my concerns which puzzled and disturbed me immensely. There was high failure rate in learner performance and that triggered my curiosity. I therefore, started seeking to understand the reasons for this decline of quality of results and poor learner performance by monitoring and analysing test results. I then correlated the results of my findings with Grade Four educators that I interacted with in my school who also expressed similar concerns about poor results in the Fourth Grade. However, they were quick to point fingers and attribute the problem to phase transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase.

Most Grade Four educators in my school highlighted that learners in Grade Four were confronted with many changes and challenges which impacted negatively on learners' performance, work rate as well as the results. Most educators that I have interacted with including educators from my neighboring schools also stated that teaching the fourth grade was extremely difficult and challenging due to the changes in the fourth grade. They also expressed a view that learners were not coping with the amount of work they were expected to do in the fourth grade. These educators argued that these changes in the fourth grade had impacted negatively on teaching and learning. The general feeling from most educators I interacted with was that the changes in the fourth grade compromised efficient provision of quality teaching and learning. There seemed to be neither

proper planning nor relevant resources, as well as capacity building measures to assist them to navigate complex transition. Educators further highlighted the challenges that learners were facing which makes it difficult for the educators to teach effectively; hence, the high rate of failures in the fourth grade.

It is concerning when educators who are tasked with the mandate of providing efficient quality teaching and learning point out that they have challenges in executing their duties and responsibilities. This suggests that there is inconsistency between the espoused theory and practice where scholars indicate that instructional leadership is significant for learner achievement and yet, a substantial number of educators do not regard this responsibility as theirs. After listening to these concerns, I interrogated the importance of educators' leadership and management experiences in providing effective meaningful learning in my site. This line of thought concurs with that of Kilinc (2014) who states that good academic learner performance is attributed to effective leadership. The literature also states that leadership is about constructing and nourishing conditions for better quality and improved learning (Hawkins & James, 2017). For example, an experienced science teacher in a secondary school in England could tell a more junior science teacher colleague that it does not matter if you do not cover the whole examination syllabus who then decides to not teach the full syllabus. That would be very effective leadership by the experienced teacher on the basis of the influence achieved but not on the basis of its objective. We expect teachers in the teaching system to influence others responsibly in order to construct conditions for better and improved learning. The process includes influencing others which may be undertaken by any member of the different systems that comprise a whole educational institution (Fertig & James, 2016). These conditions denote both the environmental and the relational facets of the work. In other words, physical environment is important and forms part of preparing the environment for effective teaching and learning. Likewise, the issue of relationships is also vital because people work well when they have feelings of job gratification and are also inspired and motivated to go an extra mile.

#### **1.4.3 Academic or theoretical dimension**

Internationally, research on teacher leadership has gained momentum over the last decade (Smylie & Eckert, 2018). I have read articles that seek to deal with constraints, enablers, and teachers'

practices in different countries around the world (Naicker et al., 2016; Smylie & Eckert, 2018; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). For the past two decades, studies on teacher leadership have gained momentum in South Africa (Grant, 2019; Grant et al., 2018; Makoelle, 2021; Makoelle & Makhalemele, 2020; Naicker et al., 2016). It has gained momentum to the point that teacher leadership models have begun to develop. For example, Grant (2008) developed a teacher leadership model that encompasses four zones where teachers should be active participants in order to be called effective teacher leaders. Other researchers have interrogated the enablers and constraints to teacher leadership practices in South African schools (Blose & Khuzwayo, 2020; Naicker et al., 2016). Expectations for the role of educators as leaders have undertaken significant changes in recent years resulting in gaps in academic literature. Acknowledgement of these limitations initially centred on the need to increase the volume of research conducted outside of the field's traditional 'knowledge centres. My study seeks to fill a gap in the literature that looks at educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners' transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools.

### **1.5 The significance of the study**

It is imperative that a study carves a niche where it can clearly demonstrate its contribution in terms of knowledge. In this section, I make a case for the necessity to conduct a study such as this one, which endeavours to comprehend how Grade Four educators as leaders and managers apply their creativity and innovativeness in supporting Grade Four learners adjust to the new conditions of teaching and learning in their new grade and phase. Understanding Grade Four educators' experiences in the context of phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary school in rural, semi-rural and township settings is deemed significant. Leadership and management are important to any organisation, although they are separate and perform different functions; they are both crucial for the advancement of the system and the achievement of organisational goals (Bush, 2010; Bush, 2018; Bush & Ng, 2019). The dynamics of the education system is no different from any organisation that requires leader and managers to drive the institution forward (Hallinger, Al-Mahdy, & Emam, 2018). And so, it is very important for researchers to pay specific attention to this phenomenon and to articulate precisely how it is played out in diverse settings.

This study was deemed essential because of various reasons comprising the view that the prevailing literature is more prescriptive in terms of educators' role of leadership and management and its effect on positive change in the classroom. I strongly believe that when scholarship prescribes what a phenomenon should look like, there is a probability that such an approach misses out in terms of providing descriptions about how the phenomenon looks (Bush, 2013; Grobler & Conley, 2013; Naicker, Chikoko & Mthiyane, 2013; Rietzug, West & Angel, 2008; Tan, 2012). Hence, this study adopted an open-minded approach by exploring how it feels to be an educator to learners undergoing transition and challenging grade in primary schools. This narrative is articulated against the backdrop of all Grade Four educators being directed by the same policy framework and expectations as other educators operating under the less challenging environments. Therefore, descriptions of what educators do in this challenging phase as well as the understanding of what informs their choices may provide valuable, contextual understandings about the enactment of leadership and management of teaching and learning. I believe that such understandings may contribute to both the national and the international scholarship with reference to leadership management in action.

Educators' leadership and management demands are constantly changing and this entails continuous research to improve existing understandings of the phenomenon. The demand is growing for educators to adjust their leadership and management tactics to address their learners needs more especial when learner go through phase transition be it primary school or high school. Improving the quality of teaching and learning in their schools is paramount. Tan (2012) contends that the existing literature is more prescriptive, rendering it insufficient for understanding the changing educational policy and contextual imperatives. These new imperatives require school leaders to rethink how best to apply their leadership so as to equip educators with the skills to facilitate learner acquisition of necessary skills to adapt through phase transition efficiently and effectively (Tan, 2012). Further, it was hoped that this study would also be able to theorise educators' leadership and management experiences and practices during this complex transition in primary school. Having stated the above-mentioned scenarios, it was trusted that this study would contribute to an improved and better understanding of how educators embrace and overcome the challenges of learners' phase transition in primary school and succeed. Understanding the

strategies that work in these South African diverse primary schools are significant in terms of improving the quality of basic education.

Leadership and management in terms of school setup focuses on ways and means of improving teaching and learning. As it has been alluded to earlier, the complexities and intricacies surrounding leadership and management practices in deprived school contexts is not fully understood (Hoadley, Christie, Jacklin & Ward, 2007; Naicker, Chikoko & Mthiyane, 2013). Therefore, it was hoped that the study would contribute profoundly to the production of contemporary knowledge about the complex interplay between the context of phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary school and educators' leadership and management practices. It was also hoped that it might fill the gaps in the existing knowledge with regards to leadership and management theory and practice in unique settings of multiple deprivations. It was further hoped that it could help to address a need for more differentiated interpretations of educators working in diverse contexts. This can assist educators who find themselves in similar situations as in the current study.

The study focus was on generating new knowledge on the use of adaptive leadership practices in the fourth grade in primary schools. The study proposes a new model of understanding primary school leadership practices that can enhance teaching and learning during transition from Grade Three to Grade Four. The study can also be used to inform other primary schools in the townships and rural areas on possible teaching and learning strategies that could be used to by Grade Four educators to support learners to cope with change and improve learner performance in the fourth grade. The findings of this study are likely to be applicable beyond primary schools in the townships or in rural areas. It can also be applicable in primary school in affluent areas in South Africa and beyond. Further, this study could be used in identifying issues that can direct the Basic Education Department developing policies that can address and accommodate the fourth grade as there is no policy at the moment in primary school about strategies that the educators can use to assist Grade Four learners to cope with change.

The study further raises questions about schools and their policies, as well as the discrepancies between the assumed knowledge that learners bring from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate

Phase as these are very significant. Most importantly, it is envisaged that the findings of this study might suggest the need for further research on phase transition from Foundation to Intermediate Phase in primary schools. I am aware of the fact that the findings of this study are not generalisable to other schools in South Africa; however, I believe that they may be contextualised by providing information on knowledge and experiences of Grade Four educators in dealing with teaching and learning in the fourth grade.

The contribution of the study has implications for the basic education system, starting with the Ministry and spiralling downwards from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to the Principals, School Management Teams (SMT), Governing Bodies, and academic staff. Together, these stakeholders have an obligation to ensure that all Grade Four educators are properly assisted in their mandate to provide efficient quality teaching to learners in primary schools to succeed in their learning. This study may also serve as a point of reference for further research of phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools. Therefore, the knowledge generated in this study is intended to assist not only the educators concerned, but also academia, policy-makers, decision-makers and strategic planners in the Department of Basic Education. Better understanding of these experiences, conceptualised them and might assist them to come up with strategies to equip and assist Grade Four educators to support learners to cope with change in the fourth grade. While I acknowledge the fact that the sample is too small, and thus cannot produce generalisable findings, insights from the results can be quite significant, nonetheless.

## **1.6 Purpose of the study**

This study explored Grade Four educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners' phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools. It sought to understand how Grade Four educators approached, dealt with and handled learners from the Foundation Phase who were expected to adapt to the new teaching and learning environment. I wanted to understand these experiences from educators' perspectives, the challenges if there are any, that impacted on teaching and learning, and the strategies they used to induct and support learners to adapt and cope with change in this critical phase. Furthermore, I sought to explore the

strategies used by Grade Four educators to mitigate challenges they experience in supporting learners to adapt to phase transition.

### **1.7 The research questions**

The study sought to generate answers to the following research questions:

- What are the perspectives of Grade Four educators in the uMlazi District about the issues of learners' phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase?
- How do the Grade Four educators support phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools in the uMlazi District?
- What are leadership and management challenges and/or enablers experienced by the Grade Four educators in supporting phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools in the uMlazi District?

### **1.8 Operational definition of terms**

I used two concepts that underpinned this study, namely, leadership and management of phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools. In this section, I briefly describe these concepts used in this study, particularly in relation to how they are used in this study. It is therefore essential that the following key concepts, which are frequently utilised throughout the thesis are clarified.

#### **1.8.1 Leadership**

There are a number of definitions of leadership which, in the context of education, all centre on teaching and learning, with some preferring learning more than teaching. Leadership can best be defined by its role and functions within the framework of the notion of what a leader should be in the organisation and its environment. Leadership can be generalised in simple words such as “act”, “role” or even “idea”. An act of leadership starts with the initiative to take on the role (Adamas, Kutty & Zibidi, 2017). In a school setting, Bush (2016) suggests that the improvement in learning outcomes is brought about by providing opportunities for teacher development. Hence, leaders who focus on the quality of teaching and learning by clearly communicating goals and managing

curriculum have significant impact, not only on the performance of the learners, but also on the overall learning environment (Hallinger, 2009; Robinson, 2007). Another element of leadership is its impact on organisational outcomes (Jones, Applebee, Harvey & Lefoe, 2010). In other words, adherents of this conceptualisation argue that leadership is useless if it does not have any positive effect on learner outcomes.

Teachers can enact leadership at different levels or areas and to different degrees. Following the definitions of King and Stevenson (2017) and Frost (2008), irrespective of their formal roles, educators in this study are perceived as (informal) leaders both inside and outside their classrooms. Whereas Poekert, Alexandrou, and Shannon (2016) define three areas of teacher leadership (individual, teams, organisation), others have distinguished four areas: 1) the classroom; 2) the subject team focusing on curricular and instructional issues; 3) the interdisciplinary team focusing on management or general issues throughout the year; and 4) the organisation (Muijs, Chapman & Armstrong 2013; Szeto & Cheng 2018). These definitions put emphasis on learning which a leader believes, should be the focus of leadership responsibilities.

In the case of this study, the emphasis of the term leadership is on ensuring that learners are learning, and also that the educators are learners as well. In this study, I use leadership to mean educators or leaders working with colleagues to achieve a vision that enables the advancement of teacher leadership, which enhances learners' achievement. I also use leadership to mean educators that use their skills, energy and creativity to improve teaching and learning in the fourth grade by influencing, directing and motivating their colleagues to work toward supporting learners to adapt well in the fourth grade. In my study, leadership is an ideal term and is conceptualised as incorporating all the actions and activities that the educators engage in so that there is effective teaching and learning in the classroom. I also use leadership in my study to mean educators working with colleagues to achieve a vision that enhances learners' performance. Further, I use leadership to mean educators that use their skills, energy and creativity to enhance educators' leadership within their schools by influencing, directing and motivating their colleagues to participate in leadership tasks that champion teaching and learning. Although I acknowledge that leadership can be done by other leaders, the focus of this study is on Grade Four educators. It is the educators that provide directions, supervision, care and resources in their endeavours to



ascertain that efficient provisioning of quality teaching and learning takes place regardless of challenges of phase transition (Bush, 2015).

### **1.8.2 Management**

The definition of management overlaps with the notion of leadership (Shanaz, 2021). Management is about creating effective and efficient systems to achieve organisational goals and visions (Bush, 2015; Bush & Glover, 2016; Daft & Marcic, 2016). Scholarship on management identifies five key components, namely, leading, organising, planning, controlling and directing (Prasad, 2020). Furthermore, management is about managers implementing and managing school policy (Bush, 2016). Management is an organisational concept that is mainly about the structures and processes that enable the schools to achieve their goals (Naicker, Grant & Pillay, 2016). Jwan and Ongondo (2011) assert that management is concerned with the preservation of performance through planning, organising, co coordinating and controlling. Bolam (2004) argues that management of school should be simplistically confined within the sociological boundaries of education through management of teaching and learning, individual characteristics and contextual pressures and training and development for educational leadership. This simplification reverts to the interlocking relationship between management and leadership in education.

Management in the present research refers to the school management team, which includes the educators. In other words, management is inclusive of everybody who is involved in the process of teaching and learning, and it is not limited to the principal, the deputy principal and the department heads. However, there are also other instances where I make a distinction between educators on one hand as informal leaders and managers, and school management teams. When I do that I make it clear that I am talking about staff that occupies formal positions of management in the schools. We all know that teachers, including Grade Four educators do not belong to that category of leaders and managers, and that their main responsibility is to teach.

### **1.8.3 Rural area**

In the South African context, rural area refers to a geographic area that is located outside towns and cities, and is also governed by traditional leaders or Amakhosi in terms of the Traditional

Leadership Framework Act of 2003, as well as KwaZulu-Natal Traditional Leadership and Governance Act of 2005. The second part of this definition sets the South African definition apart from any other definition of a rural area that can be found in the world. I can argue that this definition is uniquely South African. A rural area is generally defined in terms of low population density and remote geographic location, that is, isolation because of distance from modern infrastructure, facilities, services and technological connectivity. Ultimately, in developing countries as well as developed countries, the rural is defined as the inverse or the residual of the urban (Lerner & Eakin, 2010). The lack of transport to the nearest towns implies high costs and infrequent contact with such destinations. Often these small settlements also subsist under harsh climatic conditions (Nthulana, 2016). Rural areas in the South African context are areas primarily inhabited by the elderly and minors (Balfour, 2010; Statistics South Africa, 2011). This is due to the fact that young people migrate to towns and cities to seek job opportunities.

#### **1.8.4 Semi- rural area**

Semi-rural living is really in the name. It is a mix of living on the outskirts or within small countryside towns and villages, but also being a stone's throw from a larger city (Potts, 2017). These areas have been made more popular by the rise of home working; semi-rural living is ideal for those that love being in green spaces, but cannot give up the convenience of having everything on their doorstep (Potts, 2017). In this study, a semi-rural area and semi-rural community refers to the area that is largely rural but is also closer to the next town or city. Certainly, it is not a township in terms of the definition as indicated in the next section below.

#### **1.8.5 Township area**

Townships are defined as areas that were designated under apartheid legislation for exclusive occupation by people classified as Blacks, Coloureds and Indians in South Africa (Huchzermeyer, 2011). Townships have a unique and distinct history, which had a direct impact on the socio-economic status of these areas and how people perceive and operate within them (Donaldson, 2014). In South Africa, the term township also refers to the under developed, racially segregated urban areas that, from the late 19th centuries until the end of apartheid, were reserved for non-whites,

namely Indians, Africans and Coloureds. Townships were usually built on the periphery of towns and cities (Huchzermeyer, 2011).

### **1.8.6 Experience**

Grade Four educators' experiences are not defined like the common use of the term as referring to participation in events, activities in the process, or having certain feelings. Instead experience is defined as a category of thinking that includes people's intellectual, affective, practical characteristics, their material and social environment and their transactional relations (mutual effects on each other), (Vygotskij, 1935/2001). Thus, experience is not something concealed within individuals, but extends in space and time across individuals and setting in the course of temporally unfolding societal relations (Vygotskij, 1935/2001). Grade Four educators have actively participated in events or activities, leading to the accumulation of knowledge or skill. They have lived through an event or events; personal involvement in or observation of events as they occur. They are being involved in activities that include training, observation of practice and personal participation. Thus, experience is a category for understanding learning and development, that is, as the minimum analytic unit that retains all the features of the whole (Dewey, 1938/2008; Vygotskij, 1935/2001). In this inquiry, I analysed Grade Four educators' leadership and management practices in supporting learners phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools through their experiences

### **1.8.7 Phase transition**

Phase transition is defined as the changes that take place as learners from Grade Three move to Grade Four in primary schools (Department of Basic Education, 2011; Harper, 2015). These changes include the change of language of instruction from isiZulu language to English language, increase number of subjects, increase learning hours and increase learner work load Nthulana, 2016; Pretorius, 2014; Steyn, 2017) In this study, I explore educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners navigate this transition in primary schools in the uMlazi District.

### **1.8.8 Foundation Phase**

In the South African education system, basic education is organised into four phases, namely, the Foundation Phase (Grade R to Grade Three), Intermediate Phase (Grade Four to Grade Six), Senior Phase (Grade Seven to Grade Nine) and Further Education and Training Phase (Grade Ten to Grade Twelve) (Department of Basic Education, 2011; Steyn, 2017). The Foundation Phase is the first phase of the General Education and Training Band (Grades R to Grade Three). It focuses on primary skills, knowledge and values and, in so doing, lays the foundation for further learning (Department of Basic Education, 2011). There are three Learning Programmes in the Foundation Phase, namely, Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills. The Foundation Phase is the first phase of formal schooling in South Africa. It involves teaching from the reception year, which is called Grade R (5-6 years of age) to Grade Three ( $\pm$  9 years of age). The Foundation Phase teacher plays a vital role in laying the foundation for future learning (Steyn, 2017). Furthermore, the teacher is responsible for the holistic development of every child in the class, the development and enhancement of critical thinking, reading, arithmetic, social-emotional and life skills (Department of Basic Education, 2011; Steyn, 2017). Foundation Phase educators should have ample knowledge on child development, developmental skills, physical, sensory, communication and learning difficulties in the young child. The teacher should be able to plan developmentally and culturally appropriate activities that address diversity in the classroom by adopting the values of mutual respect, care and give ample opportunities where children can practice their skills (Malebese, 2016).

### **1.8.9 Intermediate Phase**

The focus of this study is Intermediate Phase which is the critical phase where learner transition takes place which is deemed to have implication to learners' academic work. This phase is defined as Grade Four up to Grade Six in primary school where the teacher's role remains to introduce and practice new concepts at school (Department of Basic Education, 2011). In the Intermediate Phase, children are introduced to new concepts like time management, study/revision timetables and more advanced assessments. The use of goal setting and time management (homework books, daily activities and calendars) are essential (Malebese, 2016). This phase is the focus of this study.

## **1.9 The researcher's view and positionality**

Understanding the researcher's positionality in qualitative research is significant as it underscores trustworthiness, self-disclosure and ethical principles that guide the study (Flores, 2018; Moore, 2015). According to Flores (2018), Milligan (2016) and Moore (2015), avoiding the impact of insider-ness and outsider-ness in research becomes impossible if one conducts qualitative research using interviews as data generation method. In the context of my study, I took note of this caution when I approached my research design and took cognisance of the advice that the conflicting status of insider-ness and outsider-ness was likely to be experienced when conducting research (Crean, 2018). While a discussion such as this one belongs in the methodology chapter, it is also important that I give an overview of this important issue here because, it clarifies my personal positioning as a researcher and why I chose a qualitative research design.

I was conscious of my conflicting roles in terms of my identity as an educator in one of the institutions and that my position might have an influence on the insider-ness and outside-ness at the same time. Kersen (2016) maintains that the position as an insider and outsider concurrently could be a benefit as it could facilitate insights that would not have been possible outside this double role. In a school environment, management position represents authority, power and privilege which may be attached to class and education level and race (Flores, 2018), and this is likely to have an adverse impact on the participants if they feel intimidated. It is thus, significant to clarify my position as the researcher and how I locate myself to circumvent any threats that the participants could have experienced.

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## **1.10 The location of the study**

The research took place in the previously disadvantaged primary schools in the townships, rural and semi-rural areas in the uMlazi District. The context aspect of the location is addressed in Chapter Five where I provide profiles of the three schools that participated in this study.

### **1.11 Scope and limitation of the study**

According to Rule and John (2011), good quality and responsible research comprises a declaration regarding both the delimitation and the limitations of the study. The first part of this section speaks to the scope, boundary or the delimitation of the study. Horberg (1999) posits that demarcating the problem means establishing the boundaries of the problem area within which the research progresses. Demarcating the problem assisted me in making the study manageable by focusing mainly on teachers who teach the fourth grade, which is the first grade in the Intermediate Phase. Teaching and learning is a joint effort of many stakeholders such as parents, the community, the department officials and the School Management Team (SMT) which includes the principal. However, the boundary for this study is limited to the educators. This study only focused on the leadership and management experiences of Grade Four educator in primary schools. In addition, the study was conducted in three primary schools in the uMlazi District, KwaZulu-Natal. This constitutes the delimitation of the study. My interest was on leadership and management experiences of Grade Four educators of supporting learners in transitioning from Foundation to Intermediate Phase, in the context of challenges and complexities embedded in that process.

The second part of this section focuses on the design limitation of the study. This is a qualitative research, and as such, it does not seek any statistical generalisations of the findings. Researchers converge on the notion that small samples can lead to misleading results if one seeks to generalise the findings to a broader population (Bailey, 2007). From the perspectives of quantitative researchers, research whose findings are not a representation of the views of the population is not valid and reliable. I must emphasise the fact that this study as case study did not seek any generalisation or a representation of the whole population. That is why even the sampling technique adopted did not belong to the family of probability sampling, but, belonged to the family of non-probability sampling. Specifically, it was both purposive and convenient (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). From the perspectives of quantitative research, this creates limitation as these selected sites were not a perfect representative of all primary schools experiencing phase transition challenges. However, from the perspectives of qualitative research where this study belongs, this is perfectly normal, and actually meets the aims of the study. There are many techniques that are

used to minimise the threats of biases, and these include reflexivity (Cohen et al., 2018). I present a detailed discussion on these issues in Chapter Four.

### **1.12 The structure of the study**

The thesis is organised into seven chapters, with each chapter tackling one aspect of the thesis, and this is summarised below.

#### **Chapter One**

This chapter sets the scene for this study by presenting the background to the study. Through this chapter, I highlighted key components of the study such as the statement of the problem, the research questions, the purpose, the rationale and the significance of the study. Then, I define operational terms, my view and positionality as a researcher, the location, the scope and the limitations of the study.

#### **Chapter Two**

In this chapter, I begin by defining the key concepts related to the study and also highlight the fundamental debates relevant for the topic on phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate in primary schools. To do this, I present a comprehensive review of the issues of phase transition of learners which includes the themes directly linked to the change of LoLT, the experiences of the increased number of subjects, experiences of the increased learning hours, experiences of the increased in learner numbers class, as well as workload. Further, I discuss educators' experiences in supporting learners to cope with the change.

#### **Chapter Three**

The focus in this chapter is on the theories that are used as a lens for understanding this inquiry. I have employed Adaptive Leadership Theory (Heifetz, Grashow & Linky, 2009) and Hallinger' (2011) synthesised model of leadership for learning and as a lens underpinning this study. As part

of that discussion, I give an overview about the genesis of each theory. Then, I discuss and describe each theory in detail, followed by the justification for the choice of the theories.

## **Chapter Four**

In Chapter Four, I provide a methodological orientation and trajectory for the study. I begin by presenting the paradigmatic positioning for the inquiry. Then, I discuss the qualitative research design adopted in the study. After that, I discuss the methodology that I employed in generating data as evidence that would be used to answer the research questions of my study. I further examine the research paradigm, research design, the research methodology used and I provided the motivation for the choices I made. After that, I describe the three research primary schools and outlined both the data generation, as well as data analysis strategies. These were justified in terms of the context of the study. Finally, I presented the procedures for safeguarding trustworthiness and credibility of the findings as well as ethical issues.

## **Chapter Five**

In Chapter Five, I present and discuss the findings from Grade Four educators in the selected primary schools. In discussing the findings of this study, I use the key questions that informed the study to guide the discussion. In addition, I discuss the key issues that emerged from the semi-structured interviews.

## **Chapter Six**

In this chapter, I present what I call the across site analysis which maps out the patterns in the data. The objective of doing the across site analysis is to identify key themes that emerged from the analysis of the findings from the three sets of the participants in my study. In my efforts to generate patterns in the data, I firstly attempted to elicit some similarities and differences among the schools, the participants and the communities in which the schools are located. Then, I present the perspective of educators about the issues of phase transition of learners. This is followed by a discussion about how Grade Four educators support phase transition of the learners. I also present



leadership and management challenges and/or enablers experienced by Grade Four educators in supporting phase transition.

## **Chapter Seven**

Chapter Seven is the thesis of the study. I begin by presenting a synopsis of each chapter in the study. In this chapter, I present the conclusions reached after the findings from the various participants were analysed. I begin this chapter by presenting a synthesis of the entire study and then move on to discuss the conclusions reached. Again here, I utilise the research questions to guide the structure of the presentation. Then, I present some reflections on the chapters. After that, I outline the contribution that this study makes to educational leadership scholarship. Then I present a summary of the proposed model in the context of phase transition. Lastly, I present the implications for further studies and then I conclude the chapter.

### **1.13 Conclusions**

In this chapter, I introduced the study, thus, setting the scene for this study. I also introduced the chapter by presenting the background to the study and the research problem, which demonstrated the need for this study. After that, I presented a concise discussion of key and major components of the thesis. Thereafter, I presented the statement of the problem followed by the purpose, as well as the rationale that influenced me to do this study. After that, I presented the research questions that undergirding the study. Then, I briefly discussed the key concepts in order to contextualise the study. After that, I provided a brief background and the structure of the study. -In concluding this chapter, I highlight that there is a dearth of literature that seeks to explore educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting phase transition of learners in the fourth grade. In the following chapter which is the literature review, I discuss the issues of phase transition. It unravels the literature on teacher leadership and management of phase transition in primary schools.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEWING LITERATURE ON CURRICULUM LEADERSHIP AND CONTEXTUAL CURRICULUM DYNAMICS**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In Chapter One, I introduced the study and provided a background to the problem. I then outlined the rationale of the study from the three justification view points, the personal, the professional and theoretical. Then, followed the presentation of the research questions which is made up of the main question and four subsidiary questions. Thereafter, I provided a clarification of key concepts used in this study. In this chapter, I present a review of literature for the purpose of creating a critical reflective review of associated studies so that I can identify gaps in the existing knowledge and also identify areas for further research. As part of literature review, I reviewed journals, newspaper articles, theses, dissertation and books relating to teaching in the primary schools, and the challenges relating to the migration of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. The first part of the review of literature focuses on the conceptualisation of leadership, followed by management and others that are at the core of this study.

#### **2.2 Conceptualising leadership and management**

This section is divided into two parts. I begin by presenting the meanings and understandings of leadership and management respectively, and thereafter, I examine teacher leadership and management as position or practice. I show the contested notions of leadership and management to illustrate the multiple meanings, understandings and applications of the term across the world. While most scholars seem to agree on what leadership and management is, some add new perspectives to the meaning of leadership and management. Below is the discussion of the concept leadership which is followed by the discussion of the concept management.

### **2.2.1 The concept leadership**

Leadership has been widely researched and is often seen as a contested concept because of the different views that researchers have taken in attempting to give leadership a definition (Aggestam & Johansson, 2017; Bush, 2015; Bush, 2020; Bush & Glover, 2016; Fullan, 2020; Govender, 2016; Shanaz, 2021; Sürücü & Yeşilada, 2017, Webber, 2021). The term ‘leadership’ is used to describe the practice of leading (Raelin, 2016). Leadership is about vision and about leaders working with people to shape motivations, actions and goals to move the organisations in the right direction (Andriani, Kesumawati & Kristiawan, 2018). As part of working with people to move the organisations forward, leaders need to influence and direct people to achieve the vision set out, particularly when change is being implemented (Bush, 2020; Bush & Glover, 2016; Fullan, 2020; Gyanchandani, 2017). Leaders should possess energy, skill and creativity to push their leadership agenda forward and make positive contribution to the organisation (Mamabolo, 2020).

All the scholars cited in the previous paragraph emphasise the notion of vision creation and directing the organisation towards realising the vision that has been created. In this part of the discussion, scholars emphasise the notion of influence that leaders exert on those they lead within the organisational setup. Implied in this discussion is that leadership is a process of influencing others (Christie, 2016) which may be assumed by any member of the different sections that constitute the whole educational organisation (Hawkins & James, 2017). The capacity to influence others is not restricted to those who have ‘leadership’ in their job title, but any member of staff, may influence others (Harris, 2013). Influencing and leading as practices in educational settings by definition change those being led or influenced (Fertig & James, 2016). However, the act of influencing and leadership is interactional (Hawkins & James, 2017), thus, leading or influencing others also changes the leader or influencer in some way. This is a facet of leadership that is under-explored. Influence can be achieved by being present; and/or with an action of some kind and with an array of instruments (Hawkins & James, 2016). Smylie and Eckert (2018) postulate that school leadership and management teams can appoint teacher leaders to perform tasks that go beyond their typical role as teachers.

### **2.2.2 The concept management**

The definition of the term management overlaps with the notion of leadership (Shanaz, 2021). Management is about creating effective and efficient systems to achieve organisational goals and visions (Bush, 2015; Bush & Glover, 2016; Daft & Marcic, 2016). It is mostly used in relation to an organisational hierarchy, with those occupying higher managing positions in the hierarchy having more power, accountability and responsibility than those lower down the management hierarchy. This interpretation of management has its roots in Weberian bureaucracy (Bendix, 1977), and Lumby (2017) has recently drawn attention to these origins in her journal article. Those in lowly positions in the management hierarchy are monitored and controlled by those with higher standing, in the interests of organisational competence. When viewed from that angle, it is easy to see why educational management may be viewed negatively (Connolly et al., 2017). It has connotations of control and the dominance of those deemed to be of lower standing in the hierarchy with a focus on efficiency at the expense of institutional aims and purposes (Bush & Glover, 2016). Perhaps, the notion of control should not come as a surprise given that control is one of the functions of management (Clarke, 2007; Gobson, Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1997; Megginson, Mosley & Pietri, 1992). Thus, when staff systems in schools are viewed this way, educators would be controlled and dominated by those at higher levels, such as principals who are deemed to have high status and privilege. Irrespective of the validity of such a perspective, my interest in this study is not in understanding management on the basis of how those in management hierarchy behave in relation to their colleagues but in understanding the essence of the concept management.

Educational management in practice entails delegation, which involves being assigned, accepting and carrying the responsibility for the proper functioning of a system in which others participate in an educational institution, and implies an organisational hierarchy. ‘Carrying the responsibility’ is a metaphorical description of a state of mind and does not necessarily entail actions, though it implies them and frequently prompts them (Lumby, 2017). Such actions are important in the organisational life of educational institutions. Management is about creating effective and efficient systems to achieve organisational goals and visions (Bush, 2015; Bush & Glover, 2016; Daft & Marcic, 2016). Scholarship on management identifies five key components, namely, leading, organising, planning, controlling and directing (Prasad, 2020). Furthermore, management is about

managers implementing and managing school policy (Bush, 2016). In this study, I use the term management to mean educators that use the five management components as they attempt to advance their leadership as teachers within their schools to achieve goals and visions that they set or that are set for them by their leadership team.

Various activities may be associated with carrying the responsibility for the functioning of a system in which others participate, as the person doing so engages in ensuring the system is functioning as it should. These actions are viewed as the practice of management. Thus, standard texts, such as Mullins with Christie (2016), view management as co-ordinating, directing and guiding others to achieve organisational goals. Here a confusion with leadership begins to arise. These so-called ‘management’ activities inevitably influence others, and thus, can be viewed as leadership actions according to widely accepted definitions of leadership (Bush, 2008; Cuban, 1988; Yukl, 2002). In conclusion, educational management entails carrying the responsibility for the proper functioning of a system in an educational institution in which others participate.

Carrying a responsibility of this kind is a state of mind and does not necessitate actions, though it typically and frequently does. In contrast, educational leadership is the act of influencing others in educational settings to achieve goals and necessitates actions of some kind. When those carrying a delegated responsibility act in relation to that responsibility, they influence and are therefore leading. In the following section I present multiple definitions of phase transition

### **2.2.3 The concept phase transition**

In an attempt to conceptualise phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools, I present various definitions by a number of researchers. These definitions are centred around crossover from one stage to another. For instance, Amest and Rojas (2010) define phase transition as concept that suggests a rite of passage, a crossover to another stage. The process requires an ongoing adjustment in the behaviour and is accompanied by discontinuation of old routines and bringing about new beginnings and change (Amest & Rojas, 2010). Similarly, Harper (2015) defines transition as the procedure of change, physical transfer, a discontinuation of old routines and involves the events and practices that happen when one moves from one situation to

another. For Braund and Hames (2005) and Makunye (2009), transition is a cornerstone for effective change. These definitions converge in terms of denoting transition as the process of change that is experienced when one moves from one setting to another, from one stage to another.

In education, the term transition refers to major transitional point in the education system when learners move from one grade to another (Department of Basic Education, 2011). More importantly, phase transition denotes the conversions that learners go through as they change phases from elementary school to middle school, from middle school to high school and from high school to college (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). While learners experience transition during their educational journey three major points are a particular focus on educators and reformers because transitioning learners often experience significant academic, social, emotional, physical or developmental that may adversely affect their educational performance. During the transition, for example, learners may move from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar school environment, where they encounter new educators, peers, academic expectations, social issues and school configurations that increase the likelihood that they will feel overwhelmed, anxious, frustrated or insecure (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). Fabian and Dunlop (2007) assert that the way in which transitions are experienced not only makes a difference to children in the early months of a new situation, but also that this may also have much longer-term impact because the extent to which they feel successful in the first transition is likely to influence subsequent experiences.

Wehmeyer and Webb (2012) explain that some transitions are normative and predictable (vertical) whereas others are individual-specific, occurring at some specific and predictable point in time (horizontal). Wehmeyer and Webb (2012) posit that vertical transitions are associated with life events such as beginning school, leaving pre-school to join the mainstream school system, moving from one school phase to another and movement from school to college/university, as well as changing from an educational setting into a workplace situation. Horizontal transition refers to movement from one situation or setting to another they add that well-coordinated planning for these transitions can minimise anxiety that may arise and thus make such transitions smoother. Every learner adapts to normative transition differently and there are multitudes of things that influence how easily or poor they adapt (Amest & Rojas, 2010). Transition from one educational

phase to another presents multiple complexities to learners that need informed and systematic attention of educationists. This includes changing academic practices that call for adjustment, new learning, proactive and changing roles. The term transition refers, generally, to life changes, adjustments and cumulative experiences (Wehmeyer & Webb, 2012) that occur in the lives of people as they move from one school environment to another, therefore, the concept of transition implies movement and change.

Grade Four is generally recognised as an important transition year in schooling systems which encompasses the transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to Grade 7). Furthermore, an increase in the number of six subjects is offered, the change of language of teaching and learning from mother tongue to English language commences, an increase in learning hours are added and a learner workload is increased (Department of Basic Education, 2011). This transition in itself poses several challenges for educators in providing efficient teaching and learning educators as most educators find it problematic to meet the curriculum demands in the fourth grade (Nthulana, 2016). The definitions highlighted above have assisted the study in portraying a clear picture and an understanding of this concept phase transition, its implication on Grade Four educators' duties, as well as its implication on teaching and learning in the fourth grade in primary schools. More in-depth discussion of educators' experiences of phase transition in primary schools are dealt with critically in the following sections. Below I present definition of rural, semi-rural and township areas.

#### **2.2.4 Conceptualising rural, semi- rural and township areas in the South African context**

For the purpose of clarity and understanding the geographical landscape of the chosen primary schools, it was deemed necessary in this study to present a brief background of the two concepts that define the different settings where the researched schools were located. This brief background is significant in terms of understanding the different contexts of how the schools under study were operating in these three different settings. The assumption is that context matters. This would lead to the study generating in-depth data that would enhance the credibility of the findings in this study. The term rural, semi-rural and township are not unique to the South Africa landscape but are used all over the world, particularly, in the West and those in Africa and the rest of the world. However, the meanings are not the same. The term township refers to an area in the Republic of

South Africa that, during the apartheid era, were reserved for occupation by persons of non-European descent. In simple terms, these areas were reserved for Africans, and no other race groups stayed in such areas. In the period during and following World War II, urban areas of South Africa experienced a rapid period of urbanisation as the colour bar was relaxed due to the war (Seekings & Nicoli (2005). Neither employers nor the government built new accommodation or homes for the influx of new residents. This led to overcrowding, poor living conditions, and the absence of amenities thereby, contributing to high levels of crime and violence (Huchzermeyer, (2011). High rents and overcrowding led to land invasions and the growth of shack settlements which were largely ignored by the government (Huchzermeyer, 2011). By 1950, a substantial proportion of the urban black population lived in the townships (Seeking & Nicoli, 2005).

Township communities are faced with several social problems which include lack of proper housing with electricity and running water resulting in the mushrooming of informal settlements or shack dwellings also known as just shacks. These shacks are often built illegally on vacant lands which in most cases, belongs to the municipality. The occupying of land illegally is due to the fact that the majority of the residents of townships do not possess land. In most cases, the construction is informal and unregulated by the government, and this usually results in an inadequate access to basic services. These basic essentials such as sewerage, electricity, roads and clean water adversely affects the residents' quality of life. These basic services including electrical infrastructure within townships areas require constant repair. Hence, electricity, water and sewerage are managed by various government departments, resulting in incompetence in the absence of substantial co-ordination at all stages of the project planning, budgeting, and implementation cycle (Interactive Planning Workshop for Johannesburg, 2000). These problem impact negatively on the lives of the residents in the townships.

The nature of the term rural, on the other hand, varies from place to place. It is often referred as an area in the country which is less densely populated. In the South African context, the term rural area refers to a geographic area that is located outside towns and cities (Balfour 2010; Statistics South Africa, 2011). It is generally defined in terms of low population density and remote geographic location, that is, isolation because of distance from modern infrastructure, facilities, services and technological connectivity. The lack of transport to the nearest towns implies high



costs and infrequent contact with such destinations. Often, these small settlements experience harsh climatic conditions (Nthulana, 2016). Rural areas in the South African context are areas primarily inhabited by the elderly and minors (Balfour 2010; Statistics South Africa, 2011). The inequalities produced by colonisation and apartheid, have further worsened the plights of such communities. Even the post-apartheid policy frameworks, designed by middle-class professionals, have been insensitive to rural expressions and have favoured the urban elite (Chigbu 2013; Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005).

In other countries, for example, in Europe, rural areas are referred as country side, where most people live in big estates (United States Census Bureau, 2021). It is an open swath of land that has few homes and not very many people. Agriculture is the primary industry in most rural areas. Most people live or work on farm ranches. In America, rural areas are important to all Americans because it is a primary source of low-cost and safe food, inexpensive energy, clean drinking water and accessible outdoor recreation (United States Census Bureau, 2021). Almost three-quarters of the United States is considered rural, but only 14% of the population lives there. In South Africa, as opposed to other countries like America, the rate of poverty is high in rural areas compared to urban areas. Rural areas in South Africa have been experiencing economic and social decay over the past decades due to urban migration. Rural areas in South Africa are still facing issues of poverty, low literacy rates, and the lack of basic infrastructure like water, schools and hospitals. As a result, the youth is migrating to urban areas in search of new opportunities (Helliker, 2011).

Semi-rural living is really in the name. It is a mix of living on the outskirts or within small countryside towns and villages, but also being a stone's throw from a larger city (Abramsson, & Hagberg, 2020). Made even more popular by the rise of home working, semi-rural living is ideal for those that love being in green spaces, but cannot give up the convenience of having everything on their doorstep. The above presented information was able to paint a clear picture of the South African definition of the term township and rural areas which is absolutely different from other countries in the world. For example, in Australia, Canada, Scotland and some states of the United States of America, the term township refers to a settlement too small or scattered to be considered urban (Balfour 2010; United States Census Bureau, 2021). Whilst rural, as it has been mentioned earlier that in other countries for example, in Europe, rural areas are referred to as country side,

where most people live in big estates in open swath of land that has few homes and not very many people (United States Census Bureau, 2021).

Presenting this brief background is vital in that it provides very clear picture and understanding of the context of the selected primary schools chosen for this study. In the following section, I present education challenges in the the context of South African schools as my study focused on educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools.

### **2.3 Education challenges in the South African context**

This section discusses education challenges in the South African context. Scholarship in educational leadership and management in South Africa is dominated by narratives of negativity which portray the education system as under-performing (Chikoko, Naicker & Mthiyane, 2015). The lack of resources, infrastructure and schools that are situated in poor communities dominate the discourse around education challenges (Spaull, 2013; Weeks, 2012). South African teachers are characteristically faced with challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, assessment of learners with varying learning abilities and a lack of resources (Boshoff, Potgieter, Ellis, Mentz & Malan, 2018), typically within public schooling. At best, the narrative is that half of South African schools are not operating properly due to various challenges which include the challenges, complexities and contradictions in policy implementation (Bayeni & Bhengu, 2018). Grade Four class in primary schools is not immune to these challenges.

In the Intermediate Phase, the phase transition of learners presents a complex transition for learners which could add to the already existing challenges in schools. The South African government has democratised education, and this includes widening the entry for the marginalised communities, redistribution of resources to previously disadvantage schools, increasing subsidies to learners through No-Fee policies and providing feeding scheme to learners from poverty-stricken communities (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). However, there are still challenges faced by South African educators in their school context (Maringe et al., 2015), and some have to do with the policy environment, while others relate to other issues.

### **2.3.1 Language policy affecting fourth grade transition**

In South Africa, educationists suggest that for the initial three years of education (Foundation Phase), learners who speak African languages should receive instructions in their mother tongue before they could change to English in the upper Grades (Intermediate Phase). It is stated in the South African Language-in-Education Policy (LIEP) that mother tongue should be the preferred medium of instruction in the Foundation Phase (Grade R-3). Currently, primary tuition is offered in eleven South African official languages. Section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, No. 108 of 1996, stipulates that learners have the right to receive education in the official language(s) of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable (Republic of South Africa, 1996a).

Subject to the Constitution and the South African School Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b), the Minister may, by notice in the Government Gazette, after consultation with the Council of Education Ministers, determine norms and standards for language policy in public schools. The governing body of a public school may determine the language policy of the school subject to the Constitution, the Schools Act and any applicable provincial law (Department of Basic Education, 2011). No form of racial discrimination may be practised in implementing policy determined under Section 6 of the Schools Act. The governing body of a public school must ensure that (a) there is no unfair discrimination in respect of any official languages that are offered as subject options contemplated in Section 21 (1) (b); and (b) the first additional language and any other official language offered, as provided for in the curriculum, are offered on the same level (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). However, this proclamation has implications for teaching and learning in the fourth grade as learners' transition to learn in English language. Some researchers state that the change of LoLT in the fourth grade has repercussion in efficient provisioning of quality teaching and learning (Hoadley, 2012, 2016; Nthulana, 2016; Spaull, 2016; Steyn, 2017).

### **2.3.2 Primary school contextual factors in South Africa**

In spite of educational reforms in South Africa post-1994, many schools are still dysfunctional and there is little improvement in learner performance (Weeks, 2012). Studies that were conducted

concluded that inadequate education continues to be provided by a considerable number of schools (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). South Africa is still struggling to balance the imbalances of the past and education is still facing many challenges. For example, in rural and township primary schools in South Africa, primary schools are complex, characterised by constant changing systems affecting a wide variety of learner learning aspect including emotional, academic, social and behavioural learning (Barr, Deakin- Crick, Green, 2013; Gu & Johansson, 2013; Shafr & Peng, 2013). In the South African context and also internationally, when learners move from Grade Three to Grade Four, they experience many aspects of transition from one environment to another; transition from one language to another, and transition from being taught by one teacher to being taught by more than one teacher; increased number of subjects and learning hours (Department of Basic Education, 2011, Spaul, 2016). A task team commissioned in July 2009 by Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, to investigate and advise on the implementation of national curriculum in South Africa, highlighted this phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools as a critical problem area (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

Learners have difficulties in transitioning because it involves moving from familiar activities to the unknown, and an unfamiliar context that may be uncomfortable. She further states that immediate experience often results in loneliness, shock and fear as learners find it difficult to adapt to transition (Department of Basic Education, 2011). This transition poses a huge challenge for both educators and learners which implies the complex moment of change also for educators with repercussions in providing quality teaching and learning. This suggests that educators in low socio-economic environment all over the world are experiencing teaching and learning challenges due to poor infrastructure and lack of resources. This suggest that Grade Four educators in township and in rural areas are confronted with a “mission impossible” duty of providing efficient teaching and learning amidst these challenging conditions. In the next section, I discuss the level in which learners are affected in the fourth grade due to phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase.

## **2.4 Factors affecting learners in the fourth grade**

As it has been highlighted above, when learners move from Grade Three to Grade Four they encounter many challenges that negatively affect their transition from Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in primary schools. Such learner transition is associated with changes that directly affect learner, teaching staff, and family (Castro et al., 2018; Lin Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003). Furthermore, in the fourth grade transition negatively impacts on teaching and learning as learners find it difficult to adapt and cope with the change (Argos et al., 2019; Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017; Castro et al., 2018; Lin Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003; Parent, Lupien, Herba, Dupéré, Gunnar & Séguin, 2019; Sierra, 2018; Tamayo, 2014; Wong & Power, 2019). These studies further stated that the learner considered the main agent in the transition and can be affected by different factors such as academic, personal and social factors. Below, I discuss these different factors.

### **2.4.1 Academic factors**

It has been alluded to in the previous section that phase transition in the fourth grade affects learners in three different levels. Academically, educators are one of the agents involved in this educational transition (Argos et al., 2011; Castro et al., 2018; Huf, 2013; Kartal & Guner, 2018; McDermott, Rikoon, S. H., & Fantuzzo, 2016; Pestano Pérez, 2016). Phase transition involves educators from two different educational stages, which should be coordinated and have common points in this process of change (Castro et al., 2012, 2018; Sierra, 2018; Tamayo, 2014). This collaboration between educators is time and resource intensive (Karila & Rantavuori, 2014). Furthermore, transition have negative effects which are academic in nature (Cubillos Padilla, Borjas & Rodríguez Torres, 2017; Margetts & Phatudi, 2013). The argument by researchers is that a multi-layered transition at Grade Three-Grade Four interface is not just horizontal which means, individual-specific, unpredictable and subtle everyday movements, but is also vertical, which means systemic, predictable movements over time, thus leading to more discontinuities than continuities (Lesnick, Goerge, Smithgall & Gwynne, 2010). This gives complications of its own. Therefore, such vertical movement has to be properly planned for in order to obviate systemic challenges.

### **2.4.2 Personal factors**

According to Argos et al. (2019), the first change occurs on a personal level; changes occur for the learner as an individual. In the fourth grade, the child's workload increases substantially. This is also the time when learners start following the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS). The CAPS system was designed to develop a child's independence which entails that children must be able to do work on their own and think on their own. It encourages critical thinking where learners must discover things by themselves (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Apart from academic challenge, the start of the fourth grade can also be an emotional time for young children. As they grow older, they become more aware of their differences and abilities and this may affect a child's self-esteem (Parent et al., 2019; Wong & Power, 2019). In the fourth grade, learners' behaviours change due to the impact of phase transition. Behaviours such as ages, extreme hyperactivity, inability to sit still, lower span of concentration, inattention, emotional difficulties, and negative attitudes, are manifested in the fourth grade (Parent et al., 2019). These behaviours are predictive of lower levels of academic achievement in the fourth grade (Parent et al., 2019; Wong & Power, 2019).

### **2.4.3 Social factors**

Second, at a social level, relationships with adults are beginning to be based more on learning and formal outcomes (Lehrer et al., 2017; Rimm-kaufman et al., 2000). In family relationships, the role of families will depend on their type of parenting, the information they have about the transition, and what they expect from the new phase (Tamayo, 2014). Learners seek acceptance into a new group of peers. Learners have a hard time maintaining old friendships because it is common to move to other schools or classrooms. In this regard, peer relationships also deserve care in the learners' transition (Quinn & Hennessy, 2010). In summary, it is evident through the literature that when transition occurs it impacts negatively on learners social, behavioural and academic aspects. However, this implies that educators are at the receiving end as they are experiencing extreme challenges where they have to deal with complex transition with its repercussions, as well as providing quality teaching and learning. This suggests that educators are

doing work that is beyond their call of duty, and this entails the provision of support to enhance teaching and learning, which seeks to understand through the findings of this study. The main consideration for leadership is that this understanding should enable educators as classroom leaders and managers to make provisions for the care needs of Grade Four learners.

## **2.5 Phase transition levels of analysis**

In order to enhance the credibility and depth of this study and also to understand the broad view of phase transition and the complex nature under which Grade Four educators operate; the notion of phase transition level analysis is important. Tomaszewska-Pękała et al. (2017) provide three levels where phase transition can be analysed. These scholars argue that educational transition process can be analysed as discussed in the next section. First, is the micro level which takes place in different scenarios, constituted by family, friends, educators, classmates, and the school; (b) Second, the macro-level which consists largely of the broader context where educational institutions and individuals define and operate, such as the education system. These policies have an impact on all educational stages (Khelifi, 2019). Third, the meso-level which is the interaction of the macro and micro levels and focuses on the relationships that individuals establish between different groups and the broader context. Using this multi-level approach allows for a broad view of this transition.

The macro-level regulates, on the one hand, the factors that facilitate continuity (Chan, 2010; Lehrer, 2018), the type of groupings (Huf, 2013; Margetts, 2002; Quinn & Hennessy, 2010), the funding of each stage (Greenberg, 2018), and the institutional responsibility for each stage (Arndt et al., 2013). On the other hand, the macro-level also regulates the factors related to teacher training, both for initial and lifelong learning. In summary, phase transition is a complex phenomenon which requires hands on deck for all the stakeholders of the Department of Basic Education to support Grade Four educators by develop mitigating strategies to assist learners cope and adapt to change in this complex transition.

## **2.6 Educators' perspectives about the issues of phase transition of learners in primary schools**

The perspectives of educators about phase transition of learners encompass a number of issues, including the challenges of change of Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) as an important factor; Change of LOLT as a complex undertaking for learners; the scarcity of vocabulary repertoire amongst the learners and the language change effect on learners' cognitive academic proficiency. These issues discussed in the next section.

### **2.6.1 The challenges of change of Language of Learning and Teaching as a factor**

In South Africa, after decades' years of democracy, the democratic government is still trying to offer equal and quality education to previously disadvantaged schools. There is a general consensus that education at foundation level should be accessible to all learners in their different home languages (Department of Basic Education, 2010; Nthulana, 2016; McAuliffe & Ruhs, 2017). However, one of the critical changes that impact negatively on teaching and learning in the township and rural areas is the change of language of teaching and learning in the fourth grade. From 2012 onwards, the revised National Curriculum Statements as represented by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (Department of Basic Education, 2011) envision that English (again with Afrikaans as an option) will be introduced as a subject in Grade One and learners can either take it as a First Additional Language (FAL) or Second Additional Language as a precursor to those languages becoming the LoLT from the fourth grade onwards. This change of language is seen as challenging for learners in the Intermediate Phase. In the next section I discuss the complexity of the change of LoLT for Intermediate Phase learners in Grade Four.

### **2.6.2 Change of Language of Teaching and Learning as a complex undertaking for learners**

Many studies state that the change of LoLT in the fourth grade is challenging for learners, especially in rural and township settings. Grade Four learners, learning using the South African curriculum, are unable to read text meaningfully (Department of Basic Education, 2011, 2014; Ofulue 2011; UNESCO, 2012; Wetere, 2009). The problems they encounter include synthesising



information, making informed decisions and communicating effectively (Alberta Education, 2010; Department of Basic Education, 2011; Taylor, 2016). The inability to hear and differentiate between different sounds means learners are unable to pronounce words correctly, and they lack the ability to express themselves logically and fluently. In short, learners in Grade Four are unable to adapt fully to English First Additional language (EFAL) (Department of Basic Education, 2009, 2011, 2014; Kirby, Griffiths & Smith, 2014; Scharer, 2012). This has a ripple effect on their performance in other subjects, which may be attested to the relatively high failure rates. As such, the majority of learners are progressed to the next grades as a result of age or number of years in a grade instead of actual competences in the respective subjects (Bruwer, Hartell & Steyn 2014; Weybright, Caldwell, Wegner & Smith, (2017).

Other studies on the issue of the change of language of teaching and learning have further revealed that teaching a young child using an unfamiliar language gives rise to many complex classroom encounters (Evans & Cleghorn, 2012; Fleisch, 2008, 2009; Pitman, Majhanovich & BrockUtne, 2010; Wolff, 2016). However, one of the anomalies of post-apartheid South Africa, as pointed out by Taljard (2015), is that the only learners who are currently privileged and enjoy the benefits of mother tongue education from their initial entry into the schooling system up to the university level are those with English and/or Afrikaans as their Home language. What is interesting about this set up is that these two groups are the same ones who were linguistically privileged during the previous political dispensation. Muller (2013) provides a useful and succinct summary of the language and learning complexities in schools. According to Muller (2013), when implementing mother-tongue education, the first critical mistake is the assumption that all schools are in the same situation, whereas, they are not. In support of this observation, Nthulana (2016) points out that schools in rural areas have relatively homogenous language settings, whereas urban schools have diverse and very fluid language landscape. It can be maintained that this misconception largely accounts for the ineffectiveness and low academic achievement in rural and township schools.

### **2.6.3 Scarcity of vocabulary repertoire amongst the learners**

When learners transition into the fourth grade, where English becomes the LoLT, they get confused and struggle to cope with the workload in the fourth grade. Learners are confused and most of

them spell English words with the sounds of their home language or language used for teaching in Grade Three. Wright (2012) identifies inadequate vocabulary repertoire by Grade Four learners as a precursor to challenges in reading comprehension and difficulties with reading literacy. If not addressed, it then permeates all future educational undertaking as the gap between their reading literacy skills and the demands of the curriculum widens (Wright, 2012). All these issues underscore the importance of language proficiency within this transition. This reality has implications for school leaders and managers at all levels. The collective, comprising school principals, departmental heads and classroom teachers, need to devise strategies that will address the shortcomings that Wright (2012) speaks about.

#### **2.6.4 Language change effect on learners' cognitive academic proficiency**

Findings from a UNESCO study of 25 African countries indicated that, even in well-resourced contexts, it takes children 6–8 years to become adequately proficient in an 'international' L2 to be able to then use this language effectively for academic purposes (see Alidou, Aliou, Brock-Utne, Diallo, Heugh & Wolff, 2006; Collier & Thomas, 2017; Cummins, 2008; Heugh, 2017). Most South African learners are not English first language speakers. Therefore, educators must struggle to make learners understand what has been said in English. Researchers feel that transition from learning to read to reading to learn does not automatically or easily take place with all children (Collier & Thomas 2017; Robertson, 2017; Robertson & Graven, 2019b; Spaul, 2019). Many researchers claim that it is difficult to acquire language later in life and that once early literacy is founded on a shaky pedestal, it has foundational and lasting effects on later literacy and all future learning (Abrahamson & Hytlenstam, 2009; Patkowski, 2013; Schmid, Gilbers & Nota, 2014). Others further argue that the sudden change from mother tongue to English as LoLT in the fourth grade in township schools has an undesirable effect on the cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) of the learner (Bitenelkome, 2010).

Jansen (2013) states that it is better to teach learners in English as the language the first day of school rather than to burden learners with poor instruction in the mother-tongue. Contech-Morgan (2002) also postulates that people are born with a language acquisition device that gives them an innate ability to process linguistic rules. They argue that the transition to English that occurs in

bilingual models may be extremely disruptive and educationally damaging if a high quality of support materials and teacher expertise does not exist to manage this phase effectively (Van der Berg, Burger, Burger, Vos, Randt, Gustafsson, Shepherd, Spaull, Taylor, Van Broekhuizen & Von Fintel, 2011). Lafon (2009) states that the role of LoLT has not been given adequate consideration as an issue denying meaningful access to South African education. Thus, by far the most learners acquire education in a language that is not their mother tongue. Lafon (2009) concludes that to extend the use of home language in education, there seems to be two choices. These are to utilise English to an extent where it becomes a home language for an increasing number of African learners and to assimilate African languages as the LoLT beyond Grade Three. This becomes a challenge for educators and learners as they switch to English as LoLT.

Another issue could be that South African education is facing a challenge that most Foundation Phase teachers are much older than their colleagues and retiring from the profession (Masola, 2010). These are the teachers who have been in the system for over 30 years and have the skills required to teach Foundation Phase learners reading and writing in African languages. This is perhaps scary as few young black people are interested in becoming teachers to educate African language-speaking children in their mother tongues. As part of my research, I aim to explore how educators support learners to adapt and cope with the change as learners experience transition into Grade four. Not a lot of literature covers the leadership and management of learners' phase transition during this drastic change for learners.

## **2.7 Debates about the Language of Learning and Teaching issue**

There are debates about how the language of learning and teaching should be handled in such a way that learners' learning is not negatively affected. In this section, I briefly discuss five issues that have dominated these debates, and these have serious implications for schools in South Africa, especially those located in deprived socio-economic circumstances. The three issues are, managing bilingualism in schools; managing the effect of subtractive bilingualism; how schools deal with failed assimilation process, crossing the threshold and educators' lack of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency CALP.

### 2.7.1 Managing bilingualism in schools

There has been an ongoing debate on the issue of phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase with regards to the change of language of teaching and learning in the fourth grade from isiZulu to English. The then Department of Education (2001) acknowledged that, for many Black South African learners, school represents their main, sometimes sole source of exposure to English. This is particularly so in rural and peri-urban areas, where the geographical separation of peoples along racial lines (and linked socio-economic lines) instituted under apartheid remains a feature of the country's lived landscape. The provision of enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners', including needs arising because of, *inter alia*, 'inappropriate languages or language of learning and teaching is paramount (Department of Education, 2001). The United Nations (2018) noted the significant improvement in physical access to education most particularly in relation to primary school enrolment numbers. Questions around equitable opportunities for epistemological access, which is an opportunity of learners becoming successful participants in an academic practice particularly in Grade Four, remain troublesome. In South Africa, the process of acquiring and using several languages (or parts of several languages) simultaneously has only recently become a focus for research (Heugh, 2015; Makalela, 2015, 2016; Probyn, 2015) with increasing investigation into multiple language use in educational settings for epistemic access.

Underpinning the CAPS is a theoretical orientation towards 'additive bilingualism' and the transfer of language and literacy skills from the Home Language to the First Additional Language (FAL). A strong oral foundation is also advocated for learning the FAL but this requires adequate exposure to the language, as well as adequate resources. Researchers who favour bilingual reading believe that decoding skills can transfer across languages with an alphabetic written code (Fleisch, 2008; DBE, 2011a; Spaull, Van der Berg, Wills; Gustafsson & Kotze, 2016). These researchers believe that reading comprehension skills can also be transferred across languages, such as the ability to identify setting, main characters, problems and resolution in narratives, or the ability to identify main ideas, make inferences and predictions, use linguistic or text clues to construct meaning when reading expository texts (Cummins, 2005; Rose & Martin, 2012; Sibanda, 2014; Spaull, Van der

Berg, Wills, Gustafsson & Kotze, 2016). The transfer of such skills forms the basis of Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis, namely, that there is a common underlying proficiency relating to academic literacy that is shared across languages (e.g. Cummins, 2000). Rose and Martin (2012), Spaul, Van der Berg, Wills, Gustafsson and Kotze (2016) argue that in bilingual education systems, it is important for learners to develop strong literacy skills in their home language as a basis for building academic literacy proficiency that can be shared across languages.

Those who are against bilingualism, for example, Heugh (2015) problematises the various meanings of bilingual/multilingual education, pointing out that there appears to be 'mismatches' between policies and practices borrowed from northern contexts and the multilingual realities of southern contexts. The tension arises from the perceptions of languages as 'bounded entities' which is considered a northern perspective (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Makoe & McKinney, 2014), and the more fluid, flexible use of languages in African multilingual settings (Makalela, 2015, 2016). A study of the patterns and prevalence of monosyllabic three-letter-word spelling errors made by English FAL learners (Fleisch, Pather & Motilal, 2017) brought to light misspellings of vowels in monosyllabic words and a high prevalence of errors which the researchers classified as pre-grapho-phonemic. The results showed that over two thirds of Grade Four learners in the sample had not mastered the spelling of words benchmarked for Grade Two learners. The authors surmise that such errors could be caused by limited and incomplete phonemic teaching and dialectal problems. The underlying principle is that HLs should be promoted and that additional languages ought to be acquired in order to facilitate common communication. These perspectives presented above speak to the impact of home language (HL) literacy development on performance in English as the LoLT shows connections between the capacity of educators to develop languages for literacy and LoLT and learner success in the fourth grade. Therefore, school principals, departmental heads, as well as teachers in the classroom need to be exposed to this information and knowledge so that they are able to lead and manage phase transition in the fourth grade in the most effective manner. Therefore, the discussion above suggests that the issue of bilingualism in schools should be considered carefully so that learners are not compromised.

### **2.7.2 Managing the effect of subtractive bilingualism**

Bilingualism is the phenomenon of speaking more than one language. Bilingualism is having the ability to use two or more languages to communicate (Liddicoat, 1991). It involves being able to write and speak in two or more languages. A person may become a simultaneous bilingual by acquiring the two languages at or around the same time at home. Another way a person may become bilingual is by acquiring the second language at a later time after their first which is called sequential bilingualism (Garcia, 2019). Subtractive bilingualism is when individuals learn a second language at the expense of the first language meaning that individuals often lose skills and fluency in their primary language, especially if the primary language is not being reinforced (Cummins, 2017). Additive bilingualism is a reverse of subtractive bilingualism in the sense that this phenomenon is when an individual learns the second language while his/her first language and culture are maintained and reinforced. It is a situation where a second language is learnt by an individual or group without detracting from the maintenance and development of the first language. A situation where a second language adds to, rather than replaces the first language (Cummins, 2017).

In South Africa, subtractive/transitional programmes have failed because the knowledge and experience of children from backgrounds other than a western and English-speaking one are never affirmed in the school system (Nguyen & Hamid, 2017). Subtractive bilingualism may impact students in various ways. Not only can it impact their language ability but also their cultural identity. According to Nguyen and Hamid (2017), because of the language and cultural differences that are set by the school, language minority learners have no choice but to develop a new identity. As a result of this, language minority children tend to associate less with their original cultural identity. For this reason, subtractive bilingualism can be detrimental to learners' identity. English only schooling and the belittling of the minority language stifle language minority students to lose their native language and culture (Mercuri, 2012). De la Sablonnière, Amiot, Cárdenas, Sadykova, Gorborukova and Huberdeau (2016) found that when one integrates a new identity that is viewed to have a higher and more legitimacy relative status than one's original identity, the pattern between identification levels is subtractive, which means that one's original cultural identity's identification becomes lower.

Secondly, the cognitive development of the child who speaks only an African language is abruptly disconnected because the natural cognitive development in the primary language ends when this language is taken out of the learning environment (Nguyen & Hamid, 2017). The implication of the LIH is actively teaching for transfer across languages, which, according to Cummins (2017), entails the creation of dual language multimedia books, among other things. In teaching for transfer, monolingual strategies may not be adequate to optimising bilingual development. Dalvit et al. (2009) observe that many black children suffer the ill effects of subtractive bilingualism owing to the sudden change over from a first to a second language medium of instruction. Dalvit et al. (2009) further stresses that learners cannot explain in English what they already know in their first languages; nor can they transfer into their first languages the new knowledge they had learnt through English. Blouch (2009) suggests that in most African countries, ‘subtractive’ school language policies have serious implications for learning. Young children are forced to either "sink or swim" as they start learning through English, French or Portuguese from the first day of school or at best, they will have to switch to the ex-colonial language after three years of Mother Tongue Education MTE (Blouch, 2009).

### **2.7.3 How schools deal with failed assimilation process**

Assimilation is a process where sounds in separate words change when they are put together in speech. This happens when the second sound changes to be more similar to the first. This is a common type of phonological process through languages. It can occur within a word or between words. It takes place in normal speech, and it becomes more common in more rapid speech. Assimilation occurs in two different forms. The first one is a complete assimilation in which the sound is affected by assimilation that becomes accurately the same as the sound causing assimilation. The second one is partial assimilation in which the sound becomes the same in one or more features, but still different in other features. There are different aspects of assimilation. The anticipatory assimilation is the most common one which applies to the whole lexicon or part of it. For example, in English, the handbag word in rapid speech is pronounced [hæmbæg]). This is because the [m] and [b] sounds are both bilabial consonants and their sites of articulation are similar; whereas the sequence [d]-[b] has different places but a similar manner of articulation and

is sometimes omitted, causing the canonical [n] phoneme to sometimes assimilate to [m] before the [b] (Cummins, 2017).

In South Africa, transitional English programmes currently used are adaptations of English second language methodology established in Britain and the USA, where the majority of people speak English and the minority speak languages other than English (Heugh, 2006; Jiang, 2011). This process of assimilation has failed to provide a meaningful access to, and equity in education in Britain and the USA. Acquiring proficiency in the medium of instruction (MoI) for second and foreign language speakers is a process that takes time. As Shohamy (2006) shows, if learners are required to learn a second language (L2) in order to use it as a language of instruction at school, this negatively affects the learners' academic performance because it takes them a long time (7-11 years) to reach the level of language proficiency that enables them to achieve similar scores to those of native users of that language further. The Foundation Phase teachers (FP) should teach for the transition and the key linguistic competencies needed for the transition should be spread and taught across the Foundation Phase grades (Rosekrans, Sherris & Chatry-Komarek, 2012). The FP should be the foundation providing those tools needed in the Intermediate Phase. If more than three years are needed to provide the requisite foundation, then more time needs to be accorded to the FP.

#### **2.7.4 Crossing the threshold**

The broader literature confirms the head start enjoyed by learners who hail from linguistically and materially rich backgrounds (Rosenberg, 2010) and English language proficiency offers the linguistic capital compatible with the school system's literacy forms and practices in and beyond the Foundation Phase; a linguistic capital that the majority of the learners' lack. The shift in the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) should not be an arbitrary policy pronouncement based on the years of learning, but should be dependent on learner proficiency in both the Home Language and the First Additional Language (FAL) to allow for cross-linguistic transfer of skills, and to enable them to profit from the use of the FAL as LoLT (DBE, 2011; Setati & Adler, 2000). Research is needed to delineate the thresholds that second language learners need to cross on different linguistic aspects for them to profit from the use of the FAL as LoLT, and juxtapose them



with the learners' own linguistic competences. Once a significant majority of the learners is found to have crossed the requisite thresholds, FAL as LoLT can be implemented in the fourth grade (Pretorius & Mampuru (2007). This would ensure learner readiness for the LoLT when it is introduced. What compounds the determination of the linguistic threshold is its relativity to task, rather than it being absolute.

### **2.7.5 Educators' lack of cognitive language proficiency**

Some researchers argue that educators are accountable for an insufficient language contribution due to their own inadequate English proficiency (Monyai, 2010). A lack of cognitive language proficiency (CALP) puts learners from African schools at high risk. When these learners do not gain academic and cognitive skills in their mother tongue and are not able to use academic English, they are at risk of delayed academic achievement and ultimately school failure. This is not surprising that the Foundation Phase and the Intermediate Phase of the South Africa education system presents a complex dichotomy to children's academic achievement. If this transition presents a complex dichotomy to Grade Four learners, it implies that educators in primary schools have a mammoth task of supporting these learners to cope with the change. If learners begin to fall behind academic preparation in the fourth grade, it is very difficult to catch up later. Grade Four learners in township schools are not yet sufficiently proficient in English to master new learning areas such as Science and Social Sciences through this medium of instruction. This would seem to be against the policy. However, educators and schools should manage this complex transition to give these learners support to cope with the many changes accompanied this transition in primary schools. If learners come into this transition phase with poorly developed reading skills, the challenges are even greater (Monyai, 2010). This, according to Cummins (2005), is a gross inequity as a solid body of research, over many years, tells us that a second-language needs six to eight years of well-resourced teaching before it can be successfully used as a medium of teaching and learning. Yet, our system ignores this, and Grade Four transition to English-only continues year after year in the face of damning performance indicators. This implies that there is a problem with the system of education in South Africa which this study hopes to address through insights it will generate. What is good is that the education system is sufficiently decentralised to allow

leadership and governance at school level to carefully think through what it wants to do for its children under its care (Bhengu, 2021).

This research is complex in that it is about curriculum leadership and its efficiency or lack thereof in dealing with curriculum design issues which affect learners' transition from Grade Three to Grade Four. That is why this discussion touches more on the education system and how its design affects learners and teachers in different contexts of South Africa. The anomalies I have highlighted in the paragraphs above regarding the teaching of English in primary schools have been highlighted by various scholars. Also, these scholars emphasise what should be happening in terms of offering subject packages to the young ones in primary schools. For example, adding to the debate, Spaull (2016) states that the current policy prefers children to have the first three years of schooling in their mother-tongue (Home Language), but an increasing number of schools and parents are ignoring this and opting for English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) from Grade One. Where the three-year policy is in fact being implemented, the quality of teaching is in most cases, badly compromised by weak pedagogy and a lack of learning materials in the Home Language (Spaull, 2016). But in any case, in the fourth grade, all such learners are confronted with a switch to English as the only LoLT, while their English and Afrikaans-speaking counterparts simply continue using their own language from Grade One to Grade twelve.

In summary, the context painted above suggests the need for a unique and effective way of responding to these challenges. The learners' perceived inability to adapt fully to English First Additional Language (EFAL) may well mean that they are not adequately prepared in their home language. In addition, the teacher may have applied her teaching strategies in a manner that rendered them ineffective and may not have provided much assistance when teaching EFAL reading. The question is about how then do educators support learners to adapt to the change. The next section discusses the issue of the increased number of subjects in the fourth grade and its impacts on Grade Four learners.

## 2.8 The effects of the increased number of subjects and work load as a factor

In the fourth grade, the number of subjects increased drastically and the learner's workload increases substantially. It is by curriculum design that subjects increase from four subjects in the Foundation Phase (Home language, Mathematics, Life Skills and First additional language), to six subjects in the Intermediate Phase (Home language, Mathematics, First Additional Language, Natural Science & Technology, Social Science and Life Skills). Social Science is divided into History and Geography. To address the challenge of phase transition, CAPS which was introduced in 2010, came up with one unique aspect, the minimum or maximum language time allocation or provisioning (Department of Basic Education, 2011c). This provision grants schools the opportunity for more flexibility regarding language time allocation to suit the needs of their learners (Steyn, 2017). Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2 illustrate the time allocation in the Foundation Phase and the Intermediate Phase, to emphasise the transitional process Grade Four learners are facing after transitioning from Grade Three according to the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) document.

SUBJECTS	GRADE R (Hours)	GRADE(Hours) 1-2	GRADE 3 (Hours)
Home Language (HL)	10	7/8	7/8
First Additional Language (FAL)		2/3	$\frac{3}{4}$
Mathematics	7	7	7
Life Skills	6	6	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>25</b>

**Table 1: Foundation Phase time allocation per week as per CAPS document**

Subject	Hours
Home Language (HL)	6
First Additional Language (FAL)	5
Mathematics	6
Natural Science and Technology	3.5
Social Sciences	3

Life Skills	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>27.5</b>

**Table 2: Intermediate Phase (Grade Four) time allocation per week as per CAPS document**

Table 2.1 and 2.2 also illustrate the Grade Three learners' transition from learning four subjects to six subjects (Steyn, 2017). It is stated in the South African Language-in-Education Policy (LIEP) that the mother tongue should be the preferred medium of instruction in the Foundation Phase (Grade R-3). Currently, primary tuition is offered in eleven South African official languages. In a township school, English has been taught as a subject. Abruptly, when learners move to Grade Four, English becomes the Language of instruction in all the subjects. The workload increases. Not only are they doing six subjects, in Social Sciences, there are two subjects, History and Geography; in Natural Science and Technology, there are two subjects as well. One can argue that the actual total of subjects is six. However, I am not going to argue that way because the other two subjects (History and Geography) are merged to become six (Steyn, 2017). Fox (2009) states that due to the above-mentioned changes and complexities, it is evident that all the subjects are foreign to Grade Four learners. Unfortunately, they must abruptly adjust to the new challenging realities. This is one of the reasons Grade Four learners struggle to cope with the new environment. Learners need long-term support from teachers to help them adjust to the change. Transitional challenges are more marked within First Additional Language (FAL) speaking contexts. This implies that the transition from one school grade to another if it is difficult and challenging for learners, it can be scary and extremely tough for educators to perform their duties in class.

## **2.9 The effect of the workload on the educators**

Workloads have been defined in the previous sections, and already in that section, it was indicated that workloads have some effects on staff, including educators. In an attempt to synthesise various definitions of teacher workload, Dunhanm (1994) highlights stress as a direct result of workload among educators. In this regard, Dunhanm (1994) identifies three major approaches in occupational stress in teaching that is associated with work load. The first approach based on the engineering model of stress is concerned with the demands exerted on educators in the teaching or living environment and the education context. The second approach is based on the physiological

model and focuses on the individual relations of educators to these pressures, such as frustration and headaches. The third approach based on the interactional model of stress is concerned with the demands and pressure experienced by educators, the reactions of the teacher and coping mechanisms that educators use in their attempt to cope with stress. Dunham (1994) concludes that the interactional approach provides a more all-encompassing approach for understanding teacher stress.

Dunham (1994) thus, provides a broader, yet more precise definition of teacher stress as a process of behavioural, emotional, mental and physical reactions caused by prolonged, increased or new pressure within the teaching environment which are significantly greater than their coping resource. According to Dunham's view, educators' appraisal of job demands and their coping strategies, their anticipation of future demands and readiness to deal with them, their preparation and possession of skills to handle work pressure are factors which contribute to stress among the educators. It is important that we as researchers and managers are aware of these types of stress because they have a negative impact on teaching and learning environment, and their effects have to be carefully managed by school management teams, including principals. The literature has revealed that the more class size increases, the more academic demands are in the fourth grade for both the educators and the learners, which ultimately lead to the decline of the standard of teaching and learning.

Braund and Hames (2005) offer two kinds of explanations for this decline and for the fact that it is worse in the fourth grade. A new, larger and more challenging environment, new friendship groupings, more educators and new rules all make remarkable demands on the incoming learners. The 'shock of the new' for learners after movement, in terms of changes in pedagogy, may have a much more significant and long-term impact on learners in the fourth grade and their attitude to learning (Braund & Hames, 2005). Similarly, Mwanamukubi (2013) noted that low staffing levels emanated from classes being overcrowded. These difficulties made it difficult for educators to teach effectively. Even when educators noticed that a particular learner needed individual attention it was not possible due to poor circumstances. Mwanamukubi (2013) found in his study that educators were faced with a lack of learning and teaching material and overcrowded classrooms.

## **2.10 Implications of increased work load on the educators and the learners**

This section presents a discussion about the implications of increased work load on the educators in the fourth grade. Intrinsically, there are often occasions where a heavy workload and the associated deadlines will accumulate, causing teachers to experience stress (Arokium, 2010). It is generally known that when staff are overworked, their motivation levels and commitments tend to be compromised, and this situation has to be managed very carefully if the performance of teaching staff is to be kept at its optimal level. Similarly, the increased work load for educators means that educators have added responsibilities in their work which includes supporting Grade Four learners to adapt well to the new teaching and learning conditions. While some people find such pressure motivating (Naz., Liaqat & Ghyas, 2019), others experience it as stressful (Denhere, Ngobeli & Kutame, 2010; Ragha, 2015). Grade Four educators are expected to be creative and think of effective leadership and management strategies to enhance teaching and learning (Bush & Glover, 2014). If educators do not use effective strategies, this can result in poor transitioning and time loss as learners use learning time to adjust themselves to the new learning environment and its expectations. If the transition is not properly managed it could possibly have an adverse effect on the learning process, which could result in lasting learning difficulties and poor academic requirements. Educators feel that the government is responsible for the establishment of the transition strategies (Phatudi, 2007). She further reveals that schools initially had never thought of transition strategies. It only dawned upon them when it was asked what transition strategies were employed in their schools.

The literature has discovered that transition procedure can be experienced by the partakers as shocking, worrying and at the same time challenging. This suggests that educators must play different roles, for example, psychologist, while at the same time, teaching the subject to cover the syllabus. This experience of the Grade Four educators' difficulties in doing their work is well articulated by Fabian and Dunlop (2007) who state that a highly divided day with very short periods and too many subjects that are presented in the abstract will work against many young learners, particularly those who are not confident, have not had preschool experience, come to school with a different home language and are taught by incompetent educators. When this is

juxtaposed with historically disadvantaged community backgrounds and scarce resources as is the situation in the three primary schools' in this thesis, the situation becomes even more worrisome.

The decline in learner academic performance in the fourth grade, particularly in their reading scores in the fourth grade is well-documented. Spaul (2017) speaks about the sensitivity of this transition. Academic decline at this transitional stage, even within home language (HL) speaking contexts, suggests that the transitional challenges are more marked within First Additional Language (FAL) speaking contexts. This implies that the transition from one school grade to another, if it is difficult and challenging for learners, can also be scary and extremely tough for educators to perform their duties in class. In summary, educators' experiences of overload as a result of class size is a real problem in primary schools in South Africa as the literature has revealed its negative impact on teacher performance. This is evident since the teacher does not have ample time to prepare and teach the learners, individual learners' problems are not catered for especially the slow learners because they are too many in a class and lesson periods are short. There is no in-depth preparation and grasping of the concepts since the subjects are many to be prepared and in any given responsibility, the teacher may be reluctant to carry out his duties as expected. Instead, he/she will rather give more time to classwork because of the workload. Hence, the teacher will be termed as a non-performer. All these have a negative impact on the performance of the learners within the school.

### **2.11 Increased learner numbers**

The democratic dispensation has committed itself to redressing the imbalances of the past in the education system by creating an environment that is conducive to the provision of quality education to all South African citizens (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). However, overcrowding in the classrooms has remained a challenge to most rural and township schools and may remain part of the system in the long-term (Marais, 2016). A policy document on Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure prescribes the provision of safe classrooms to schools with a maximum of 40 learners per class (Department of Basic Education, 2013). Equal Education (2014) puts the recommended learner to teacher ratios in all primary schools at 40:1 and 35:1 at primary secondary levels. The classroom is the most important area within a school where learners spend most of

their time, ideally, in an environment that is conducive to effective learning (Khan & Iqbal, 2012). A teacher would set up desk configuration in the classroom in a manner that they feel will not hinder the process of teaching but rather make it easier for the learner to adapt to the changes in the fourth grade and understand concepts being taught. This issue has implication for the management in the schools, and also for how classroom management is done in response to the needs of the learners.

## **2.12 Effect of overcrowding on effective teaching and learning**

A classroom is said to be overcrowded in which the number of learners exceeds the optimum level such that it causes hindrance in the teaching and learning process (Dabo, 2015). The study conducted by Marais (2016) found that learners' problematic behaviour, such as lack of attention, boredom, lack of discipline, fighting and even vandalism of the resources can be related to overcrowded classrooms. Didactical neglect as a result of an unbalanced learner:educator ratio (LER) was argued by researchers, such as Cortes, Moussa and Weinstein (2012), Marais (2016), Van Wyk (2008), as being detrimental to learners' academic progress and development. It is even worse in the fourth grade as learners experience phase transition. Didactical neglect refers to the teacher's inability to pay enough attention to each learner's educational needs (Cortes et al., 2012; Marais, 2016; Van Wyk, 2008). It is argued in this study that the increase of the class size in the fourth grade has a potential to impact negatively on educators provisioning of efficient quality teaching, as well as learners' academic performance.

It is evident from the literature that the educators who teach in these classes have reported lesson delivery difficulties and failure to keep up to date with marking class and home activities because of overcrowded classrooms. The resources have not been adequate for the large classes especially prescribed textbooks and supplementary reading materials. Learners have to share desks and chairs in some instances, and this has since been affecting the learning environment. Infrastructure delivery by government in other schools has not matched the intake of learners and the demand for classrooms has been on the increase. When immediate solution is not found, schools have to endure such problems. As a result, learners are continually performing poorly in the fourth grade because they are unable receive quality and meaningful learning. This is supported by Snow and



O'Connor (2016) who argue that the number of children in a class has a bearing on the abilities and opportunities of educators to closely observe and facilitate meaningful teaching and learning of diverse groups.

### **2.13 Challenges experienced by teaching overcrowded classes**

In a study done by Snow and O'Connor (2016), it was revealed that all-round performance of learners was generally found to improve when the classes where there was small number of learners. Educators were able to check the work of slow learners as they had enough time to do so. According to Ganimian and Murname (2016), the evidence in their studies has shown that the reduction in the size of the class has been effective on the teaching and learning processes. They then tracked the performances of individual learners after reduction in size. Dabo (2015) conducted a study to identify strategies that educators used in teaching overcrowded classes. The findings showed that educators mostly used lecture method. Challenges experienced by teaching overcrowded classes included that of educators who failed to practise a variety of methods, such as higher-order questioning and active learning approaches (Marais, 2016). The lecture method would be more suitable for the mature learners in high schools or colleges. In the contexts of primary school learners as it is the case in this study, the teaching methods must be associated with closeness to the learner for purposes of proper guidance, especially in language learning (Marais, 2016).

In one of the studies conducted in Kenya which Spaull, Van der Berg, Wills, Gustafsson and Kotze (2016) refer to, the class size was reduced from about 90 learners to about 43 learners by utilising the services of contract teachers. In a similar study in Andhra Pradesh, India, Muralidharan and Sundaraman (2013) found that reducing the pupil-teacher ratio of 36 by 10% using either a contract teacher or a regular civil-service teacher led to an increase in the learners' performance. The use of other personnel to reduce the class size is an intervention strategy in these two studies to improve the teaching and learning class environment. Of interest in the current study would be to establish whether the educators in the current study are using similar strategies so as to spend more contact time with learners that have poor competencies. Having other personnel who can come in to help would point to the involvement of the School Governing Body (SGB) of the school when it comes

to South Africa. This structure is responsible for the appointment of additional staff in public schools.

Accumulated demands and responsibilities in Grade Four increase the teachers' experiences of stress, which often have a negative impact on their physical and psychological well-being (Haydon, Alter, Hawkins & Theado, 2019). This particular phenomenon, coined as 'teacher stress' refers to the unpleasant or negative feelings experienced by teachers as a result of having the perception that they are unable to effectively deal with professional tasks and demands (Naghieh, Montgomery, Bonell, Thompson & Aber, 2015). Despite the corpus of research focused on identifying the causes, the consequences and the possible interventions of psychological stress, the findings revealed that the problem of overload among the sampled educators was created by a lack of teaching equipment and facilities, overloaded curriculum and learners' misbehaviour and attitude towards schoolwork (Naghieh et al., 2015; Ramberg, Låftman, Åkerstedt & Modin, 2019). Other issues relating to for instance, administration, the behaviours of learners, the perceived self-incompetence and the parental expectations of the learners were also revealed as contributors to teacher stress (Naghieh et al., 2015). It is evident that teacher stress remains a prevalent concern among international and South African teachers (Boshoff, Potgieter, Ellis, Mentz & Malan, 2018). This study has also revealed that the major source of educators' strain stress particularly in the fourth grade in primary schools was a difficulty in the educators' achieving the desired objectives, daily workload being too great and class sizes being too large for the available facilities. Research, among other things, sought to identify the problems encountered by the educators, which affect their performance in terms of their ability to effectively support Grade Four learners to adapt and cope with phase transition in primary schools.

#### **2.14 Educators' experiences of adapting learners to cope with change**

Primary school educators, especially in the fourth grade should help learners cope with phase transition changes by helping them to adapt. According to Martin (2013), the effects of adaptability are very strong, and adaptability is a factor with a high impact on academic and non-academic outcomes. Martin (2013) further asserts that in order to help learners adapt, for the purpose of increased school performance, complex and comprehensive personal development, the educator

himself/herself must prove this ability to cope with change. The literature reveals some challenges experienced by educators in adapting learners to cope with change of phase transition. Studies of the transition, from learners' point of view, have been carried out in different countries. For example, in Australia, Speering and Rennie (1996) established that during transition, there is considerable re-organisation of either the school, the curriculum or teacher-learner relationships. Experiences of change, novelty, and uncertainty are common to all humans. These include major events such as beginning school, moving out of home, and starting a new job. They also include more everyday events such as a change in job role, having to think of alternative transport when a flat car battery strikes, or having unexpected guests join for dinner. The extent to which we are able to adjust our thoughts, actions, and emotions in order to successfully respond to these types of situations is known as adaptability (Martin, 2013). This involves adjusting the way we think about the situation to consider different options, undertaking different actions to better navigate the situation, and minimising emotions (like anxiety or frustration) that may be unhelpful or distracting (Speering & Rennie, 1996).

Speering and Rennie (1996) established that learners, in their study, were particularly unhappy with teaching strategies that were used in the new grades such that they wished for teacher-learner relationships of the previous years of their primary schooling. In another study, Dunlop (2001) established that children felt acutely embarrassed by their lack of knowledge, or difficulty in finding their way around a new place, but also that they were delighted in their current abilities when these were recognised. This has implications for the ways in which learners can be and should be kept interested. This implies that educators need to design, plan their lessons very carefully and devise effective strategies to support learners to adapt. The success of this activity requires educators' patience, relevant resource, expertise and enough time. Martin (2013) concluded that the children with better adaptability were later on more successful in their further lives. They proved to be more flexible to changes, more content and engaged more frequently into the social happenings in comparison with the children with a lower level of adaptability. This suggest that educators need capacitating workshops and support from all stakeholder to enhance teaching and learning in the fourth grade.

## **2.15 How educators support learners cope with transition**

This study that is reported in this thesis is mainly about understanding how teachers in Grade Four manage and support the learners in transition from Foundation Phase (Grade Three) to Grade Four which is in the Intermediate Phase. Therefore, as part of the teaching and learning support that Grade Four educators provide, the review of literature identifies two strategies in this regard, namely, scaffolding and code switching.

### **2.15.1 Scaffolding strategy**

Phase transition poses several challenges to the learners to which they have to adapt. It may not be easy for the educators to plan for this transition if the lack of knowledge and understanding of what transition is, prevails (Nel & Muller, 2010). To support the learners to adapt to the changes, a variety of strategies are used by educators during phase transition. Scaffolding and code switching are some the strategies that educators use in primary schools. The term scaffolding was first used by Wood, Bruner and Ross in 1976 (McCabe, 2013). Scaffolding refers to support or assistance that is provided to young children, which enables them to reach higher levels of performance than they could reach independently. The most effective way is using varied strategies guided by how the child is doing.

Once the child is doing well, less support and help is provided. When the child struggles, more specific instructions are given until the child starts to progress again. Scaffolding relates to the concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) of Lev Vygotsky's model of social learning. His theory implies that all learning builds on existing skills and knowledge and that there is a zone in which new knowledge and skills are being developed utilising existing fundamentals (Vygotsky, 1978). This scholar proposes that educators use co-operative learning practices whereby, less competent learners develop with the help of a more skilful person, whether this is an educator or a peer learner. Vygotsky believes that with the appropriate assistance, the learner, within his/her ZPD, can get the necessary "boost" to fulfil the task. This appropriate assistance or support enables the child to achieve success in something he/she would not have been able to do single-handedly; support by a more skilful /knowledgeable person is needed.

In the literature, ZPD has become synonymous with the term scaffolding. However, Vygotsky never used this term in his writings (McCabe, 2013). Scaffolding is a key aspect of effective teaching and entails modelling of a skill, providing hints or clues and adapting material or an activity (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). In order to achieve the desired goal, scaffolding or assistance is most efficient when the assistance corresponds with the learners' needs. In summary, the literature has revealed that scaffolding is the key aspect of teaching and learning that can be used by educators to support learners to cope with change in the fourth grade. The discussion about this strategy has implications for the management of teaching and learning in Grade Four in the participating schools. It would be interesting to find out if the participants are familiar with this approach and understand the extent to which their application or failure to do so affect their support for the learners in transition.

### **2.15.2 Code switching as a strategy to enhance learning**

The second strategy that scholars highlight is code switching. This approach to teaching is another strategy that many educators use to support learners to adapt and cope with change in the fourth grade. Code-switching is the mixing of two or more language varieties within a single utterance or conversation (Lesada, 2017). Most educators inside Grade Four grade classroom in the townships and rural areas primary schools do not have any other choice but to utilise the use of the learners' mother tongue in teaching their subjects for better and easier understanding (Makalela, 2015, 2016). Students who are highly motivated, feel confident, and feel safe are more open to input (Krashen, 1986). Krashen further postulates that learners need less stressful environments to learn successfully. Jegede (2012) suggests that educators code switch as a means to cope with the challenges. She further states that Grade Three learners come to the fourth grade with insufficient vocabulary to understand when English is used as a medium of instruction. Therefore, to explain the concepts, educators translate what they have said from English to mother tongue. Code-switching strategy is used by educators to facilitate understanding in the fourth grade.

Research has shown that the use of code switching by South African educators that is grounded in the social circumstances in which it occurs "constitutes a purposeful and productive teaching

strategy” (King & Chetty, 2014, p. 41). Code-switching is used for both the management of the classroom and for explanatory purposes where the content is complex and concepts may not be immediately accessible to learners through English (Setati, Adler, Reed & Bapoo, 2002). However, issues arising from the use of code-switching include the exclusion of learners in diverse, multilingual classrooms who do not share those languages. The perception of language as pure and bounded (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Makoe & McKinney, 2014; Makalela, 2015, 2016) is what influences educators’ sometimes guilty attitudes towards their use of code-switching in the classroom (Probyn, 2009).

Pollard (2002) discourages code switching by stating that it tends to be detrimental to the development of both languages. Learners may also not need English explanations, as they know that the entire lesson will be repeated in their native language. Therefore, blocking the use of home language and limiting instructional adaptations for learners is simply not based on solid scientific evidence (Pollard, 2002). It merely makes the already challenging task of the teacher more challenging (Goldenberg, 2008). According to Nel and Muller (2010), code-switching practice limits rural and township learners’ exposure to English. These scholars further state that, unprincipled code-switching, employed at the spur of the moment, was rife in the classrooms. It robbed learners of exposure to the FAL, which ironically, was used for assessment. John and Rule (2011) contend that code-switching does not pay attention to context, but, that it is often superficial; lacks the richness of texture afforded by spatial, temporal and depth dimensions of contextualisation. However, some researchers feel that code switching can be a very successful strategy which minimises the language barrier in the classroom, but overt linguistic inadequacies in the LOLT cause ‘confusion, frustration or discomfort’ (Evans & Cleghorn 2012). They argue though, that the dependence on code-switching as the sole strategy to support learners, may improve understanding of content, but not English proficiency and educators need to talk and teach through a second language up to the learners’ level of understanding and not jump into interpreting or code switching. The authors conclude that code-switching needs to be understood in bounded linguistic contexts of interaction between teacher and learners for a given purpose. Code-switching is used as a form of scaffolding (Salami, 2008).

Supporting all the above views, Cook's (2001) multicompetence theory argues for the positive involvement of Home Language in learning process. According to this theory, second language learners are multicompetent because their minds house two grammars. Due to this multicompetent state, second language learners have a right to use their Home Language (L1) in the learning process. In summary, the literature has revealed the good and bad side of code-switching strategy. This implies that Grade Four educators' use of this strategy might have compromised teaching and learning by robbing learners' exposure to the language of teaching and learning. But also, this suggests that training and workshop are needed to assist educators about how to use these strategies appropriately without compromising learners. Phase transition should not be the problem of the Grade Four educators only, it should be planned systematically by all stakeholders to mitigate challenges that Grade Four learners encounter.

## **2.16 Dealing with the dearth of teaching and learning support materials**

Large-scale studies have found that Grade Four educators struggle to implement the curriculum in the manner specified by the guidelines (DBE, 2015; Taylor, Van der Berg & Mabogoane, 2013). Taylor (2017) reported that officials do not seem to be accountable for the lack of school functionality. Bitenelkome (2010) revealed that insufficient use of teaching strategies by educators and a total absence of learning aids, class demonstrations or motivation to improve their teaching strategy contributes to the poor performance of the learners. According to Matshipi, Mulaudzi and Mashau (2017), the shortage of learner-teacher support material (LTSM) can be a problem, with too few copies of textbooks available and it becomes futile to assign both class and home work when the materials cannot cover all the learners in the overcrowded classroom.

A study conducted by Kewaza and Welch (2013) to examine how big class sizes affected the use of teaching materials in lower primary classes, found that although materials like manila papers and coloured markers were not regularly supplied to them. The few that they got were used by the educators to design teaching materials if the educators had the time. This meant that learners were deprived access to these materials which would help in enhancing their understanding of the subject. This would in turn hinder the progress of those learners who might have needed special attention because of their inadequate competence in other subjects. Schools without enough books,

computers, photocopiers or learner teacher support material (LTSM) are unable to create conducive environments for effective teaching (O'Connor & Geiger, 2009). Parallel to the already cited challenges, a lack of resources hinders proper teaching and usually, has a negative impact on learners and educators. Mubanga (2010), Maswanganye (2010) and Mwanamukubi (2013) investigated factors that contributed to the causes of learning difficulties among learners particularly in the fourth grade. These studies revealed that educators faced challenges of inadequate teaching and learning material to support Grade Four learners to transitions from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. Many township primary schools did not have libraries and library personnel (Govender, 2013). Nasvaria, Pascoe, and Kathard (2011) also state that there are barriers in the school system to enhance Grade Four learners' transition in primary schools. Barriers included poor foundation skills in learners and difficulties with language.

In summary, the literature has revealed that the lack of resource is a barrier to quality teaching and learning in the fourth grade. Even for educators who are highly skilled and have a myriad of personal resources, decision making, and teaching practices may be hindered by stress and burnout arising from high demands and low organisational resources (Bottiani, 2019). It is therefore, upon this study to come up with recommendation and models to assist Grade Four educators to provide effective teaching and learning in Grade Four. Regardless of what it is they must do, the lack of resources in schools is extremely detrimental to the learners' learning and the educators instructing a class. A majority of learners learn better by being hands on in classrooms.

## **2.17 Supporting learners to adapt to and cope with the challenges of change**

Discussions in the previous sections have indicated that Grade Four learners and teachers alike, face numerous challenges in adapting to and coping with new teaching and learning conditions. Some of these challenges are structural across the education system while others are contextual. The Constitution of South Africa and the Schools Act states that parents, learners and educators shall promote and accept the responsibility for the organisation, governance and funding of schools, in partnership with the state (Republic of South Africa, 1996a, b). This democratisation of education in South Africa required a new national education system which suggested the participation in school activities by all stakeholders, especially parents (Republic of South Africa,



1996a, b). Parents are, therefore, expected to play a prominent role in the education of their children. Social structures like parents should be involved in education (Anney, Mmasa & Ndunguru 2016). However, according to Louw (1999), many South African parents, particularly in previously disadvantaged communities, are reluctant and unwilling to be involved and participate in their children's school activities. Studies have shown that inadequate involvement from parents can lead to a number of problems. These problems include the lack of effective learning and teaching that led to low pass rates by the learners. The learners felt that their parents do not care about them or their education (Leicester & Pearce, 2000; Van der Westhuizen & De Bruyn, 2002). When parents neglect their educational task, educators are faced with the enormous challenge and responsibility of making a difference in the learners' spiritual, moral and social lives (Myeko, 2000).

## **2.18 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented a review of literature that examines various issues relating to educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners to transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools. This chapter has also provided an in-depth examination of key issues and what has already been researched about the topic. This has assisted me in understanding the theoretical perspective of many issues pertaining to this study. The literature reviews also helped me to be aware of what is known about the study, interpret it and be able to identify where there are gaps and contradictions. The chapter has also shown that educators experience challenges when they assisting the learners to adapt to the new teaching and learning environment, and it has also indicated how educators mitigate the challenges encountered. In the next chapter, I present the theoretical underpinnings for the study. The chapter focuses on two theories as a framework. These theories are the adaptive leadership theory and teacher identity theory, distributed leadership theory and Instructional leadership theory.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I presented a review of literature on various aspects of curriculum management, particularly, on how educators support Grade Four learners cope with and adapt to new teaching and learning environment in their first year in the Intermediate Phase. The main purpose for conducting the review of literature was that of identifying gaps in knowledge regarding this phenomenon of learner transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase and educators' experiences of this transition and their role in it. This chapter presents a discussion of theories that constitute a framework for the study. In this chapter, I begin by highlighting what a theoretical framework is all about and how it differs from a conceptual framework. I then describe in detail the two theories that constitute a theoretical framework, and the two theories that I adopted for this study are Adaptive Leadership Theory by Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) and Hallinger's (2011) synthesised leadership for learning model. I conclude by indicating how the theoretical framework is relevant for this study.

#### **3.2 Description of the teacher identity theoretical framework**

A theoretical framework in a research is considered by many renowned researchers (Grant & Osanlon, 2014; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018) as one of the most critical elements of an empirical research. It is a theory that informs and clarifies the structure and visual modality of the research work (Grant & Osanlon, 2014). It is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a study and introduces and describes the theory which explains why the research problem under study exists in the first place (Sacred Heart University Library, 2020). Grant and Osanlon (2014) define a theoretical framework as a blueprint of research and one of the most significant facets of the inquiry procedure. It serves as the guide on which to build and support your study, and it also provides the structure to define how you will philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically and analytically approach the thesis as a whole. Ngulube, Mathipa, and Gumbo (2015) emphasise the crucial role that is played by a theoretical framework in shaping the inquiry of a study. Further, they consolidated the benefits of theoretical framework from different literature to produce the

following important points. A theoretical framework serves as a basis of a research plan; it situates the researcher within a scholarly discourse and links the study to the broader body of literature; it provides a frame within which a problem under investigation can be understood; it shapes the research questions and helps to focus the study; it allows the researcher to narrow the project down to manageable size; it offers a plan for data generation; it operates as a tool to interpret the research findings, and it also provides a vehicle for generalisations to other contexts (Ngulube, Mathipa & Gumbo, 2015).

Theories are formulated to explain, predict and understand phenomena and, in many cases, to challenge and extend existing knowledge, within the limits of the critical bounding assumptions that define the phenomenon being studied; it illuminates the data set and helps focus attention on specific activities relevant for the research (Ngulube, Mathipa & Gumbo, 2015). When researchers do not use a theory to inform their research, they risk the possibility of failing to raise and examine theoretically grounded questions and may generate findings of a narrow or limited value (Maxwell, 2012). According to Saldaña and Omasta (2018), theories distil research into a statement about social life that holds transferable applications to other settings, context, populations, and possible time periods. Theory gives researchers a framework for making sense of their observations by providing an overarching structure to their studies. Through the use of a theoretical framework, data that might initially seem unimportant or unrelated may be identified, explained or related to other data in meaningful ways (Maxwell, 2012). Theoretical framework is used in research as a guide that helps the researcher to direct his or her search for data and to determine how the findings speak to the framework (Imenda, 2014).

Before choosing the theory, it is essential to check if the study supports or disputes the framework used and also to check if the findings can be explained using the incorporated framework. Hence, it acts as a road maps toward understanding what is observed and assist in formulating informed decisions about those observations and guides the researcher in providing meaning to every stage and related aspects of the study (Imenda, 2014). As I have indicated in the previous section, when researchers do not use a theory to inform their research, they risk the possibility of failing to raise and examine theoretically grounded questions and may generate findings of a narrow or limited value (Maxwell, 2012). For this reason, researchers must be cautious when using theory, because

while it may illuminate certain areas, other aspects may be overlooked and researchers may miss opportunities to establish new and creative ways of framing phenomena (Becker, 2007).

### **3.3 Differentiates between a theoretical framework and conceptual framework**

A theoretical framework is the application of a theory or a set of concepts drawn from one and the same theory to provide an explanation of a particular phenomenon or research problem (Imenda, 2014). A conceptual framework is a system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that support and inform research which, like a map, guide and provide coherence to an empirical inquiry (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Robson, 2011). Consistent with this explanation, Berman (2013); Knight, Halkett and Cross (2010), state that a conceptual framework provides a model for the relationships between variables that may or may not imply a particular theoretical perspective, with the purpose of describing a phenomenon. In addition to this, Miles and Huberman (1994) state that a conceptual framework explains, either graphically or in a narrative form, the main things to be studied, for example, the key factors, concepts, variables and the presumed relationships among them. It is an end result of bringing together a number of related concepts to explain or predict a given event or give a broader understanding of the phenomenon of interest. It is useful where theories fall short of explaining meaningfully the phenomenon under study (Imenda, 2014).

To summarise, a theoretical and a conceptual framework differ in that while a conceptual framework is a structure used to explain the natural progression of phenomena, a theoretical framework is based upon one or more theories that have already been tested (Camp, 2001; Grant & Osanlon, 2014; Imenda, 2014). The National Research Council (2002) suggested that one of the six guiding principles of scientifically based research in education is to link research to a relevant theory (Eisenhart & De-Haan, 2005). AERA's (2006) assertion that one criterion for judging the merits of an educational research is grounding in a theoretical or a conceptual framework. Resonating with the above, researchers outline the differences between theoretical and conceptual frameworks. I also had to identify and choose an appropriate framework for my study.

### **3.4 Context matters**

One of the ironies of leading teaching and learning is that educators are faced with the daily unpredictability of the classroom and of the learning process (Hargreaves, Fink & Southworth, 2003). The study was based on assumptions that it is important to learn about the how of educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting the learners' transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools. The central assumption is that leadership and management is best understood as a practice, stretched over the school's social and situational contexts. The context in this study of learners' phase transition is not just simply a backdrop for activity and thought, but it is constitutive of leadership practice as leadership and an individual's cognition is enabled and constrained by the situation in which it takes place (Resnick, 1991). The interdependence of the individual and the environment shows how human activity and the situation is the appropriate unit of analysis for studying practice. Hence, the practice occurs between leaders and followers interacting around a particular task. For example, this study explored educators who came from three different school settings. One school is in a rural area; another one is located in a semi-rural area, while the third is from a township area. Therefore, it is assumed that these educators would experience phase transition of learners' issues differently in their different context. Hence, human activity is best understood by considering both leaders and environment together through cycles of task completion because the leaders and environment are essentially intertwined in action contexts (Lave, 1988).

In a way that is consistent with the theoretical underpinnings outlined above, a perspective on leading practice that attends to leaders' thinking and action is developed. Leadership involves the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination and use of the social, material and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning. This definition supports a perspective on leadership, defining it as the ability to empower others with the purpose of bringing about a major change in form and function of some phenomenon to help an organisation achieve current goals (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Cuban, 1988; Leithwood, Begley & Cousins, 1990). This study acknowledges that leadership and management is supported by a network of people engaging in leadership and management practices throughout the education system. School managers therefore, need to encourage teamwork and collaboration, as well as

support of people working together to introduce new thinking, tactics and initiatives. So, leadership needs to be understood in terms of leadership performance and interventions in the organisation and not just in terms of leadership traits and authority in the organisation. This approach encourages collaboration between leaders, in their unique contexts, and work toward improving teaching and learning.

### **3.5 Choosing theoretical framework of this study**

I indicated in the previous chapters that the learners' phase transition is not a unique phenomenon to South Africa. This phenomenon is prevalent in other countries and poses a huge challenge for both educators and learners, sometimes with dire repercussions on the learners' performance. It is therefore, important to know how Grade Four educators support learners to enable them cope with the phase transition challenges. It is also imperative that as researchers, we understand how educators enhance their practices to enable learners to adapt well in Fourth Grade. As Imenda (2014) suggests, it is imperative for me to identify and describe the most appropriate theory or theories that provide a framework for analysis of this study. In this study, I examined a particular social group, the educators. A social group is a collection of people who identify with one another and are part of a similar social category (Stets & Burke, 2000). This study specifically delves into how educators adapted their curriculum management strategies so that they can support their learners to adapt to the new learning conditions.

Against the background provided above, I chose Adaptive Leadership Theory advocated by Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) and Hallinger's (2011) synthesised leadership for learning model. This theoretical framework was a preferred approach in understanding leadership and management experiences of educators in supporting phase transition of learners' transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in the selected primary schools. The two theories complement each other and provide a comprehensive view that enables me to understand, first how teachers in the study adapted their leadership, and secondly, how their adaptation supported teaching and learning opportunities for the Grade Four learners. The two theories are discussed in the following sections. Adaptive Leadership Theory is discussed first, followed by Hallinger's Instructional Leadership Model.

### **3.6 Adaptive Leadership Theory**

The first theory to discuss is Adaptive Leadership Theory (ALT) as proposed by Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow and Marty Linsky in an effort to understand the components of successful leadership. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) define adaptive leadership as the practice of mobilising people to tackle tough challenges through debates and creative thinking, and identifying opportunities to thrive. They view the concept of ‘thriving’ as more than survival, but to mean growing and prospering in new and challenging environments. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) maintain that adaptive leadership is specifically about change that enables the capacity to thrive. Successful adaptive changes build on the past rather than jettison it. They assert that new environments and new dreams demand new strategies and abilities, as well as leadership to mobilise them (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). As in evolution, these scholars see these new combinations and variations helping organisations to thrive under challenging circumstances rather than to perish or regress.

A challenge for adaptive leadership is to engage people in distinguishing between what is essential to preserve from their organisation’s heritage from what is expendable. Successful adaptations are thus, both conservative and progressive. The most effective leadership anchors change in the values, competencies, and strategic orientations that should endure in the organisation (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). These scholars contend that leadership should wrestle with normative questions of value, purpose, and process as successful adaptations make best the possible use of previous wisdom and know how. Those seeking to lead adaptive change need an experimental mind-set and must learn to improvise as they go, buying time and resources along the way for the next set of experiments. Adaptation relies on the diversity and for an organisation, adaptive leadership would build a culture that values diverse views and depends less on central planning and the intellect of the few at the top, where the likelihoods of adaptive success goes down. New adaptations significantly displace, re-regulate, and rearrange some of the old. Hence, not many people like to be rearranged. Therefore, leadership requires the diagnostic ability to recognise those losses and the predictable defensive patterns of responses that operate at the individual and systemic level. It also requires knowing how to counteract these patterns.

Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) maintain that adaptation takes time, and thus, it requires persistence and determination to meet the adaptive challenges of an organisation. They state that substantial change is the product of incremental experiments that build up over time. Thus, those who exercise this form of leadership must stay in the game, even while taking the punches along the way. For Heifetz, Kania and Kramer (2004), adaptive leadership assumes leadership to be a process rather than being viewed as individual competencies. The leader needs to mobilise people in order to meet the immediate adaptive challenges. The leader redirect people on specific challenges at their disposal; they address it by changing tactics and modifying the manner it was tackled in the past. This lies at the heart of leadership in the short term and over a period of time, these efforts build an organisation's adaptive capacity, encouraging and processes that will create new norms that enable the organisation to meet the prevailing stream of adaptive challenges modelled by a world that is ever ready to offer new realities, prospects, and pressures (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009).

Adaptive leadership achieves change by employing the knowledge of the people with entrusted interest in taking the organisation to a higher level to search and implement solutions to challenges. This provokes debates, encourages rethinking and applying processes of social learning in a given context; the organisation can also achieve change (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). According to Heifetz et al. (2004), since the model proposes that team work to solve problems in the organisation, the model provides a framework for getting commitment from members to actively participate and own the process. There are two main components that constitute the definition of a problem in an organisation or institution; these are technical and adaptive challenges, and they are discussed below.

### **3.6.1 Technical and adaptive challenges**

According to Heifetz and Linsky (2002), the most common cause of failure in leadership is produced by handling adaptive challenges as if they were technical problems. They maintain that there are two types of challenges that leaders face in any organisation. The two challenges are technical and adaptive challenges and while technical challenges might seem to be very complex, they are seen to be easily defined and have well-known solutions (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). These



scholars add that with technical challenges, anyone with appropriate skills, expertise and adequate and relevant resources can resolve them. Adaptive problems on the other hand, refer to problems that are not easily defined. Adaptive challenges have gaps between aspirations and operational capacity that goes beyond the expertise and current procedures of an organisation (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009).

In most cases, adaptive challenges are systemic; hence, they do not do a prescription ready for diagnosis. They require in-depth thinking, creativity and learning. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) assert that adaptive challenges require a leader in the organisation who subscribes to experimentations, encourages innovative thinking and effect changes from several areas in the organisation. If people are not encouraged in learning new ways of doing things, change of attitudes, values and alteration of deep-seated behaviours, people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). The sustainability of real change depends on having people in the organisation who regardless of adaptive challenges, embrace the problems and internalise the change itself.

### 3.6.2 Distinguishing technical challenges and adaptive challenges

In this section I give a brief discussion about the distinguishing feature of technical and adaptive challenges. The table summarises these distinguishing features.

Kind of challenge	Problem definition	Solution	Locus of work
Technical	Clear	Clear	Authority
Technical and adaptive	Clear	Requires learning	Authority and stakeholders.
Adaptive	Requires learning	Requires learning	Stakeholders

**Table 3: Adapted from Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009)**

Table 3 above, modified from Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009), outlines some differences between technical problems and adaptive challenges. The table shows that challenges sometimes

do not always present themselves in nicely packed boxes as either technical or adaptive. In most cases the challenges come mixed with the technical and adaptive aspect tangled, demanding involvement of adaptive leadership to learn and find collaborative solutions.

Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) provide three unique characteristics of adaptive challenges. The first characteristic is that the adaptive challenges have non-linear inputs and outputs. As discussed in the previous chapter, Grade Four educators in primary schools are experiencing challenges of learners' phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase which are different in context. There are no procedures or guidelines available as yet, to assist Grade Four educators to deal with these challenges so that they can in turn successfully support learners to adapt and cope well with the changes. Heifetz Grashow and Linsky (2009) provide a theoretical lens with which we can understand how Grade Four learners can be assisted to navigate through these challenging phase transition period as they sift through what is essential and what is expendable. In that process, they experiment with solutions to the adaptive challenges at hand.

Heifetz Grashow and Linsky (2009) caution against engaging challenges with comprehensive plans outlining huge jumps forward. These scholars prefer experimentation because adaptive challenges involve complex systems that can easily generate unpredictable responses. They admit the fact that not all the plans will work but others will be able to generate important new information. The second characteristic, Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) assert that formal authority is not enough in dealing with adaptive challenges. As it has been alluded earlier on, it requires that leaders involve other stakeholders and mobilise differently skilled personnel with expertise to deal with the challenges in the organisation at hand and succeed. The challenge, as alluded to by Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009), is that different parties each may want different results. Also, different people have different perspectives about how things should be done; hence, people have different beliefs, values, skill and knowledge that leaders should understand. Working collaboratively with other stakeholders help in solving problems. Producing progress requires leaders to influence other people to change their priorities, beliefs, habits and loyalties (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). The leader has to mobilise for new discovery; in that process shedding certain entrenched ways, tolerating losses as the pathway is not a straight line, and because working

through an adaptive challenge will always involve distributing some losses, and thus, dictating that adaptive leaders generate new capacity to change.

The study conducted by Ronfeldt et al. (2013) indicated that even when some members of the staff were prepared to work outside usual times to enhance the levels of learners' academic performances, not all staff members were involved. That means that even when benefits are evident some people do not see them the same way (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Another characteristic of adaptive challenge is the protocols that were highly successfully implemented in the past can seem to be out-dated (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). Adaptive leadership therefore requires leaders on regular basis to change tactics and strategies. Hence, the solution that seemed to have worked previously may not certainly work in another challenge as there are many factors that act at any given time. The nature of the challenge, people involved, time and space where the challenge exist determine the solutions reached. In the next section, I discuss Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009), adaptive leadership process.

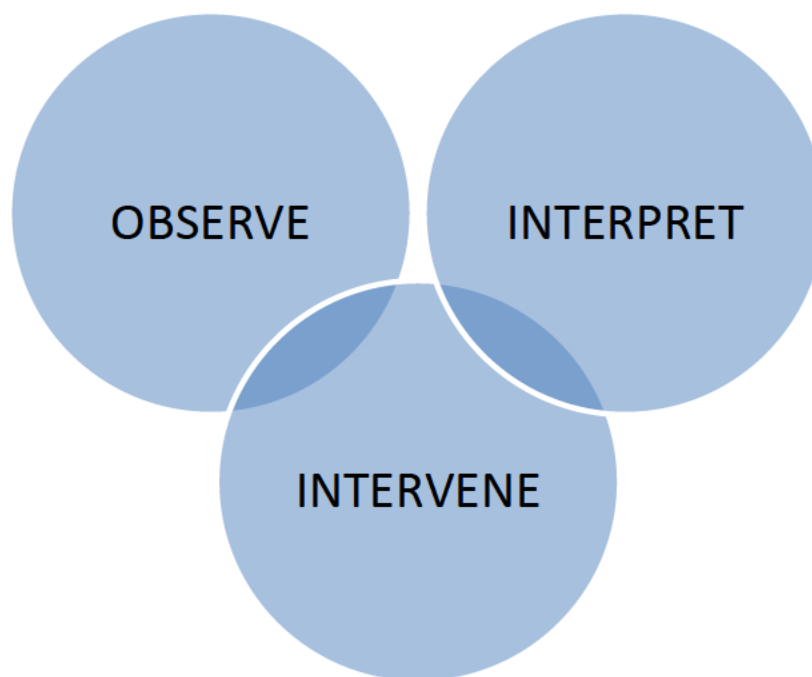
### **3.6.3 Observing events and patterns**

According Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009), adaptive leadership is an iterative process comprising three key activities. The first activity is observing events and patterns around you. This is followed by interpreting what you are observing whilst developing multiple hypotheses about what is really going on. The third activity is designing interventions based on the observations and interpretations to address the adaptive challenge you have identified. The process is iterative because each of these activities builds on the ones that come before it and the process overall repeatedly refine the observations, interpretations as well as interventions. In essence, the leader observes events and patterns, taking in this information as data without forming conclusions or making assumptions about the data's meaning. Thereafter, the leader diagnoses the situation in the light of the ideals at stake, and unbundle the issues involved.

Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) acknowledge that different people observe the same event or situation differently, depending on their previous experiences and unique perspectives. Consistent with this assertion, it is acknowledged that observing is a highly subjective activity. However, in

exercising adaptive leadership, the goal is to make observing as objective as possible. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) note that it is not that easy to watch what is going on but very hard to observe objectively while you are in the middle of the action in an organisation. They recommend that leaders should try to take themselves momentarily out of the action and simply observe the situations.

The metaphor of getting off the dance floor and onto the balcony is a powerful way to do this. It enables you to gain some distance, to watch yourself as well as others while you are in the action, and to see patterns in what is happening that are hard to observe if you are stuck at the groundfloor level. It is remarkable how much more you can see when you momentarily take yourself out of the action and simply watch and record. We typically ask the balcony person to tell the group initially, what he or she observed, just the facts, without any interpretation, as if the group were watching a videotape of a soccer game without any commentary. In the next section I discuss second activity that is involved in adaptive process, namely, interpreting.



**Figure 1: Adaptive leadership process adapted from Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009)**

### **3.6.4 Interpreting what you are observing**

As it has been mentioned earlier on, interpreting what has been observed is another activity involved in adaptive processes (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). These researchers maintain that interpreting is more challenging than observing. It entails making sense of what has been developed from the observations, noting that other people may have formed different interpretations of the same situation. After observations, tentative interpreting is done by developing multiple hypotheses about what is actually going on meanwhile, recognising that hypotheses are simply that, they are hypotheses. The main purpose is to make interpretations as accurate as possible by considering the widest possible array of sensory information and engaging with the group's preferred interpretations (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009).

The leader identifies the issues that demand the most attention and counteract avoidance mechanisms such as denying the issue, attacking individuals rather than issues, pretending that the problem is technical or simply scapegoating. It is noted however, that it may not be possible for an individual to form and evaluate all the possible interpretations that could be deduced from just a single set of observations. The recommendation is to get leaders to view the same set of data from several different angles. As reflections and continuous learning proceed, new ways to interpret what goes on around the institution and new ways of carrying out the work is entrenched. To practise adaptive leadership, you have to take time to think through your interpretation of what you observe, before jumping into action.

### **3.6.5 Designing interventions**

The third and the last activity in the adaptive process is designing interventions based on the observations and interpretations with the purpose of solving adaptive challenge (Heifetz et al., 2009). According Heifetz et al. (2009), a well-designed intervention provides the context and connect the interpretation to the task at hand so that people can value your perspective as relevant to their collective endeavours. Furthermore, the leader should inspire and influence people to embrace and take responsibility for the problem at a rate they can handle considering the resources available and context. The idea is that of keeping the level of distress within tolerable limits by

protecting those who raise hard questions, generate distress and most importantly, challenge people to rethink the issues at stake. To summarise, adaptive leadership involves moving people who have not been convinced by logic and facts. This requires the leader to adapt, to use his or her mental models to capture the context and make sense of it; to influence others towards a well-thought out activities and processes that seek to enhance achievement of organisational goals (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009).

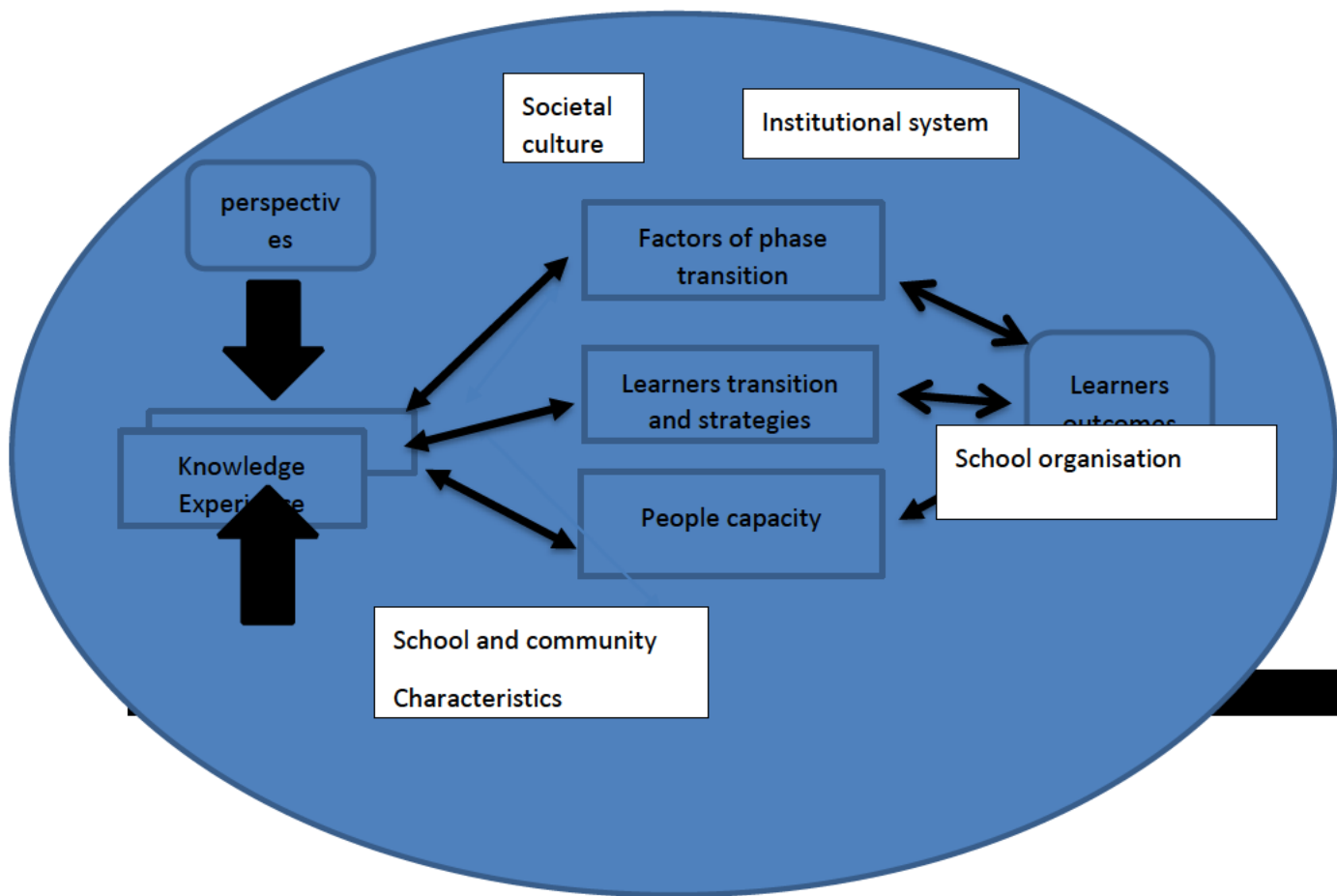
### **3.7 Hallinger's (2011) synthesised leadership for learning model**

The second theory that was adopted as theoretical framework is Adaptive Leadership Theory by Heifetz, Grashow and Linky (2009). I believe that this theory is relevant for the study focus. This study focused on educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools. Adaptive Leadership Theory mentioned above provides a theoretical perspective of leadership that deals with change and adapting leadership practices to ensure that teachers survive and thrive under new teaching and learning conditions. There is then a need for a theory that addresses specific teaching and learning conditions of learners that may explain their transition endeavours can be supported. Therefore, I opted for Hallinger's (2011) synthesised leadership for learning model to frame my study. The reason for choosing Hallinger's model was due to the fact that the study focuses on how grade educator in primary schools, support Grade Four learners in adapting well to the change learners. This is achieved through a collaborated effort, resilience and good set of values in an organisation. Values both shape the thinking and the actions of leaders and represent a potentially useful tool for working with and strengthening the school's learning culture (Barth, 1990). This model highlights the role of values in shaping leadership which define both the ends towards which leaders aspire, as well as the desirable means by which they will work to achieve them (Hallinger, 2011). Every school has a mix of values that shape the day-to-day behaviour of the principals, the educators and the learners regardless of whether the leaders are aware.

The model (see Figure 2 below) emphasises that leadership is enacted within an organisational and environmental context. This study investigates educators' leadership and management experiences as it is enacted in the context of learners' phase transition in primary schools. The model assumes

that school educators operate in an “open system” that consists not only of the community, but also of the institutional system and societal culture (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010; Mulford & Silins, 2009). Effective leadership is both shaped by and responds to the constraints and opportunities extant in the school organisation and its environment. Second, the model assumes that the exercise of leadership is also moderated by personal characteristics of leaders themselves. In particular, the model highlights personal values, attribute, beliefs, knowledge and experiences of leaders as sources of variation in leadership practice.

The other key aspects of the model concern the links connecting the leader and leadership attributes with leadership processes and performance requirements; these are linked, in turn, to individual, unit, and organisational effectiveness. According to Fleishman, Mumford, Zaccaro, Levin, Korotkin and Hein (1991), leadership processes refer to the activities of leaders and followers within organisational contexts as they solve organisational problems. This includes social influence processes that flow through organisational contexts and they include dynamics associated with the management of change. The strong assumption in this model is that such processes have great influence ultimately on organisational effectiveness and success (Zaccaro et al., 1991).



**Figure 2: A synthesised model of leadership for learning (Hallinger, 2011, p.127)**

It is essential to understand the purpose, the context, and the participants when determining the leadership approach that is going to advance educators' efforts in supporting learners' transition and enhance learner academic performance in Grade Four. Rhodes and Brundrett (2009) maintain that learner centred leadership styles that put more focus on all learners learning are more closely linked to successful attainment of school goals. Leadership for learning is central to the work required of a school leader (Hallinger, 2010). It is important that educators are identified as leaders in class; they do not only know teaching and learning challenges, but they should also be aware of the most relevant and applicable approaches and styles of leadership to address those challenges. As it has been mentioned in the literature, not all approaches are applicable in all settings and context. Educators are encouraged to know their context and the desired outcomes to ensure that the selected approaches or styles provide maximum impact to learners' success in schools.



Third, Figure 2 suggests that leadership does not directly impact learner learning; rather, its impact is mediated by school-level processes and environments (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008). In addition, the double-headed arrows in Figure 2 suggest that school leadership both influences and is influenced by these school-level processes and conditions (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 2010; Mulford & Silins, 2009). Finally, it is noted that this conceptualisation frames leadership as directed explicitly, though not solely, towards learners' support to adapt and cope with change, particularly learning outcomes. I chose Hallinger's (2011) synthesised leadership for learning model to frame this study. This model allowed me to deal simultaneously with both the complex learners phase transition, educators experiences' constraints and enablers in supporting learners (Nicolini, 2013). Leadership has to be understood in relation to combinations of different professional practices. Hence, leadership is not a simple and straightforward leadership performance but, a complex process of co-production to be handled in a concrete manner (Salo, Nylund & Stjernstrøm, 2014). Therefore, leadership practices related to teaching and learning form part of broader, complex and dynamic educational and organisational practice architecture.

### **3.8 An integrated model used to frame the study**

In the previous section, I discussed separately, Adaptive Leadership Theory as proposed by Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) and also Instructional leadership model as proposed by Hallinger (2011). In this section, I explain how I integrate the two theories in order to provide a framework for the study of educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools. The two theories assume that the context is constitutive of leadership and management. At the base of the integrated model (see Figure 3 below), I put adapting to phase transition, a solution for every child and the context chosen for this study.

The convergence of phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase highlights school technical problems and adaptive challenges (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). Both theories incorporate the educators' leadership and management experiences, knowledge, values and beliefs in the complex contemporary environments that educators are faced with. In

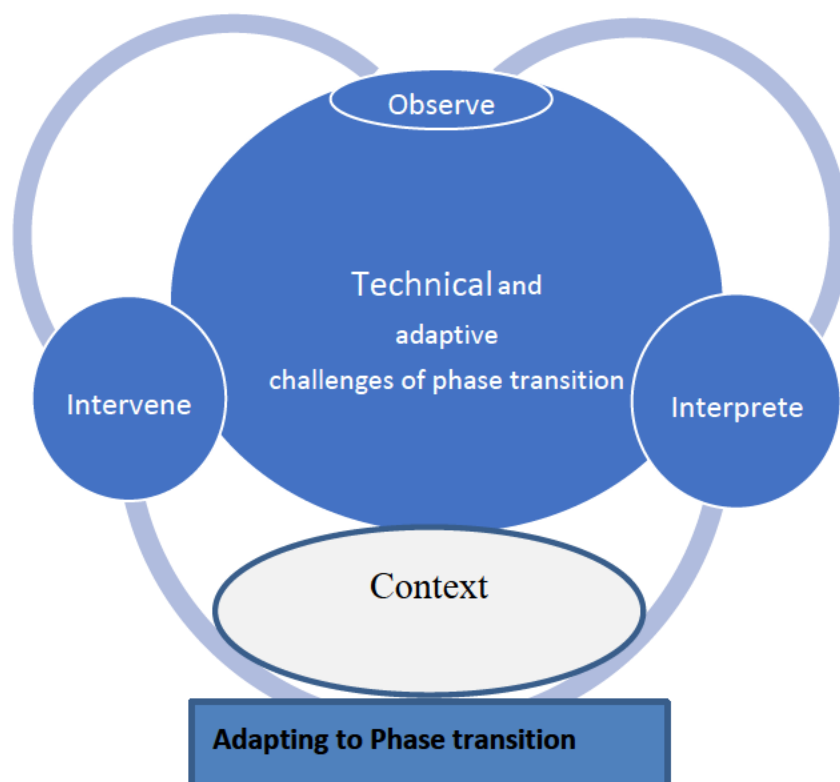
this study, the focus is on the educators, noting that there are other leaders in the school who are engaged with teaching and learning. In the integrated model, I put the educators at the centre of everything that happens in the school. The educators' influences and works with others to tackle the technical and adaptive challenges they are faced with to ensure that learners are supported to adapt and cope well with the changes in the fourth grade. The process involves observing, interpreting and intervening. The phase transition issues include change of language of learning, increased number of subjects, increased class size and increased learning hours. The ultimate objective is to ensure that learners are supported and educators are able to provide effective teaching and learning that enhances learner performance in the fourth grade in primary schools.

### **3.8.1 Representation of an integrated model used in this study**

Grade Four educators were at the centre for this study. The model shows two types of challenges that educators could encounter in their work with Grade Four learners. These challenges are technical and adaptive challenges (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). The model provides three processes that educators need to embark on in order to support learners to cope with the change. First, educators must observe events and patterns; take this information as data without forming judgements or making assumptions about the data's meaning. They should then be able to diagnose the situation, and unbundle the issues involved.

The model suggests that educators should have the skill to get off the dance floor and onto the balcony and observe their teaching process. Getting into the balcony is a powerful way to observe events and patterns. It enables you to gain some distance, to watch yourself as well as others while you are in the action, and to see patterns in what is happening that are hard to observe if you are stuck at the ground-floor level (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). The educator as leaders play a significant role in promoting the quality of teaching and learning, the learners' academic achievement, and the degree of learners' performance in the schools (Chell, 2011). Another activity that is provided by this model in adaptive leadership which involves interpreting observations. This suggests that Grade Four educators should be able to reflect on burning matters to prevent and facilitate an enabling environment where educators view the same set of data from several different perspectives interpretations that could be made from a single set of observations.

Lastly, the adaptive process involves designing interventions; such interventions are well-designed to provide specific contextual responses; they connect your interpretation to the purpose or task on the table so that people can see that your perspective is relevant to their collective efforts (Heifetz et al., 2009). Educators should consider the resources that are available and the context; they should account for the challenges but handle it well. It is imperative that educators connect with the values, beliefs and anxieties of the learners in the fourth grade. They should pull all available resources, skills and knowledge at their disposal. Moreover, this model encourages educators to use their mental models and adapt. Also, they have to influence others towards well thought activities and processes that seek to enhance teaching and learning. They should be able to capture the context and make sense of it, and to support learners to adapt to the change and achieve their goals in primary schools. Educators partners with various stakeholders for the improvement of teaching and learning by providing a school culture where all educators and parents, including school leaders, can work together for the benefit of all learners acquiring best knowledge through learning (Woolfolk & Hoy, 2009). The proposed integrated model was deemed appropriate to study direct and indirect learners phase transition challenges that affects not only the leadership practices but mostly efficient provisioning of quality teaching and learning. The model seeks solution for every learner in primary schools.



**Figure 3: Adaptive leadership theory model**

Figure 3 indicates the application of both technical and adaptive challenges in dealing with the challenges and difficulties faced by teachers and learners who transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. Adaptive Leadership Theory clearly, provides a relevant lens to understanding how teachers and school managers handle this difficult phase.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented Adaptive Leadership Theory, and it highlighted some main constructs of the theory which were the technical problems and adaptive leadership challenges that the educators are faced with in Grade Four. In this chapter, I presented and outlined an integrated model to show how I connected the two theoretical constructs in order to have a bigger frame to study educators' leadership and management experiences of phase transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in primary schools. In the next section, I provide a comprehensive discussion about methodological issues considered in conducting the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I discussed a theoretical framework that underpinned this research. The theories that constitute a framework are Adaptive Leadership Theory and Instructional leadership model. I further presented how these two theories merged to form a theoretical framework for the study. This chapter presents and justifies the methodological journey that this study took. Then, I discuss a qualitative research design that was employed in the study. Thereafter, I explore the methodology that was used to generate data that would assist in answering the research questions. I adopted this qualitative inquiry so that I could get an in-depth perspective of the lived experiences of Grade Four educators in supporting learners phase transition in primary schools. Afterward, I present the methods of data generation that are obviously aligned with the methodology. I also provide the rationale for using each method. Then, I discuss the analysis of the field texts. This is followed by discussing issues of trustworthiness. The chapter concludes by addressing the steps taken to ensure that the study was conducted ethically. It is important to explain that all empirical research among humans and animals are conducted in ways that comply with ethical standards as set out by research and academic institutions. Similarly, I had to ensure that the study complied with the general research ethics and more importantly with the University of KwaZulu-Natal ethics policy. This is in line with the views expressed by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) who state that the methodology chapter should explain the logic and flow of the systematic processes followed in conducting a research project and in gaining knowledge about research problem. It is believed that the preferred research methodology for this study assists in providing suitable answers to the following questions. Before I proceed with the discussion, I think that it is appropriate at this time to remind the readers about what are the research questions.

#### **Research question**

- What are the perspectives of Grade Four educators in the uMlazi District about the issues of learners' phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase?

- How do the Grade Four educators support phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools in the uMlazi District?
- What are leadership and management challenges and/or enablers experienced by the Grade Four educators in supporting phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools in the uMlazi District?

## **4.2 Philosophical assumptions underpinning the study**

Since I was a teenager, I had a scientific outlook on life as I always wanted to see proof to believe those around me of why they think and do what they do. This was ontological thinking which was based on evidence, facts and statistics. I looked at life with a positivist worldview, which entailed objectivity, proof, evidence and little or no time for relationships (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In recent years, I started to interact with people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and different persuasions. As these interactions grew, I began to read around issues of multiplicity of truths, especially in human sciences. Such readings exposed me to alternative explanations of the nature of reality (ontology), and that there are multiple ways of accessing knowledge (epistemology). I began to acknowledge the diversity of realities and ways to create meaning from these people. When I became a departmental head and later a deputy principal in my school, I made it my mission to work closely with other educators in the schools in the uMlazi District to hear their views about their realities of the world. These educators come from different backgrounds and in my worldview, building a relationship with someone, and understanding them is of great importance. Next, I present a detailed discussion about research paradigm because such a discussion is important in even deciding on the study design and methodology, and all other closely related elements such as sampling, data generation techniques, analysis techniques, and issues of ensuring trustworthiness of the findings.

## **4.3 Research paradigm**

I chose interpretivist research paradigm because this it allowed me to look at educators as individuals, each with their own contextualised leadership and management experience of supporting learners transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools. In

research, people's world views are known as paradigm which researchers often position themselves in (Rule & John, 2011). This resonates with De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2011) who believe that every study should be conducted within a certain research paradigm. Research paradigm can be explained in many ways by different philosophers and researchers. Nevertheless, many seem to converge on the view that it is a lens by which people make sense of the world (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013; Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Tomaselli, 2018; Okeke & van Wyk, 2015). Expressing a similar line of thinking, many researchers consider a paradigm as an essential worldview framed by a constellation of beliefs, values, and methods within which research takes place (Creswell, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kivunja, Ahmed & Kuyini, 2017; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Furthermore, these scholars concur that a paradigm is made of the following constructs ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology.

The literature provides three major educational research paradigm which is scientific, critical and interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Christiansen, Bertram and Land (2010) state that research paradigms represent a particular worldview that defines for the researcher who carries that view what is acceptable to research, and how it should be done. These paradigms are based on assumptions about knowledge and ways of assessing it. Kivunja, Ahmed and Kuyini (2017) advise that a paradigm guides the whole process of research from constructing the research question, methods of generating data to data analysis. The ways in which research paradigm is explained by different authors has affected me as I embarked on this research about how educators engaged with their experiences and practices of teaching and supporting their learners as they transition from Foundation to Intermediate Phase.

Doing self-introspection has enabled me to realise that my view of the world has changed from seeing the world as fixed and immutable to one that acknowledges the multiple realities that are prevalent in the world. I have become what philosophers term an interpretivist, which prioritises people's interpretations of their world and their engagement with it. In my master's study, I declared myself to be an interpretivist. I realised that this paradigm enabled me to understand my participants and their lived experiences. It also allowed for me to interpret their lived experiences with a subjective worldview, and see things "through their eyes". The paradigm, coupled with the methodology that I used, allowed me to build relationships with my participants. I recall an

incident where one educator was astounded when he saw the approach I took. According to that participant, researchers usually treated her as if she was involved in a court case, where questions were fired at her. The reason for this participant's amazement stems from the latitude that the interpretivist paradigm gives researchers and participants. It allows for flexibility and does not hold researchers bound to one way of doing things (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a result, I liked and adopted this paradigm as my own outlook on life had changed and so was the interest and focus of the research I was undertaking.

When I began my PhD journey, there were so many questions that I was unable to answer. I wanted my study to be different from my master's degree, and I wanted to make certain that this study was original. One of the pertinent questions that I remember, that needed answers was, should I be using the same paradigm again? After conversations with my supervisor, I found that the interpretivist paradigm fulfils the prerequisites for the methodology I wanted to use. Further, my intention was not just to collect information from many participants, but rather, to build rapport with them and 'get into their shoes', and retain their trust throughout the research process. However, this is not to mean that I would not seek deeper understanding of what the participants mean by what they say and do. Even though I chose interpretivist paradigm, I thought that it would be necessary to discuss my reasons for retaining this paradigm for this study. I explored the possibility of using positivist, post-positivist and critical paradigm. The reason that I chose these particular paradigms is that, I had initially thought that these could be applicable. Each paradigm is made of the following constructs ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology. However, careful scrutiny of their constituents' parts convinced me that they were not suitable.

Paradigms are based on various assumptions associated with understanding the social reality (ontology), knowledge and truth (epistemology) that is concerned about the source of our knowledge, the forms of knowledge and methods of obtaining new knowledge, axiology, (values) which touch on mostly ethical consideration and lastly, how data is generated and analysed (methodology). While I have clarified that I chose interpretative paradigm for this study, I begin by giving an overview of the other competing paradigms that could have been used as well. Positivist paradigm was developed by Auguste Comte in the 19<sup>th</sup> century developed positivist paradigm basing it on the principles that there is one principle of single objective truth (Scotland,



2012). According to Aliyu, Bello, Kasim and Martin (2014), reality can only be revealed through scientific knowledge and it uses logical empirical explanation in its analysis. The positivist paradigm assumes the existence of a single truth (ontology) and the objective truth naive realism (Aliyu et al., 2014; Kivunja et al., 2017). Positivist researchers believe that the truth and the reality exist out there waiting to be discovered, studied and understood and the positivist truth is measured through reliability and validity (Scotland, 2012). In this research, the reality is assumed to be socially constructed and is subjective, depending on the experience of the participants. Since the nature of truth in positivist paradigm is objective, the knowledge in this regard is also viewed as independent of the knower, and thus, objective.

Positivist research paradigm is quantitative by design and is usually associated with statistical calculations, analysis and mathematical solutions, since survey and laboratory experiments are commonly used (Bless, Hogson-Smith & Sithole, 2013; Cohen et al., 2018). However, this study is qualitative by design, and thus, positivist research paradigm was not suitable. Post-positivism research paradigm on the other hand is also known as transformative paradigm; hence, it seeks to deal with injustices in societies (Kivunja et al., 2017). Post positivism emerged from positivist traditions and share certain similar believes but differs in several ways. For example, adherents of this paradigm do not think of rigid cause and effect but, they acknowledge that all cause and effects can happen nonetheless (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The next dominant research paradigm is critical paradigm and is discussed in the following paragraphs.

This research paradigm views reality as entities that are socially constructed and are under a constant internal influence (Scotland, 2012). Critical paradigm is more focused on communities whilst this study focuses on people at a very small scale and the knowledge is subjective. In a critical research paradigm, community worldview is considered when the knowledge (epistemology) is created as the researcher needs to interact with the participants (Aliyu et al., 2014); Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the critical paradigm is about transforming the lives of the participants and helping them in their state of ignorance and misapprehensions. Then, it is taking them from that state and helping to transform their lives. Certainly, this was not my intention in conducting this study; my intention was not to emancipate anyone, but rather, to understand the social realities of my participants, Grade Four teachers.

Therefore, the best fit for my study was the interpretivist paradigm. In this study, I wanted to hear the lived experiences of my participants and understand their worldview and practices in supporting learners' transition in the fourth grade. As much as the knowledge is transactional and subjective, it is mostly socially, historically and dialectically constructed whilst the knowledge in my study is hermeneutical (Aliyu et al., 2014). Consequently, understanding and appreciating paradigms boosted the quality of this research in many aspects (Kivunja et al., 2017). One of the major difficulties I had with the positivist and post-positivist paradigms is that they do not allow for relationship building and rapport, which is germane to who I am as a researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

#### **4.3.1 Interpretivist paradigm**

I indicated in the previous section that interpretive paradigm was chosen due to its appropriateness for this study. The factors that influenced the choice of my paradigm included ontological assumptions which emphasise the existence of multiple realities (Cohen et al., 2018; Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Okeke & van Wyk, 2015). I do not believe in a single and objective social reality (Flick, 2014). Interpretivism is directed at understanding the phenomenon from the individual perspective in their own experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). An interpretive research paradigm is also characterised by a need to understand the world as it is from a subjective point of view and seek an explanation from the participants' point of view rather than the observer's point of view (Ponelis, 2015). In other words, my perspectives do not matter, but it is those of the participants that matter. Therefore, as much as I am subjective, I do have to ensure that I suspend my assumptions and perspectives and allow those of the participants to emerge. More discussion on this issue is provided in the trustworthiness section later on in this chapter.

In interpretivist paradigm, the research methodology is also referred to as naturalist methodology; hence, the researcher is expected to study the participants in their natural settings (Kivunja et al., 2017). In an interpretivist paradigm, data is often qualitative in nature and provide a rich and in-depth overview of the study setting in unique context (Brundrett & Rhodes, 2014). Interpretivism assumes that knowledge is socially constructed and that social reality is subjective, limited to context, space and time; hence, it cannot be generalised (Andre, 2009; Creswell, 2013). In an

interpretive perspective, human beings are treated as social actors, thus, the meanings and interpretations of their realities are constructed by them through their experiences, interactions and actions.

In an attempt to ascertain the values of the study, I drew from Wahyuni's (2012) explanation where he mentions that, "in terms of axiology, interpretivist researchers take the stance of the emic or insider perspective, which implies having to study social reality from the perspectives of the people themselves (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2011). Whilst that could be done, the participants' rights should not be violated in any way. To safeguard the participants' rights, there are certain procedures that must be followed such as seeking ethical clearance from the institution that holds the rights to the study as their property. In this instance, it is the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I had to apply for ethical clearance and the ethics committee had to satisfy itself that my conduct in the field would be ethical. A detailed discussion on this issue is provided later on in the section on ethical considerations during the study. Interpretivist researchers discover reality through the participants' views, their background and experiences.

#### **4.4 Research design**

A variety of descriptions of research design have been advanced by different authors. According to Creswell (2012), researchers use a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approach, when deciding on their research design. Yin (2017) describes a research design as a plan of action to move from one point to another, where one point can be described as a set of original issues to be answered and there are some set of conclusions about these questions. According to Trochim, Donnelly and Arora (2016), research design is seen as providing a glue that holds the research project together. Cooper and Schinder (2014) assert that research design constitutes a blueprint for the generation, measurement and analysis of data. Cooper and Schinder (2014) argue that through research design, the researcher is able to decide which research methodology to choose for the research project, and this helps the researcher to allocate the resources efficiently. Furthermore, Cooper and Schinder (2014) look at the research design process as the plan and structure of investigation that will ensure that answers to the research questions are solicited.

When looking at the different descriptions of the research design process it becomes clear that research design is an activity that is conducted over a certain period of time. The descriptions of research design also indicate that the research process is undertaken to answer a question or questions, and that this is done by outlining the procedure by which the researcher will go about answering that question or questions.

In the context of this study, the design or approach that I adopted is qualitative. The literature provides three research approaches namely qualitative, quantitative and mixed method. The difference between the three approaches is that quantitative approach uses numbers while qualitative approach uses words, and mixed-method approach incorporates both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell, 2013). In this study, I made use of the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research approaches given by Cooper and Schinder (2014). According to Cooper and Schinder (2014), quantitative research approach is useful when the population of the study is large. These authors argue that in quantitative research approach there is a very limited researcher involvement and such involvement is sometimes controlled to prevent bias. Cooper and Schinder (2014) go on to say that quantitative research approaches are most appropriate when the purpose of the researcher is to describe or predict, or when the researcher is aiming to build and test theory. Another distinction given by Cooper and Schinder (2014) is that quantitative research approach uses probability sample techniques as opposed to qualitative research which uses non-probability sampling. When describing something the researcher is essentially looking for an in-depth understanding of the units being studied. Therefore, as supported by Cooper and Schinder (2014), quantitative research approaches aim to build theory by gaining an in-depth understanding of the units being studied.

A research design is very important in that all other aspects of the study have to align with it. Even the research questions need to indicate that there are no generalisations sought. Similarly, the method that is used to select the participants and participating institutions or schools needs to be aligned to both the paradigm and the design or approach, as well as the research questions (Bricks; Coleman & Morrison, 2012; Creswell, 2009). The research questions of this study are in alignment with the qualitative research approach which recognises experiences, meanings and interpretations, as well as the perceptions that people attach to their lives or social world (Andrade,

2009; Creswell, 2013; Kumar, 2011; Woodbridge, 2014). As such, this study is located within interpretivist perspective, which predominantly uses quality approach, and favours a qualitative research design, and favours research methodologies such as case studies which I adopted for this study (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

I chose qualitative research design as it is aligned well with the philosophies of interpretivist paradigm (Anney, 2014). This is because the qualitative approach deals with people's opinions, views and beliefs (Anney, 2014). Furthermore, Polkinghorne (2005) posits that qualitative research is an inquiry that is focused on describing and clarifying human experience as it appears in people's lives. This illustrates that qualitative designs fit in with my research methodology. Furthermore, a qualitative study is about generating in-depth data (Anney, 2014). Unlike the quantitative approach, which relies on numerical data, in-depth qualitative data is gathered mainly by spoken or written language (Polkinghorne, 2005). Polkinghorne (2005) suggests that possible in-depth data sources are, among others, interviews, observations, documents and artefacts. The objective of enquiry is to develop an idiographic body of knowledge that is best encapsulated in a series of working assumptions that describe individual cases (Firestone, 2010). Hence, my ultimate goal was to I understand how Grade Four educators support learners phase transition as they observe, and interpreted it, and to establish how their perceptions shaped the action they took within that reality.

To further elaborate on qualitative approach and its relevance for this study, I contend that qualitative research deals with experiences, beliefs, behaviour which are impossible to quantify mathematically, and these occur in the natural setting of the participants (Patton, 2001). Most importantly, the researcher is the primary tool in data generation rather than some non-living instrument. Further, the data that emerges from a qualitative study is descriptive, meaning that it is reported in the word of mouth or written texts, and so is the analysis. Social reality is constructed through participants' perception, experiences and the way they make sense of their lives (Creswell, 2013; Thanh, 2015; Woodbridge, 2014). Qualitative research seeks an understanding of a particular phenomenon from the perspective of participants (Creswell, 2013). Attention is paid to facts and data is interpreted in respect to the facts of a case rather than generalisation (Creswell, 2013; Thanh, 2015; Woodbridge, 2014). Qualitative approach was adopted in this study because

understanding social reality entails negotiations of meanings, outcomes and even interpretations are negotiated with human data sources.

#### **4.5 Locating this qualitative, interpretivist study within a case study methodology**

Like all other aspects of research in qualitative inquiry, case study is also described differently by different scholars. A case study methodology is an in-depth systematic investigation in a particular instance, in order to generate knowledge in its natural context (Rule & John, 2011). A case study can be a single person who is a case of some phenomenon, a group, an institution or a community (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study is a multiple case study involving twelve Grade Four educators in primary schools. In line with the focus of the research, a multiple case study looks at phase transition challenges in the rural, semi-rural and township primary schools. The aim was to explore how Grade Four educators enact their leadership and management practices in supporting learners adapt and cope with the changes in Grade Four.

In this study, I chose a multiple case study as a methodology to address the research questions identified in Chapter One. I made this decision after extensive reading around the different methodologies in educational research, particularly, qualitative inquiry. I also provided unique instances of real people in real situations, thereby, allowing readers to understand the phenomenon being studied (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). In addition, multiple case study methodology assisted me in probing deeper into the understandings of how Grade Four educators supported the learners in transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in different primary schools' contexts. To enhance the credibility and depth of this study, it was very important for me to have a wealth of descriptive materials about Grade Four educators' experiences in supporting learners' phase transition in their unique, natural context (Rule & John, 2011).

Case study research also raises questions about the boundaries and defining characteristics. Merriam (2009) posits that a case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. Creswell (2010) shares Merriam's view by adding that a case study is a qualitative research approach in which the researcher explores a bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time, a through detailed, in-depth data generation involving multiple sources of information. The boundaries that define the cases in my study were primary school educators and more specifically

Grade Four educators who teach and support transitioning learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediated Phase. According to Yin (2009), a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. I considered these factors when I selected my research sites and participants. Hence, my main responsibilities as a research instrument in these multiple cases was to get into the natural work place of the teachers, derive qualitative data through, in-depth interviews and analysis of each case to give meaning to this study (Leigh, 2013; Merriam, 2002). This enabled me to single-handedly conduct the research from beginning to an end, without any assistant from other researchers.

Due to the fact that the sample that I used to generate data was not large, I was able to direct all my energies into understanding and unpacking the difficulties of each participant's unique perspectives and world views in their own natural situation. This allowed me to unpack numerous deep-rooted, in-context realities about what participants perceived as their truths and why it was like that. By bringing to the fore the participants' distinctive natural interpretations of reality, this added to the richness of the generated data and this is what qualitative case studies pride themselves of (Leigh, 2013; Merriam, 2002; Rule & John, 2011; Yin, 2009). My motivation to frame this study within qualitative inquiry design as can be deduced from the above discussion, is attributed to the multifaceted strength of the case study which overweight the deficiencies of the approach.

#### **4.6 Selection of the research sites and participants**

When selecting my participants, I used the advice of Polkinghorne (2005), that the selection process requires purposive and iterative strategies. It is for this reason that the selection of my participants was a time-consuming and a reflexive process. On the one hand, I had to make certain that I have participants who wanted to participate in my study, and on the other hand, I had to make sure that I had participants that were going to provide a rich diversity of stories of experience. I also needed to use iterative strategies to make sure that the participants I had chosen were suited for my study. The sampling methods that I employed was both purposive and convenient. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to select participants that are relevant for the study (Rule & John, 2011). According to Cohen et al. (2011), purposive and convenient sampling methods are

often used in small-scale qualitative studies. Employing purposive sampling technique for this research process, enabled me to obtain relevant data from information rich participants. I used purposive sampling to access knowledgeable individuals who have in-depth knowledge about a particular issue in this study, namely Grade Four educators in primary schools (Cohen et al., 2011). I used purposive sampling to select participants and primary schools that can inform the research problem and the central phenomenon in this study (Creswell, 2013).

I selected schools from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education and purposively chose the uMlazi District. The reason I chose the uMlazi District was that this district had a large number of schools which are situated in different contexts, for example, the uMlazi have schools situated in rural, semi-rural and township areas. I then selected primary schools from these different areas which constituted the criteria to form the population. I selected three No – fee paying schools, one from the rural, one from the semi-rural and one from the township area. The purpose of the study was not to generalise the findings but to gain in-depth knowledge of how Grade Four educators support learners phase transition in different school contexts. I selected a small size in line with Yin (2014), to enable me to generate in-depth detailed data from the participants.

This is confirmed by Maree (2016) who posits that there is no sample size in qualitative study, but he recommended that sampling should be done until a point of redundancy or saturation is reached. That is the reason why my study ended up with twelve participants; that is where the point of saturation was reached. Since I had to drive and spend long hours and a lot of money on transport to travel to generate valuable data from these unique samples, I selected people who had the potential to display the set of characteristics that is highly significant and appropriate for the research questions. For instance, the participants I selected were teachers who taught Grade Four, as those teachers handled learners affected by the transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. Rule and John (2011) also state that in purposive sampling, the researcher selects research participants deliberately because of their suitability in advancing the purpose of the research (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2014).

I selected three primary schools through purposive sampling on the basis of their location and context. I selected these rural, semi-rural and township area primary schools in order to understand



if there were patterns of similarities or differences of educators' experiences in supporting of learners' phase transition in the fourth grade. Furthermore, these schools were selected for convenience whilst keeping in mind that they all should have qualified educators who were hands on deck in various activities aimed at supporting Grade Four learner in transition in these primary schools. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) define convenience sampling as an act by researchers to choose samples that are easy for them to reach. Since I was born and bred in Durban. I knew the area quite well, and the schools were not far from from where I live; thus, they were easily accessible. This enabled me to spend reasonable amount of money in terms of transport costs to the research sites. I knew that these schools were not representative of all Grade Four learners who are undergoing phase transition in primary schools in the district. Nevertheless, they were uniquely representing themselves (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2014). The intention of the study was not to generalise the results beyond the group sampled. In the next section, I provide details about how I gained access to the research sites and recruit the participants for the study.

#### **4. 7 Gaining access to the schools**

To commence the process of selecting my participants, I had to gain the access to the schools. Gaining access to the schools was not a problem but I had to do some combination of strategic planning and hard work. Researchers such as Gummesson (2000); Feldman, Bell and Berger (2000); Shenton and Heyter (2004) point out that it is not easy to gain access to organisations, and this is one of the problems that face researchers aiming to carry out in-depth qualitative case studies. They assert that, these challenges are not documented in the literature in much depth. They further state that these hurdles related to gaining access are often neglected or seen as merely a tactical issue.

The literature provides three types of access, the first one is formal access which refers to obtaining an agreement between the organisation and the researcher on specific terms including what, when and how the researcher will generate empirical data from the organisation and in return what s/he will provide. The second one is personal access which means that the researcher is getting to know relevant individuals. The third one is fostering individual rapport which refers to developing a

good understanding and collaboration between the participants and the researcher (Gummesson, 2000; Laurila, 1997). Guided by these notions of access, I visited the selected schools optimistic that all would be well and that all educators would be willing to contribute in my study. As I have repeatedly explained in the previous sections, my study required that Grade Four educators express their perspectives about phase transition of learners and how they support learners to adapt and cope with the changes in the fourth grade. I was lucky because I knew all the principals of the school I had visited. So, obtaining permission to conduct research was not a problem as all the principal gave me permission without any hassles. However, some educators disappointed me and apologised that they were not available to participate in my study. They claimed that they were too busy as they were overloaded with Grade Four work which was challenging and would not have time for me or any other researchers to waste their time.

As disappointed as I was, I proceeded to other schools and had to find other educators from other primary school to replace the educators I was denied to include in my sample. This time, I had a strategy to avoid the issue of time as an obstacle in hindering getting the participants. In the next three schools I visited, I promised educators that I would interview them during breaks or anytime of their choice. In that way, I would not interfere with their teaching time. Further, I would provide meals for each participant when I come for interviews. That was not bribery but it was a way of ensuring that they will not be spending their time and money at the same time while we held our conversations. The strategy worked very well; eventually, I was able to get four participants in each three primary schools.

I obtained permission to work with these educators from the principal and also relied on them to recruit potential and willing educators to participate in my study. To get the Grade Four educators from each school, I had to use convenience sampling. Convenient sampling involved selecting participants that are accessible and convenient for the researcher. I chose convenient sampling for this study because Grade Four educators were hard-to-reach group for me (Cohen et al., 2011). Using convenient method made things much easier and convenient for me to access the participants. Had I used other methods, it would have been difficult and time-consuming for me to familiarise and understand different staff members in each school. Convenience method further made it easier for me to get people with unique characteristics that were needed for the research

through recommendations that were given by the principals a (Merriam, 2009; Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011).

Like any other sampling procedures, convenience sampling had some disadvantages attached to it. The disadvantage was that it was prone to biases of the principals which I had no control over. Some educators were visibly disgruntled by this exercise. I had to explain to them the purpose of the exercise and assure them about the purpose of the study and the fact that our conversations were confidential and that anonymity was guaranteed. I also had to explain that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any given point if she so wished as I was ethically bound to keep to that promise. Through convenience sampling intertwined with purposive sampling, I managed to get twelve Fourth Grade educators, (four in rural settings, four in semi-rural setting and four in township settings). I discussed the profiles of the research schools as well as the profiles of the participants at the beginning of Chapter Four. The aim is to connect the results with the context under which the participants worked and the presentation of the data. Having discussed issues of gaining access to the research sites and participants, the logical step is to talk about how data was generated once in the research sites.

#### **4.8 Data generation techniques**

The next step after obtaining permission to access the research site was to generate data. This section presents and discusses the methods and instruments that I used to generate data. I was influenced by my ontological, epistemological and methodological stance to choose the methods and instruments I employed to generate data. As opposed to some researchers who use the term ‘data collection,’ I took a decision decision to use the term ‘data generation’ to signify interpretivist perspective that data was not out there waiting for me to ‘collect’. I had to be there as a research instrument to interact with the participants (Leigh, 2013; Merriam, 2002), and understand how educators enacted their leadership and management practices in supporting Grade Four learners’ phase transition from Grade Three to Grade Four in their respective schools and the manner in which they did this (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2014). Yin (2014) views data gathering process as a collection of information, which may be in the form of numbers, words or observation of a group of activities about a phenomenon under investigation.

Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) assert that to generate data, you need meticulous and systematic method that will be employed, which will answer the research questions.

There are different kinds of data generation techniques one can use. In this study, I considered a number of data generation methods which are discussed below before choosing what was deemed appropriate one. Before considering the best data generation technique, I had to first look at the Critical Incident Technique. After reading about this technique, I found it not suitable since it focuses on behaviour in defined situations. Although this technique would have been more relevant in a qualitative research project but it is more of a controlled approach. According to Collis and Hussey (2003), Critical Incident Technique is more useful in an interview. It has limitations though, in that the participants are expected to remember specifics of critical behaviours. The technique was not suitable for this study. Preliminary readings indicated that the potential participants in this study may not be keeping diaries of what happens at work on a daily basis. Even if the participants kept such diaries, the limitations associated with this data gathering method are immense. For example, it would be difficult for me to analyse the data because the manner in which the participants would have recorded their data would not have been the same. Furthermore, I would have struggled to find enough participants since such a technique relies mainly on volunteers. This technique was therefore discarded.

#### **4.8.1 Semi-structured interviews**

I used semi-structured interviews as a method of generating qualitative data. Before getting into a detailed discussion of this method, I give a broad overview of what constitutes a discussion between interviewers and interviewees. Data generation in this study entailed obtaining information through direct interchange with an individual or group that has been identified as possessing the knowledge that the researcher is seeking (Greeff, 2011). This is regarded as a social relationship designed to exchange information between the participant and the researcher. Greeff (2011) defines qualitative interviews as an attempt to understand the world from the participants' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences and to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations.

Having looked at the above data generation methods, I realised that if a carefully structured document which could elicit credible responses was to be used, the data I should produce is the data that I can trust and rely on. I chose semi-structured interviews because they are flexible and provide open platforms where participants are free to air their experiences, perceptions and provide explanations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2008; Walliman, 2009; Yin, 2014). Maree (2016) views interviews as one of the most important data generation methods which are used to produce case study evidence. The study is based on qualitative design where the researcher interacts with participants in their own environment. It is important to not disrupt the participants' life settings; thus, the interviews were conducted in the schools where participants work at their convenient times.

There are different kinds of interviewing strategies (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2011) that may be employed in the qualitative approach, such as structured, unstructured interviews and semi structured or informal interviews. Yin (2012) posits that semi-structured interviews can offer rich and substantial material than other types of interviews. I employed semi-structured interviews because this technique allowed me to engage with the participants in generating information that is needed by the study. I utilised semi-structured interviews mainly to engage with the participants for the purpose of sourcing information. Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative method of inquiry (Andrade, 2009; Kumar, 2011) which is used to understand certain aspects in the social world view of the participants. Interviews are best suited for understanding people's perceptions and experiences (Blandford, 2013). In addition, I used a semi-structured interview as it has an advantage of probing for more answers (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen & Guest, 2005; Ritchie & Lewis, 2011; Creswell, 2013) where necessary.

Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative method of inquiry (Andrade, 2009; Kumar, 2011) which is used to understand certain aspects in the social world view of participants. Further, I used semi-structured interviews in this study to have control over the pace and structure of the interviews, at the same time, allowing the participants to give detailed information. In a semi structured interview, the questions are formulated in advance, and the interviewer can decide on the sequence of the questions during interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since the data that I generated was qualitative, the flexibility of semi-structured interview allowed me to achieve in-

depth information by probing the participants' responses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Probing was necessary for me to gain in-depth data that was needed to answer the research question. Semi-structured interviews with regards to its flexibility improved the trustworthiness of the study.

Semi-structured interviews as data generation method has its own disadvantages as well. The prominent drawback of this technique is that one may not have too many participants; hence, the intensity and complexity of interviews may be lost (Bengtsson, 2016). In this instance, twelve Grade Four participants were interviewed for approximately an hour each. Each interview took almost an hour in a space of their convenience. In addition, planning and arranging semi-structured face-to-face interviews was time consuming. Further, not all participants were equally articulate and insightful about the issues pertaining to the study, resulting in an uneven data (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). There privrf an opportunity for some participants to respond in various ways including, attempting to impress me or reserve concealed some information. Furthermore, semi structures can be expensive in terms of time. The generated dat can be daunting in terms of volume which may make the analysis to be difficult (Cohen et al., 2011). Combined with the voluminous, textured data generated, it took longer time to sort and analyse data.

Notwithstanding the limitations highlighted above, I was able to get rich, in-depth data from the participants in this research. I took several steps to minimise biases and to strengthen this source of evidence about educators' experiences of supporting learners phase transition. To minimise biases, I made it a point that I did not take sides during the interviews. I accepted the data as it was presented by the participants, constantly probing questions for in-depth detailed examples of their experiences. Further, I allowed the participants sufficient time to respond without interrupting them. More than that, after each interview, all the data captured was transferred to the computer system during the data transcription process. The interviews were conducted as a guided conversation where the participants were made to feel relaxed and comfortable to share their experiences. The conversation was guided by pre-set questions (Mack et al., 2005). However, they were not rigid and they allowed flexibility in the process. I used a digital audio recorder to capture the participants' voices accurately for each interview (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 2013; Kumar, 2013). I recorded each interview. The digital recorder afforded me enough time to listen to the

interviewee attentively whilst writing down jotting down only important issues. This assisted me to analyse the responses and engage fully with the interviewee because I was not writing everything down.

I conducted the interviews in a manner that precluded the participants from hijacking the conversation which may lead the interview astray. Therefore, sticking with the time set and principles of the semi-structured interview, was critically important. After each interview, I transferred each interview and saved it in my computer and to protect and secure the information. I also saved the interviews on my memory stick as well as using online storage facility as a way of ensuring that I did not lose it. The process of interviews stretched for six months due to unavailability of some participants; hence, no interviews were conducted during tests and examinations. Interviews were conducted during week days. Many participants did not avail themselves over the weekend, citing personal commitments like visiting their families or families coming to visit them. During the interviews I made the participants to be comfortable and feel at ease before beginning the interviews. I assured the participants that it was a conversation and that there was no right or wrong answer but the aim was to listen to their experience of learners' phase transition. Follow-up questions were asked where necessary while allowing them to use the language they were comfortable with when expressing various points. In other words, the participants were free to migrate between English and IsiZulu. As a result, we had a deep and fruitful conversations with the participants.

#### **4.9 Analysing qualitative data**

Data analysis is a systematic presentation of the generated data to make sense of its meaning (Yin, 2014). It is important that I as a researcher, produce the findings. It must be noted that such findings can only be developed if the data that has been generated can be analysed so that meaning is developed. In research term, this whole process is called data analysis (Yin, 2014). The process of data analysis begins with the categorisation and organisation of data in search of patterns, critical themes and meanings that emerge from the data (Creswell, 2014). A process sometimes, referred to as "open coding" is commonly employed whereby, the researcher identifies and tentatively names the conceptual categories into which the phenomena observed would be grouped. These

emerging categories are of paramount importance as qualitative researchers tend to use inductive analysis. In a case study like this one, the data generation and analysis can also go hand in hand in an iterative manner in that the results of the analysis can also help to guide the subsequent production of data (Cohen et al., 2014; Creswell, 2014).

In preparation for data analysis, I consulted literature intensively on thematic analysis and established that thematic analysis is common in most qualitative data analysis versions (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Clarke and Brown (2013) define thematic analysis as a method which is used to analyse qualitative data through the process of categorising, arranging, and presenting insights into forms of meanings or themes. They further state that the advantage of thematic analysis is that, it provides a highly flexible approach, which produces a rich and detailed data. In this study, I used four phases that need to be followed as stated by Braun and Clarke (2006), and these are; familiarising oneself with data, generating code and searching for themes, reviewing and naming themes and lastly, producing a research report.

#### **4.9.1 The actual steps taken during the analysis process**

I undertook a laborious task of doing data analysis myself with the purpose of understanding and observing the whole process unfolding. I considered that data analysis should be guided by the theoretical, research question and research design (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Clarke and Braun (2013) define thematic analysis as a method which is used to analyse qualitative data through the process of categorising, arranging and presenting insights into some forms of meanings or themes. They continue to state that the advantage of thematic analysis is that, it provides a highly flexible approach which produces rich and detailed data. Both thematic and phenomenological analysis methods recommend that the researcher must first get to understand what was said in the interviews, how it was said and why it was said. That understanding becomes the first steps towards a long and intensive process of analysing the data. The process of data analysis was daunting when thinking of the huge volume of data that I had to analyse. After I had thoroughly read data analysis literature, I was consoled by the fact that when analysing, one needs to be systematic and consistent; hence, data analysis is a scientific exercise (Giorgi et al., 2012). The discussion of the four phases follows next.



### First phase: Familiarising myself with the data

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that this is a key phase in qualitative data analysis. It is a process that entails transcribing, reading and re-reading data while also noting initial ideas. Transcription is a process of converting audiotape recording into text data (Creswell, 2013). To familiarising myself with data, I first listened to my recorder for several times and also referred to my notes that I took while I was generating data. Together, it provided a better understanding of what was said and how it was said before transcribing it. In this stage, I was able to listen to how I conducted interviews, starting from the welcoming where I was trying to create and sustain rapport. Transcribing each interview immediately after the interview is an added advantage (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). During this stage, I got to familiarise myself with my data through carefully reading each transcript individually and trying to understand the lived experiences of participants. Transcribing allowed me to deeply immerse myself into my data, a process that is describe by Clarke and Braun (2006) as searching for meanings and patterns.

### Second phase: Generating initial codes or determining the natural meaning units

When analysing the researcher always tries to first understand the literal meaning and move to deeper meaning (Cooper, Fleisher & Cotton, 2012). As part of that process, I highlighted in different colours and made notes. In that process, some similarities and contradictions started to emerge from their expressions of what they were experiencing. Smith and Davies (2010) define coding as the method where the researcher organises data in a way that helps obtain a clearer picture of the message being communicate by the data. Those notes are referred to as initial codes whilst in phenomenological analysis, they are called natural meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I identified the codes and matched them with data extracts from which the codes were identified and extracted (Creswell, 2009). I sorted the different codes into potential themes and collated all the relevant data within their identified themes. These meanings or codes revealed the surface meaning because it is where I gathered initial meanings. To make it easier, I drew a table which reflected the raw data and the meaning I had deduced and I gave it a label or name (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To continue with familiarising and making meaning of the experiences of the participants, I read carefully and extracted all the passages that were responding to the first. For instance, “What are educators’ experiences of phase transition in the primary schools? I looked through every transcript to understand what the participants said were the changes in the fourth grade. To illustrate how data was analysed, I will make an example with just one question. So, I started by opening a table and labelled it as participants’ meaning, and then posted all meaning of phase transition. In this table, I was able to elucidate each participant experience of what they said were the changes in the fourth grade. I ended up generating the candidates’ theme and sub-theme.

### Third phase: Developing meaning

The third step is about developing meaning. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this stage of data analysis can be achieved by working systematically through the entire data set, giving full and equal attention to each data item, and identifying interesting aspects in the data items that may form the bases for repeated patterns (themes) across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This stage is not about coding but meaning making (Christensen, 2018).

### Fourth phase: Transformation of the meaning units/ Revelatory structure

This phase in Braun and Clarke (2006) is termed searching for themes. The meaning units or initial codes were interrogated. Whitting (2009) also notes that some of the themes that emerge may not match with any or have very insignificant meaning about the phenomenon. I did not disregard any theme at this juncture as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that nothing should be thrown away at this point as themes are still developing and that one particular theme may carry a significant meaning which might be contradictory to the rest but important.

## **4.10 Reviewing the fourth and fifth phases and naming themes/ Determination of structure**

Drawing from Braun and Clarke’s method of analysis, I further interrogated the meaning of my themes trying to see what other underlying meanings were there. I was continuously asking ‘what does this tell me about educators’ experiences?’ (Whiting, 2009). I read all coded extracts for each theme and checked if they formed any coherent pattern (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I went back to

the collated data extracted for each theme and organised them into a coherent way with accompanying narratives. In this process, weaker themes were discarded and other combined. I then wrote a detailed analysis of the study to show how each theme fitted into the broader story and how it relates to the research question. This sent me back to my research questions and to my data to check what was initially mentioned as an experience, or whether the experience reflected adaptive leadership, and whether it was answering the question of educators' experience. Whilst working on the finalisation of the themes, I was constantly aware of Adaptive theory as theoretical framework of the study.

#### **4.11 Enhancing the quality of the study through trustworthiness measures**

It is always important that the quality of the study can be enhanced so that its findings can be trusted, or be trustworthy to use the framework that was developed by Lincoln and Guba. Many researchers concur that trustworthiness in qualitative researcher is determined by credibility, rigour, transferability, dependability, transparency, and audit trail (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014; Shenton, 2004). There are many strategies that Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest for addressing credibility of the study, these may include peer debriefing, prolonged engagements, persistent observation and triangulation. Triangulation is recommended by many researcher (Jennifer, 2002; Leung, 2015; Noble & Smith, 2015) in qualitative studies. Trustworthiness refers to the quality of the inquiry and is used as a way of evaluating qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). The trustworthiness of this study was framed by four elements which were developed and popularised by Lincoln and Guba, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Polit & Beck, 2012; Schreier, 2012). I next discuss each of the four criteria to judge the trustworthiness of the research.

##### **4.11.1 The principle of credibility**

Credibility in qualitative research is defined as the extent to which the data and data analysis are believable and trustworthy. Credibility in qualitative research implies that the findings are trustworthy and believable and they reflect the participants' views (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Mertler & Charles, 2010). Most interpretivist researchers propose that there is no one single reality that has to be discovered through research, but that each individual constructs a personal reality;

therefore, credibility is the most appropriate route to take (Smith & Ragan, 2005). Credibility in this study was enhanced by the kind of rapport that was established between the participants (educators) and me. The whole process of conducting the study was transparent and the participating educators participated voluntarily in the study. I set up an appointment with each educator to explain the purpose of the study. The discussion in our meetings were about ethical issues, consent forms, withdrawal from participation in that there were no negative implications in doing so. I also explained the point that the study was purely academic and not for profit making; therefore, no incentives were to be expected. In that way, whatever they told me came from them voluntarily, without any expectations of payments or any benefits whatsoever. That gave the participants adequate time to reflect before time to think about their participation before they sign the consent forms.

Another important point that I achieved through those meetings is that I got to explain the issue of using a voice recorder and how the interviews were going to be conducted for which ethical implications need to be considered. Using voice recorder to record data during interviews was another way of ensuring credibility of the study. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) assert that enhancing credibility during data generation by using an audio recording device enables the researcher to accurately create interview transcripts instead of relying solely on taking notes during interviews. All the interviews took almost an hour and they were conducted at the time and spaces that was convenient for them. Interviews were recorded while I take notes (Creswell, 2009), and I transferred each interview into my computer and safely saved them.

Another method of ensuring credibility is through member checking. After finishing transcribing data, I gave participants the opportunity to check if the data was transcribed correctly. Rule and John (2011) state that credibility deals with whether the participants agree that the researcher had adequately represented their construction of reality. I also used the expertise of a reputable established academic from the University of KwaZulu-Natal as my peer reviewer to evaluate my research and methodology and interpretation regarding educators' experiences phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools. Henry (2015) asserts that peer briefing is essential to clarify some facts of research, which may not have been clear to the researcher.

There are other issues that can undermine the credibility of the study and each researcher must be aware of such issues. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) state that the researcher's primary goal is to be unobtrusive as possible in order to not influence the outcome of the study. The personhood of a researcher in qualitative research is an important and ever-present aspect of the investigation (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Hence, I cannot claim to not be affected by the research process and my relationship with my participants. I accept my subjectivity, which may have influenced my observation and interpretation within the setting (Creswell, 2016). My personal, social and cultural circumstances can influence and shape my experience and my interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2016). I am a deputy principal in a primary school and I am responsible for curriculum management in the whole school. I have witnessed the frustrations of the Grade Four educators struggling to assist learners from Foundation Phase to cope and adapt to the change in the fourth grade. These experiences tend to shape my interpretation and experiences in the study in a particular way. My work experience helped me to gain better understanding of the topic. To ensure that my work experience did not influence my experience on the study, I applied reflexivity and member-checking to ensure that my interpretations were consistent with the realities of my participants.

#### **4.11.2 The principle of transferability**

The second criterion to ensure trustworthiness is known as transferability. Transferability is the applicability of the findings to another context that is similar to the original one (Cohen et al., 2011). Transferability of qualitative studies can be made possible when the researcher provides thick description to allow the findings and the conclusions to be determined by the reader (Rule & John (2011). Transferability is also judged by the reader based on the degree of similarities with the research site and the reader's site (Lodico & Spaulding & Voegtler, 2010). In this study, I have provided sufficient information about the field work site to enable the reader to make their own decision on the relevance of the findings of this research to their own context (Tracy, 2013). This means that the reader can compare the findings of this study to other studies to establish if there are any similarities and if the findings are transferable. I also enhanced transferability of this study's findings by making sure that accurate findings and recommendations on educators'

experiences of phase transition in primary schools were well captured, and can be applied by other educators or other readers to other contexts similar to this of my study.

#### **4.11.3 The principle of dependability**

Dependability is the third criterion to assess trustworthiness of the findings. Dependability is about making the process within the study distinct to enable future researchers to replicate the work, but not necessarily to produce the same results (Thomas & Magilvy, 2014). Dependability refers to the possibility of tracking the procedure and processes followed by a researcher for data production in the research site (Lodico & Spaulding & Voegtler, 2010). Dependability is concerned with the extent to which one's findings will be the same if repeated under similar contextual situations (Merriam, 1995). I ensured the dependability of the study by providing the details about all the processes, including the qualitative research design and the methodology and the application of the methods. This is in line with Shenton (2004) who views the research design and its implementation as a prototype to assess the dependability of the study. Another technique that can be used is that of ensuring that all the process cohere with the study purposes, the paradigm chosen, and design and the sampling strategies adopted. For instance, I chose non-probability sampling method and worked with a manageable sample size. By choosing this method which aligns well with qualitative design and interpretive paradigm, I acknowledged the fact that the findings were not at all geared towards any form of generalisation. Additionally, I ensured that during the process of data analysis, all field texts were fully examined. I ensured that research questions were relevant and well-formulated so that they solicited the kind of responses that talk to the research questions.

Interviews were audio-recorded to enhance the accuracy and authenticity of the findings, and to ensure that bias was minimised or even eliminated during transcription. The advantage of listening to the audio-recordings enable me to identify any discrepancies, and reviewed my notes and facilitated the process of crystallisation (Maree, 2007) of the participants' experiences of supporting phase transition in their schools. To ensure that there was transparency in terms of all the processes that I followed, I conducted a dependability audit trail. In terms of this process, I gave a detailed discussion of research methodology and research methods, and ethical processes. In the context of this study, dependability was also strengthened by working with experts in the

field and other academics who had an interest in the study. An independent critical reader peer reviewed the findings of this study to ensure that there was congruence in terms of data generation, findings and data analysis.

#### **4.11.4 The principle of confirmability**

Confirmability is concerned with whether the findings reflect the experiences and ideas of the participants. For data to meet the criterion of confirmability, there must be explicitness in the way evidence was developed, categorised, reconstructed and interpreted (De Vos, 2010). I ensured confirmability by employing various techniques including member-checking during the interviews and confirmability measures after the interviews process had concluded. This is but one of the techniques that are used to ensure that what is found emanates from the participants' views, and not from the interpretations of the researcher which may miss what the participants actually meant by what they said. That is where the notion of confirming comes from. The interviewer has to confirm from the participants if his or her interpretation is consistent with what they said, and thus, does not misrepresent their views and experiences. Usually, member-checking occurs during the interview process. The participant may clarify on the spot what s/he meant by what s/he may have said to the interviewer.

The second, closely related concept is that of confirming the story that the researcher may have constructed from listening and analysing the transcripts of the interviews. Confirmability also means that researchers have to confirm their interpretations and the accuracy of the stories that the participants may have shared. In my case, I first sent back the transcripts of the interviews. The purpose of that was to ensure that the participants could associate with the content of the interview or conversation. The other technique that I used was to set up a session with each participant to share my interpretations of what they had told me. In other words, the claims that I was making about their experiences were bounced back to them to either confirm or refute such claims. It may happen that what I claim to be their reality from my perspective does not align with theirs. Therefore, this gives them another opportunity to confirm if my interpretation is accurate and depicts their experiences as they expressed them to me during our conversations. In that way, I can

say with confidence that all the claims I am making enjoy the support of the participants as a representation of what they told me.

All the processes presented above are meant to ensure that there is rigour in the analysis, interpretation and arriving at the conclusions. Rigour and transparency in this study were displayed in every stage of the research to ensure that the data analysis, interpretation, findings and conclusions are undoubtedly trustworthy. That did not only ensure credibility of the study but also the dependability as well. Shenton (2004) highlights the notion of some overlaps in these strategies. In keeping with the trustworthiness requirements, I kept on asking myself throughout the study as to ‘how the study was aligned with and reflecting the realities as constructed by the participants (Merriam, 1998). However, Nowell et al. (2017) recommend that by showing logic and explicitly explaining the process followed confers the dependability of the study. In that regard, attempts were made to explain the reasons behind any decision made as I have explained in the previous sections. Nowell et al. (2017) further advise that steps must be taken to help ensure, as far as possible, that the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. I have confidence that the results of this study depict the views and experiences of the participating teachers who taught Grade Four in their respective schools.

#### **4.12 Ethical issues**

It is important to acknowledge that for every research that is conducted, it has to follow ethical procedures. In the following section, I discuss some of the ethical protocols that I observed to ensure that the study complies with all aspects of trustworthiness, transparency and rigour. Ethical considerations form part of rigour in research in terms of ensuring that the study is conducted ethically. The ethical considerations that I discuss include, seeking permission to conduct the study, the autonomy of the research participants, confidentiality issues and lastly, the anonymity of the participants and their schools.



#### **4.12.1 Permission to conduct research**

Ethics can be regarded as a set of moral values which offer guidelines and behavioural expectations about the best behaviour in conducting empirical research with participants (Strydom, 2010). Soliciting permission to conduct the study is one of the most important elements of doing research, especially in human sciences research. The researcher must plan to moderate the research and adhere to the prescribed ethical conduct (Creswell, 2013). Christiansen et al. (2010) also suggest that ethics in research is vital, especially when it comes to research involving humans and animals because all research studies follow certain ethical principles which involve the right of participants to be protected from any harm that might be caused by the research. Ethics are important because they focus on providing guidelines for the researchers, reviewing and evaluating research and establishing enforcement mechanisms to ensure that researchers follow key dimensions of ethics (Berzonsky & Adams, 1999).

In keeping with the definitions provided in the paragraph above and in compliance with the code of ethics, I consulted the University's *Policy and Procedures on Research Ethics* and its *Policy and Procedures on Managing and Presenting Acts of Plagiarism*, and I understood the content. Therefore, I had to abide by the general principles set out in the University's policies, and the obligations which the policies imposed upon me, and to mitigate any ethical and other risks that might arise. In particular, I did the following in order to prevent unethical procedure. Firstly, I applied for ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee in the College of Humanities of the University of KwaZulu-Natal and approval was granted (see appendix). Secondly, as part of ethical clearance application at the University, I requested and obtained permission from the Department of Basic Education in the province of KwaZulu-Natal to conduct research in its schools and permission was granted. The appendix in this regard is attached. in (see appendix). Thirdly, a request was sent to the school principals as gate keepers at school level, asking for permission to conduct research in their respective schools and the permission was granted. The appendix is attached in this regard. Data generation process started immediately thereafter, as the participants had already expressed the desire to participate, pending the granting of ethical clearance and approval by the main gatekeeper, the provincial Department of Basic Education.

#### **4.12.2 Autonomy of the participants**

The autonomy of the research participants is a universally acknowledged principle, and such autonomy has to be explained to the participants so that they know them and participate with full understanding of their rights. The autonomy includes certain processes that each research has to undertake to ensure that the participants understand their rights and powers of autonomy. Such processes include informing the participants about the nature and purpose of the study. The nature and purpose of the study was explained to all the participants at the start of the research process. This was done both verbally and in writing, before they were requested to sign the declaration of informed consent forms. I also assured the participants about their participation that it was voluntarily and that there was no obligation to participate (Creswell, 2013). After that, I gave the participants the consent form which shows that they were not forced to participate in the study. I also explained to the participants that there was neither compensation nor deception in participating in this study as this research. Forster (2010) supports the view that the researcher should avoid using financial compensation or inducements to convince the participants to participate.

#### **4.12.3 Issues of confidentiality in research**

Issues of the participants' autonomy and confidentiality are closely related. Litchman (2012) states that the basic principle of conducting experiments on humans is that voluntary consent is essential, and that confidentiality is important and that it must be assured. The participants were assured of confidentiality and its implications. *Pseudonyms* were used to refer to participants' actual names and their schools in this study. I assured all the participants that they would not be exposed to any form of harm because of their participation in the study. Maxwell (2013) asserts that the duty of the researcher is to protect the participants, build trust with them, promote the integrity of the research and guard against any form of misconduct. I ensured that the participants confidentiality and privacy were not compromised by making sure that I was the only person who could listen to the voice recordings and transcribe the voice recordings. This principle forced me to keep the generated data and any other privileged information about the participants private. Accordingly, I did not allow information generated during the study to be accessed by people other than my supervisor.

#### **4.12.4 The principle of anonymity**

The principles of anonymity and confidentiality overlap in many ways. For instance, confidentiality has to do with the information and identity of the participant being strictly kept between the researcher and the participant. Similarly, the principle of anonymity has to do with ensuring that the name or the identity of the participant as the provider of information is kept secret and private; nobody should know who participated in the study. The principle of anonymity is meant to also ensure that the principle of non-maleficence is observed. Such a principle simply says, no harm should be caused to the participants due to their participation in a study (Cohen et al., 2018). During the signing of consent forms, I also explained to my participants that their identity would be protected and that their identities were not to be disclosed anywhere in the study. I informed them that their right to privacy would not be contravened during the study. I therefore, referred to the participating schools as Sgodiphola Primary School, Akhisizwe Primary School and Zuzimfundo Primary School, and *pseudonyms* were used instead of the real names of the participants. This was likely to make participants feel secure in the knowledge that the information they would disclose was not going to be traced back to them.

#### **4.1.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a detailed discussion of methodological issues, including issues of research paradigms and what constitutes them, research designs and methodology, sampling techniques, data generation processes, ensuring trustworthiness and ethical considerations. I had to explain how I ensured that all these processes were aligned to the research methodology of the study, including the topic itself and the research questions guiding the study. The next chapter presents the research findings and the interpretation of data.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Four, I presented a methodological discussion about various issues relating to research design and methodology that were followed in the study. That chapter included the discussion of the research paradigm, the research approach used and other key issues pertaining to the research methodology. In this chapter, I present the findings from the interviews with Grade Four educators, and these findings take the form of narrative description of their responses to my interview questions. In presenting the findings, I use traditional model of data presentation as recommended by Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008). According to these authors, there are two main approaches to writing up the findings of qualitative research (Burnard et al., 2008). The first approach is to report key findings under each main theme or category, using appropriate verbatim quotations to demonstrate those findings. This is then accompanied by separate discussion chapter in which the findings are discussed in relation to existing research. Burnard et al. (2008) refer to this as the traditional approach. The second approach incorporates the discussion into the findings within one chapter. In this study, the approach that was followed is the first approach.

I opted for the traditional approach in presenting findings in this chapter and it includes the following chapter. The presentation of findings is informed by the research questions, and to support the claims that I make after analysing the interviews, I used the direct words of the participants. Using *verbatim* quotes of the words of the participants is the hallmark of qualitative inquiry. However, before I present the data and the supporting evidence in the form of direct quotes from the interviews, I provide brief profiles of each school and that of the participants.

#### **5.2 The profile of the sampled primary schools**

It is important that the readers can connect between the data presented and the contexts of the participants and their institutions. I selected three primary schools in the uMlazi District as research sites in this study. The first school is located in the rural area, the second in the semi-rural area,

and the third in the township area. I purposively chose these three primary schools in different demographic areas to explore the educators' leadership and management experiences in different context to generate rich data which is reflective of these educators, unique experiences of phase transition.

Another reason for purposively choosing these primary schools was because the mother tongue which is isiZulu is used as a language of instruction in the Foundation Phase. In the Intermediate Phase, the language of instruction changes to English. The selected schools are No-fee paying schools and are situated in the areas that can generally be regarded as deprived contexts, confronted by socio-economic issues such as high rate of unemployment, poor housing, high crime rate and the lack of sufficient amenities, as well as inadequate teaching and learning resources. In line with the confidentiality principles of research and as part of ethical consideration school identities and those of the participants had to remain confidential. I used fictitious names for the case schools' names and participants. The fictitious names for the schools were Sgodiphola Primary School, Akhisizwe Primary School, and Zuzimfundo Primary School. I discuss their profiles below.

### **5.2.1 Profile of Sgodiphola Primary School**

Sgodiphola Primary School is a Quintile 2 school in the semi-rural settlement situated in the south of the city of Durban. Sgodiphola is one of the schools which is recently by democratically elected government in 1994. The school is fenced and has proper toilets for learners and educators. The population around the school are predominately from RDP development houses. The school has high enrolment of 1452 learners which has led to the challenge of the shortage of space for learners. As a result, most of the grades have learners exceeding the capacity of the class.

Sgodiphola Primary School as by default, is situated in a semi-rural demographic and is servicing a whole mix of learners whom the majority come from the township residing in Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) house. These are houses that form part of the effort of the government of national unity in 1994 to build houses for poor communities. Only a small percentage of learners come from the nearby rural settlements. These low-cost houses provided by the government are congested around the school covering every piece of land that was left available when the construction of the township as well as the RDP house was completed. The

areas around the schools, due to the influx of people occupying RDP house, is densely populated. Learners who attend these school have well educated parents as well as those with low levels of education.

The community is characterised by high levels of unemployment and high levels of illiteracy; hence, most of the community members around the school depend on hand-outs from the government, while some depend on various forms of government grants. A substantial number of learners live with grandparents and some learners live with their brothers and sisters because their parents have passed on due to various illness. In this schools, participants reported that parents, in varying degrees, were not giving sufficient support to the learners and the school. They highlighted that parents lacked support in term of assisting learners with homework and providing support to the school in terms of protecting the school's infrastructure from vandalism and theft.

The participants reported that the majority of the learners in this school is solely dependent on the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP). The school has a programme of organising food parcel for those learners who are identified as coming from extremely poor backgrounds to take home. Since this is a primary school, most learners particularly in Grade R and most Foundation Phase learners who live far from the school for safety reasons use learner transport to come to school. However, some learners who live nearby walk from home to school. Since the school is located in a semi-rural area, many learners have reasonable access to technology such as internet connectivity, as well as gadget such as computers, television at home and cellular phones. This equipment can be very useful in term of learners acquiring new global knowledge and networking with other learners or doing various school projects. In the next section I present the profile of Akhisizwe Primary school.

### **5.2.2 Profile of Akhisizwe Primary School**

Akhisizwe Primary is a Quintile 2 school situated in a rural settlement approximately 34 kilometres from the city of Durban. Akhisizwe was built during apartheid era; hence, it is not well resourced and it has never been upgraded or renovated since it was built. The school has a lower enrolment of learners (560) compared to the two schools in the study. Unlike in the township and semi-rural

where houses are congested around the school, houses in this community are sparsely located over a large area and, that has an effect on lower learner enrolment compared to the other schools. It does not have computer laboratory, science laboratory or a library. Educators cited that many attempts have been made by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and the community members to renovate the school, but all those stories did not succeed. According to the educators, the school needs a serious and urgent renovation as it is not safe and not in good condition for both the educators and the learners.

The school is positioned near a narrow gravel road which is typical of the conditions of the road in rural areas. The school does not have resources such as libraries, computer or science laboratory or playground for learners. The buildings of the school follow the outdated traditional rectangular - shape structures of two long buildings each with eight small classrooms parallel and adjacent to each other. There was no proper office for the principal, administration block or a staffroom for educators. The principal used an old mobile classroom as both an office and administration space. The school building conditions were poor and characterised by many broken windows and doors. The participants highlighted that poor condition of the school was attributed to vandalism and lack of funds to renovate the school. The classrooms are overcrowded because of the shortage of floor space for learners. There are only ten class rooms and learner are around 68 per class. People make a living through various agricultural activities such as selling African traditional food like *amadumbe* and *bhatata* (sweet potatoes).

The educators of this rural schools reported that socio economic conditions around this school was distressing as approximately about 70% of their learners were living below poverty line and confronted numerous forms of socio-economic challenges. Due to the difficult geographic landscapes, access to various facilities was a challenge. This was attributed to poorly maintained gravel roads. Also due to sparsely located houses some learners walked longer distances from home to school. Further, some learners walked long distance for the valleys to the main roads where they could get learner transportation facilities. As a result, learners often arrived at school late and tired as well. The school had running water and electricity connection. Houses in this area did not enjoy the convenience of running water and electricity. The lack of such basic fundamental essentials impacted negatively on the learners' academic work. Hence, time which could be spared

for schoolwork was instead, spent by most female learners attending to various household chores. These included fetching cattle, goats, water from the river or firewood from the forest. The negative impact on learners' academic work in these community was further exacerbated by them being alienated from global awareness and knowledge due to the lack of electricity supply.

The alienation from global knowledge was due to the fact that very few learners had accessibility to technology such as internet connectivity, computers and television sets at home. Gadget like cellular phones usage was limited. This was a huge challenge during times of emergencies. Most community members in this area also experienced poverty; hence, they depended on government's social grants. The level of illiteracy is also very high as the status of education levels of the majority of adults in the nearby communities is low. There were visible signs of inadequate financial resources, material possessions, lifestyle and support networks required for learners to flourish in their education. In this school, participants reported that parents, in varying degrees, were not giving adequate support to the learners and the school. The general agreement among the participants was that the lack of parental support and that such a lack of parental support had negative implications on the learners' academic performance. Although learners benefited from National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), these poor living conditions were also causal factors for learners' frequent absenteeism from school. In the next section, I present the profile of Zuzimfundo Primary school.

### **5.2.3 Profile of Zuzimfundo Primary School**

Zuzimfundo Primary is Quintile 2 school situated in the township settlement school in the uMlazi township which is located approximately 20 kilometres in the south of Durban. This school was built under the previous apartheid government. However, it has just been recently renovated and new classrooms have been built. The school has 20 permanently employed educators which includes, the principal, the departmental heads (DHs) and one school administrator. The school has an enrolment of 658 learners, from Grade One to Grade Seven. The school is under-resourced; it has only one photocopy machine and one desktop computer. The computer is for administration purposes only, it is used for capturing learners' information in South African school administration and management system (SASAMS). The school has no science laboratory nor a library. There is



a shortage of teaching and learning materials such as stationery, textbooks, exercise books and so forth.

This township school is also susceptible to the challenges faced by the schools in rural and semi-rural contexts. The school is accessed by learners from various backgrounds, resulting in the integration of learners from diverse type of backgrounds. This is attributable to its proximity and accessibility to all. As such, this school has a combination of learners from the average social class and the poor families. The community surrounding this school has a high rate of illiteracy and unemployment as most of the breadwinners are either depended on government's social grant or are pensioners. Notwithstanding this, the majority of learners are able to access internet, computers, television at home and cellular phones to connect with the global world. Regardless of the challenges this community faces, most parents are passionate about education and they support their children with school work.

### **5.3 Description of participants in the study**

I generated data from 12 participants who are Grade Four educators in selected primary schools in the uMlazi District in KwaZulu-Natal. These participants were Grade Four educators, purposively chosen. Furthermore, all participants were from previously disadvantaged primary schools and community with low socio-economic status. The participants in these primary schools also experienced teaching learners who are facing similar changes that are unique to the fourth grades which impact negatively on teaching and learning. These changes include increased number of subjects, longer hours, increased learner work load and overcrowding. To maintain anonymity, the participants were given a pseudonym which were used in the presentation of data. The table below indicates the *pseudonyms* that are used throughout the thesis, their gender, professional qualification and teaching experience.

School	Participant's name	Gender	Qualification	Teaching experience in years	Teaching experience in Grade Four
<b>Akhisizwe Primary School</b>	Mr Mthembu	Male	B. Ed IP	10	7
	Mrs Ndelu	Female	PTD	12	8
	Mrs Mbili	Female	PTD	14	11
	Miss Zungu	Female	PTD	13	5
<b>Zuzimfundo primary School</b>	Miss Ncwane	Female	B. Ed IP	15	6
	Mrs Gumede	Female	PTD	16	9
	Mr Jili	Male	B. Ed IP	10	5
	Ms Sokhela	Female	B. Ed	5	3
<b>Sgodiphola Primary School</b>	Mrs Khumalo	Female	B. Ed IP	11	8
	Mr Simamane	Male	B. Ed IP	9	6
	Miss Dlamini	Female	PTD	17	10
	Mrs Shabalala	Female	PTD	22	9

**Table 4: Biographical information of participants**

There are few observations to make from this table. The majority of the participants in this study was made up of female educators. Out of 12 educators who participated in this study, there are only three male educators. All the educators that participated in this study were professionally qualified, which means that they are capable of teaching in primary schools in South Africa. Four educators indicated that they have a three-year education diploma and four educators have Bachelor degrees and no educators have a lower qualifications or Master's Degree. It is vital that educators are appropriately trained so that they are be able to provide quality education to learners. The qualifications of the participants are important to understand due to the assumption that if educators are qualified to teach, that has a positive impact on the way they teach.

## 5.4 Presentation of the findings

The presentation of findings is based on the research questions that drive this study. The presentation has been done thematically, and these themes emerged from the analysis of the participants' responses to the interview questions. The main question was about the educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners' transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in the primary schools. The analysis of their responses generated three themes and these themes are: (1) The perspectives of the Grade Four Educators about the issues of learner transition in the fourth grade; (2) How Grade Four Educators support phase transition of learners from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in their schools, and (3) The leadership and management enablers and challenges experienced by Grade Four Educators in supporting phase transition of learners from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in primary schools in the uMlazi District. The first theme has four sub-themes and the second has three sub-themes, while the third has two sub-themes. These are summarised below in Table 5.

Theme	Sub-themes
1. Perspectives of Grade Four educators about the issues of learners' transition into the fourth grade in the uMlazi District	1. Change of language of teaching and learning (LoLT).
	2. The increased number of subjects.
	3. Restructuring of classes or increased class size.
	4. Longer learning hours.
2. How the Grade Four Educators support phase transition of learners from foundation phase to intermediate phase in their schools	1. Rigorous induction strategy
	2. Code-switching
	3. Scaffolding

3. The leadership and management experienced by Grade Four Educators in supporting phase transition of learners from Foundation phase to intermediate Phase in primary schools in the uMlazi District.	Constraints: 1. Lack of resources 2. Mitigating strategies

**Table 5: Table of themes and sub-themes of the study**

#### **5.4.1 Perspectives of Grade Four educators about the issues of learners' transition into the fourth grade in the uMlazi District**

The participants shared their views regarding their experiences of learners' phase transition in the fourth grade. The discourse around their experiences were characterised by four main issues, namely, the change of language of teaching and learning (LoLT) from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase; the increased number of subjects in the fourth grade; the restructuring of classes or increased class size, as well as the increased learning hours. Each of these issues are discussed next.

#### **5.4.2 Change of the language of teaching and learning**

The participants in all three sites shared a similar view that one of leadership and management issues that they were experiencing during phase transition was about the change of the language of teaching and learning (LoLT). Most said that when the language of instruction changed, it became difficult for them to teach as learners did not understand lessons' instructions and questions in the new phase. Some of the participants said that when learners did not demonstrate understanding the lessons, it required educators' creativity and innovativeness to create and coordinate a system that enabled them to bend the rule and do code switching. Code switching means presenting a lesson in English and then explaining it in isiZulu. This system was coordinated and implemented by Grade Four educators to support learners understand the lessons. Mr Mthembu from Akhisizwe Primary School said:

*The knowledge of English in most learners in the fourth grade is not enough. [Kusaduma nje,'] meaning that these learners do not understand English completely. If you ask them*

*questions in English, they do not understand. They cannot, for an example, even write a simple sentence in English. It is even worse if you teach content subjects; they do not understand the terms and concept until you explain them in isiZulu.*

This view was corroborated by Miss Zungu from the same school that, at an initial stage, learners struggled in understanding English. This is what she said:

*It is very difficult to teach learners the first time in a new language because of the way they seem confused. I end up knowing exactly the fact that when you go to class A, I will be speaking to Xolani or Andiswa only. If I want them all to participate, I will be compelled to use isiZulu which is the language they know and understand from the Foundation Phase. If I continue teaching them in English only, I become a nonsense and others just hate you.*

Some educators attributed the challenge of the language change to the pressure of the socio-economic background of the learner in the rural areas. The fact that some of the learners came from rural areas where there was a shortage of resources and learners came from the environment where they did not receive academic support like their counterparts from township or urban areas. teaching them in English was a big challenge. Slindile Mbili from Akhisizwe Primary said:

*I don't blame the learners; they are from rural areas which are deprived in term of resources and support from the stakeholder and their family. Without proper support, it is very difficult to teach learners the first time in a new language because of the fact that these learners do not understand English, and they come from a disadvantaged community. There is a lot of social issues such as poverty that confront these learners. So, if you are teaching in class, the state of confusion, despair, loss of interest and tiredness is glaring from these Grade Four learners, and this makes it very difficult and hard to teach them.*

Similarly, the other two educators from Akhisizwe Primary School pointed out that English language was an issue with Grade Four learners as they transit from Grade Three to Grade Four. The root cause for this was attributed to learning in mother tongue in the Foundation Phase, as well as little English exposure in the rural areas. Mr Kholiwe Zungu from Akhisizwe Primary School narrated his story about rural areas this way:

*It is very difficult to teach learners the first time in a new language because if you teach them they get confused; they get confused because they do not understand what you are*

*teaching. The fact that our school is in a rural area makes things very difficult. Our learners are not well exposed to television where they can learn some little English while still in the Foundation Phase. When they get to Grade Four and start leaning in English, they become confused.*

Furthermore, Slindile Mbili from Akhisizwe Primary also stated that learner from the school in a rural area walked long distances and lived in poor conditions. This alone, affected their performance in class. This is what she said:

*The absence of learner transport due sparsely built houses affects learners' academic performance; when learners arrive at school they are already exhausted. Teaching these learners, using unfamiliar language makes teaching even more challenging and a time-consuming experience. The lack of parental involvement also impacts negatively in supporting these learners to adapt to the changes. I am tired all the time, and emotionally drained because of the effort I put and the pressure I exert on myself in trying to support these learners to adapt and cope with change. This means that I am teaching both my subject and isiZulu.*

The subject of language of instruction as a barrier to effective teaching and learning emerged in the other two schools (semi-rural and in township schools). The issue was not as severe as it appeared to be the case in Akhisizwe Primary school, a rural school. This is because there was exposure to television; phones and interactions with learners from different schools. This is what Miss Sanelisiwe Khumalo from Sgodiphola Primary School, located in a semi-rural area said:

*Our school is in a semi-rural area; our learners have adequate access to resources such as a library. They are exposed to English through mixing with other learners from ex Model C schools. Many learners' knowledge of English is not enough for learning purposes. However, the change of language is a challenge to some learners. However, due to the fact that our school has a library, I encourage my learners to go and read in order to improve their reading skills.*

This was corroborated by Mrs Philisiwe Gumede from Zuzimfundo Primary School in the township who said:

*Although our learners come from the townships where there is English exposure through access to resource such as TVs and libraries, but when they are learning in class there are learners who still find it very difficult to understand the lesson. I end up knowing exactly the fact that when you go to Class A, I will be speaking to Xolani or Andiswa only, and if I want all of them to participate, I will be compelled to use to isiZulu which is the language they know and understand from the Foundation Phase.*

Similarly, the other educators from the same school expressed the same frustration. This is what Aphiwe Sokhela from Zuzimfundo Primary also said:

*Most of the learners who attend this school come from this area; they mix with other learners from different schools whose language of instruction is English. It is disappointing to find learners in the fourth grade struggling to understand. Life Sciences in the Foundation Phase it is named “Amakhono Empilo” (Life Skills); so, it is confusing for learner in the fourth grade. I must explain to them now that what they knew as “unxande” (Square) in in the Foundation Phase is now rectangle, “unxantathu” (triangle) and so on., Now, they have to speak English and answer in English which was not the case in the Foundation Phase. This makes teaching and learning more difficult in the fourth grade and it’s a problem.*

Some educators had contradicting views regarding learners’ exposures to resources such as TV, computers and cell phone that could enhance their knowledge of English. This what Miss Nhlanhla Jili from Zuzimfundo Primary in the township said:

*Growing in the township with all the available resources and exposure to English language has made little difference in terms of learners adapting easily in the fourth grade. Knowledge of English is not right for these learners especially in Maths, where as a teacher, you have to explain in isiZulu in order for them to understands shapes and you are forced to use Zulu words like “nxande”, meaning square, sondezela, (meaning round off). I end up confused myself as a teacher because I have a challenge of isiZulu as I have never taught Maths in isiZulu, but all in all, if I want them to understand my lesson; I have to bend the rules and I teach them in isiZulu as wrong as it is because I do not have a choice until they adapt by the end of Term Two.*

Ntombizodwa Ncwane of Zuzimfundo Primary in the township added this:

*These learners watch TV and movies every day in their homes, but it is strange that some of these learners do not understand the lesson that is presented in English. With all the available resources in the township, it is really frustrating. All in all, English to them is not adequate for Grade Four curriculums such that you find that in a class of 63 learners, only a few learners can understand what I am saying in English, and can even respond in English.* Philisiwe Gumede from Zuzimfundo Primary in the township area also added this:

*The knowledge of English is not enough. I teach NSTech and I am supposed to conduct my lesson in English as per department prescript but if I teach in English only, without mixing with isiZulu. My learners, in as much as they are from the township, they just stare at me in a state of confusion and disillusionment. This is frustrating, exhausting and demotivating. At the end of the day, learners are not coping they are struggling.*

Sanelisiwe Khumalo from Sgodiphola Primary in a semi-rural area, concluded:

*It feels like I am teaching Grade One because most of the things are new; new language of learning; six subjects; two new subjects; new environment where they are now taught by different educators; tasks are given timeframes and must be learned and mastered. My work as an educator has doubled; I need to support them more; more support more work which means more pressure and more stress; it is indeed frustrating.*

Some educators highlighted that the SMT is against using mother tongue when trying to support these learning by explaining in isiZulu which exacerbates the challenges of the change of the language of instruction. Aphiwe Sokhela from Zuzimfundo Primary said:

*So, it is a challenge because you read instructions or questions in English and they do not understand; then you are forced to rephrase the same question and further explain it using isiZulu. After you have explained it in their mother tongue, then they begin to understand the instructions. When I code switch, I am breaking the rules of the department. The HOD insists that I must stick to the rule and if I am found explaining in isiZulu, I am in trouble. This is a big challenge for me to teach my subject and cover all aspects needed for each term. This causes frustration and stress, and it prohibits me from working at my best.*



This was corroborated by Mrs. Anastasia Shabalala from Sgodiphola Primary School in the semi-rural area. She explained:

*We always fight with the SMT and the subject's advisors for not covering the term work as learners do not finish work. I am always left behind because I am trying to support the learners and not to overload learners with work since they are struggling with language. The SMT seems not to understand our circumstances. They insist that the curriculum states that you must stick to the Annual Teaching Plan which is a challenge. These learners are used to five sentences a day how are they going to write notes for six subjects in the fourth grade? That is why they never finish work. They also do not know how to leave spaces between sentences. This, at the end of the day, becomes my burden as the HOD and the subject advisors are expecting the syllabus to be finished at the end of the term.*

This is what Mildred Dlamini from Sgodiphola Primary had to say:

*It very difficult to teach learners the first time in a new language especially because there is no parental involvement. You give work during your period; they do not finish because of the language barrier, so you give them homework; they won't do it because there is no one at home. Now, who will explain the instructions and assist the child to understand the work? So, the child will come the following day and the homework is not done. The lack of parental involvement is a challenge we are facing in supporting learners in the fourth grade in this area, and it very frustrating. Learners are not coping; as result, I do not finish the syllabus; it is impossible. If I do not finish my work, learners miss out and I am in trouble; I will be called to the office by the HOD to explain.*

It is emerging from the findings that the change of language of instruction was a challenge. This change of language of teaching and learning confused both the learners and the educators. The participants indicated that when the language of instruction changed, it became difficult for them to teach because learners did not understand the lessons. They therefore, did what they called code switching, where they taught in English but then explained what they were saying in isiZulu. The findings from the voices of the participants show that when learners from Foundation Phase come to the Intermediate Phase, their knowledge of English was not adequate for learning purposes in the fourth grade. This became evident when learner did not understand the lessons. The effect was

that educators struggled and became frustrated; they experienced difficulties and could not cope with the teaching duties. The situation had to be managed in order to reduce the barriers. To enhance the efficiency in English the participants used isiZulu. This suggested that the teachers of Grade Four had to bend the rules to support learners by code switching in the fourth grade. It also emerged from the findings that some educators found it difficult to support learners through code-switching as the SMT members were against using isiZulu when teaching.

The impact of the change in the language of teaching differed from school context to the other. That change had a negative effect on the learners' ability to understand the lesson presented. It emerged from the findings that the contexts of the schools had an effect on learners' English competency in the fourth grade. This factor was attributed to the fact that most learners, for example, in the townships and semi-rural areas were exposed to TV, cell phones and computers, while most learners, particularly in the rural area were not. Exposure to these resources could positively impact on learners' knowledge of English in the fourth grade which could assist them to adapt to these changes. It is emerging from the participants in the rural area that it was difficult to teach and support learners to cope with learning demands. These were the learners who were affected by poor living conditions. These poor conditions have had a negative effect on learners' learning. It also emerged that code switching was a challenge to other participants as they did not learn isiZulu in school; they had attended ex-Model C schools. Therefore, teaching in isiZulu to support learners who do not understand English becomes a challenge. Some participants from the township and semi-rural schools alluded that they had never taught Mathematics in isiZulu but because Grade Four learners did not understand English, they were compelled by circumstances; they had to resort to teaching in isiZulu, of which they also lacked competency and vocabulary.

Some participants from all the three schools further indicated that when they gave homework, some parents did not support learners with homework. Participants indicated that when they asked learners the reasons why their homework was not done, learners used to say that parents did not have time while others said that they did not stay with their parents or supportive adults; therefore, they could not do it alone because they did not understand instructions. The lack of support from some parents exacerbated the problem caused by the change of language of instruction. Such a situation made it difficult for educators to finishing the syllabus on time. Activities which were

supposed to be done as homework, for example, Mathematics, Natural science, Social sciences had a lot of activities that required the child to do it independently at home. The work that was supposed to be done at home ended up being done in class due to limited involvement of some parents.

#### **5.4.3 Educators' experiences of the increased number of subjects**

This section presents the second dimension of the participants' responses to the question about their experiences of dealing with Grade Four learners who were undergoing transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. The participants from all three sites shared a similar view that they were experiencing an increased number of subjects in Grade Four. Most participants from all the three primary schools said that when subjects increased from four to six, most learners found it difficult to cope with the increased volume of work. Learners found it difficult to catch up and when the period ended and the next educator came in for his or her lesson, many learners could not finish the work by the end of the period. Most educators highlighted that the increase of subjects made teaching and learning very difficult and strenuous. This is what Ntombizodwa Ncwane from Sgodiphola Primary in semi-rural area said:

*The increase in the number of subjects is a challenge in the fourth grade. I learned different strategies to deal with the situations I found myself in. The culture that I set in my classroom helps to foster excellent teaching and learning even though it's my break. I always made time to help my learners. I am a teacher that wants to make sure that learners progress. The workload is heavy; however, I push hard to make success of the job. It also takes time because these subjects are new to them to understand and grasp the necessary concept.*

This was reiterated by the other educators from the same school in the semi-rural area. This is what Mildred Dlamini had to say:

*The problem we are experiencing with regards to the increased number of subjects in the fourth grade is that our learners mix subjects. They fail to understand that different educators teach different subjects, and learners do not have a clue of these new added subjects. I have to make sure that if I ask them to take an exercise book of my subject I make a follow up to ensure that it is the correct exercise book; if I do not do follow up,*

*learners are going to take the wrong exercise book. This activity is very stressing and strenuous because I have to do it to all the three classes that I teach every day.*

In corroboration with Mildred Dlamini's views, Sanelisiwe Khumalo from the same school, Sgodiphola Primary also said:

*Learners do not finish work due to the number of subjects that are added in the fourth grade. They also mix subjects; for example, if a learner does not find an exercise book for isiZulu, she or he will take any exercise that they find and use it. When the next educator comes to class and ask learners to take exercise book for his or her subject, the learner will use the same exercise she or he has used for isiZulu work. Learners do not know how to identify exercises books for correct subjects.*

Conversely, other educators from the same school shared similar sentiments. For instance, Anastasia Shabalala from Sgodiphola Primary also explained:

*When subjects increase in the fourth grade, the amount of work gets too much for the learners. Learners get confused, and this makes it difficult for me to move on with my faster ones because if I increase the pace, it will not help learners; many learners will be left behind. This is because many learners mix and confuse exercise books, and the work gets lost or the learner has thrown away the work; that give us problems.*

Adding to this discussion, Sihle Simamane from Sgodiphola Primary School concluded:

*The problem we are experiencing with regards to the increased number of subjects in the fourth grade is that our learners mix subjects they fail to understand that different educators teach different subjects, and they do not have a clue of these new added subjects.*

Primary schools in the townships were not immune from the challenges of the increased number of subjects. This is what Nhlanhla Jili from Zuzimfundo Primary School in the township said:

*Learners do not finish work due to the number of subjects added in the fourth grade and different educators taking turns during their period; this is a worrying factor. They mix subjects; for example, they fail to identify an exercise books according to the subject educator. They tend to take any exercise book that the learner comes across with; some lie, saying that they have left exercise books at home. When they do come with exercise books*

*you find that it is mix masala. For example, for isiZulu lesson, the learner will use an NS exercise book, and if they can't find an exercise book for isiZulu, they will take another exercise book for another subject, tear off some pages, throw them away with all the work done. When I come to class to teach the following day, half of the class has no work. It is exhausting and extremely frustrating; more than all, it is demotivating.*

Educators from the other schools had similar concerns about the challenge of increased number of subjects in the fourth grade. This is what Anastasia Shabalala from Zuzimfundo Primary School in the township alluded:

*Learners seem to be confused when educators change periods whilst they are still trying to internalise what was taught by the previous educator. Then, learners have to immediately get ready for another subject when they have not finished the work given to them, and this creates problems for them and the teacher. Therefore, this increased number of subjects implies a large amount of work that learners are supposed to do in these grades. I can see that they are suffocated; remember that they are still very young.*

Educators from the primary school in the rural area shared similar views about the negative impact of the increased number of subjects on Grade Four learners' academic performance. This is what Kholiwe Zungu from Akhisizwe Primary School in the rural area said:

*The increase in the number of subjects has a negative impact on teaching and learning. I have seen with grave concern the confusion and frustration written on the face of these learners when I am teaching in class. And when you mark their activity after the lesson, it is an embarrassment to see how little work the learners have written which shows that they are struggling with their school work due to added workload of new subjects in the fourth grade.*

Lindiwe Ndelu from Akhisizwe Primary School in the rural area added this:

*When these learners come to school to learn, they have already been immersed in their household chores such as cooking, cleaning, fetching firewood or castle. These chores are attributed to living in rural areas. The added workload impacts badly on learners' academic performance. This is an indication that these learners are struggling because of*

*the amount of work that has increased. I wish tat these innocent learners can be prepared of the imminent changes while they are still in Grade Three so that they do not suffer this much in the fourth grade.*

Slindile Mbili from Akhisizwe Primary School in a rural setting said:

*The increase in the workload is a problem in the fourth grade. When I check the learners' schedules of the previous classes in the Foundation Phase; it tells a different story about learners' performances. You can tell that these learners' academic performance was good but when they come to the fourth grade, the increased learners' workload becomes a challenge to these learners.*

Lindo Mthembu from Akhisizwe Primary School said:

*The added subjects increase the learners' amount of work, and it affects me as well in the sense that I am not able to cover the work which is supposed to be covered in class, and this affects the whole term. I cannot move forward with my work leaving learners behind. Also, the stationery becomes too heavy for them to carry; it requires big backpacks of which, some parents cannot afford. Learners become extremely confused and squash the books and exercise books in a small bag and this becomes untidy. Sometimes, they leave some books and exercise books at home or parents make them to leave some of the books. This makes teaching and learning very difficult and frustrating because when I come to class for my subject, many learners do not have books or exercise books to do their work.*

That is what Lindiwe Ndelu from Akhisizwe Primary School had to say:

*If one checks the department's lesson plans, it does not accommodate Grade Four learners in rural areas. Plans are designed in a way that suggest that we teach learners who are given all the support like learners in the townships and urban areas, not knowing the type of conditions under which we teach the learner in rural areas. These lesson plans guide us with time such that they tell us that at a certain time a particular activity should be done, and it further states that contact time for each subject is limited to an hour which is not enough. In class have to teach, give activity which there is no time to mark; no time to do*

*mental work and no time to give homework in spite of the kind of learner we teach in the fourth grade.*

All the participants indicated that the increased number of subjects was a challenge to the learners' learning. It also emerged from the participants' views that learners found it difficult to complete activities due to the increased amount of work. The participants cited that when learners came to school they were burdened with heavy load of household chores from their homes. The added workload made it a challenge to learn effectively in that grade. The participants cited that learners were confused by the educators changing their period because that was new to them. The repetition of work adds to the burden of increased number of subjects and made learners to be exhausted. This exhaustion and fatigue made learners confused during lesson presentation and impeded meaningful learning. That situation compromised the quality of teaching and learning and it was also frustrating for educators. The participants cited that learners mixed exercise books and did not finish work on time. All the participants indicated that when educators were frustrated, their work rate was compromised, which made it challenging to finishing the syllabus.

It also emerged from the participants' views that an increased number of subjects had a negative impact on teaching and learning in the fourth grade as the child's workload increased substantially. This is also the time when learners start following the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) curriculum. Learners found it difficult to cope with the increased workload in the fourth grade. The increased number of subjects in the fourth grade was one of the major factors that the educators experienced in the fourth grade in primary schools. I have highlighted in the previous chapters that in Grade Four, the subjects substantially increase from four subjects in the Foundation Phase (Home language, Mathematics, Life Skills and First additional language), to six in the Intermediate Phase (Home language, Mathematics, English language, Natural Science & Technology, Social Science and Life Skills). Unfortunately, they must adjust abruptly to the new challenges. This is one of the reasons Grade Four learners struggle to cope with the new environment. Learners need long-term support from educators to help them adjust to the changes.

#### **5.4.4 Educators' leadership and management experiences of the increased learner numbers in class**

This is the third dimension of the participants' experiences of leading and supporting the learners during the transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. The participants had been asked about their experiences of this transition. Their responses from all three sites shared similar views that the issue that they were experiencing during learner transition in the fourth grade is the increased learner numbers in class. All the participants affirmed the view that classes from the Foundation Phase were more in numbers compared to the numbers of classes in the Intermediate Phase. So, when the learner came to Grade Four, educators were compelled to combine classes to address the issue of the shortage of teaching and learning space. This arrangement made classes in the fourth grade to exceed their holding capacity. The views of all the participants were that the restructuring of classes invariably led to overcrowding when the numbers increased. All educators stated that overcrowding made it impossible to reach all learners especially those who needed special or individual attention. Educators alluded that, this was a serious challenge because some learners took advantage of the situation and never did their work or submit it for marking. When the parents checked learners exercise book at home and found that there was no work, they came flying to the school to fight with the educators.

The participants from rural area alluded that they did not have many classrooms, adding that overcrowding was an issue that is known in South Africa. The participants emphasised that the challenge of overcrowding of learners was prevalent, particularly, in the rural areas and that it impacted negatively on the efficient provision of quality education, especially, on their transitioning to Grade Four. This is what Kholiwe Zungu from Akhisizwe Primary School said:

*Teaching Grade Four in these conditions of overcrowded classes is a challenge. I am not able to attend to individual learners that need special attention. Those are the learners that are left behind because of the larger number of learners in one class. I cannot even see cheating learners and those who are avoiding doing the school work and you end up leaving them behind. However, I try by all means by also calling parents to come to school so that I explain to them that learners need support at home to compensate or make up for the lack*



*of individual attention due to the large class size and the large amount of work in Grade Four. Most parents do not come to school.*

The three educators from the same school also shared similar experiences and views as those of Kholiwe. This is what Lindo Mthembu from Akhisizwe Primary School said:

*It very difficult to teach Grade Four learners in an overcrowded classroom, especial learners in the rural area where living conditions are harsh for the learners and the conditions of the school is not favourable for learning. These learners have just transitioned from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase, an environment that is completely different from what they have known. These learners are experiencing a new setup for the first time. Then, you teach them in an overcrowded classroom where there is not enough space to even divide them for group work; it is very challenging.*

Lindiwe Ndelu also from Akhisizwe Primary School added this:

*Overcrowding in Grade Four is a challenge because I cannot just give learners work and leave them to work on their own; you have to go with them and try to explain in isiZulu up until they understand. It is very difficult to teach in an overcrowded class; teaching learners who for the first time, are learning new subjects in the new language of instruction in the rural area.*

The third educator, also from Akhisizwe Primary School, Slindile Mbili concluded:

*Restructuring of classes is a challenge in the fourth grade. These learners are very young; we give them a lot of work in an unfamiliar language, with six subjects; it is really difficult in Grade Four. This affects the fourth grade learners negatively, and for me as an educator, my morale is always low. As a school in a rural area, we have on numerous occasions, tried in vain to request mobile classes from the department to minimise the problem of overcrowding in our school.*

Participants from the semi -rural and the township schools respectively, cited that it was a common trend that learners from the Intermediate Phase were packed in their classrooms. They alluded that overcrowding of learners in this phase negatively affected them. This is what Sihle Simamane from Sgodiphola Primary School in the semi-rural area said:

*Restructuring of classes is a problem because we receive learners from the Foundation Phase who have more classes than us the fourth grade. So, when they come to our limited classes we combine these classes, cramming the learners in threes per desk and that makes teaching very difficult, adding to the already existing problems in the fourth grade; and it is just not working.*

Mildred Dlamini also from Sgodiphola Primary School supported this view, saying:

*Restructuring of classes is a problem as it affects teaching and learning in the fourth grade. When learners are cramped in one class, it is very difficult to teach them. It is also difficult even to assess learners effectively if learners are overcrowded. Grade Four in particular is a critical grade where learners from the Foundation Phase start to learn in a different way than the one they are used to.*

Sanelisiwe Khumalo, a third educator also from Sgodiphola Primary School concluded:

*It is difficult to work in overcrowded class. I end up shouting every day from the start to the end of the period because I want to finish my lesson and move on to the next class. However, overcrowding makes it difficult to work within the stipulated timeframe. It is also even a challenge to support these learners to adapt to changes in this grade. When periods end I have to go to another class where I will experience similar challenges.*

This is what Nhlanhla Jili from Zuzimfundo Primary School in the township said:

*Our school is not immune from the common townships problem of overcrowded classes in the school. Learners come from different areas, as well as from informal settlements which contributes to the school exceeding its capacity. Hence, learners in the fourth grade are crowded, which makes it extremely difficult to support these learners to adapt well to changes. It is even more difficult to do continuous assessments effectively because you cannot assess while other learners are behind. What is worrying is the fact that some learners as time go on; they never get assisted and that child will never catch up with the grade work for the rest of the year.*

This view was also supported by many participants from different schools in the study. The participants in the townships attributed overcrowding to informal settlements and Lindela (temporary shelters for people waiting for government RDP houses). Ntombizodwa Ncwane from Zuzimfundo Primary School in the township area reported this:

*We have informal settlements next to our school which makes the numbers to be high. Therefore, we are forced as a school to do restructuring of classes which leads to overcrowding of some classes. Unfortunately, the fourth grade in my school is one of the classes that are overcrowded. This is a big problem because as a teacher, in as much as I try to support this learner to adapt, I also teach them being aware that they come from the Foundation Phase. They need more teacher attention. I end up not being able to reach all learners when teaching because they are large in numbers. There is a great need for individual attention since they are new to this phase and everything in this grade is new, therefore, individual attention is extremely important to adjust.*

Philisiwe Gumede from Zuzimfundo Primary School also supported this view, saying:

*Overcrowding in the townships is a known challenge which needs to be addressed by the government. In my school, learners in the fourth grade are overcrowded. The result is neglect because of overcrowding which makes it difficult for me to support all learners to adapt well. This is due to many changes in the curriculum, therefore, many learners need to be supported in order to adjust. Large class sizes in the fourth grade makes it difficult for me to achieve this objective. Overcrowding also makes it difficult for me to do my work properly.*

Aphiwe Sokhela from Zuzimfundo Primary School added:

*Overcrowding is a big problem in the fourth grade due to restructuring of classes which is a common trend in our schools in the townships. When learners are squashed in one class because of the shortage of floor space in our school, teaching and learning becomes a challenge. I cannot do my work professionally the way the department expects me to do as I cannot adequately attend to all the learners.*

Anastasia Shabalala from Zuzimfundo Primary concluded:

*In the school, we do not see eye to eye with the school SMT when it comes to the allocation of learners to classes. The SMT prefers that learners must be less in the classes in the Foundation Phase and be more in the classes in the Intermediate Phase. This arrangement, however, disadvantages the fourth grade; hence, they are new to this grade and they need more attention.*

It is emerging from the findings presented above that educators experienced challenges of increased class size during learners' transition in primary schools. The data presented revealed that

overcrowding of learners led to neglects of learners as educators were unable to pay individual attention to struggling learners. The data also revealed that the work of most educators has decreased; they hardly performed at their full potential because of overcrowding. Overcrowding implies that when learners are neglected. When learners are overcrowded in one classroom, it is difficult to teach, especially because educators are required to attend to the learners' individual needs. This was frustrating and stressful to the educators, and such a situation had a negative impact on the provision of effective teaching and learning in the fourth grade. The participants also alluded to the fact that the overcrowding of learners did not affect teaching and learning only but also assessment as well. They argued that it was difficult to ascertain a true reflection of the learners' performance as it was difficult to guard against cheating due to the lack of sufficient space between learners. This was evident since the educators did not have enough time to prepare and support learners. Therefore, individual learners' problems were not catered for especially the slow learners.

#### **5.4.5 Educators' experiences of increased teaching and learning hours**

This is the fourth dimension of the educators' experiences of the transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. The participants were asked about how they experienced such transition, and the responses from all the sites shared similar views in this regard. Their views were that their experiences during learners' transition was also characterised by an increase in teaching and learning hours in the fourth grade. Most participants emphasised that longer learning hours posed a challenge as learners struggled to stay focused until the last hour of teaching and learning. Educators mentioned that they also struggled to adapt to longer hours of teaching and learning compared to shorter hours they were used to in the Foundation Phase. As a result, learners got tired quickly, lost focus and found it difficult to concentrate. When learners were tired, some began to sleep in class whilst the educator was teaching. Some started to be chaotic and others just refused to participate in class activities. Most participants said that later periods in the afternoon are often the one that were mostly affected because by that time, most learner showed signs of fatigue and exhaustion. Educators stated that when all these things occurred, learners' behaviours made teaching to be extremely challenging. This is what Lindo Mthembu from Akhisizwe Primary School had to say:

*I teach learners who come from Foundation Phase, who are used to shorter learning hours. When they come to the fourth grade, they find out that learning hours have increased. This becomes a problem to the learners as they are not used to longer learning hours. This is exacerbated by the fact that the school is in the rural area. Living in rural areas has its disadvantages. For example, learners walk long distances to school due to the unavailability of learner transport. This is due to the fact that houses and/or dwellings are scattered and there is shortage of proper roads. This affects learners badly. When they get to school, they are already tired. Teaching these learners becomes a challenge because if my period starts at one, when I teach they will just be staring at me and they are not absorbing any information from the lesson. By this time of the afternoon, most learners are exhausted and tired. To solve this problem, I have to improvise and give them something that does not require them to think. I give them something to write or notes that they will read the following day, but I cannot talk and expect them to listen and respond because they will neither listen nor respond.*

The three participants described the living conditions in the rural area as having negative effects on the learner's academic performance in the fourth grade. They attributed some of the challenges to the context under which learners live. Kholiwe Zungu of Akhisizwe Primary School had this to say:

*Learner become exhausted quickly and start making noise. This is due to longer hours in the Intermediate Phase which the learners are not used to. The living conditions of these learners in this rural area is appalling as some of them don't live with parent, so they are responsible for the work at their home which is strenuous for them. This impact negatively on their energy levels in class. If I give them work, they cannot move faster copying from the chalkboard. You will find that the learner will copy the date for the entire period.*

Lindiwe Ndelu also from Akhisizwe Primary School, which is located in rural community had this to say:

*It very difficult to teach the fourth grade when learners are tired. What makes the situation worse is that the majority of these learners walks long distances from home to school as there is no transport for them in this area. Further, these learners are used to shorter periods in the Foundation Phase; now, all of a sudden, their learning hours have increased.*

*This exhausts them and sometimes, it becomes very confusing for them to tell the truth. That is the reason their academic performance drops in the fourth grade; it is very difficult for them to learn when they are tired. It is also very difficult for me as an educator to do my work effectively.*

Slindile also from Akhisizwe Primary School, located in rural community concluded:

*Increased learning time is a challenge for learners as they are not used to longer learning time, let alone that some learners live far from school, unlike their township counterparts whose schools are easily accessible. When I teach my subject, I do not complete the lesson. I complete it the following day because if I spend the whole period, they will get tired, and I have to repeat it in order for learners to understand.*

In the semi-rural and the township school, most participants cited that longer hours in the fourth grade impacted negatively on teaching and learning. The participants have no control over learner contact time since they work within the policy of the departments confines. The policy does not allow them to adjust to create space for learners to have more breaks to prevent fatigue. This is what Sihle Simamane from Sgodiphola Primary School which is located in a semi-rural community had this to say:

*In the fourth grade, learners get tired very soon due to the fact that Intermediate Phase contact time is longer than in the Foundation Phase. Many learners lose concentration quickly while there is a lot of work to be done. The fact that they live close to the school as they don't have to walk long distance like learners in the farm, does not help. When they are tired, they refuse to write and become chaotic. I have to stand up and go around in class telling them ["children write if you do not want to write you will not go home"], I can't even change the timetable because the department is strict with contact time and we can't change anything we have to keep trying.*

Sanelisiwe Khumalo from Sgodiphola Primary School in a semi-rural area said:

*The problem of longer hours is that learners become slow when they are tired and are left behind. This affects teaching and learning because those learners who are behind with work never get attended to individually because of time constraints. Sometimes, I cannot*

*detect learning barriers, let alone addressing those barriers because I cannot reach all learners that I teach due to time factor. I feel incompetent and as a failure.*

Mildred Dlamini also from Sgodiphola Primary School in semi-rural area supported the above view and said:

*When learners get to the fourth grade they are not used to longer learning hours as period in the fourth grade are one hour. After 12:00 which is the time that Omalume “learner transport” take them home in the Foundation Phase, they are hungry and tired. If my period is after 12:00, teaching for me will be a waste of my time and energy. So, I give them something to write, they are too slow and very few learners will complete the activity. Teaching time for me is wasted and the pressure to finish the syllabus amounts. This is a problem I am facing in the fourth grade.*

Anastasia Shabalala from Sgodiphola Primary School, also located in a semi-rural community, concluded:

*The problem with longer hours is that learner do not finish work because they are too slow when they write and they get tired quickly. The problem arises when you have to do assessment and I ask myself what it is that I am going to assess due to the small amount of work I have done which is not going to be enough for assessment standard at this level. This alone becomes my problem and this is what we are experiencing in the fourth grade on daily bases.*

This was corroborated by the participants from the township school who argued that the challenge of increased teaching and learning hours in the fourth grade impacted negatively on teaching and learning as learners tended to get tired very quickly. This is what Aphiwe Sokhela from Zuzimfundo Primary School, which is located in the township, had to say:

*With regards to the long hours in the Intermediate Phase as opposed to the Foundation Phase, is the fact that they quickly get tired and become very slow. I try by all means to be patient with them and give them small portion of work that they will be able to complete by the time the period end. At list you know that they have done something.*

Nhlanhla Jili from Zuzimfundo Primary School which is also located in the township had this to say:

*Longer school hours are very exhausting to the learners, especially periods that are later in the afternoon. I tell them that we are still in class; they must learn that this is how we try to assist them. I do not change the time table because all subjects are the same; I tell them, “you are not in the Foundation Phase; you must get used to the fourth grade; we are here to learn and not to sleep!”.*

Ntombizodwa Ncwane from Zuzimfundo Primary School, in the township supported the views expressed in the above extract when she said:

*The most challenging thing for me with the issue of longer learning hours in the fourth grade is that, it is difficult to do my work as required by the department because learners get tired very quickly. The township learners are exposed to a lot of disturbances; for example, noise from cars, people and late night’s sleep from watching too much television could add to the problems of longer hours in the fourth grade.*

Philisiwe Gumede from Zuzimfundo Primary School in the township concluded:

*Learning periods in the Foundation Phase are less than those in the Intermediate Phase. Therefore, that is why learners in the fourth grade get tired too quickly and the work is not finished at the expected timeframe. This is my problem teaching the fourth grade; I am stuck in situation. I cannot do anything about it but to push and push learners hoping that some little teaching is taking place.*

It is emerging from the findings presented above that educators were experiencing challenges of longer learning hours during the phase transition. This is due to the fact that when learners came to the fourth grade, their concentration capacity did not match the demands of the work in Grade Four. The data revealed that when learners became exhausted, they did not finish the work given to them. Longer teaching and learning hours impacted negatively on teaching and learning in the fourth grade. Teaching and learning became a challenge to the educators when learners got exhausted. This appeared to be a systemic, as well as a technical problem which educators have no control over, but, at the same time, they had to come up with mechanisms to support the learners cope with the changes. Therefore, educators and leaders and managers had to come up with a strategy to resolve the problem.

When learners got tired, educators had to develop a response which, in the context of this study, entailed stopping teaching and give learners written work. In that way, learners had to stop



focusing on listening, and focus on writing; therefore, there is a shift from listening skills to writing skills. This also seemed to compromise teaching and learning as learners' tasks piled up, and the educators' workload accumulated daily. Therefore, it became difficult for the teachers to complete these amounts of work in stipulated timeframe. The data has revealed that when learners in the study got exhausted, they lacked concentration and never finished work given to them within a specified time. This means that a considerable amount of work that need to be done throughout the year lagged behind as more time had to be allocated to ensure that work was completed. This also revealed that some educators became demotivated and demoralised as they were unable to do their work properly and successfully due to these challenges. Educators could not finish their work in stipulated timeframe, and that compromised teaching and learning. Educators displayed inability to motivate and resuscitate learners during afternoon as they shouted at these learners or even threatened them when they got tired.

#### **5.4.6 Reflections and summary**

The findings in the first theme indicate that educators experienced numerous challenges relating to their ability to support learners during the transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in their schools. This was due to phase transition factors which are embedded in the curriculum design. The findings in this theme indicate that these factors, which included the change of language of learning, increased number of subjects, increased learning hours and increased class size, as well as increased workload, had a negative impact on teaching and learning. It is emerging from the participants in this study that these factors of phase transition have increased academic challenges and decreased learners' performances. Ultimately, a combination of these factors prevented the attainment of expected or desired academic outcome of learners in the fourth grade. The findings also indicated that educators though trying to handle these issues the best they can, they needed intervention of the experts to assist them so that they are able to engage with these issues properly in the fourth grade. The findings also suggest that effective teaching and learning that takes place in the fourth grade is minimal due to phase transition challenges. In the next section, I discuss how Grade Four educators support phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in their schools.

## **5.5 How Grade Four educators support phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in their schools**

The study found that educators developed and coordinated a system to apply a variety of strategies to support Grade Four learners to adapt to and cope with the changes. The strategies that educators developed included a rigorous induction programme; code switching and scaffolding. All the participants highlighted that these strategies developed were educators' initiatives and innovativeness geared to support learners to cope with the changes. They are not necessarily an education departmental policy prescript; hence, educators applied these strategies on their own discretion, informed by educators' contextual realities in their classrooms.

### **5.5.1 Educators' introduction of rigorous induction programme**

Participants from all the sites shared similar views that they incorporated rigorous induction strategy in their teaching and learning to support learners' transition in the fourth grade. Participants alluded to the fact that that preparing Grade Four learners depended on the educators' leadership and management beliefs, values, practices, preparedness and proper planning of the lesson. That means that when the educators are well-prepared, they are able to plan, organise and prepare learners well for the fourth grades' lessons presentation. Most participants mentioned that one of the strategies of supporting learners which seemed to be working well, was walking around the classroom. This helped the educators ensure that each and every learner had a pen and exercise book or textbook before the start of the lesson. Most participants mentioned that they employed this activity while also explaining clearly the instructions before they begin teaching so that all learners understand what is expected of them. This is what Ntombizodwa Ncwane from Zuzimfundo Primary School said:

*To prepare Grade Four learners starts from me as a teacher. I cannot prepare a learner if am not prepared as a teacher, and this lies with the educator preparing the lesson in a proper way. Planning a lesson in a proper way is when I am being innovative by creating teaching aid that I will use in class because now I am reinforcing and I come with a new language and new subjects.*

Similarly, another educator from the township alluded that learners in the township have an advantage of adequate exposure to knowledge through technology such as computers and TVs. Aphiwe Sokhela from Zuzimfundo Primary School in the township supported this view, saying:

*Learners do not take long to adapt to the changes. This is because of the available resource at their disposal in the community, for example, libraries and access to TV and cell phones. I do rigorous induction by incorporating charts and pictures in my lesson to make it interesting. I make learners do a lot of practical activities including games.*

Nhlanhla Jili from Zuzimfundo Primary School, also located in the township corroborated the above view by saying:

*In the township, I do not take much time to adapt my learner to cope with the changes. I teach learners from different backgrounds in this township school. Some learners live with parents who are educated and they assist learners at home. Some learners live with siblings who go to schools in the more affluent areas in the suburbs, so, mixing with those people helps because a child could learn a thing or two which can help the child in class. This makes it easier for us as educators to do our work. I give my learners a lot of activities, including homework to prepare them for the new environment. I always ensure that I move with the learner which, sometimes gives me problems with my superiors for not sticking to the annual teaching plan.*

Philisiwe Gumede from Zuzimfundo Primary School added this:

*We are lucky, our school is in the town where learners have access to resources including people who can assist the learners at home. I however, do induction by explaining to the learners the changes and I try my best to create a friendly environment by making learning fun without missing the objectives of the lesson.*

This was corroborated by Mildred Dlamini from Sgodiphola Primary School which is located in a semi-rural community who added:

*Proper planning entails that I first define the terms first. For example, if I teach multiplication in Maths, I first explain what multiplication is in isiZulu, (ukuphindaphinda) before I teach them what the new name is of this term which they already know in the Foundation Phase in isiZulu but now it is a new term for them (ukuphindaphinda) because it is now in English. Then, I drill them to pronounce this term until they are able to do so before I can continue with the lesson of the day, which, of course, I will not finish. The*

*following day, I repeat the same lesson but now I slowly introduce new terms and explain them in isiZulu as well. I will repeat that strategy up until they understand a little before I give them a task to write.*

This view was supported by Sanelisiwe Khumalo from Sgodiphola Primary School, situated in a semi- rural community who said:

*I have to be innovative and creative and plan a proper strategy to deliver my lesson. It is important that first of all, I make learners relax by giving them simple activity to familiarise them with the new environment. Then, I tell them the rules and make them memorise these rules. I do this to change their mind-set a bit and conscientise them that they are now in the fourth grade. I give them small amount of work. I do not rush them to complete it. I will do that to make some follow up to see who is writing and who is not until they get used to be in the fourth grade.*

Lindiwe Ndelu from Akhisizwe Primary School added this:

*Induction is very important for the fourth-grade learners; hence, the Intermediate Phase is an environment completely different to the Foundation Phase in so many ways. For starters, learners are taught by different educators; that alone, is a problem which is coupled with the stress of learning in a new language. So, I am very careful that I do not add an unnecessary stress to learners by giving them too much work. I go slowly, step by step, introducing them to the now new way of learning, totally different from the one they are used to. When I am teaching, I work with them assisting them, slowly until they become better.*

Slindile Mbili from Akhisizwe Primary School, also located in a rural community said:

*I first set up the rules in class for my subject. Then, after I have taught them, I then drill them on what they have learned until they understand before I can continue with other lessons. I do not move to the next lesson if they do not understand the one I am presenting. The following day, I repeat the same lesson, but now, I slowly introduce new terms and I explain them in isiZulu as well. I will again drill them until they understand something a little before I give them a task to write. If they do not finish, I ask them to complete it at home and mark it the following day.*

Anastasia Shabalala from Sgodiphola Primary School located in a semi -rural community had this to say:

*I start every lesson by walking around, checking and ensuring that every learner is using the appropriate exercise book. I do that by asking the learners to open the exercises to see if all learners are using the correct exercisebook for my subject. If I do not do that as part of induction, I won't get my work the following day. I repeat the same activity until they gradually adapt.*

Aphiwe Sokhela from Zuzimfundo Primary School added this:

*Firstly, I explain to them in isiZulu, that now they have six subjects which are taught by different educators and I emphasise that they will be taught in English and each subject is allocated 1 hour. I further explain to them what they will be learning from these different subjects because to them it is like everything is new. I also encourage them to mix with other Grade Four learners from multi- racial schools living in the township.*

Sanelisiwe Khumalo from Sgodiphola Primary School located, in a semi-rural community had this to say:

*There is not much one can do because it is beyond us, but I try by all means to do my best to help where I can. Sometimes, I try to apply curriculum differentiated strategy to help by giving those learners not yet adapted some work that is different from the rest of the class. Theirs will be less difficult to help them catch up. We are in a semi-rural area where our school caters for learners from different backgrounds. It is important for me to adjust my teaching to accommodate all learners in this grade. It is important to note that these learners will adapt slowly until September, and by then, you can feel that now this is a Grade Four class.*

Lindo Mthembu from Akhisizwe Primary School, located in a rural community had this to say:

*Grade Four is a critical grade because of all the changes that learners encounter which they ought to adapt to. At this critical transition point. It is therefore, important that I do not rush them but, try and give them small amount of work. So, I teach them that in such a way that I give them something they will complete quickly so that by the time the period ends they have finished it. This gives me time to tell them that they must get ready for the next period until they get used to the changing of periods.*

Kholiwe Zungu from Akhisizwe Primary School, also located in a rural community had this to say:

*Phase transition changes affect teaching and learning a lot. To me, it is a point of disintegration for learners because most of the things they know from the Foundation Phase changes. When I am teaching, I can see from their eyes that they are lost, but I do my best to make them comfortable before I begin my lesson. To make things worse, this is a rural area; the school is alienated from the world and knowledge that could assist our learners adapt quickly. I do role play together with them and sing so that when I start my lesson they are all focusing. I make my lesson very short and brief to enable them to adjust to the new style of teaching and learning.*

It is emerging from the findings presented above that educators supported learners' transition to cope with the changes in the fourth grade. It is also emerging from the data that the participants had similar views about supporting learners to cope with change although they applied rigorous induction approach. This implies that there was no specific planned programme for educators in place to address challenges during phase transition. Educators used their creativity and innovativeness to think of strategies to support learners. This also implies feelings of engagement and high job commitment of the educators. Educators used rigorous induction techniques to prepare learners to adapt and cope with the change. It is however, emerging that the learners' transition in the fourth grade posed challenges to both the educators and the learners. This is not easy for the educators as planning needs a lot of time and energy. If transition is not properly managed it could possibly have adverse effects on the learning process, which could result in lasting learning difficulties and poor academic requirements.

### **5.5.2 Code-switching as a strategy to support learners**

The findings presented in the previous sections have shown that the transition of learners from Grade Three (Foundation Phase) to Grade Four (Intermediate Phase) is full of difficulties and complexities embedded in the design challenges. As leaders and managers in the classroom, teachers were asked about how they managed the situation in terms of addressing these challenges and complexities. Their responses indicated that they had a common understanding of the approach to adopt in supporting the learners cope with the demands of Grade Four. For instance, to support learners to understand the materials, all the participants shared similar views that they applied code

switching strategy to enhance the learners' understanding of the learning content during transition and enable them to cope with change in the Fourth Grade. All the participants mentioned that they used code switching as the strategy to support learners because it seems to be effective. Most participants alluded that when the learners came to the fourth grade, their knowledge of English was not adequate for Grade Four curriculum. Learners had limited exposure to English language in Grade Three because the language of instruction at that grade is isiZulu. Using this language did not adequately prepare learners for Grade Four language change. This is what Anastasia Shabalala from Sgodiphola Primary School said in this regard:

*We are in a semi-rural area with learners from different backgrounds and adequate exposure to knowledge is lacking. The knowledge of English language to some learners, is not enough in that they do not understand instructions. I cannot just give them work and leave them to work on their own. I have to go with them and try to explain in isiZulu up until they understand.*

This view was shared by Sanelisiwe Khumalo from the same school, Sgodiphola Primary School. She said:

*Different educators come in different periods and that is too much for these learners; they do not understand this; that is why they are failing. The noticeable challenge is the language of teaching and learning instruction that is different from the Foundation Phase and it affects teaching and learning. So, in order to assist and support these learners, I do code switching so that learners at least understand me when I teach my subject.*

Another educator from the same school, Mildred Dlamini, supported the view expressed by Sanelisiwe, and said:

*I got to come with an idea for all my learners. So, sometimes, I just need to calm down and think of how to approach different strategies. For me, it was not just about winking, it's about getting quiet and thinking, and coming up with some kind of strategy. The strategy should be to understand the child and find a way to help them learn. By the way, these learners watch TV; they play with learners from various schools who have been learning in English since the first grade. They have some English exposure which makes me do code switching when it is necessary especially when introducing new concepts or explaining difficult words.*

The participants said that most learners in the township could speak English at home. But in Grade Four, there were some learners who struggled to adjust to the new language of teaching and learning which made it challenging for educators to teach in English without switching to isiZulu to explain certain new concepts. This is what Ntombizodwa Ncwane from Zuzimfundo Primary said:

*The fact that many learners mingle with learners for multiracial schools in the area, makes it easier for me to do my work. I do switch code from time to time to explain new concepts as some learners struggle to adapt to the change. I code switch regardless of the fact that it is against the policy which my HOD always warns me to stick to the policy prescripts.*

Nhlanhla Jili from Zuzimfundo Primary School, which is located in the township added this:

*I am compelled to use isiZulu to explain Maths concepts because if I do not use isiZulu to explain, they will not understand the lesson and if I give them work, they will not be able to do it. It is important therefore, to state that as a teacher, I also have a challenge of isiZulu because I have never learnt in isiZulu. I even asked the learners to show me what they are saying in isiZulu; then, I will know whether what they are saying in isiZulu is a multiple, subtraction, equal or division signs or if they are shapes, it a square, rectangle or triangle.*

Some participants alluded that learners in the townships were assumed to be in a better situation due to the availability of the resources in the community like libraries and exposure to gadget that might enhance fluency in English language. Unfortunately, that was not the case. The participants argued that most learners did not understand lesson presentation in English. This is how Philisiwe Gumede from Zuzimfundo Primary School put it:

*It does not matter that our school is in the township with so many resources in the community for learners to improve their understanding of English like TVs. As a teacher, I now have a problem because the class is doing my activities wrong. I test my learners by giving them an activity without explain in isiZulu. Many learners do the activity wrong; only a hand full gets it right. Then, I repeat the same activity but this time, I explain it in isiZulu; most learners get it right. That is when I realised that there is a problem in the fourth grade.*



Aphiwe Sokhela also from Zuzimfundo Primary School supported the views expressed by Philisiwe Gumede above, saying:

*It is the isiZulu teacher who enjoys teaching because they understand. But to us, it is difficult even if you give the project without first explaining it in isiZulu, they will not understand it. It is very strange because these learners live in the township; they are close to everything like TV which can help them understand English.*

Participants from the rural areas alluded that it was likely that learners did not speak in English when they were at home due to sparsity of their home which made it difficult to meet with other learners. The only chance that learners get to speak English was in the classroom. However, this was found to be not enough to enable them to understand the lessons unless educators did code switching. This is what Lindo Mthembu from Akhisizwe Primary School said in concurrence with the views expressed by the other participants above:

*The only way to assist these learners is to code switch, but also, encourage them to talk in class and I give them more task to read. I use pictures a lot during my lessons and also make them speak English during the lesson and do presentations, and allow them to use English in between when they are stuck. This strategy helps because, as we are in the rural area, there is no way that these learners will speak English at home.*

Lindiwe Ndelu from Akhisizwe Primary School added this:

*Our learners in the rural areas speak predominately isiZulu; their parents are illiterate. It is probable that the only time they speak English is in the classroom. I therefore, use both isiZulu and English when I teach to support these learners to adapt to the changes; that is the strategy and I design more reading and presentation activities so that they will get used to English. I use pictures in class when I teach and give them more homework to familiarise themselves with the new language of learning.*

Slindile Mbili from Akhisizwe Primary School in the rural arear supported the views expressed above:

*Our learners are from rural areas which is a disadvantage in terms of English exposure foro these learners. Our learners are practically remote from modem technology, unlike learner in the township or in town where they can watch movies or go to the internet and get some knowledge. In the fourth grade, learners do not understand the new language of teaching and learning such that if you write a question in the board, the learners will bring*

*back the same question to you as an answer. So, to make my job easier; I code switch to assist learner to understand my lesson.*

Kholiwe Zungu also from Akhisizwe Primary in the rural area concluded:

*The fact that learners are learning many subjects in a short space of time, I do not expatiate. I summarise when I teach my subject (Social sciences) which is also new to them. If I teach them in more detail, learners will be more confused. I code switch to help them understand my summary and new concepts they have never seen before. Also, I use charts a lot with concepts in English and their meaning in isiZulu. That is how I prepare my learners to cope with Grade Four curriculum.*

It is emerging from the findings presented above that all educators code switched to support learners to cope with the changes during phase transition. The participants mentioned that if they did not code switch during the lesson presentation, it would be difficult to teach, or for the learners to understand what was taught. Learners did not show any understanding of the lessons, particularly the new added subjects. Participants further alluded that Grade Three learners came into Grade Four with insufficient vocabulary to understand when English was used as a medium of instruction. Therefore, to explain, educators translated what they have said in English into mother tongue. Code switching strategy entailed using two languages simultaneous to support learners to adapt to the new language of instruction; however, educators also stated that it was challenging and time consuming. Learners may also not need English explanations, as they know that the entire lesson will be repeated in their native language. This practice further limited rural learners' exposure to English and this was problematic for educators to meet the curriculum demands of the fourth grade. This implies that there is big gap between the Foundation Phase and the Intermediate Phase in primary schools which needs to be closed. Educators in the fourth grade are faced with the challenges of supporting learner transition, which impacts negatively on teaching and learning.

### **5.5.3 Educators leading and managing scaffolding strategy to support learners adapt to and cope with change**

The other strategy that the participants used to support Grade Four learners in adjusting to new realities is scaffolding. In fact, most participants shared a similar view that they used scaffolding as a strategy they have created to support learners to transition to Grade Four. Scaffolding in this context, is when educators use Grade Three work to support the Fourth Grade when introducing lessons. Scaffolding refers to support or assistance that is provided to young children, which enables them to reach higher levels of performance than they could reach independently. The most effective way is using varied strategies guided by how the child is doing. Once the child is doing well, less support and help is provided. When the child struggles, more specific instructions are given until the child starts progressing again. Educators in this study used Grade Three work to build new knowledge to enable learners understand by linking new knowledge from the one already known.

All the participants mentioned that teaching Grade Four was challenging because learners were confronted with a lot of changes. The participants said that if they did not go back to what learner knew before they started a new lesson, learners did not understand the entire lesson. Therefore, educators decided to implement this strategy of going back and forth as the solution to Grade Four challenges. However, educators also mentioned that applying this strategy was time consuming and strenuous. The participants as mentioned in the previous themes, alluded that living in the countryside have its own disadvantages with regards to scarcity of resources to enhance teaching and learning. Educators implemented scaffolding as a teaching strategy to support Grade Four learners adapt well to the changes. This is what Kholiwe Zungu from Akhisizwe Primary, located in a rural community had to say in this regard:

*Firstly, I try to go down to their level of understanding. Since their knowledge of English is not enough for Grade Four curriculum demands, by going back to remind them of Grade Three work, that helps them understand. For example, I reflect back to Grade Three curriculum and refer to what they know and, using pictures, I ask them what it is in the picture and what it was called in Grade Three. They will tell me in isiZulu; then I will remind other learners who have forgotten in isiZulu before I explain it in English. This is*

*because, if I do not reflect back to Grade Three work and explain it in isiZulu before I teach them in English, the whole class will just stare at me, lost for the entire lesson. This is however, very frustrating and strenuous as I do it every day.*

Lindo Mthembu also from Akhisizwe Primary School had this to say:

*I use pictures and charts most of the time; I ask them to read after me by reading in English and thereafter, I interpret the content in the charts or picture by explaining the meaning in isiZulu. To help learners understand a question, I first read the question, check if they understand by asking them what they think the question wants, before I explain it in isiZulu. I first read the question in English then I translate it in isiZulu. At the end of the day, we go back at teaching in isiZulu the same way Foundation Phase does so that learners can understand what is taught. This is however, very difficult as I do this to all the classes I teach, and by the time I finish working, I am dead tired every day. Just imagine what this does to my health; I am a dead man walking.*

Lindiwe Ndelu also from Akhisizwe Primary School added this:

*For me, working in the school that is situated in the rural area should not be an excuse. If I want to see progress in my subject, I am forced to go back a little to Grade Three work as a way of trying to remind my learners. I do this strategy in order to connect and link what they know to what they are learning now so that they understand my lesson better. The environment in the fourth grade is different from Grade Three. It has a lot of teaching and learning changes that confuse the learners.*

All the participants shared similar views regarding the use of scaffolding strategy to support learners adapt to the changes. For instance, Aphiwe Sokhela from Zuzimfundo Primary added her voice on this discussion:

*First and foremost, I explain in isiZulu the exercise book, that is, to tell them that now every subject has its own exercise book. Then, I slowly teach them how to do the class work while reminding them by reflecting back to Grade Threes work. They will not finish my work because they are too slow. I then teach them about homework which they will not finish because they do not understand English instructions; I will then do homework in class with them explaining in isiZulu throughout the whole activity. I will repeat the same activity three times in order for them to understand the activity. This is a very painful*

*experience and it is affecting my health and livelihood because when I go home there is nothing I do other than sleep because of exhaustion.*

This was corroborated by the participants from the same school Ntombizodwa Ncwane who added this:

*Going back and start from something the learners know is another option in the fourth grade to make these learners learn. To solve this problem, there is not much we can do unless we use what we can, then scaffolding strategy becomes one of the strategies we use to try and support learners, though it is strenuous.*

This was reiterated by the participants from the semi- rural primary school, Sihle Simamane who said:

*To prepare these learners for Grade Four curriculum, I adjust to the Foundation Phase level because they cannot adjust to my level yet; there is curriculum that needs to be covered in time. So, since everything is new to them in the Grade Four, I repeat every lesson two or three times until they understand it before I move to the next lesson up until they adapt. This is time consuming, but I do it to help these young innocent souls. This is a challenging and a painful experience such that when I get home I am unable to perform my duty due to exhaustion.*

Also, Sanelisiwe Khumalo from Sgodiphola Primary School in semi- rural added this:

*Scaffolding entails a simplest form of teaching to ensure that many learners who are struggling in the fourth grade, are accommodated. I need to also go slowly when teaching, by giving them simple tasks. I even call them to the table and explain to them individually until they understand.*

Mildred Dlamini from Sgodiphola Primary School supported this:

*In my subject, I use scaffolding strategy by the way of asking questions. For example, they will be required to name the continents of the world, which would work they did in Grade Three and explain it in isiZulu; then, they will be able to give correct answers afterward. I can see some improvement in my subject when I use this strategy.*

Anastasia Shabalala from Sgodiphola Primary School explained:

*Firstly, I explain questions in isiZulu, also reminding them how it could be done by referring back to Grade Three work. Then, I come back to English language. This strategy*

*helps a lot as you are able to move on with some learners during lesson presentation. Some learners unfortunately will be left behind.*

It is emerging from the findings presented above that most educators in the study applied scaffolding strategy to support learners in transition to cope with the changes. The data presented revealed that before they taught the learners on Grade Four work, educators had to go back to Grade Three work. This implies that Grade Four syllabus would not be covered in stipulated time and that a lot of teaching time was lost repeating the work that was already done. According to the participants, such a strategy was exhausting and time consuming. Educators reported that most learners felt overwhelmed by such changes and the amount of work which learners needed to learn in a short space of time made teaching a challenge. This suggests that the lives and health of the educators was at stake as the data has revealed that the educators were always tired after work. This also implies that Grade Four curriculum was compromised as most of the time was spent on supporting learners to adapt and cope rather than learning Grade Four work. In the next section, I discuss the leadership and management constraints in supporting phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase.

## **5.6 Obstacles that the educators encounter in supporting phase transition of learners from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in primary schools**

The section on the presentation of data has been dominated by negative stories from the participating teachers regarding their experiences dealing with the transition of Grade Four learners from Grade Three which belongs in the Foundation Phase. Nevertheless, data has also indicated that these teachers made efforts to support the learners adjust to the new learning conditions, a huge jump from four subjects to six. Teachers were also asked to share their thoughts and experiences about what they saw as obstacles they encountered while providing teaching and learning support to Grade Four learners in the Intermediate Phase.

### **5.6.1 The lack of resource as an obstacle to overcome**

Educators made attempts to support the learners adapt to and cope with the new realities brought about by them joining Grade Four class. The study found that educators experienced challenges

when supporting the learners in adapting Grade Four learners to the new learning conditions, and to cope with this change. The lack of resources became a constraint in their efforts to support learners to cope with the changes. The participants mentioned that the lack of resources made it challenging to teach in the fourth grade. The participants from all the sites shared the similar views of the lack of resources to support learner cope with change in Grade Four. They said that the lack of resources frustrated the learners' transition and efficient provision of teaching and learning. Most participants said that if learners do not have exercise books it became a challenge to do their work efficiently. What made the situation even worse was that their schools did not have specific programmes to address the challenges of learners' transition. All the participants said that supporting Grade Four learners to cope with change entirely remained their responsibility as there was no supportive environment for them. This required educators to organise, plan and improvise to support learner cope with the change. The resources they were talking about are basic teaching and learning materials such as books, exercise books and others. Educators said that if learners do not have exercise books it become a challenge to do their work appropriately. This is what Sihle Simamane from Sgodiphola Primary School, located in a semi -rural community had to say:

*Grade Four is a challenging class due to the changes attributed to learner transition from the Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. So, the issue of the lack of teaching material is a big problem that impacts negatively on the efficient provision of quality teaching and learning in this critical grade. I know that some parents in this semi-rural area can afford the stationery and if I tell parents to buy stationery, they do not respond or they claim that they have bought all the material required. I cannot argue with the parents. I assist if there is extra stationery at school but if it is finished, I tell the learner that they are not going to enter the class if they do not have an exercise book. This remains my problem for the rest of the year.*

Sanelisiwe Khumalo also from Sgodiphola Primary School said:

*The lack of teaching resource to support the fourth grades' phase transition is a challenge. These include computer lab where learners can use a computer to enhance English, speaking and listening skills. The school does not have programmes to address phase transition. The Department also does not have any programmes to assist us because they do not have a clue about what we are experiencing in the fourth grade in our schools in the townships. They always refer us to the policy of the department even if you asked subject*

*advisors to come. I have to think and devise strategies to support learners to cope with the changes.*

Mildred Dlamini also from Sgodiphola Primary School, shared a similar view as her colleagues in that school and said:

*Neither the Department of education nor the school have well-developed plan to assist educators to support learners adapt to the change. You go to the workshop and come back with nothing to assist you. The Department talks about assessment and so forth but they do not assist us as to what we should do to assist learners cope with phase transition in the fourth grade. We develop our own strategies to adapt them.*

The views expressed by the three participants above were shared by Anastasia Shabalala from Sgodiphola Primary who said:

*The school does not have interventions strategies to assist educators support learners transition in the fourth grade. We are confronted with piles of marking which is the experience that is killing us. I teach four classes in Grade Four plus one class in Grade Five for which I have to do marking every day. I do not have time to attend to learners with learning barriers who are many in the fourth grade due to lack of resources in the school.*

Lindiwe Ndelu from Akhisizwe Primary School, located in rural community had this to add:

*They cannot copy from the chalk board; you will find that the learners will copy the date for the entire period because when you give them work to copy on the chalk board, they copy letter to letter, which is why they are slow and if it happens that you did not find out that learner would have ended up not writing your work and have not learnt anything throughout the entire period. And if I report the problem of the fourth grades the SMT and the principal just turns a blind eye. The problem remains with me for the entire year while learners are helplessly sinking with the boat. These learners need special gadgets to enhance and improve language deficiencies and writing skills in the fourth grade to cope with the change.*

Participants in the school located in the townships also shared similar views on the issue of the lack of resources. This is what Philisiwe Gumede from Zuzimfundo Primary School had to say:

*I have not seen anything done that speaks to phase transition or a planned programme from the Department. Grade Four is treated like any other grade in the school. There are*



*no resources or specific programmes in place that address Grade Four challenges. There are no intervention plans that I know; the one that I know are for learners with barriers as we are an inclusive school, but for Grade Four in particular, there is none. To help Grade Four learners succeed, we are left to our own devices. It is us educators who devise strategies to support these learners to adapt to the change.*

Ntombizodwa Ncwane from Zuzimfundo Primary School, also located in the township had this to say:

*The lack of resources in our school is a problem that we are facing in Grade Four as we do not have relevant materials for the fourth grade that will complement learners' lack of new language of teaching in the fourth grade and materials that will improve learners' efficiency in writing as they are slow.*

Nhlanhla Jili also from Zuzimfundo Primary School added:

*My work as an educator has doubled because, before I teach, I need to support these learners to adapt, go down to their level; this is frustrating; more work means more pressure and stress. We do not sleep because today you think of this method and tomorrow you think of another method. This is because we do not have resources and we are not assisted in terms workshops to learn relevant strategies to confront phase transition. The Department of Education is silent about this issue of learner transition in the Intermediate Phase.*

Aphiwe Sokhela another teacher from Zuzimfundo Primary School reiterated the same view expressed by her colleagues:

*We do not have resources to help us assist learners cope with phase transition. There is a lot of work in the fourth grade. It is a lot of work because we do not only teach the fourth grade only. Some of us teach Grade Four, Grade Five and Grade Six. Therefore, there is a lot of preparations; lots of classwork and a lot of assessment needed to be done; thus, the pressure is too much on our work.*

This is what participants from rural area alluded to on the issue of the lack of resources to support learners phase transition. Kholiwe Zungu from Akhisizwe Primary School said:

*I don't know whether it is because we are in the rural area. The Department does not assist us as there are no relevant materials and resources to enhance teaching and learning in*

*the fourth grade to assist us to enable us to support these learners who are struggling. The Department only assumes that in the fourth grade all learners know English.*

The lack of teaching resource was a challenge that educators experienced in supporting learners to adapt and cope with change. Grade Four educators stated that the lack of relevant resources to assist the learners to cope with change made teaching and learning difficult. Lindo Mthembu from Akhisizwe Primary School in the rural area supported:

*The lack of resources to assist learners with phase transition is a problem that leaves us as educators very exhausted and drained because we do a lot of interventions that we think are appropriate as we try and assist these confused learners. I try giving learners more activities and more homework to drill but still we do need help to up our effort at assisting these learners who are struggling with Grade Four learning conditions. They struggle in the school and at their home due to the condition they are living under.*

The participants stated that it is even worse when the schools do not have appropriate programmes to assist Grade Four learners to enhance language deficiency and improve writing skills. Educators said that assisting Grade Four learners to cope with change remains entirely their responsibility. Slindile Mbili from Akhisizwe Primary School concluded:

*Departmental workshops are a waste of time; they can do them but if the question of resources that seek to speak to the problems in these grades is not addressed in our schools, there is nothing that we as educators can do. We are on our own and the education of our learners will decline if we are not assisted. The fact that we do not have libraries, laboratories in our schools, our problems will remain inside the belly of the beast. You are often told by your superiors to do a library corner in the classroom even though there is no floor space; our classrooms are full.*

It emerged from the findings presented above that the lack of resources posed challenges for educators in supporting learners' transition in Grade Four. It is also emerging from the findings that there were no proper and adequate resources for Grade Four educator to use in order to support learner to cope with the change. It evident from the findings that Departmental workshops were not assisting as they did not address the issue of resources and programmes directed specifically addressing the challenges. Therefore, educators had to struggle to make learners adapt and cope with the change in the fourth grade. In summary, the lack of resources to complement educators' efforts of supporting learners' transition inside the classroom accentuates learners' deprivation of

efficient provision of teaching and learning in grade. Educators were expected to carry the burden of turning the low keys of the lack of resources in the fourth grade to the high notes of supporting learners to adapt to the change. This implies that teaching and learning is compromised in this grade and educators are desperate for support of the stake holders.

### **5.6.2 How educators mitigate the challenges that hamper learners' efforts to adapt to and cope with change**

In this theme, all the participants cited that they had developed some strategies that were meant to mitigate the effects of the inhibitors to effective teaching and learning as a result of the learners' transition to Grade Four. Therefore, these strategies constituted what I can call enabling factors to support the learners cope with the transition. All the participants mentioned that they were patient with the learners and they employed a slow-paced approach in teaching Grade Four learners. Most participants alluded that, although this strategy seemed to be working but it implied more work on their side because a lot of learners' work was not covered by the end of the year. This is what Sanelisiwe Khumalo from Sgodiphola Primary School, located in a semi-rural community had to say:

*To mitigate this problem, we have adopted an attitude to be patient with them; take things slowly. At times, as wrong as it is we give class work as homework on top of a daily homework to cover for the lost time, and this implies more work for learners at home and more work for educators in class which includes marking that work that was supposed to be done and marked the previous day.*

Mildred Dlamini also from Sgodiphola Primary School supported the above-mentioned view, saying:

*Other subjects like NS, learners find it difficult to adapt because there are words and concepts that you cannot use isiZulu to translate them but we try different strategies and drill them and be patient in that way so as to assist learners adapt and be able to learn in the fourth Grade.*

Sihle Simamane from Sgodiphola Primary School, also located in a semi-rural community reiterated this point, saying:

*I take things very slowly when I am in class because fast pace will mess thing up and confuse them. I give them an activity and go with them step by step until they finish. I will continue with this strategy until they adapt.*

Anastasia Shabalala from Sgodiphola Primary, located in a semi-rural community said:

*Time is a problem in that, on the one hand, you are trying to assist learners adapt; on the other hand, there is an issue of new added subject; this becomes too big for learners and it takes time for learners to understand these new added subjects. I adjust my lesson plans and preparations in order to accommodate struggling learners.*

This was corroborated by participants located both in the township and rural community. Nhlanhla Jili from Zuzimfundo Primary School, located in the township had this to say:

*These learners need to have been prepared from the Foundation Phase to write fast, so that when they come to the Intermediate Phase, they are well prepared to cope with the fourth grade's academic demands. We are in the township which is an advantage because of the availability of resources that can help learners in the community; for example, libraries, internet connectivity and TVs. Efforts aimed at adapting learners to the new conditions depends on the learners; some are easy to adopt and some are difficult. We usually go back a little and exercise patience by going a step by step slowly when teaching. If I move faster, I will find myself moving alone, and that is how we struggle trying help these learners to adapt.*

Ntombizodwa Newane from Zuzimfundo Primary in township supported this, saying:

*Some learners tend to be quiet and passive up until the end of second term, then you realise that learners can actually talk and participate in class, the problem was the changes and the new environment. So, when learners come to the fourth grade, it is important that you do not rush them, but try and give them small amount of work. So, you need to teach them that in such a way that you give them something they will complete quickly so that by the time the period ends they have finished.*

Philisiwe Gumede from Zuzimfundo Primary in the township added this:

*The best way to mitigate the challenges is to take it easy with them; if you give work you have to be friendly. I give them assessment; I give them enough time to respond and always be around them to assist because they are struggling.*

Aphiwe Sokhela from Zuzimfundo Primary School, located in the township had this to say:

*The best way to assist these learners is to revise, drill and explain in isiZulu; in that way, they will be able to give you something, although it might not be what you would have wanted them to give you. I support the learners by explaining the meaning of the words they do not understand.*

Kholiwe Zungu from Akhisizwe Primary School, located in a rural community had this to say:

*I do take it into account that I am dealing with learners who face multiple deprivations when I teach these learners; because they are in rural area, I try by all means to be patient with them and give them small portion of work that they will be able to complete at the end of the period. At least, I would know that they have done something; not too much work; that at least they will do half of it and never finish because they are too slow.*

Lindo Mthembu from the same school as Kholiwe Zungu (Akhisizwe Primary School), concurred with the views and experiences expressed above, saying:

*I try peer learning strategy by encouraging those learners who are trying harder to influence those who seem to be lost at sea, who cannot even respond at all during lesson activities in class. I encourage them to speak and respond to questions; I even ask if it is wrong or even in isiZulu, and, I later correct the language.*

Lindiwe Ndelu, also from Akhisizwe Primary School added this:

*I try to encourage them to speak in English and also to do more reading in the morning and in the afternoons; we also use pictures and give the more homework.*

Slindile form from Akhisizwe Primary School in the rural rea concluded:

*I adjust my lessons plan and preparations in order to accommodate struggling learners by giving them activities that are simple and easy; that are not in the fourth grade's level although these activities may not accelerate progress toward achieving desired learning objectives of Grade Four.*

The discussions above have indicated that Grade Four teachers adopted various strategies that are meant to assist the learners learn with understanding, and thus mitigate the negative effects brought about by sudden changes in the teaching and learning environment, and the effects of socio-economic deprivations of the communities they lived in.

## **5.7 Reflections and summary**

The findings expressed in this theme indicate that educators were implementing planned strategies which included rigorous induction, code switching and scaffolding to support learners' transition in the fourth grade in the primary schools. The findings revealed that there were no specific planned programmes for educators in place to manage learners transition challenges in the fourth grade. Therefore, in response to this situation, some educators engaged in creative thinking and planning to devise strategies to support learners in Grade Four. The findings suggested that there was little knowledge that learners brought with them into the Intermediate Phase due to their inadequate English proficiency that became evident when in the fourth grade. A number of constraints were expressed. That data from all the participants also suggested that phase transition in primary schools was not properly coordinated by the education district in term of information dissemination to primary schools. The implication is the learning gaps that resulted, and these compromised teaching and learning time as more time and focus was spent toward supporting learners to adapt to change.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the data generated from the participants was analysed, interpreted and presented, and evidence to support the claims made was produced. The main focus was on revealing what educators say about their experiences of handling the learners' transition from Foundation Phase (Grade Three) to Intermediate Phase (Grade Four). It was evident from the qualitative data that educators experienced various challenges that characterised the transition. What came out clearly as well, is that the challenges that characterised this transition compromised the quality of teaching and learning, and thus, had negative impact on curriculum delivery. The data has also indicated that educators did not just sit idly, doing nothing to overcome the challenges they faced, but, they developed some strategies to support learners to adapt using various strategies.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **ACROSS SITE ANALYSIS: MAPPING PATTERNS IN THE DATA**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I presented a descriptive discussion of analysis of the findings from the semi-structured interviews. In this chapter, I move on to do an analysis of the findings by drawing patterns from the findings and relate them to the literature and theoretical framework that I presented in Chapter Two and Three respectively. I begin this chapter by outlining the patterns, showing similarities, as well as differences among research sites and in the participating educators. I then present the themes under which the findings are discussed in relation to the research questions.

#### **6.2 Similarities and differences amongst the communities in the study**

All three schools chosen are located in the uMlazi District in the eThekweni Municipality in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. These primary schools were located in different geographical areas which is rural, semi-rural and township. The reason for selecting schools which are different in terms of demography in this study was to ascertain what characterised these communities and possible effects of these on effective teaching and learning in Grade Four (1<sup>st</sup> year of Intermediate Phase). Based on the literature I reviewed, I believe that the characteristics of the community could have an impact on the functioning of the schools. All the participants from various research sites explained that their experiences about the communities where the three schools are situated is that these communities have socio-economic challenges. These socio-economic deficits negatively impacted on the schools in terms of procurement of adequate teaching and learning resources. These entailed the appointing assistant educators to assist Grade Four learners phase transition, computers to support learner adapt to the demands of the fourth grades' changes and more book to read for learners to improve English proficiency. The educators in the rural school described the community around the school as poverty-stricken with high-rates of unemployment in the population. In the context of the semi-rural community, the educators shared similar views of high unemployment rates. The majority of the people lived in RDP development houses. The educators

from the township described their community around these schools as consisting many informal-settlements and low-cost housing which is common characteristics of communities in the townships.

The economic situation that these communities were confronted with posed enormous challenges to the schools and schooling. For instance, some parents could not assist the schools financially in the rural areas. The educators were not only experiencing challenges in dealing with teaching and learning issues, but also, they had to understand the communities' circumstances. In this study, the economic inability of these communities negatively impacted on the ability of the most parents to actively participate in the school programmes and support teaching and learning. The contextual factors of these school differ around the issue of poverty, the lack of parental involvement, the lack of learner transport issue and the lack of resources in the communities where the schools are situated. These social factors required interventions that were beyond the capacity and depth of the educators. In such school contexts, the role of an educator was complicated due to an expectation of being able to deal with social problems that manifested in the school as a result of a social circumstances in the community.

The participants shared similar views on the issue of parental participation in these three schools. Educators expected parents to actively participate in the education of their children. In Akhisizwe Primary School, which is located in a rural community, some parents had difficulties in helping their children with school work due to illiteracy or work situation. Many parents worked far away from home, leaving their children alone in the care of the neighbours. In the school located in a semi-rural area and in a township, most children stayed with their grand parents and some children who are orphaned stayed in child-headed homes. Moral et al. (2017) found that communities in low socio-economic contexts generally, have low parental involvement due to the fact that some parents are illiterate. Pashiardis, Brauckmann and Kafa (2018) also assert that people in low socio-economic contexts are people who have low academic levels while some are even illiterate. The education of the child begins at home which implies that the lack of parental involvement in school work of a child can have negative effects on the child performance in schools. A lack of parental involvements adds extra responsibility to the educators (Gu & Jonansson, 2013; Maringe &



Moletsane, 2015). In the next section, I discuss similarities and differences amongst the participating schools in the study.

### **6.3 Similarities and differences amongst the participating schools**

There were three sampled primary schools for this study. One school, Akhisizwe Primary was located in a rural community; Sgodiphola Primary was located in the semi-rural and Zuzimfundo Primary was located in a township area. These schools shared similarities and differences. In line with Budge (2005), who suggests peculiarities of the local contexts must be understood, I felt that it was necessary to outline these similarities and differences in order to illuminate how the participants may have made the meanings of their local contexts in relation to Grade Four learners' phase transition. There are a number of aspects that the three primary schools shared, and these include inadequacies in relations to appropriate infrastructure, classrooms and recreational facilities. The condition of buildings of Akhisizwe Primary school in the rural school and Zuzimfundo Primary in the township were poor, characterised by broken windows and doors. The condition with regards to buildings at Sgodiphola Primary School in the semi-rural was good compared to the two schools studied since it was recently built and even had a library. Two of the three primary schools Akhisizwe from rural area and Zuzimfundo from the township did not have resources like media centres or a library. All three schools had no computer laboratory. The absence of these resources in these school constituted a disadvantage in term of enhancing quality education for the phase transition from Foundation to Intermediate Phase. The availability of such resources could assist in supporting learners to adapt to the new learning environment in Grade Four.

All the schools had electricity connections in all the classrooms. Two of the three primary schools had proper sanitation and municipal piped water in their buildings. Akhisizwe Primary School had flushable toilets for the educators and visitors. However, learners were still using pit toilets that were insufficient in terms of numbers; they were stinking and had damaged doors. The participants in this school reported that the toilets in the schools were in better condition than the toilets found in most of the learners' homesteads. One of the positive aspects of interpretivist paradigm underpinning this study is that it values the multiplicity of meanings and social realities. The

justification by the participants and the unwillingness to fix these conditions suggested some kind of anomaly in the meanings and interpretations of decency, in this case, decent toilet facilities. While others could interpret the state of the toilets as appalling, others may see it as acceptable in the sense that they are way better than the situation in the learners' homes. I found that kind of logic disturbing, considering that the environment wherein formal teaching and learning takes place should be conducive and free of health hazards.

Overcrowding of learners in the classroom in Akhisizwe Primary school was not bad compared to the semi-rural and township school in the study. This was attributed to the low enrolment levels of learners in rural school although the number of learners exceeded the capacity of this primary schools. Due to the fact that houses were sparsely located over larger areas, that has ramification for lower learner admission in this school compared to its counterparts. The educators in the rural school reported that about 80% of their learners were living under unfavourable conditions. These conditions are exacerbated by an uneven geographic terrains and poorly maintained gravel roads which made it difficult to access different amenities. Some learners had to walk long distances from their homes to the school as there was no learner transport system to take them to school. The participants in this school alluded to the fact that other factors impacted negatively on the learners' academic performance and on teaching and learning activity. Zuzimfundo Primary School, located in the township had similar building structure like Akhisizwe Primary, but Zuzimfundo had three mobile classes in addition to the six classrooms the school had. In this township school, educators stated that overcrowding in classes was due to the increased number of informal settlements commonly known as *imikhukhu* (shack dwellings) near the schools and the construction of Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) house in these areas. There have never been new schools built or renovated in an attempt to respond to the increasing number of people flocking to these areas. The building condition at Sgodiphola Primary School was in good condition having been recently built in modern contemporary double storey structures. In Sgodiphola Primary School, overcrowding was attributed to mass relocation of people from different areas who were attracted by the availability of cheap land which was sold by the Induna (member of traditional leadership) in the area. The community sympathised with people that moved from informal settlements in urban areas, understanding the predicaments that people were facing in those areas. But educators were concerned about the impact it has on the school

enrolment. However, the shortage of space in these three primary schools have a negative impact in term of supporting learners' transition to Grade Four. Overcrowded classrooms made it difficult for educators to attend to learners who need individual attention especially, Grade Four learners as they struggle to adapt to the changes. Table below illustrates the building profiles of the three primary schools in the rural, semi-rural and in the township.

	<b>Akhisizwe Prim. School</b>	<b>Sgodiphola Prim. School</b>	<b>Zuzimfundo Prim. School</b>
<b>Building conditions</b>	Poor	Adequate	Poor
<b>No of classrooms</b>	6	18	8
<b>Media Centre</b>	0	0	0
<b>Computer Lab.</b>	0	0	0
<b>Library</b>	0	1	0

**Table 6: Profile of school buildings in rural school**

All the three primary schools had electricity power supply and all the classrooms had electricity connections; however, Sgodiphola and Akhisizwe Primary Schools, which are in rural and semi-rural respectively, had a problem of electricity supply interruptions of due to poor infrastructure. The participants from these schools reported that the schools were constantly vandalised by thugs from the community and they steal copper pipes and electricity cables. They alluded that these acts of vandalism, burglary and theft were disorganising the smooth running of the school and. They were also depriving learners of learning in a safe and conducive environment as enshrined stipulate in the South African Schools Act. Educators found it difficult to mobilise resources like television and radios to enhance listening and pronunciation skill among Grade Four learners. All the three schools had shortages of educators in terms staffing and improving teacher: learner ratio, and this affected mostly Grade Four educators in providing efficient teaching and learning.

<b>Learner enrolment</b>			
<b>Period</b>	<b>Akhisizwe P. School</b>	<b>Zuzimfundo P. School</b>	<b>Sgodiphola P. School</b>
<b>2019</b>	560	658	1452
<b>2018</b>	569	675	1556
<b>2017</b>	565	663	1688

**Table 7: Learner enrolment levels in the three rural schools in the past three years**

Table 7 above reflects the learner enrolment for the past three years (2017 to 2019) in the three participating schools. The contextual factors discussed in the previous sections and chapters have had a negative impact on the learners learning, particularly, Grade Four learners who are affected by phase transition challenges from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. Educators emphasised that most parents of the learners were not employed, and also had low levels of education. Most of the parents depended on government's social grants of various types and handouts. Although there was electricity supply in the community, learners did not have resources like a library where they can access books and internets for global knowledge. The participants in rural, semi-rural and township primary schools shared similar sentiments that the combined effects of these socio-economic factors were disadvantaging their learners in term of support teaching and learning situation in the fourth grade.

Most participants reported that the academic and literacy levels of the majority of the parents in the communities surrounding the three primary participating schools were low. The participants highlighted that most learners lived with parents who did not complete matric or tertiary education. It is a common fact that the levels of education that persons have achieved determine to a large extent the current income and future prospects for their children (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). It was apparent that financial muscle, and support systems deemed necessary for learners to succeed in their education were inadequate. This was due to lower levels of education of the majority of adults in the surrounding communities of these schools. Hence, the participants stated that most parents, struggled to provide sufficient support to the learners as well as the schools. Some learners in this primary schools relied entirely on the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP). The provision of food parcel was made for the neediest learners identified in the schools, to take home.

The employment rate of adults in all the school were generally low, resulting in a number of homes being dependent on social grants. In the rural areas, unemployment challenges were worse than in the communities in the semi-rural and the township schools. Few parents that were employed in rural area worked in the fields in the farm; some worked as domestic workers and other earned a living by selling fruits or vegetables in the city. In search of employment opportunities, some parents were forced to leave their children with extended family members whilst others were left on their own devices. Abandoning children was viewed by most participants as having a negative impact on the learners' education in terms of receiving adequate support from home. That was found to be the opposite of what was experienced by learners who resided with their parents or guardians in the affluent areas in the suburbs. The lack of self-esteem among some parents was apparent. Some parents were reported to be reluctant to come to schools or to assist their children with homework since they themselves were dropouts from these schools. All the participants had a similar view in this rural primary schools in one way or the other, alluded of the fact that there was inadequate support received from Department of Basic Education officials, and such inadequacy was mostly due to the lack of information about the challenges that educators and learners experienced in the fourth grade.

Both primary schools in the township and semi-rural schools had similar challenges as those encountered in the rural settings. The living conditions of semi-rural and township primary schools were slightly different from the school in rural area in term of living conditions. The employment rate was low but better than in the rural area. Most of the learners walked from home to school, while other learners used the service of learner transport. The integration of diverse types of learners due to proximity and accessibility of these schools could be an advantage to the learners in term of sharing knowledge. When learners from different backgrounds mix together, they share information which is good for learners. Also due to a lot of activities happening around these schools, learners had adequate exposure to global knowledge. All the three schools were participating in the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), receiving meals on a daily basis for each and every learner. This was one of the strategies used by the Department of Basic Education aimed at motivating underprivileged learners to attend school on regular basis by providing learners with meals everyday. It was hoped that this programme would contribute to the improved learner attendance and that starvation could not be an obstacle to the learners learning.

All the participant highlighted that since the introduction of NSNP in schools, learner attendance and concentration span had considerable improved for some learners. Even though there was poverty in the communities surrounding these schools, interventions such as NSNP made a difference.

#### 6.4 Similarities and differences amongst the participants' educators

There were notable similarities and differences in the participating Grade Four educators that emerged from the analysis of data. For instance, all the educators that participated in this study shared similarities which included their academic qualifications. They all had a three or four-years teaching qualification which, according to South African standards, are qualified educators. This means that these educators are capable of teaching in primary schools in South Africa. They all taught Grade Four learners in low socio-economic conditions. Participants in the sample were aged between 28 and 55 years and there were no educators between the ages of 18 and 27 years in the sample. This could imply that most educators who participated in this study had several years of teaching experience. The range of educator ages can be regarded as a strength that ensured that the school system did not only benefit from the experience of the older educators but also that there was a potential for a refreshing inflow of new innovative ideas from the younger educators. This varied age group mix augurs well for the school system particularly during the transition from the traditional teacher-centred approach to the more current learner-centred approaches. The ages of the participants were therefore, considered to be an important factor in understanding educators' work experience in teaching in primary schools. The experience of educators was also considered important to enhance the depth and the credibility of the data generated. Gove and Cvelich (2010) stress that the inadequate supply of educators has resulted in the phenomenon of hiring unqualified educators in many countries. In stark contrast to what Gove and Cvelich (2010) say, all the educators in the study were fully qualified. Table below depicts the gender, age, teaching experiences of the twelve participating educators.

	Akhisizwe Primary School				Sgodiphola Primary School				Zuzimfundo Primary School			
	Miss Zungu	Mr Mthembu	Mrs Ndelu	Ms Mbili	Ms Khumalo	Ms Simamane	Mrs Dlamini	Mrs Shabalala	Mrs Ncwane	Mrs Gumede	Mr Jili	Ms Sokhela

<b>Gender</b>	F	M	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	M	F
<b>Age</b>	32	38	44	40	35	40	49	53	45	51	38	29
<b>Teaching experience</b>	13yrs	10yrs	12yrs	14yrs	11yrs	9yrs	17yrs	22yrs	15yrs	16yrs	10yrs	6yrs
<b>Experience in Grade 4</b>	5yrs	7yrs	8yrs	11yrs	8yrs	6yrs	10yrs	9yrs	6yrs	9yrs	5yrs	3yrs

**Table 8: Gender, Age, teaching experience and experiences of Grade Four educators**

Table 8 indicates that there is little variation in the participants' qualifications. Most educators have Bachelor degrees and diplomas and no educators had lower qualifications or master's degree. In this study, there were only two males. This is probably due to the fact that there is a tendency for more females to be choose teaching as a profession as compared to males. It is also possible that there are generally more female educators than male educators in South Africa who teach in the Intermediate Phase learners. Apart from equity considerations, a reasonable gender balance among educators had value in terms of role modelling for the learners. Though I could not create a balance of gender but I was able to generate data that was significantly valuable for this study. It is vital that educators are appropriately trained so that they are able to provide quality education to the learners. The qualifications of the participants were important to understand if educators were qualified to teach and qualification had an impact in the way they teach learners in the Intermediate Phase in the primary schools. In the next section, I discuss and analyse the similarities and differences of the three themes of this study.

## **6.5 Analysis and discussion of the findings**

The study aimed at exploring leadership and management experiences in supporting phase transition of learners from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in primary schools. The analysis of the findings in this study generated three subthemes that can be used to capture the similarities and differences in the manner in which the participants from all three primary schools in this study made sense of learners' phase transition as a phenomenon in their contexts. I termed the three sub-them as (1) Educators' perspectives of the issues related to learners' phase transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in primary school; (2) Educators experiences in supporting phase transition of learners from foundation phase to intermediate phase;(3)

Educators' leadership and management challenges and/or enablers in supporting phase transition of learners from foundation phase to intermediate phase. In the next section, I discuss and analyse in details these emerging sub-themes.

#### **6.5.1 Educators' perspectives on the issues of learners' phase transition in primary schools in the uMlazi District**

All the participants from the three primary schools had the perception that learner phase transition in primary schools had an effect on the efficient provision of quality education in the fourth grade. These changes included the language of teaching and learning, the increased number of subjects, the increased learning hours and the increase in the class size. All the participants concurred that these changes in the fourth grade posed a challenge to both the learners and the educator as learners were not coping. When learners struggled to cope, it made it difficult for the educators to teach effectively, and thus, the provision of quality education experiences suffered.

In line with Adaptive Leadership Theory underpinning this study, educators acted in ways that are consistent with Adaptive Leadership construct, that they should take themselves out of the action and just observe the situations and patterns as they occur. According to Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009), the educators need to get off the dance floor and onto the balcony which enables them to gain some distance, to watch what is happening in the fourth grade. This is also the stage where educators have the ability to diagnose the situation in the light of what they perceive is at stake, and try to unbundle the issues involved. It is acknowledged that previous experiences and unique perspectives enable different people to observe the same event or situation in different ways. Therefore, getting of the dance floor into the balcony, the participants acknowledged that they could not be specialists in everything. They counted on the broad base of different other people to render added support and knowledge for the educators to be able to support Grade Four learners to cope with phase transition challenges. This is in line with Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) who posit that that new situations and new dreams call for new strategies and capabilities, as well as the leadership to organise them.



In this study, there were some differences and similarities that were drawn from the perspectives of the participants. In line with Cohen et al. (2011), Creswell (2014), as I explained in Chapter Four, this qualitative research was concerned with in-depth meanings that the participants generated and there was a focus on the uniqueness of the participants' perspectives on how they made sense of the phenomenon in their contexts. In the next section, I discuss Educators' similarities and differences perspectives in experiencing the effects of change of language of teaching and learning in the fourth grade.

#### **6.5.1.1 Educators' perspectives and experiences regarding the effects of the change of language of teaching and learning of Grade Four learners**

The theme that emerged prominently and frequently from this study, and which corroborates the existing literature was the change of language of instruction that was understood as challenging to some learners in understanding lessons in Grade Four. This change of language perspective was dominant in all the three schools studied but varied in terms of its perceived impact on teaching and learning due to different context of the primary schools. The most common view was that when the language of instruction changes, it becomes a challenge for learners, which makes it difficult for educators to teach and learners to understand the content that is taught. The effect of the change of language of teaching and learning has been highlighted by various scholars, and these scholars emphasise the enormity of the transition to adopting a new language of learning. For instance, Heugh (2017), as well as Collier and Thomas (2017), posit that it takes children six to eight years to become adequately proficient in the 2<sup>nd</sup> language to be able to then use this language effectively for academic purposes.

Other studies reveal that Grade Four learners are unable to adapt fully to learning in the English language (DBE, 2009, 2011, 2014; Kirby, Griffiths & Smith, 2014; Scharer, 2012). This has a ripple effect on their performance in other subjects, which may be attested to the relatively high failure rates. The ripple effect of the change of language of learning in the fourth grade in this study differs from one school to the other. For example, the effect of the change of language of learning in the fourth grade was not as severe in the two schools (Sgodiphola Primary in the semi-rural and Zuzimfundo Primary, located in the township) as it was the case in Akhisizwe Primary

School. This is attributed to the learners in the semi-rural and the townships primary schools having adequate exposure to television; smart phones, computers and internet connectivity. This exposure plays a fundamental role in acquiring knowledge which enhances their access opportunities to quality education. The inadequate exposure to these resources by the learners in the rural school has alienated them from the global knowledge base, and this has an impact on their education. For example, Mr Mthembu, a Grade Four educator from Akhisizwe Primary School, clearly described the extent of how severe the changed of language of learning has in his school when he said:

*The knowledge of English in most learners in the fourth grade is not enough. [ 'Kusaduma nje'], meaning that these learners do not understand English completely.*

The main message from this participant was simply that these learners were virtually nowhere; it was like they had to start afresh. This was corroborated by Miss Zungu from the same school who argued that at an initial stage, the learners struggle in understanding English. This is what she said:

*It is a challenge to teach learners the first time in a new language. You end up speaking to the few learners. Teaching in isiZulu makes them participate in class which is the language they know and understand better.*

The two extracts highlight the enormity of the challenge of the change of the language of instruction in Grade Four. Other educators from the same school attributed this severe challenge of the language change in their school to the pressure of the socio-economic background of the learner in the rural areas. They alluded that their school, unlike schools from urban or township areas, did not have adequate resources which is a constrain for Grade Four learners. They added that these learners came from an environment where they did not receive academic support like their counterparts from townships and semi-rural areas. Highlighting the rural context as a factor that contributed to the severe effects of the change of language of learning in her school, Slindile Mbili from Akhisizwe Primary school had this to say:

*Learners from rural area are deprived in term of resources and support from the stakeholder and their family. Without proper support, it is very difficult to teach learners the first time in a new language because of the fact that these learners do not understand English, and they come from a disadvantaged community.*

This point has been raised in the previous chapter and it underscores the perceptions that Grade Four educators had about the effect of the language changes on their teaching and learning in Grade Four. The question of “how, when and why the change of language impact on teaching and learning in the Fourth Grade”, emerged as a complex one and, entailed a context embedded process, which was dependent on the individuals’ beliefs, knowledge, experiences and context (Hallinger, 2011). It is emerging from the above discussion that the change of language of learning in the fourth grade in primary schools is a challenge to both the learners and the educators. Some the challenges of the language of learning are attributed to the socio-economic background of some schools, as depicted for example, in the schools in rural areas which had a lack of resource and inadequate exposure to global knowledge. It is difficult to teach and support learners to cope who are already affected by poor living conditions. This suggests that teaching and learning time is compromised in the fourth grade.

#### **6.5.1.2 Educators’ perspectives and experiences of the increased number of subjects in Grade Four classes**

The increased number of subjects in the fourth grade was another factor that came prominently in this study. The participants stated that when the number of subjects increases from four to six in the fourth grade, most learners found it difficult to cope with the increased volume of work. Learners found it challenging to catch up during the lesson and by the time the period ends and the next educator comes for his or her lesson, many learners could not finish the work by the end of the period. Most educators alluded that, the increased of subjects made teaching and learning very difficult and strenuous. When this is juxtaposed with a historically disadvantaged community background and scarce resources, the decline in learners’ performance in Grade Four is no surprise. However, these circumstances are always worrisome (Spaul, 2017). The differences in the impact of the increase number of subjects on teaching and learning also varies. In the rural area, the challenge of the increased number of subjects in the fourth grade was aggravated by other contextual factors of the schools. For example, learners from rural primary school come to school to learn already exhausted by walking long distance from home to school; there is also the issue of household chores such as cooking, cleaning, fetching firewood or castle. The participants in the three schools described the increase in the number of subjects in Grade Four as detrimental to

effective learning of learners; however, they also highlighted the effects of context-specific factors such as learners' backgrounds, the community type, the teachers' experience and the school size (Bloch, 2009; Hallinger, 2003).

The perspectives of Lindiwe Ndelu from Akhisizwe Primary School regarding the increased number of subjects in the fourth grade is that "one must take different school factors into cognizance." She was alluding to the fact that she was teaching learners some of whom were heading their families because their parents' absence. This is what she said:

*The department's lesson plans do not accommodate Grade Four learners in rural areas. It is designed in a way that suggests that we teach learners who are given all the support like learners in the townships and urban areas not knowing the type conditions of the learner that we teach in rural areas.*

The above-mentioned view and that of the other participants highlight the effect of the context on the learners' learning in Grade Four. The views and experiences expressed by the participants in the three primary schools are corroborated by Dimmock and Walker (2000) who argue that the meaning of successful leadership must be realised in relation to the context in which people are situated and the values underpinnings of the schools as institutions in society. This is also shared by Osborn, Hunt and Juach (2002) who assert that leadership and its effectiveness is to a larger extent, dependent upon the context. In other words, an effective leader must be able to understand the context in which the institution is located and navigate the challenges that are encountered in that particular context.

In the fourth grade, child's workload increases substantially from four subjects to six subjects (DBE, 2011). The increase in the number of subjects had an impact on teaching and learning in the fourth grade. Steyn (2017) found that when the number of subject increases, it means that the learners suddenly transition from one teacher to being taught by four or five specialist subject educators. However, adapting to various pedagogical approaches has disadvantages as well. Learners have to adjust to an increased amount of homework of varying nature. It appears that in the fourth grade, the role of educators is complicated with the expectation of being able provide quality teaching and learning and also support learning to adapt to the change as a results of phase

transition in Grade Four. The findings of this study confirm the previous studies that reported on challenges of the increased number of subjects in the Fourth Grade.

It is evident from the views shared by the participants that the effect of the added subject in the fourth grade has a negative impact on the efficient teaching and learning. This was more visible during lesson presentation in class when learner struggled to cope with the added demands of work. The added subjects made it even more difficult for the educators to support the learners adapt to and cope with the change in the teaching and learning environment. This suggests that there is a systemic problem within most of the primary school in relation to Grade Four transition from Foundation Phase, and these need to be addressed. This systemic problem within primary school makes teaching challenging and compromises effective teaching and learning processes.

#### **6.5.1.3 Educators' perspectives and experiences regarding the increased teaching and learning time in Grade Four classes**

The findings presented in Chapter Five suggests that the increase in the learning hours is another perspective that came up prominently in this study as exerting negative pressures on the educators who teach in Grade Four which the first grade in the Intermediate Phase. The majority of the participants alluded that when learning hours increased most learners had difficulties coping with the demands of Grade Four. The most common view that runs across all the participants and across all the participating schools was that the longer learning hours in the fourth grade resulted in the learners' lack of concentration and attentiveness, which ultimately rendered teaching and learning situation ineffective and pointless. Learners who are tired may fall asleep in class and do not participate. Such views are shared by scholars such as Haydon et al. (2019; Bakken, Brown and Downing (2017); Tucker (2022), as well as Spaul (2017), to mention just a few.

What has also emerged from the analysis is that the effect of the increased learning hour varies across the three schools, although the contexts in all three was largely considered as deprived. However, due to the low morale that many of the educators demonstrated during my conversations with them, they all showed signs of despair, complaining about the fact that the learners had

difficulties in coping with the new teaching and learning environments. For instance, Ntombizodwa Ncwane from Zuzimfundo Primary School in the township complained as follows:

*The most challenging thing for me with the issue of longer learning hours in the fourth grade is that, it is difficult to do my work as required by the department because learners get tired very quick.*

The similar view was also shared by Lindiwe Ndelu from Akhisizwe Primary School who expressed her dissatisfaction with the current realities as follows:

*It very difficult to teach Grade Four learners when they show clear signs of exhaustion. What make the situation worse is that, the majority of these learners walk long distances from home to school as there is no transport for them in this area.*

The views expressed by the two participants above are consistent with those expressed by all the participants in this study. Their voices have been expressed in the preceding chapter. I am repeating some snippets from their extracts only as a way of showing the extent of the similarity of their experiences and perspectives regarding the changes in Grade Four that relate to the extended teaching and learning time. In this study, most participants alluded that longer instructional hours resulted in attention deficit and fatigue, making learners feel fatigue or fall asleep during class time. They also mentioned that longer learning hours pose a strain to learners as they become overwhelmed and feel overworked in the fourth grade. In this study, it is clear that the increased learning in the fourth grade made teaching and learning difficult for both learners and educators. It is emerging from the data presented above that educators were experiencing challenges of longer learning hours during phase transition. This is due to the fact that when learners come to the fourth grade by default, their concentration capacity does not match the demands of the fourth grade work. The issues that were raised by the participants in this study resonate with evidence from other studies conducted in South Africa and elsewhere in the globe. Various scholars highlight the negative of increased number of lessons on the Intermediate Phase learners (Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017; Fox, 2009; Haydon et al., 2019; Khan & Iqbal, 2012; Marais, 2016; Spaul, 2017; Steyn, 2017; Tucker, 2022).

#### **6.5.1.4 Educators' perspectives and experiences regarding the increased class sizes in Grade Four**

The theme that is discussed in this section is aimed at showing the pattern in the stories expressed by the participants across the participants and across the schools. In other words, what I present here is more than just the voices of the participants, but to indicate what I see as patterns in their voices and relate such patterns to the current scholarship. One of the common themes across the schools is that of class size. Irrespective of the context (rural, semi-rural or township), the increase in the learning hours and also overcrowding seems to be a recurrent issue that bothered the Grade Four educators due to the manner in which it affected learners' learning in Grade Four. The phenomenon of overcrowding is explained by Dabo (2015) as involving a scenario where a classroom has the number of learners that exceeds the optimum carrying capacity. This scholar further argues that such a phenomenon has negative implications for curriculum delivery in the sense that it causes a hindrance to effective teaching and learning process (Babo, 2015). Therefore, 'over crowdedness' referred to the lack of infrastructure, such as a lack of classrooms, as well as a high Learner Educator Ratio (LER), referring to the number of learners per teacher in a classroom. The challenge of overcrowded classrooms in the fourth grade was described as making teaching impossible due to continuous disruptions and interruptions in the three schools.

There are other effects that are caused by overcrowding in schools. For instance, a study conducted by Marais (2016), found that learners' problematic behaviour, such as lack of attention, boredom, lack of discipline, fighting and even vandalising resources can be related to overcrowded classrooms. Overcrowding prevents proper education from taking place within the classroom. Because the class size is too big, there is no space for moving around and to attend to learners that need individual attention. The participants highlighted that the challenge of overcrowding of learners was prevalent, particularly, in rural areas where there were instances of overcrowding. Such overcrowding negatively affected the efficient provision of quality education, especially on the transitioning to Grade Four. This is what Lindo Mthembu from Akhisizwe Primary School had to say in this regard:

*Overcrowded classroom especial, among the learners in the rural area where living conditions are harsh, compromised the quality of teaching and learning environment.*

The connection between overcrowding and didactic issues is well-documented, and it usually results in some kind of neglect of some of the learners during teaching and learning process. Didactical neglect as a result of overcrowding of learners in class was argued by researchers, such as Cortes et al. (2012), Marais (2016), Van Wyk (2008), as being detrimental to the learners' academic progress and development. Teachers struggle to manage their time and work (Zydziunaite et al., 2020). Two teachers explicated how their burdensome duties and shortage of time set them backwards, and invariably, there is a need for catching up with Grade Four work. To that end, Nhlanhla Jili from Zuzimfundo Primary School expressed his views as follows:

*Our school is not immune from the common townships problem of overcrowded classrooms in the schools. Learners come from different areas, including informal settlement which makes the school to exceed its capacity. Hence, learners in the fourth grade are crowded in confined learning spaces which makes it extremely difficult to support these learners to adapt well to changes.*

This extract clearly shows that although rural communities are popularly known to be sparsely populated, they nevertheless, experience similar challenges as the other participating schools from different contexts in terms of overcrowding and related impact. Therefore, what scholars refer to as didactical neglect is prevalent across the research sites. Didactical neglect refers to the teacher's inability to pay enough attention to each learner's educational needs (Marais, 2016). In this study, the increased class size in Grade Four has been viewed as having a negative impact on teaching and learning. For instance, highlighting the need for educators to address didactic needs of all learners in class Ntombizodwa Ncwane from Zuzimfundo Primary School expressed her views this way:

*They need more teacher attention; I end up not being able to reach all learners when teaching because there are large numbers in class. There is a great need for individual attention since they are new to this phase and everything in this grade is new, therefore, individual attention is extremely important to adjust.*

The pattern in the data presented in Chapter Five indicates that educators were experiencing challenges of increased class size during learners' transition in primary school. The data presented revealed that overcrowding of learners leads to neglects as educators are unable to pay individual



attention to all learners, including those that were struggling in their learning. Therefore, individual learners' problems are not catered for especially the slow learners because of overcrowding. Experiences shared by the participants across the schools and contexts were similar, and they all resonate with those of other scholars who have researched this area such as Cortes et al. (2012); Marais (2016); Snow and O'Connor (2016); Van Wyk (2008) and Zydziunaite et al. (2020). Therefore, the findings of this study are not isolated, nor do they bring in new understandings about the connection between overcrowding and didactic processes. What I found to be surprising is that all three contexts seemed to suffer the same problems in terms of the intersection between curriculum delivery in Grade Four classes and overcrowding phenomenon. My assumptions before I embarked on this study were quite different from what the analysis uncovered.

#### **6.5.2 Educators' views about the intervention support they provided to the learners' transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase**

This section presents educators' views about the kinds of interventions that they designed to address the challenges and complexities brought about by phase transition. As I have indicated elsewhere in this chapter, the main purpose of this chapter is to paint a picture about what obtains across the schools, in this particular case, it is in relation to intervention mechanisms adopted. After educators had taken time to think through their interpretation of what they had observed about transition related challenges, it was time to design intervention strategies that were informed by their observations and interpretations of the events in the fourth grade so that they could make progress in terms of either technical or adaptive challenge of learners' phase transition (Heifetz et al., 2009). Well-designed interventions provide a context; they connect your interpretation to the purpose or task on the table so people can see that your perspective is relevant to their collective efforts. Implied here is the notion of collective efforts of all the stakeholders involved in the school context. This view resonates with the views of Heifetz et al. (2009) who assert that the role of teachers or any professional is to ascertain that stakeholders are equipped with adaptive skills to enable the learners adapt to the changed environment. In the case of this study, Grade Four educators as leaders and managers have to ascertain that these learners are supported and equipped with relevant skills that are appropriate for adaptation and coping with the change regardless of the learners' diversity or background.

In this section, I analyse the views of educators about interventions strategies in supporting the learners so that they can transition from Grade Three to Grade Four. What has emerged as a common thread across the schools is that Grade Four educators devised rigorous induction sessions, code switching and scaffolding techniques. It must be stated, however, that there is no one-size-fits-all method of supporting phase transition of learners from Foundation to the Intermediate Phase. As a result, to address the challenges of learners' phase transition, educators were responsive to the contexts in which they were working. This supports the argument that leadership and management is a complex, non-linear and multidimensional construct (West-Burnham, 2009). Nonetheless, as discussed in Chapter Two, there are strategies enacted by educators to support learners to adapt to the change.

Judging from the findings of this study, Grade Four learners' phase transition could be described as a complex multidimensional practice (Fullan, 2008; Marishane & Botha, 2011; West-Burnham, 2009). Grade Four educators were faced with a mammoth task of supporting Grade Four learners to adapt to and cope with the change in the midst of phase transition complexities and challenges. Educators had to draw upon all of the available resources, skills and wisdom to deal and overcome complexities; for example, the learners who came to school hungry (all three schools); overcrowding (all three schools); inadequate teaching and learning resources (all schools); Akhisizwe Primary School), as well as learners arriving to school exhausted due to walking long distances were responded to. The confluence of these factors often impedes the educators from supporting Grade Four learners to adapt well to the changes. Often, Grade Four educators had to rethink how best to apply their leadership and management practices in their dynamic, difficult contexts to enhance teaching and learning. They had to facilitate skills effectively and efficiently in supporting Grade Four learners to adapt and cope well with the change despite these challenges.

Grade Four educators in primary schools had a responsibility of supporting Grade Four learners to adapt and cope well with the changes. In supporting learners to adapt, it was necessary for the educators to navigate from one type of activity or one type of strategy to another as long as it was working. Heifetz et al. (2009) state that well-planned interventions provide a context; they connect your interpretation to the purpose or task at hand so that people can see that your perspective is

relevant to their collective endeavours. In line with this argument, Miss Khumalo, an educator from Sgodiphola Primary School described the job of the educators in the fourth grade as strenuous job involving constant thinking about the innovations in ensuring that learners are supported well. Demonstration of organisational, planning, innovative and creative thinking, communication and global awareness skills were significant skills provided by the participants to support learner phase transition in primary schools. To conclude this discussion, I should highlight one point which seems to suggest a shortcoming among the Grade Four educators in the three schools. I concede that, as they argue, they did some observation, interpretation of what was going on in their school, and thereafter, they provided interventions. Without judging them, it does not emerge in the findings that as Grade Four educators, the collaborative and collectively developed interbension strategies as enshrined in adaptive challenges aspect of Adaptive Leadership Theory (Heifetz et al., 2009). Below, I discuss and analyse the strategies that were used by educators to support Fourth Grade learners phase transition.

#### **6.5.2.1 Educators' use of induction as a strategy to enhance the transition of Grade Four learners**

The notion of challenges and/or inhibitors to effective transition of Grade Four learners, has dominated the discourse in this study. Nonetheless, the study has also shown that there were leadership strategies that the teachers adopted, and this section focuses on these leadership strategies, and these strategies are applicable across the three schools. The general view from all the participants is that they incorporated rigorous induction strategy in their teaching and learning to support learners adapt to Grade Four teaching and learning conditions. Participants from all three schools experienced challenges of Grade Four learners' phase transition challenges in varying degrees. According to Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009), there are three unique characteristics of adaptive challenges. These unique challenges are non-linear inputs and outputs, and that there are no prescribed procedures other than generic guidelines that assist the institution to deal with the challenges. They further state that solutions come from interacting with contextual variables; hence, outputs would not be predictable. In line with the propositions by Heifetz Grashow and Linsky (2009), the participants believed that, preparing Grade Four learners

depended on the educators' leadership and management practices, preparedness and proper planning of the lesson. In the context of this study, this means that when the educators are well-prepared, they are able to plan, organise and prepare learners well for Grade Four lessons presentations. This view is supported by Fox (2009) who states that if the transition is not properly managed, it could possibly have an adverse effect on the learning process, which could result in lasting learning difficulties and poor academic requirements.

Most participants mentioned that one of the strategies of supporting learners, they walked around the classroom as part of monitoring teaching and learning. Educators in this study were applying what is suggested by Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) which is about observing the patterns in the class; interpreting what they are observing so that they can design relevant interventions to address the adaptive challenge that they will have identified. Below I present a few snippets from the interviews I conducted with the participants. Highlighting what she does to monitor and observe what goes on in class, Anastasia Shabalala from Sgodiphola Primary School summarised her leadership practices as follows:

*I start every lesson by walking around checking and ensuring that every learner is using the appropriate exercise book. I do that by asking the learners to open the exercises to see if all learners are using the correct exercise book for my subject.*

What has also been expressed by this participant is that she repeated the same process many times such that it sank in the minds of the learners; in that a rhythm was established in the form of an organisational culture within her class. Establishing a particular culture is critical is young children are to get used to what is expected of them in class or in the school premises. Similar sentiments were expressed by other participants from the same school. Such sentiments were not limited to just one school, but were shared by all the participants and in all three schools, thus suggesting a pattern of what was happening in all the schools in the study. The importance and benefits of creating a rhythm is emphasised Aphiwe Sokhela an educator from Zuzimfundo Primary School who said:

*The learners do not take long to adapt to the changes. I do rigorous induction by incorporating charts and pictures in my lesson to make it interesting. I make learners do a lot of practical activities include games.*

Grade Four educators from all the research sites indicated that observing learners' behaviours and patterns in these initial stages helped them in ensuring that each and every learner had a pen and exercise book or textbook before the start of the lesson. Most participants mentioned that observing learners while also explaining the instructions before they begin teaching was helpful in ensuring that all learners understood the instruction and to perform what was expected of them in during the lesson. However, there were variations in how educators practised rigorous induction in Grade Four, which was attributed to different school contexts. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) state that different factions each want different outcomes; hence, people have different perspectives about how things should be done. In line with this assertion Lindo Mthembu from Akhisizwe Primary School explained:

*Grade Four is a critical grade because of all the changes that learners encounter which they ought to adapt to. It is important that I do not rush them but try and give them small amount of work.*

This is in line with the fact that adaptive leadership entails that leaders constantly change their tactics and approaches. The solution that was successful before may not be successful in another challenge. Hence, there are various factors that act at a given time (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). It is also emerging from the data that the participants had similar views about supporting learners to cope with change while also applying rigorous induction approaches. This implies that there is no specific planned programme for educators in place to address challenges during phase transition. Educators used their creativity and innovativeness to think of strategies to support learners. It is however, emerging that learners' transition in Grade Four posed challenges to both educators and learners. This is not easy for educators as planning needs a lot of time and energy. Below, I discuss and analyse educators' views and experiences of using code switching as a strategy to enhance Grade Four learners' learning.

#### **6.5.2.2 Educators' views and experiences of using code-switching as a strategy to enhance Grade Four learners' learning**

One of the patterns in the data is the fact that all participants used code switching as a strategy to facilitate understanding among Grade Four learners. All the participants shared similar views that they employed code switching to support learners to understand lessons in Grade Four. The

majority of the participants in the study acted according to the school context, and this varied from one setting to the next in supporting learners in the fourth grade. While this is the case, the findings also show that such a strategy was not accepted by everybody within the schools, although I do not have clear evidence to support that claim that in each school there was a counter argument against the use of code switching. What is clear in the literature is that there is a diversity of views about the benefits and dangers of using code switching in the classroom. In short, what came out in the data about code switching is supported in the literature, although arguments used in the findings and that in the literature is completely different.

On the positive side, researchers feel that code switching can be a very successful strategy which minimises the language barrier in the classroom, but overt linguistic inadequacies in the LOLT cause confusion, frustration or discomfort (Evans & Cleghorn, 2012). Scholars (e.g. Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2010; Mulford & Silins, 2009) share similar views that educators in the fourth grade are confronted with a more complex teaching role in response to the demands and requirements of the environment under which they work. Hallinger (2005) affirms contextual factors that shape leadership and management behaviours of educators as they are enacted in their spaces. Therefore, educators ought to be sensitive to their context. The context that has driven Grade Four educators to use code switching was a background of schooling of the learners that grew up in homes where English was a foreign language and was hardly used in their daily lives. The other is that Grade Four learners did not understand instruction when only English was used in class and code switching has to be used. The findings have also shown that in some schools, departmental heads were vehemently opposed to the practice but Grade Four educators continued anyway, and taught their learners using such a technique.

One of the observations that constitutes a pattern in the findings is that although some departmental heads (not forming part of this study), were against the use of code switching, their arguments were never based on any linguistic foundations. They all used government policy as the reasons for discouraging this practice. The findings do not show if these departmental heads produced any alternative approaches to supporting Grade Four learners to facilitate understanding. In some ways the views of the departmental heads could be removed from the reality in the classroom in terms of ensuring that Grade Four learners are supported. I say this based on the fact that educators as

leaders and managers in the classroom have constructed code switching as a particular form of action to fit the context or situation. This is supported by Hallinger's (2011) model which maintains that reality, whether it is an issue of attribution to individuals or the conditions found within the situation, is constructed by those embedded in the situation. The implication of the discussion above is that educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting phase transition of learners in primary school could be properly understood by taking context into account. I do not want to talk much about the departmental heads because they did not participate in this study. Therefore, I could not ask them questions for clarity on this issue. Nevertheless, it is evident from research perspective that there are positive and negative aspects to it.

The literature clearly shows that where there are arguments against code switching. However, such arguments are based on the linguistic dangers of using this technique if the users are not extra careful about it. On the positive side of this debate, scholarship in South Africa has shown that the use of code-switching by South African educators that is grounded in the social circumstances in which it occurs constitutes a purposeful and productive teaching strategy (King & Chetty, 2014). On the negative side of this debate, Evans and Cleghorn (2012) warn that while code switching minimises the language barrier in the classroom, however, overt linguistic inadequacies in the LOLT cause 'confusion, frustration or discomfort. Educators in this study used code switching strategy which entails using two languages simultaneous to support learners to adapt to the new language of instruction. Most interestingly, some of the participants viewed this technique as challenging and time consuming. In the next section, I discuss and analyse differences and similarities of the implementing scaffolding strategy to support Fourth Grade learners to adapt to the changes.

#### **6.5.2.3 Educators' views and experiences of using scaffolding as a strategy to enhance Grade Four learners' learning**

There are numerous strategies that were adopted by Grade Four educators across the three schools and scaffolding is one of them. In this section I outline what has emerged or is emerging as a pattern of how this strategy was adopted in all three schools. First, the findings presented in Chapter Five clearly show a pattern about how environmental factors affected teaching and

learning situation in all three schools. Similarly, a pattern emerged about how Grade Four educators in the three schools responded to the changed teaching and learning environment in the Intermediate Phase. The negative effects posed by the environment have to be dealt with in order to ensure that meaningful teaching and learning occurs. In this section, I discuss strategies that Grade Four educators utilised to minimise the negative impact of the transition. The emerging pattern in the data indicates that the participants in all the three cases used scaffolding as the strategy they have adopted to support learners' transition in the fourth grade. Scaffolding in this context, is when educators use Grade Three work to support Grade Four learners when introducing lessons. In other words, this approach assumed that there were deficits in their knowledge. Therefore, the teachers had to go backward in order to go forward. The term scaffolding was first used by Wood, Bruner and Ross in 1976 (McCabe, 2013) which refers to support or assistance provided to young children, which enables them to reach higher levels of performance than they could reach independently.

The most effective way is using varied strategies guided by how the child is doing. Once the child is doing well, less support and help is provided. When the child struggles, more specific instructions are given until the child starts progressing again (McCabe, 2013). The study found out that the participants had to refer back to Grade Three work in order to support learner to adapt to and cope with the change. It is evident in this study that Grade Four educators enacted their leadership practices in their space to support learners to cope with the change in the challenging phase transition in their school context. Dominant variations were captured in the learners' response on teaching and learning. The participants emphasised that if they did not go back to what learner know before they start a new lesson, learners would not understand the entire lessons. This was corroborated by the participants from Sgodiphola Primary School, Ntombizodwa Ncwane who added:

*Going back and start from something the learners know is another option in the fourth grade to make these learners learn. To solve this problem, there is not much we can do other than to use what we can then; scaffolding strategy becomes one of the strategies we use to try and support learners, though it strenuous.*

This was reiterated by participants from the semi- rural primary school, Sihle Simamane who said:

*To prepare these learners for Grade Four curriculum, I adjust to the Foundation Phase*



*level because they cannot adjust to my level yet though there is curriculum the need to be covered in time.*

What is critical from the views expressed in the two extracts above represent the general views of all the participants in the study. Therefore, it is clear that the pattern is about the use of scaffolding in the three schools. In summary, what has emerged in the analysis of findings is that Grade Four educators constructed a particular form of action to fit the environment within which they worked. Educators' individual leadership's attributes, school systems, and community characteristics mediated how they created their reality. The implication of the discussion above is that leadership and management in dealing with adaptive challenges takes the context into account. Phase transition challenges were cropping up each day, thus, pressurising the educators to bend the rules to mitigate these challenges. Consistent with the assertions by Heifetz et al. (2009), the educators in the researched schools faced situations that demanded responses outside their repertoire which could not be closed by expertise and procedures in place at the time. The manner in which the educators merged these strategies demonstrated responsiveness and adaptation to the context where they worked. According to Oftelie, Booth and Wareing (2012), adaptive leadership is ideally suited to drive creative approaches in complex environments. In the next section, I discuss and analyse the educators' views and experiences about enablers that supported their efforts and inhibitors that undermined their efforts of facilitating learners' transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase.

#### **6.6 Educators' views and experiences about enablers and inhibitors to supporting learners' transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase**

In this section, I present the views and experiences of educators about enablers and inhibitors that respectively, supported or frustrated their efforts to support learners' transition to the Intermediate Phase. The literature has revealed that primary schools are complex, characterised by constant changing systems affecting a wide variety of learner learning aspect including emotional, academic, social and behavioural learning (Deakin-Crick, Green, Barr, Shafr & Peng, 2013; Gu & Johansson, 2013). Mrs Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education also highlighted that phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools is a critical problem area (Department of Basic Education, 2011). It is emerging from the findings that

the educators in primary schools had difficulties in adapting Grade Four learners to cope with change of phase transition.

The lack of resources has been cited as some of the major constraints in the educators' experiences in supporting learners to adapt to and cope with the changes in Grade Four which is the first class in the Intermediate Phase. The participants in the three schools mentioned that the lack of resources made it difficult to teach effectively in the fourth grade in a manner that enables the learners to cope with the demands of that grade. Even for educators who are highly skilled and have a myriad of personal resources, decision making, and teaching practices may be hindered by stress and burnout that may arise from the high demands and low organisational resources (Bottiani, 2019). Below, I discuss and analyse educators' similarities and differences experiences of the lack of resources in supporting Grade Four learner to adapt to and cope with the changes.

#### **6.6.1 Educators' management of enablers that enhance Grade Four learners' adaptation efforts to cope with changes**

The participants from all three research sites shared similar views that they employed some mitigating strategies that they regarded as enablers in supporting the learners' transition in Grade Four. All the participants mentioned that they exercised patience and employed a slow pace approach when teaching Grade Four learners. Most participants alluded that, although this strategy seemed to be working, but it implied more work on their part because a lot of learners' work was not covered by the end of the year. The evidence of challenges of time constraints to complete the syllabus, inadequate human and physical resources cut across all three primary schools. Besides adopting a slow pace approach and patience, the participants were able to adapt to the local conditions and utilise their understanding of the conditions to mobilise resources that can support the learners' education in Grade Four. For example, Lindiwe Ndelu from Akhisizwe Primary School articulated this point when she said:

*I reduce the pace when I am teaching Grade Four. I go with them step by step supporting each learner all the way until they adapt.*

Another participant from a different school highlighted that they encouraged the learners to collect old papers and magazines to extract pictures that can be used as learning aids to illustrate certain points or ideas during teaching and learning process. She comments:

*We also use pictures and give the more home works. I do this to compensate the unfavourable condition of work in this school. Also, from the fact that most parents of these learners are illiterate, learners in rural areas are alienated from resources and modern technology to assist them to acquire new knowledge.*

This is important because it indicates that Grade Four educators did not sit down and fold their arms and complain about the lack of resources, but they were creative and demonstrated acute understanding of their environment, and used it to the benefit of the learners. The significance of resources is emphasised by scholars such as Chikoko et al. (2015) who posit that, in effective schools, there is maximum utilisation of time for teaching and learning. On the issue of understanding the local context of deprivation, Miss Zungu retorted “*I take it into account that I am dealing with learners who face multiple deprivation when I teach these learners*”. On the issue of patience, Nhlanhla Jili of Zuzimfundo Primary School commented:

*I try by all means to be patient with them and give them small portion of work that they will be able to complete later.*

Ideas captured in the discussion summarises the views and experiences of all the participants in the study who understood the circumstances within which their learners lived, and exercised patience and identified additional learning resources that do not require finance and used it to augment their teaching. All these enablers (patience and resourcefulness) are inherent within the educators. This is in line with Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009), who define adaptive leadership as the practice of mobilising people to tackle tough challenges, creative thinking and identifying opportunities to thrive. The participants used mitigating strategies to adapt learners to cope with change in the fourth grade. The participants mentioned that they were patient and employed a slow pace approach when teaching Grade Four learners.

### **6.6.2 Educators' views and experiences of the lack of resources as an inhibitor in supporting Grade Four learners' phase transition**

This section focuses on the inhibitors that undermine the efforts of Grade Four educators in supporting Intermediate Phase. The study was done in schools that were by default, deprived in terms of their location in socio-economically depressed communities. Therefore, it came as no surprise that the dominating discourse when it comes to amenities and facilities, the views of the participants from all sites were largely negative. All the participants emphasised the lack of resources to support learner cope with change in the fourth grade as a major hindrance. Most participants highlighted the lack of resources which, they argued, made it difficult to support learners' transition. All participants said that if their school did not have adequate resources to support effective teaching and learning environment, that posed a challenge to their efforts of providing quality curriculum delivery. Studies have found that educators in Grade Four struggled to implement the curriculum in the manner that is specified by the guidelines of the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2015; Taylor, Van der Berg & Mabogoane, 2013).

What made a bad situation worse, is the fact that their schools did not have specific appropriate programmes to address challenges of the learners. In other words, the participating educators felt isolated in many respects. By this I mean that the participants did not feel supported neither by the Department of Basic Education nor by their School Management Teams. Some of the participants felt so upset about feeling unsupported by the department such that they have lost hope that there is anything that the department can do for them. To illustrate this point, listen to what Slindile Mbili from Akhisizwe Primary School had to say:

*The departmental workshops are a waste of time; they can do them but if the question of resources that seek to speak to the problems in grade is not addressed in our schools, there is nothing can we as educators can do.*

Echoing similar sentiments, Kholiwe Zungu from Akhisizwe Primary Schoolsaid:

*I don't know whether it is because we are in the rural area or not. The Department does not assist us in anyway as there are no relevant materials and resources to enhance teaching and in the fourth grade.*

The lack of resources was viewed as a major inhibitor and the two extracts above represent the views of all the participants. The importance of resources has been highlighted by many scholars. According to Matshipi, Mulaudzi and Mashau (2017), the shortage of learner-teacher support material (LTSM) can be a problem. With too few copies of textbooks available, it becomes a futile exercise to assign both class and homework when the materials cannot cover all the learners in the overcrowded classroom. The level of the lack of resources to support learners in the fourth grade differed in these schools. The findings presented in Chapter Five have indicated that the educators found it difficult to teach in the context of heavy workloads. In other words, the lack of physical resources which could be used to support learners adapt to new teaching and learning conditions, compounded the challenge of overcrowding which is systemic in nature.

Teacher workload is defined as the teaching or added duties that they perform within schools outlined by their management as mandatory (Hosain, 2016). Over and above the workload that teachers perform daily, they have ‘invisible work,’ which is work that is done outside of the school, which creates the overload that teachers often complain about (Wilson, 2016). This reality leaves teachers struggling to manage their time and work (Zydzianaite et al., 2020). While this discussion is not the focus, however, the shortage of resources and feelings of helplessness brings this issue to the fore. The anger that Grade Four educators in the study felt is reflected in the literature. For instance, Taylor (2017) reports that officials do not seem to be accountable for the lack of school functionality, an issue to which is of grave concern. To the educators, it seems like the government through the education department does not care about their needs, and the findings have shown that stress levels have gone up as a result of various factors including this feeling of helplessness.

### **6.6.3 How educators deal with and manage learner adaptation demands during the phase transition**

This section presents an emerging pattern about how the participating educators managed learner adaptation demands during the phase transition. There are certain demands on the learning of the learners at this level of their development, and teaching and learning environment has to be managed in a particular way to ensure that learners benefit from their classroom experiences. What has emerged from the findings presented in Chapter Five is that the participants from all the sites

shared similar views that they were experiencing challenges in their efforts to assist learner adapt to the new teaching and learning environment. Their success in ensuring that the learners were able to adapt and thrive, they ensured that they gave learners more time to their work. In other words, Grade Four educators availed themselves to the learners for extra tuition. Echoing what had been expressed by other participants from different schools, Sihle Simamane from Sgodiphola Primary School asserted:

*On a daily basis, I sacrifice my own time to make sure that my learners succeed. This took a lot of dedication, commitment, and teamwork.*

The views captured in the extract above represents the experiences of all the participants from all three schools. Besides giving the learners extra time, they were also given extra activities to practice writing, thinking, and solving problems. Highlighting this point, Lindo Mthembu from Akhisizwe Primary School made this comment, “*We lead tasks and initiate different activities to make sure learners’ benefit*”. Again here, the views expressed is representative of what other participants from the three schools did to assist the learners adapt and cope with the level of work at Grade Four. Assisting learners to adapt to the new conditions and thrive resonates with the key tenets of Adaptive Leadership Theory (Heifetz et al., 2009). Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) maintain that adaptive leadership is specifically about change that enables the capacity for members to thrive, and not just to adapt and survive. Most effective leaders anchor change in the competences and strategic orientations that should endure in the organisations (Heifetz et al., 2009). Therefore, mitigating strategies to the challenges that crop up is of paramount importance.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the discussion of findings that were presented in Chapter Five. To enhance the discussion, I injected literature and theoretical framework. The intention was to paint a clear picture about the experiences of Grade Four educators across all the three schools. As the chapter developed, I captured what was similar or different across the three schools. In teasing out similarities and differences, I borrowed the ideas of Dwyer and Emerald, (2017). These authors advocate the notion of generating a pattern in the data by drawing from what each participant is saying on any important idea or point. I have done that in this chapter, and because of that, I was able to say with confidence that what a particular participant had expressed resonated with the

views of other participants. In the previous chapter, I extracted views from all the participants, and in this chapter, I was pulling ideas from what the participants had already expressed in Chapter Five, and in that way, I was able to develop patterns in the data. The next chapter presents the conclusions and discusses the implications of the conclusions for various stakeholders or sectors in society where these conclusions can apply.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **SYNTHESIS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter aimed at mapping out patterns of what is emerging from the analysis. In trying to abstract emerging patterns from the descriptive data I began by drawing patterns that developed from the across sites analysis of the findings that was discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis. In this chapter, I present conclusions that are drawn from the findings that were presented in Chapter Five and the discussion of findings presented in Chapter Six. The chapter also highlights the lessons that can be learnt from these conclusions. I also attempt to indicate the extent to which the research questions that were posed in Chapter One have been addressed, as well as how curriculum leadership practices can be enhanced by the lessons drawn. However, before I present the conclusions in this final chapter, I commence by providing brief reflections about the previous six chapters of the study to remind the reader about what the essence of each chapter is. Thereafter, I draw on my findings to formulate the conclusions of the study. I use the research questions that underpinned the study to frame the discussion of the conclusions. I adopted this approach since it affords me an opportunity to categorise the presentation of the conclusions. This approach further puts me in a better position to assess the extent to which the research questions have been sufficiently answered. After that, I then provide the retrospective journey of my PhD. Thereafter, I outline the contribution of my study. Then, I present reflections and summary of adaptive leadership theory within the context of phase transition of learners from Foundation to Intermediate Phase in primary school. I conclude by making a number of recommendations based on the conclusions and implications for further research.

#### **7.2 Synthesis of the study**

The study summary serves as a reflection on the chapters that constitute the thesis. The study I undertook aimed at understanding how educators supported Grade Four learners who find themselves in the transitioning phase from Foundation to Intermediate Phase, and enable them to



cope with the change in this complex situation of phase transition. There are unique challenges confronted by Fourth Grade learners transition that individual educators had to deal with. The thesis consists of seven chapters.

I set the scene in this study in Chapter One where I introduced the topic of the study; I provided a background and rationale for conducting this study, and in so doing, I also draw from my personal, professional and conceptual contexts. After that, I presented the statement of the problem, the purpose and the rationale for the study. Then, I discussed the significance of the study, as well as three research questions that steered the study. Furthermore, I clarified the key terms, demarcation and limitations of the study. I conclude this chapter by outlining the layout of the study which indicated what each chapter of the thesis entailed. Chapter Two presented a discussion of the relevant literature relating to learners' transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools. I commenced by locating the review conceptually. I analysed the body of literature on leadership and management to assess competing conceptualisations of leadership and management constructs. Thereafter, I interrogated the literature, linking it to educators' perspectives of the issues related to learners' phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools; educators' experiences in supporting phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase follows; and educators' leadership and management challenges/enablers experiences in supporting phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. Through this review, I gained theoretical insights about how learners' transition in to the fourth grade was understood and practised in South Africa and elsewhere in the world.

In Chapter Three, I had from time to time, position myself conceptually in the study. I drew on Adaptive Leadership Theory (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009) and Hallinger's (2011) synthesised leadership for learning model. I opted for these theoretical constructs because I believed that they can serve as a map that could provide coherence for this study to enable me understand how this phenomenon can be understood and explained. In Chapter Four, I discussed the research design as well as research methodology that I employed. This is a qualitative, multiple case study which explored educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting Grade Four learners in different primary schools' context.

I started by declaring and describing my paradigmatic disposition taken about the nature of reality (ontology), the relationship between knower and known (epistemology) and assumptions about methodologies. Interpretivist research paradigm, being my paradigmatic home, assisted me to look at multiple realities of educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting phase transition of learners the fourth grade in different primary schools. I used semi-structured interviews as my primary data generation method. Through this face to face interview technique, I was able to establish a relationship of trust and rapport with the participants. This developed a bond of trust and honesty, which enabled the participants to be more open to share their feelings with me truthfully, freely and with no restrictions or reservations. The aim was to get each participant's distinctive contextual interpretations of phase transition of learners and the meanings it brought to each of them. I also discussed approaches that ensured that my study findings remained trustworthy. I always maintained ethical standards as articulated in the protocols of Ethics Committee of the University.

In Chapter Five, I discussed in detail, the findings generated from Grade Four educators who participated in this study through the use semi-structured interviews. I divided discussion of my findings into two parts. I present the findings using *verbatim* quotes to ensure that the 'voices' of the participants remained original in the study. In Chapter Six, I proceeded to making analysis of the findings by drawing patterns from the findings and relate them to the literature that I had discussed in Chapter Two and the Theoretical framework that was presented in Chapter Three. I outlined the patterns showing similarities, as well as differences among the participating primary schools and Grade Four educators. I presented the theme in relation to the research objectives and questions. In Chapter Seven, I conclude the thesis by firstly providing my conclusions drawn from the findings. This is followed by sharing some lessons learnt and the implications. I conclude by reflecting on the original contribution of the study to the existing knowledge and ongoing debates in the field.

### **7.3 Research questions re -stated**

The main research questions of the study are:

- What are the perspectives of Grade Four educators in the uMlazi District about the issues of learners' phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase?
- How do the Grade Four educators support phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools in the uMlazi District?
- What are leadership and management challenges and/or enablers experienced by the Grade Four educators in supporting phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools in the uMlazi District?

#### **7.4 Me and my research journey**

This section is intended to put me inside the study of Grade Four learners transitioning from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. In Chapter One, I highlighted my philosophical perspective and why I think the paradigm I adopted for the study was appropriate. In this section, I reflect on my research journey from when I started this study up to where it is at the moment. My research journey was challenging yet exciting, providing learning experiences as it had both the high notes, as well as the low keys. The high notes of my research journey were when I met new people during data generation phase, acquiring and generating new knowledge. The low key of my PhD journey was when I encountered various life challenges that negatively impacted on my academic progress, work and personal progress.

I registered for my PhD in August 2016, four months after my Master's degree graduation from the University of Zululand, which was in April 2016. My first supervisor got me through induction process very well. Soon, I started working on my research proposal which progressed very well and after I defended it on 21 July 2017 it was approved. I defended my research proposal on Saturday morning which coincided with my late mothers' celebration ceremony to remember her, her teachings, the values, the morals and the respect she instilled in us as family when she was still alive. This was a Saturday that I will never forget because of two things. First, on that day, I was very emotional due to the nature of that event. I was not in my space spiritually. Second, I was nervous because I was going to defend my PhD proposal the very same day at 10:00. After successfully defending the proposal, I started working on the chapters and I was progressing well until 2018 after I received my ethical clearance. My academic challenges started in 2018 which

was the year to go to the field for data generation. Due to the increasing amount of my professional teaching work and time I needed to focus on my study, it was difficult for me to balance the two. I applied for leave from the department to go the field and generate data from the sampled primary schools. Unfortunately, my application was declined. I was very frustrated as I had to use breaks time to go and meet the participants and when I had finished, I would go back to work and go on with my daily duties which was a very exhausting and challenging. I also used my breaks time and afternoon after work to go to the field to generate data come back late at home and begin the transcription process. When I completed my fieldwork, ready to begin analysis process my supervisor resigned and left the University, and I was left stranded. This coincided with the period where I had to answer the ancestral calling and undergo spiritual training (ukuthwasa) so that I could be healed. I was compelled to suspend the study in 2020 to attend to my spiritual realm and journey which was a very difficult and challenging experience of my life. During this period of spiritual journey, what kept me moving and motivated was knowing the truth about myself. I was able to confront and embrace the challenges during that period until the end of that part of my journey. In other words, I can say that it was the end of another journey within a broader journey of my PhD study.

## **7.5 Presentation and discussion of conclusions**

The recurring view that emerged prominently from educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting phase transition of learners was the impact that the transition had on their teaching and learning environment. The learners' phase transition was understood as challenging to most learners in the fourth grade, and it posed a strain to the educators in doing their work effectively. The educators' perspectives were that the experiences of the change of language of teaching and learning, their experiences of the increase number of subjects, their experiences of longer teaching and learning time and the increased number of learners in class posed challenges on the provision teaching and learning in Grade Four. To support these learners, the educators devised a number of strategies to assist the learners adapt to and cope with the new and changed learning environments. To discuss these conclusions, I use the research questions as an organising framework for discussion.

### **7.5.1 What are the perspectives of Grade Four educators in the uMlazi District about the issues of learners' phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase?**

As indicated in the previous chapters where the findings are discussed, the participants' perspectives and experiences are dominated by negativities surrounding the transition and how they were supposed to teach and manage their classes. I have provided a detailed discussion about this question in Section 6.6.1 which deals with the perspectives about the issues of learners' phase transition. The challenges that dominated the discourse are (1) The change of the language of learning, (2) The increased number of subjects in Grade Four, (3) The increase in class size in Grade Four and (4) The increased in teaching and learning hours. I can conclude from the discussion drawn from the discussion of findings in the previous chapter, Chapter Six, that these changes were the most challenging issues of phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools. In response to these changes, the participants had to design different approaches to handle these phase transition change challenges. For example, Grade Four educators used code switching, scaffolding and rigorous induction strategies to address the challenges they encountered in the process of supporting Grade Four learners deal with changed teaching and learning conditions. These issues are discussed in detail in Section 6.6.2 of Chapter Six.

Based on the findings presented and discussed in Chapter Five and Chapter Six respectively, I can conclude here that educators' experiences in working with Grade Four learners (Intermediate Phase) influenced the way in which they reacted to the new teaching and learning situation. Knowledge, creativity, innovativeness and experiences of Grade Four educators seemed to have mediated the form of collaboration, as well as the way collegiality occurred. This in part, contributed to the variations of leadership and management practices enacted within Grade Four educators' space in handling the changes they were confronted with. In consistent with some constructs of Adaptive Leadership Theory, educators intervened according to their unique environment and different levels of educators' knowledge, commitment and experiences. The conditions in primary schools informed the forms of educators' leadership and management practices in relation to these phase transition changes in the Intermediate Phase. An example of

this can be witnessed in the manner in which they demonstrated deep insights about the contextual deprivations of the community in which their schools are located and how they addressed the learners' needs.

The participants in the three research schools also perceived these changes of phase transition in relation to socio-economic factors to be problematic. The findings have indicated that, participants in this multiple case study, acknowledged the effects of the profile of the community, its backgrounds, and the school cultures on grade transition issues of Grade Four learners. Other issues that negatively affected effective transition of Foundaiton Phase learners to Intermediate Phase include financial resources, school size and competencies of some educators and school managers in facilitating effective learner transition processes to mention a few. This study therefore concludes that Grade Four educators had acute awareness of the effects of the local conditions on te learners' learning processes. That is why, through their recognition of these socio-economic factors, educators of these three primary schools practically embraced their unique school settings, and responded appropriately. They applied a broad-spectrum of leadership and management practices in a collective and collaborative effort to face the challenges of phase transition of learners to ensure that Grade Four learners succeeded. The overall impression was that Grade Four educators devised a particular form of action to fit their environment or condition. This harmony was seen for example, where at one extreme, Ntombizodwa Ncwane an educator from Sgodiphola Primary School explained that she learned different strategies to deal with the situations in the fourth grade in her school. She was referring to the lack of teaching resource. She maintained the culture that she set in her classroom which helped to foster excellent teaching and learning even though it was her tea break, she would help the learners. Furthermore, Ntombizodwa Ncwane had a special interest in learners that she noted, had demonstrated a slump in terms of their academic performance in the fourth grade, andt she believed was associated to their poor family background. She had a strong conviction that these unfortunate learners needed to be supported such that the impact of their poverty-stricken homes on their learning was mitigated so that they could cope with the phase transition challenges.

We also have Lindiwe Ndelu on the other extreme end, who is an educator in the same primary school in a rural area. She said that for her, working in the school that is situated in the rural area

should not be used as an excuse for mediocrity in the learners' academic performance. She argued that if she wants to see progress in her subject, that must be visible in the learners' academic performance irrespective of their socio-economic circumstances. Miss Ndelu's approach to dealing with Grade Four learners was seemingly less compassionate as she perceived these learners as capable and who were willing to learn. She tried to conceptually strip them of their realities of their lived experiences of deprivation. She argued that she did not intend to become involved or understand these learners' family situations. This study thus, concludes that while all Grade Four educators in the study demonstrated their support, love and care for the academic progress of Intermediate Phase, some adopted a tough stance that can be described as a 'no-nonsense' approach. This is similar to the findings of a study conducted by Mkhize (2017) in the rural communities south of Durban. That study was about understanding instructional leadership practices of secondary school principals in deprived communities within the uMlazi District. This is the same district as the one where I conducted my study.

The conclusions drawn from Miss Ndelu's stance suggests that some variations in the manner in which different educators support learners in a particular phase exist, and that is normal. This is important and accentuate the relevance of Adaptive Leadership Theory where each individual has to observe the situation, Interpret it and Intervene (Heifetz et al., 2009). Such constructions of reality manifested in some educators' different approaches as they deal with the fourth grades' phase transition challenges. In confronting phase transition challenges, Miss Ncwane for instance, assumed a softer approach that was characterised by a kind, nurturing and empathetic posture. Miss Ndelu on the other hand, assumed a firmer approach to challenges in Grade Four, firm in avoiding classification of learners as underprivileged (Mkhize, 2017). She did not want to concentrate on the social conditions in the communities that they would not be able to ease. Her energies and efforts were more focused on the learners based on the premises of the school learning. There were many other cases that emerged from this study where the educators had to use their mental models to make sense of their complex, contextual situations. The educators were seen to be going extra miles and beyond the call of duty to assist Grade Four learners. The ways in which the educators blended these practices demonstrated responsiveness and adaptation to the context in which they worked. Their responses were, more often than not, influenced by their careful analyses of the situation, which was stripped of emotions. The metaphor of getting off the

dance floor and go the balcony is at play in these actions aimed at assisting Grade Four learners to adapt to the new teaching and learning realities (Heifetz et al., 2009). In the section below, I draw the study's conclusions on how Grade Four educators supported phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools in the uMlazi District.

### **7.5.2 How do Grade Four educators support phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools in the uMlazi District?**

This research question is closely related to the first one, but, it is slightly different in that this one extends from the participants' perspectives to focus on their activities in facilitating the transition. The findings of the study have revealed that there are a number of strategies that the participants engaged in to support Grade Four learners adapt and thrive through this complex and challenging phase transition although this had various levels of success. These strategies included a rigorous induction, code switching and scaffolding. In this study, the word thriving is a relative term which entails different levels and the extent of success for different people in different settings. In this regard, it is relative to the level of success of Grade Four educators in supporting learners to successfully adapt to and cope with the new teaching and learning environment in the Intermediate Phase. At the initial stages, the strategy that worked well for the educators to support learners to adapt was rigorous induction strategy. The participants mentioned that they walked around the classroom, ensuring that everything was in order before the start of each lesson. There is no specific planned programme for educators in place to induct learners. The participants mentioned that they also engaged in code switching as a teaching strategy to assist learners understand the lessons. The participants revealed that it was very challenging to teach learners the first time in a new language because the only language of learning they knew and understood when they came to Grade Four was isiZulu. The participants mentioned that if they did not code switch during the lesson presentations, there was no progress in terms of learners' understanding the lesson content.

The other strategy that the educators engaged in was scaffolding. The participants said that if they did not go back to what the learners knew before they started a new lesson, learners would not understand the lessons. Therefore, going back and forth was the solution although this was also



found to be strenuous and painful to endure. Educators stated that, though scaffolding strategy was helpful, it was time consuming. Although Grade Four educators took all these initiatives to support the learners, there was no evidence of school management involvement. Therefore, I can conclude here that the participants demonstrated some of the key elements of teacher leadership. However, it is also clear that the participants have some way to go in terms of attempting to obtain a buy-in of their immediate supervisors in the form of departmental heads. The findings do not show that the collaboration that occurred involved members of school management teams. Therefore, it does not appear that their leadership and management practices enjoyed the support of the school management teams. Obviously, the participating educators need to work on this aspect in order for systemic transformation to take place in the schools.

Grade Four educators in this study were confronted with various different disadvantages in terms of resources which necessitated different approaches to support learners in the fourth grade. The various approaches educators used to deal with learners' phase transition challenges is attributed to educators' leadership and management qualities, different beliefs, knowledge and experiences of each Grade Four educator. In addition, the multi-professional collaboration through participation and an interactive dialogical culture was perceived by educators as a joint task in supporting Grade Four learners was adopted by the educators. Although educators trusted that these initiatives were appropriate in solving phase transition challenges, the degree of success could vary from school to school. In the following section, I discuss conclusions around the challenges and enablers experiences in supporting Grade Four learners phase transition in primary schools.

### **7.5.3 What are leadership and management challenges and/or enablers experienced by the Grade Four educators in supporting phase transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools in the uMlazi District?**

The findings did not indicate any factor that can be described as an enabler in facilitating the transition of Grade Four learners. As we have noted in the previous sections, the teachers' experiences were characterised by negativities and obstacles, some of which were posed by the local environment, while others were systemic and structural. For instance, the fact that when

learners migrate from Grade Three to Grade Four, they experience change in the language of teaching and learning, is a systemic and structure of the curriculum. To deal with such situations calls for the skills to adapt to the current conditions. That is why Adaptive Leadership was adopted as one of the theories to frame the analysis and the discussion. Under the constraints experienced, educators stated that the lack of resources is the challenge that they experienced when they prepared Grade Four learners to adapt to and cope with the change in Grade Four. Educators said that inadequate resources had a negative effect in supporting learners phase transition in Grade Four. Educators said that if learners do not have exercise books and textbooks, it becomes a challenge to do their work appropriately. This is an aspect that needs special attention in the fourth grade.

Overcrowding is another factor that posed challenges when they engaged in learners' academic support. It was difficult to attend to learners that needed individual attention. Additionally, assessing learners under such conditions was a challenge. Learners took too long to adapt to the new teaching and learning conditions, and that was another negative factor. There was not enough time available to cater for slow learners. The lack of cooperation between parents and educators was another constraint as some parents did not assist with homework. Grade Four educators had to respond to the constraints and opportunities that may have existed in supporting phase transition of learners. Educators' skills levels, knowledge and experiences in the fourth grade also shaped how they responded to these constraints, as well as opportunities. This is attributed to their understandings of what worked for them in their school contexts. I can conclude that supporting Grade Four learners to adapt to and cope with change in the fourth grade remained entirely the educators' responsibilities. This was due to inadequate resources available in the school or even in the district. There were no human resources to capacitate and equip educators to handle the Grade Four learners. In addition to the above conclusion, I can conclude also that there was no clear communication between educators in the classroom and school management teams. The findings have shown that there were times where Grade Four educators were so upset about not receiving due support from the school and education department in the form of the district officials. This is an area that educators need to work on if the situation has to change and improve. Teachers in the classroom and school management teams have to have a common vision about what the school

needs and where the school is going. This seems to be absent in the three primary schools in this study.

Another factor that educators stated as a challenging experienced was supporting the learners adapt to the changes in the fourth grade. The absence of proper mechanism in place at a school level or efforts from the department at district level to intervene to address problems in the fourth grade was a great concern. Under the enabling factors, literature suggests that educators possess a personal self which in some ways, impacts on how they perform their teaching duties (Yazan, 2019). Some of these teaching duties form part of their teacher leadership practices. In this study, Grade Four educators have demonstrated how their multiple personal selves played a prominent role in advancing their educator leadership and management practices in engaging mitigating strategies to the challenges of adapting the learners to cope with the changes. Educators approach of being patient to the learners and employ a slow-paced momentum when teaching the learners constituted an innate enabling factor to learners' challenges to adapt to changes. This also implies that it cannot be easy for educators to support phase transition of learners as they lack support from the key stakeholders including school management teams. They needed everybody to come on board and give support to the primary school. The next section, I discuss the contribution this study made.

## **7.6 What can be learned from educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting phase transition of learners this study?**

This study has contributed to a new phenomenon in educational leadership research on teacher leadership and management in selected primary schools in a district. The study has revealed a plethora of teacher leadership and management experiences that educators in selected primary schools, particularly, Intermediate Phase, practise which can be regarded as novel to education leadership research. The study contributes some insights about some nuanced revelations relating to educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting phase transition in primary schools. Different enablers and constraints that they experience in supporting learners to adapt to and cope with the changes in the Fourth Grade were identified. Therefore, this study is original and makes a humble contribution to education leadership scholarship on educators' leadership and

management experience. One of the insights that can be drawn from this study is the futility of educators who take good initiatives as it is the case here, but such do not find resonance with the school vision and mission. The custodians of such remain the formal leaders in any institution. Therefore, it is important that they are kept in the loop about what is being done or proposed and why. The issue of a disconnect between Grade Four educators and school management teams is a cause for concern which can tarnish a good story.

I acknowledge that schools and school systems do not look the same everywhere (Nguyen et al., 2017). Still, some aspects or functions of leadership behaviour might be held constant across many contexts (Belchetz & Leithwood, 2007). It is possible that different leadership strategies are more useful in the various phases and trajectories of school improvement including Grade Four learners' transition in primary schools (Bellei et al., 2016). The location of schools might be another important element constraining educators' leadership practices. The conclusions that I made in this study suggest that the manner in which learners are supported in the fourth grade in terms of strategies and tactics used by educators, embraced, in varying degree a pervasive spirit of resilience, interconnectedness, compassionate and kindness. These sets off value systems resonate with Ubuntu principles (Bhengu, 2006; Pillay, 2012; Waghid, 2014). At different levels, the educators seemed to be using these principles to create an enabling environment and a clear sense of purpose in supporting the learner to adapt to and cope with the change. This is in line with Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky's (2009) Adaptive Leadership Theory which underpins this study. Adaptive Leadership Theory affirms that leaders understand that context matters as it can enable or constrain their behaviour, which shows that context awareness is imperative in leadership.

The strategies and tactics devised by Grade Four educators were applied on daily basis and were flexible. Depending on the nature of the contingency the application of these strategies and tactics sometimes, resulted in some of the 'rules' being bent. For example, in the case of the change language of instruction from isiZulu to English, learners found it difficult to understand their lessons. Educators had to bend the rules and code switch by using isiZulu to explain their lessons. Bending the rules caused conflict and contradictions between the educators and the School Management Team (SMT) in policy implementation (Bayeni & Bhengu, 2018). This implies that there is no understanding between educators and the SMT in relation to understanding the phase

transition challenges of Grade Four learners in primary schools. The conclusions reached are consistent with the narratives from the literature which suggest that educators do what is necessary for the learners to pass even if it means bending the rules and go an extra mile for purposes of maintaining human dignity (Oelofsen, 2015).

This misunderstanding between the SMT and the educators is also evident on the issue of increased class size in the fourth grade. This also implied the existence of poor planning on the side of the SMT. The SMT and the educator do not see eye to eye with regards to organising classes so that Grade Four learners are not squashed. Creating an enabling and conducive environment for Grade Four learners could mitigate phase transition challenges. With regards to the issue of long learning hours, educators and management of the school could adjust time table and give breaks for learners to reduce fatigue on learners which made it difficult for the educators to teach. Close monitoring of learner performance by the SMT could facilitate the school to organise relevant resource to support Grade Four learners. There was no account of stakeholders or the department officials coming to monitor Grade Four learners' progress and giving support to educators in the form of capacity building workshops or inductions. The lack of support from the department shows that there is a gap between educators and the department which stems from the fact that the two components are not talking to each other with regard to managing, supporting learners transition challenges in the fourth grade and formulation of strategies that the educators can use to mitigate these problems. I must also state at this juncture that whatever the participants said about the provincial Department of Education represents their views and experiences. Therefore, in terms of this study design, I could not speak to the education department's officials to elicit their views in this regard. This then means that what the participants shared with me remains their reality and truth. I have no obligation to verify it from the department's officials. This also has implications for the recommendations that I make at the end of this report. In other words, there should be no expectations that I recommend anything that the Department of Basic Education should do to address the challenges and obstacles encountered by Grade Four educators.

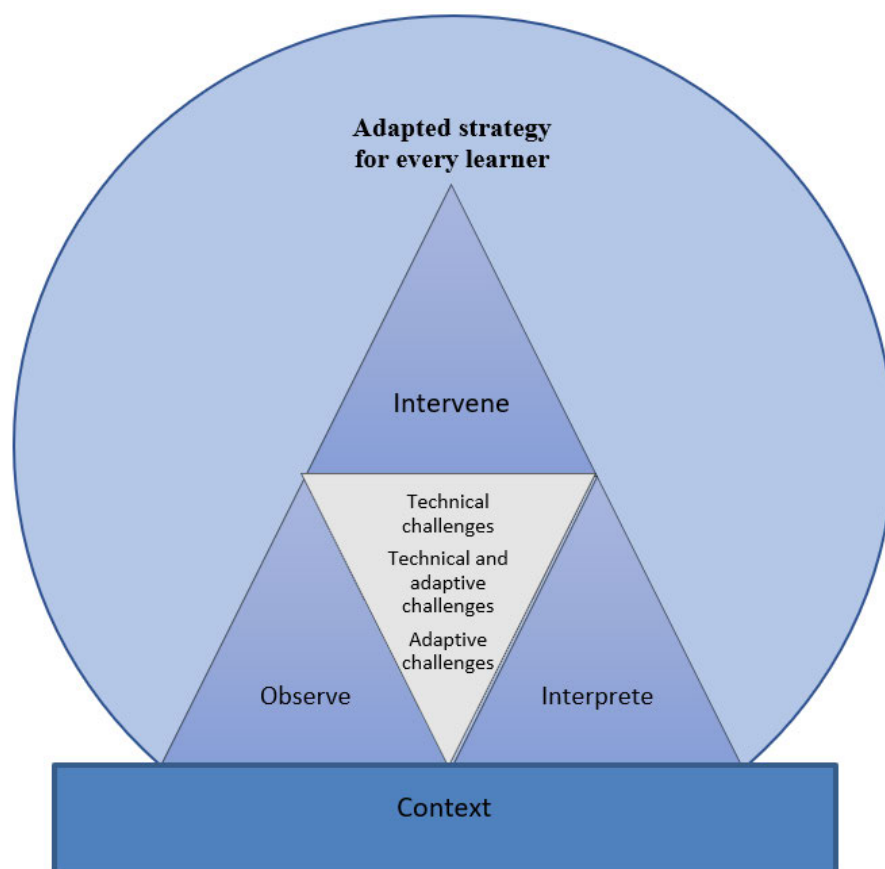
Educators stated that they used mitigating strategies to the challenges of adapting learners to cope with the changes. Educators stated that being patient and employing a slow-paced approach when

teaching Grade Four learners was the solution to mitigate some of the learners' challenges to adapt to changes. This implies that it cannot be easy for the educators to plan for this transition as educators lack relevant knowledge, guidance and support to assist the learners in primary school in the townships. The contribution of this study is based from the research participants showing how they support learners' transition in the Fourth Grade. The findings led to the extension of adaptive leadership model that relates to Grade Four learners' transition in primary schools. The findings led to the development of a model that is explained in the next section below. This model summarises the actual leadership practices of Grade Four educators as they grapple with supporting the transition of Foundation Phase learners to the Intermediate Phase in selected primary schools in the uMlazi District.

### **7.7 The proposed Adaptive Leadership Model in the context of phase transition**

Learner transition is a phenomenon where learners in primary schools, transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. This learner transition, as it has been mentioned in the previous chapters, has an impact on teaching and learning in the fourth grade. This impact is caused by a number of changes that occur including the language of teaching and learning, increased number of subjects; increased learning hours and work load increases, as well as overcrowding where the class size increases. This is the grade where most learners struggle to adapt and cope with all the changes. This becomes a challenge for educators as they find it difficult to provide efficient teaching and learning support. The challenges that Grade Four educators face are aggravated by the schools' contextual issues which include the lack of infrastructure, resources, overcrowding, as well as the shortage of staff. Educators had to develop adaptive solutions strategies by being innovative and creative in order to overcome these phase transition issues and ensure that learning was not compromised in Grade Four. These adaptive solutions and strategies are collaboration between educators, the school and the community. The educators ensured that strategies that are developed support learners to adapt so that efficient quality teaching and learning activities are provided in the fourth grade.

Based on the findings of this study and the discussion which integrates literature and adaptive leadership theory as advanced by Heifetz et al. (2009), as part of the theoretical framework, I have produced an adapted version of Adaptive Leadership Theory. The proposed model attempts to explain how educators can improve teaching and learning in the fourth grade by narrowing the gap between the Foundation Phase and the Intermediate Phase. This model is presented below. Thereafter, I give further details about this model and indicate how it assists in understanding leadership and management practices of Grade Four educators in the study.



**Figure 4: Adapted Model of Adaptive leadership by Heifetz, Grashow and Linky**

This notion of bridging the gap that I have spoken about is important, but so too is the notion of ‘narrowing the gap’. The argument I am advancing is that the greater the differences between

cultures of the Foundation Phase and that of the Intermediate Phase, the greater the challenges for the learners and the greater the risk of not being able to comply with the demands of the of the fourth grade. This is evident in the findings and conclusions of this thesis. The function of this model is to conceptualise how Grade Four educators address or endeavour to address the challenges in teaching and learning as learners undergo the transition from Foundation to Intermediate Phase.

The model further attests to the fact that teaching and learning is the core function of the schools. If there is no effective teaching and learning in a school that school may fail to achieve its desired objective. Grade Four educators are experts of their subjects and one of the important activities is to deliver quality teaching and learning. Grade Four educators must also play different roles, which include managing learners in the classrooms, monitoring learners' work, acting as a parent, encourage and develop learners, identify problems beforehand so that they can support learners' transition and adapt successfully to the pedagogic conditions obtaining in the fourth grade.

The model proposes that Grade Four educators and the Department should team up and be committed to applying adaptive leadership practices in order to be able to assist learners to adapt to and cope with the changes. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) maintain that adaptive leadership is an iterative process involving three key activities. These three key activities include observing events and patterns around you which entail that educators remove themselves temporarily out of the action and simply observe the situations (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). This kind of observation is termed, getting off the dance floor and onto the balcony. Being on the balcony is a powerful way of observing events and patterns. It enables educators to gain some distance, to watch themselves, as well as other educators while in action, and to observe patterns of what is happening that are difficult to see if you are down at the ground-floor level. It is remarkable how much more educators can see when they momentarily take themselves out of the action and simply watch and record. As such, educators in this study attempted to stand in the balcony and viewed phase transition as a complex, contextual, multidimensional space that demands educators to providing appropriate support to learners so that they adapt to the change conditions in the fourth grade.



Interpreting suggests that educators are making sense of what they are getting from their observations in the fourth grade, acknowledging the fact that other people might have formed different interpretations of the same situation. Upon interpreting observations, multiple hypotheses about what is really going on are developed, and simultaneously, recognising that these hypotheses are simply hypotheses, and thus conceptual. Upon observing events and patterns, the educators formed perspectives about the issues of phase transition of learners in the fourth grade. These issues included the change of language of learning, increased number of subjects, increase learning hours and increased class size. Furthermore, educators needed to design appropriate and effective strategies based on their observations and interpretations of what seem to be the case in the fourth grade. This is consistent with the service of making progress on the adaptive challenge (Heifetz et al., 2009). Hence, a well-designed intervention provides context; they connect their interpretation to the purpose or task on the table so that people can see that their perspective is relevant to their collective efforts. Among other things, they should consider the resources that are available and the context. Taking the context into consideration, the three primary school educators in this study engaged rigorous induction, code switching, and scaffolding strategies as intervention to mitigate phase transition challenges.

There were some constraints and few enablers in supporting the learners. The lack of resources and the issue of learners taking too long to adapt were some of the constraints to contend with. Grade Four educators had to change their tactics and engage in another strategy to minimise the challenges encountered in supporting the learners to adapt. This was in line with Heifetz et al. (2009) who state that leadership and management entail constantly adapting and changing tactics and strategies. Hence, the solution that seemed to have worked before may not automatically work in another challenge because there are many factors that act at any given time. The nature of the problem, people involved, time and space where the problem occurred would determine the solutions that are reached. One of the enablers was the personality of the educators; for instance, by being patient to the learners that were slow. Each of these adaptive activities builds on the ones that come before it and the process overall is iterative; you repeatedly refine your observations, interpretations, and interventions.

The distinctive feature of dealing with adaptive challenges is that the educators must connect with the challenges and anxieties of Grade Four learners in the Intermediate Phase. This includes drawing upon all available relevant resources, skills and wisdom. Furthermore, adaptive leadership involves moving people who have not been convinced by logic and facts. This requires leaders to adapt, to capture the context and make sense of it; to inspire others towards well-designed strategies, activities and processes that seek to improve the performance of the institution. These constructs can also assist educators to be able to provide efficient teaching and learning despite the changes in the fourth grade. Although educators did not get any form of support from the schools or the education department, they made sure that they used available resources to support learners to cope with change which showed the side of resilience from educators in challenging situations.

Through this study, I propose this model for consideration in analysing and understanding what some primary schools, particularly in rural areas and in the townships can do. I believe that this model provides profound insights, and thus, can be useful to the understanding of Grade Four educators' leadership and management actions that are geared towards supporting Intermediate Phase learners adapt to the new teaching and learning environments. I also believe that Grade Four educators who adopted this model would be able to support learners to adapt to the change smoothly. Educators would be in a better position to explore other possible ways of providing quality teaching and learning and improve the results of their schools. This model makes three extensions on Adaptive Leadership Theory as advocated by Heifetz et al. (2009). First, Adaptive Leadership Theory in managing learners' transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary school show that educators must be able to ascertain whether learners' transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase is a technical or adaptive problem. Second, they must understand that challenges do not always come neatly packed as either 'technical' or 'adaptive'. Hence, most of the challenges come mixed with the technical and adaptive elements intertwined. Third, educators must know contextual factors of their schools and develop strategies to support learners cop well with the change.

## **7.8 Recommendations**

The study has the following recommendations. First and for most, it has become quite clear that Grade Four educators in the study had to be contextually intelligent and become adaptive leaders and managers of teaching and learning in order to be able to support learners effective to adapt well to phase transition change. All the recommendations made are based on the conclusions made and discussed in this chapter. Secondly, all the recommendations are directed at the participating educators who taught Grade Four.

### **7.8.1 Recommendations to the Grade Four educators relating to how they support phase transition of learners in the Fourth Grade**

Without attempting to generalise, these findings and conclusions have some implications for other educators who are teaching similar grades in similar contexts. I say this with clear acknowledgement that circumstances are not the same across the country and also that rural communities are not homogeneous (Nelson Mandel Foundation, 2005). The challenges and a whole range of inhibitors to the transition are real and some are systemic, such as the change of the language of teaching and learning, as well as the doubling of the number of subjects, while others are not.

This being the case, there is a need for Grade Four educators to seek and demand specific programmes that are aimed at improving the capacity of teachers to handle these challenges. Such programmes can be sourced from outside agencies, but also from within the schools themselves. In other words, the concept of agency is of the essence in this recommendation. It does not matter as to where support comes from, as long it is not imposed by the outsiders. Educators in the participating schools should work closely with their school principals and School Management Teams in designing and implementing sustainable strategies that will enable them to support the learners adapt to and cope with the new teaching and learning environments. It has become clear in the findings and conclusions that parents constitute a major element in supporting learners’

learning. Therefore, it is important that teachers should devote time developing plans to promote parental involvement in the education of their children.

### **7.8.2 Recommendations relating to Grade Four educators address leadership and management challenges or enablers in supporting phase transition of learners**

The findings have shown that there are various challenges and very few enablers that support Foundation Phase learners to adapt to the new phase. It is also clear that the division between the Foundation Phase and the Intermediate Phase in the primary school will remain for some time, and also that educators at school level have no influence and will for a foreseeable future remain with no influence in terms of changing the policy arrangements. However, it is clear that schools can do something to mitigate the negative effects of the challenges to the transition process. Therefore, it is recommended that the facilitation of the transition process at school level should include the establishment of orientation programmes and increased opportunities for educators across phases to familiarise themselves with each other's situation and practices, as well as the development of extracurricular activities during the first year of the Intermediate Phase to capitalise on friendship groups throughout the transition process.

A conclusion has been made that there is no collaboration or communication between educators at classroom level and school management teams. Hence, there are so many challenges and misunderstandings about what educators are trying out in their respective classrooms. Therefore, it is recommended that educators should try their best to utilise their creativity and innovation to bring onboard their immediate seniors in the form of departmental heads. It is from that level that the whole school management teams can be harnessed in working together by way of trying to find solutions to these endemic challenges.

Another finding has been made which suggests that the whole area of phase transition is novel. This idea was advanced even in Chapter One and subsequent chapters did not indicate if much is known in South Africa about educators' experiences of phase transition and how it can be supported such that Grade Four learners do not suffer the adverse effects of this transitions. Therefore, a need for future research in this area is another aspect of this study's recommendations.

The findings of this research have indicated that Grade Four educators in primary schools in the context of some primary schools in South Africa working in rural, semi -rural and township schools possess leadership and management skills. The findings have also indicated that issues of learner transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase are under-researched in South Africa. These findings are consistent with existing scholarship. This implies that more research is needed that will provide deeper insights about this important area of study.

## **7.9 Conclusion**

This study has presented a particular perspective about a neglected aspect of leadership and management which focuses on the transition of learners from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase. This chapter has presented conclusions made on the topic given that the study has been done and completed. The chapter has provided a reflection on the previous aspects of the study and the chapter. The chapter also presented a summary of the proposed model, and also made some recommendations and suggestions for further research. Most importantly, I have striven to synthesise and conclude the journey navigated and lessons learned after I undertook this study. Accomplishment of this milestone has never been an easy task as some research books advocate. I have immersed myself into the research, as well as establishing rapport with educators as participants in this study. I also interacted with the literature to gain in-depth understanding about what is existing in the field. Phase transition from Foundation Phase to Intermediate Phase in primary schools has been studied immensely internationally but not much locally.

The debates which remain is about how Grade Four Educators enact leadership and management experiences in supporting learners' transition in their different school settings. I chose to research educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting phase transition of learners in primary school in township, semi-rural and rural primary schools to push the boundaries in the field. Therefore, I believe that this study contributes somehow to the field from the perspective of educators' experiences in supporting Grade Four learners' in primary schools' different context. It has also shown and confirmed that the phase transition of learners in primary schools is a complex and challenging phenomenon. Knowledge and experiences that educators possessed, shaped their understandings and practices in supporting learners in the fourth grade of phase

transition challenges in primary school and their practices. These conclusions affirm the notion that phase transition in primary schools, more specifically in the townships, semi-rural and rural areas in this study, is a dynamic construct that contains a number of factors and perspectives that shape its character.

The conclusions arrived at have also asserted the relevance of viewing contextual factors as imperative to understanding how educators support learners in the fourth grade. The model proposed in this study, suggests that the skills, knowledge and experiences that Grade Four educators hold influence the manner in which they confront phase transition and support Grade Four learners. The dominant practices that emerged from this study are those that are consistent with some aspects of adaptive leadership such as observing patterns, interpreting and intervention. I am strongly convinced that these adaptive theory construct assisted me to understand the educators' leadership practices and successes in managing supporting the learners that were undergoing the process of phase transition.

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## Appendix A: Declaration form

### Declaration

I..... (Full names of participant) hereby

confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study:

**Investigating educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in primary schools in uMlazi District: A multiple case study.** I have received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and I consent voluntarily to take part in the study. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from research at any time should I so desire.

**I agree/ do not agree** for the use of audio recording device.

Signature of educator

Date

.....

.....

Thanking you in advance

S C Shabalala (Mr)

## Appendix B: Letter to DoE requesting permission to conduct research in KZN schools

  
PO uMlazi

4031

01 August 2017

Attention: The Superintendent-General (Dr EV Nzama)

Department of Education

Province of KwaZulu-Natal

Private Bag X9137

Pietermaritzburg

3201

Dear Sir

### **Request for permission to conduct research**

My name is Sandile Caiphas Shabalala, a PhD student in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). As part of my degree fulfilment, I am required to conduct research. I therefore kindly seek permission to conduct research in three primary schools under your jurisdiction in uMlazi District. The title of my study is **Investigating educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in primary schools in uMlazi District: A multiple case study**.

This study aims to investigate how the Fourth Grade Educators support learners transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in primary school secondary school principals. The planned study will focus on the Fourth Grade Educators in primary school. The study will use semi-structured interviews with the Fourth Grade Educators. Participants will be interviewed for approximately 40-60 minutes at the times convenient to them which will not disturb teaching and learning. Each interview will be voice-recorded. Responses will be treated with confidentiality and pseudonyms will be used instead of the actual names. Participants will be contacted well in

advance for interviews, and they will be selected to participate in this study. Participation will always remain voluntary which means that participants may withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime if they so wish without incurring any penalties.

You may contact my supervisors, UKZN Research Office or me should you have any queries or questions:

**Supervisors:**

Dr BNCK Mkhize

[REDACTED]

E-mail: [bnckmkhize@gmail.com](mailto:bnckmkhize@gmail.com)

**UKZN Research Office**

HSSREC-Ethics

E-mail: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za)

**My contact number:**

[REDACTED]

E-mail: [sandile6@live.co.za](mailto:sandile6@live.co.za)

Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Thanking you in advance

Yours sincerely

S.C. Shabalala (Mr)

## Appendix C: Letter requesting permission from the principals to conduct research in schools

████████████████████  
PO uMlazi

4031

15 September 2017

The Principal

----- uMlazi

District

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Request for permission to conduct research**

My name is Sandile Caiphas Shabalala, a PhD student and a lecturer in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). As part of my degree fulfilment, I am required to conduct research. I therefore kindly seek permission to conduct this research at your school. The title of my study is: **Investigating educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in primary schools in uMlazi District: A multiple case study.**

This study aims to investigate how the Fourth Grade Educators support learners transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in primary school secondary school principals. The planned study will focus on the Fourth Grade Educators in primary school. The study will use semi-structured interviews with the Fourth Grade Educators. Participants will be interviewed for approximately 40-60 minutes at the times convenient to them which will not disturb teaching and learning. Each interview will be recorded.

### **PLEASE TAKE NOTE THAT:**

- There will be no financial benefits that participants may accrue as a result of their participation in this research project.

- Your identity will not be divulged under any circumstance/s, during and after the reporting process.
- All the responses, observations and reviewed documents will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Pseudonyms will be used to represent the school and names of the participants.
- Participation will always remain voluntary which means that participants may withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime if they so wish without incurring any penalties.
- Participants purposively selected to participate in this study and they will be contacted well in advance for interviews.
- The interviews shall be voice-recorded to assist me in concentrating on the actual interviews.

You may contact my supervisors, the Research Office or me should you have any queries or questions:

**Supervisors:**

Dr BNCK Mkhize

[REDACTED]

E-mail: [bnckmkhize@gmail.com](mailto:bnckmkhize@gmail.com)

**UKZN Research Office**

HSSREC-Ethics

E-mail: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) **My**

**contact number:**

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

E-mail: [sandile6@live.co.za](mailto:sandile6@live.co.za)

Your positive response in this regard will be highly appreciated.  
Thanking you in advance

Yours sincerely

S.C. Shabalala (Mr)

### Declaration

I..... (Full names of the principal) of -----(School name) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study:

**Investigating educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in primary schools in uMlazi District: A multiple case study.** I have received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and I consent voluntarily for the school to be part of the study. I understand that the school is at liberty to withdraw from research at any time should the school so desire.

**I agree/ do not** agree for the use of audio recording device.

Signature of Principal

Date

.....

.....

School stamp

Thanking you in advance

Shabalala Sandile Caiphas (Mr)



## **Appendix D: Letter requesting permission from the Fourth Grade Educators to participate in the Research**

  
P O uMlazi

4031

15 September 2017

The Educator

Sample Secondary School

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Request for permission to participate in a research**

I am currently a PhD student in Education Leadership, Management and Policy at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus. I am presently engaged in a research study which aims to explore how secondary school principals enact instructional leadership in challenging multiple deprived contexts. The topic of my research is: **Investigating educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in primary schools in uMlazi District: A multiple case study.** I would very much like you to participate in this study because I believe that you can provide valuable insight in extending the boundaries of our knowledge on this concept.

Your identity in this study will be protected in accordance with the code of ethics as stipulated by the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I undertake to uphold your autonomy as the participant. You will be free to withdraw from the research at any time without negative or undesirable consequences to yourself. However, you will be asked to complete a consent form. In your interest, feedback will be given to you during and at the end of the study.

You may contact my supervisors, UKZN Research Office or me should you have any queries or questions:

**Supervisors:**

Dr BNCK Mkhize

[REDACTED]

E-mail: [bnckmkhize@gmail.com](mailto:bnckmkhize@gmail.com)

**UKZN Research Office**

HSSREC-Ethics

E-mail: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za)

**My contact number:**

[REDACTED]

E-mail: [sandile6@live.co.za](mailto:sandile6@live.co.za)

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully

SC Shabalala (Mr)

..... DETACH AND RETURN.....

**Declaration**

I..... (Full names of participant) hereby

confirm that I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study:

**Investigating educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediated Phase in primary schools in uMlazi District: A multiple case study.** I have received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and I consent voluntarily to take part in the study. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from research at any time should I so desire.

I agree/ do not agree for the use of audio recording device.

Signature of Educator

Date

.....

.....

Thanking you in advance

## **Appendix E: Interview guide for Grade Four educators in uMlazi District primary schools**

[NB. These questions will guide my discussion with the educators. Follow-up questions will also be posed depending on the responses of the participants].

### **Biographical Information**

Grade taught ..... Subject(s) taught .....

Where trained .....

Qualification obtained.....Level trained  
for.....

Teaching experience ..... Experience of teaching grade 4: .....

Preferred grade .....

What are educators' leadership and management experiences in supporting learners transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase in primary schools?

Sub- questions:

1. Firstly, how would you characterise your experience of teaching grade 4 as part of transition. What do you say are the changes learners experience in the fourth grade? What are the challenges (if any)?
2. What is your experiences of inducting and supporting learners to adapt and cope with the change in the fourth grade? How quick do these learners adapt to the changes in grade 4?
3. What are the challenges (if any) you experience in adapting learners to cope with change in the fourth grade? What are the strategies you use to support learners to adapt to the change? How much pressure does these changes have of your work at this grade?
4. Were your prepared for this learners' transition in the fourth grade? What are the mitigating strategies to challenges to adapt and support learners to cope with the change?

5. What other information can you add as far as the issues in your school of learners' transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase is concern? What have you learned from your experiences?

**Thank you very much for participating in this interview, god bless you all**



## education

Department:  
Education  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1041

Ref.:2/4/8/1312

Mr SC Shabalala  
55 North Ridge Park  
360 Kenyon Howden Rd  
Montclair  
4001


Dear Mr Shabalala

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"EXPLORING EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES OF PHASE TRANSITION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A CASE OF UMLAZI DISTRICT"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 04 August 2017 to 09 July 2020.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Connie Kehologile at the contact numbers below
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

Kingsburgh Primary School  
Umkwili Primary School  
Ekuphileni Primary School

  
Dr. EV Nzama  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 04 September 2017

#### KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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## Appendix G: Turnitin report

### Sandile Shabalala Second Draft

#### ORIGINALITY REPORT

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STUDENT PAPERS

#### PRIMARY SOURCES

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