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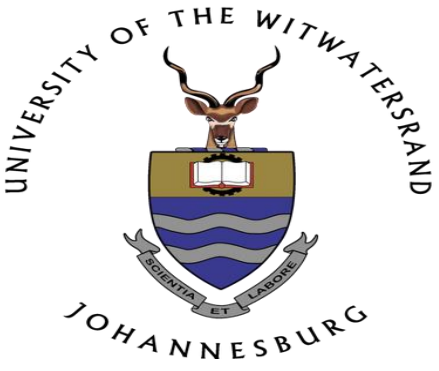

EXPLORING LEARNER LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF RURALITY AND MULTIPLE DEPRIVATIONS AT FOUR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN OHANGWENA REGION, NAMIBIA

BY

OLIVIA NDALIKUTALA SHINANA

A thesis submitted in the fulfilment of the academic requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the faculty of Humanities:

School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand,

Johannesburg

Supervisor: Prof S. E. Mthiyane

Co - Supervisor: Dr P.E Mthembu

Date submitted: March 2023

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Olivia Ndalikutala Shinana, declare that: **"Exploring learner leadership in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations at the four secondary schools in Ohangwena Region, Namibia"** is my original work and that:

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We, Professor S. E. Mthiyane and Dr. P.E. Mthembu

As the candidate's Supervisors agree to the submission of this thesis.



Supervisor's signature



Co-Supervisor's signature

Date: 02 March 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my heartfelt and deepest gratitude and appreciation to:

God, the Almighty, for bestowing me the strength, wisdom, and intellectual ability to complete this study.

Prof S. E. Mthiyane, my supervisor - for his wise and sedulous guidance, invaluable support, and encouragement towards completing this study. Not only were you a supervisor, but you have also been a caring mentor, and my growth as a researcher is partly accredited to you. Thank you, Prof Mthiyane.

My elder sister, Pelagia Mwalonga Shinana, for providing me with financial support to complete my study.

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture in Namibia for permitting me to access the schools to conduct this research.

Mrs Sanet Steenkamp for encouraging me to do my PhD and Rauha Haipinge for invaluable support from the application to the submission of my thesis. My colleagues Isak Hamatwi, Simon Vaeta, Teopolina Kayumbu, Eva Shaimba, Johannes Benjamin, Daniel Henghono, and my brother Desderius Tiliindje Shinana for encouragement to finish this study. I also thank Claret Sabiso Misika for her library assistance when I was constantly knocking on the door of the local community library.

All four schools and research participants for having allowed me into their school spaces to make it possible to obtain the data used in this study. I cannot mention their names for obvious ethical reasons, but their contributions are profoundly valued.

I kindly apologise for not mentioning all of you who contributed, in one way or another, to the success of this study. I am grateful for all your support and contributions.

DEDICATION

This thesis is especially dedicated to the following:

My parents, Mrs Asteria Ashipala and my father, Damasius Shinana, who, against other odds, sacrificed to send me and my brothers and sisters to school and taught me the value of education and from whom I shall continue to draw inspiration;

My husband, Henock Hanga, for his encouragement, support and understanding during my studies - I know it was not easy.

And

To my beloved children, Reginald, Onesimus, Marley and Otavia and their aunty Katalina: for all those long days when I was not around, and please emulate. May this study inspire you that none can succeed without hard work, sacrifice, determination and endurance.

ABSTRACT

The issue of democracy and learner representation is juxtaposed against the cultural beliefs of rural residents. People in rural areas think less about what government policy says about learner participation and consider more what is commonly practised in their context and cultural grounds. Literature on learner leadership indicated that little research had been undertaken to determine the impact of learner leadership in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations. This study's primary goal was to explore learner leaders' conceptualisations, practices, and experiences in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations in four secondary schools in the Ohangwena Region.

As a result, this study presents the findings of a qualitative case study on learner leadership in rural and multiple deprived secondary schools in Namibia using an emancipatory paradigm. Thematic analysis was used in conjunction with the Participatory Leadership Theory, Critical Theory, and Cultural Historical Activity Theory to analyse data generated in the study. The data was generated through semi-structured interviews with four secondary school principals, four liaison teachers and eight parents (four school board chairpersons and four long-serving members), focus group discussions with thirteen learner leaders, questionnaires with the school principals and liaison teachers, and the document review.

The study revealed minimal learner participation in school leadership structures and decision-making processes. Due to the ambiguity of Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, which fails to specify how schools should handle learner participation and representations, all participants in the researched schools were unsure of the roles of the Learner Representative Council in the school board and other structures. The challenges experienced include the rules and regulations; peer pressure; cultural beliefs and practices, lack of training provisions; parental discouragements and intimidation; lack of motivation; poverty and language barriers. While this study recognised the impact of learner leadership implementation challenges in rural secondary schools, the researcher posits that the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture should develop guidelines to assist all stakeholders (school principals, teachers and parents) who work directly with learner leaders, in understanding the importance of their leadership roles in schools.

Keywords: Learner leadership; multiple deprivations; Namibian secondary schools; participatory decision-making; rurality; school leadership.

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

NEA	Namibia Education Act
LRC	Learners Representative Council
GRN	Government of the Republic of Namibia
SRC	Student Representative Council
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNC	United Nations Convention
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
MoBEC	Ministry of Basic Education and Culture
DfES	Department of Education and Skills
ED	Education Grant
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
PLT	Participatory Leadership Theory
CHAT	Cultural Historical Activity Theory
CT	Critical Theory
UN	United Nation
SGD	Sustainability Development Goal
SASA	South Africa Schools Act
SGB	School Governing Body
HREC	Higher Degrees Ethics Research and Clearance Committee
SSIPR	Semi-Structure Interview for School Principal
SSIT	Semi-Structure Interview for teachers
SSIP	Semi-Structure Interview for Parents

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DATE CONSIDERED	19 February 2021
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Minimal
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY 1
1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Problem Statement 7
1.3 Purpose and rationale for the study 10
1.4 Significance of the study 13
1.5 Objectives of the study 15
1.6 Critical research questions 16
1.7 Discussion of key concepts used in the study 16
1.7.1 School leadership 16
1.7.2 School management 17
1.7.3 Participatory democracy in schools 19
1.7.4 Learner leadership 24
1.7.5 Rurality 26
1.7.6 Multiple deprivations 27
1.8 Delimitations of the study 30
1.9 Organisation of the thesis 30
1.10 Conclusion 32
CHAPTER TWO 33
LITERATURE REVIEW 33
2.1 Introduction 33
2.2 Review of international literature on learner leadership 33
2. 2. 1 Trend and debates about learner leadership 34
2.3 Continental (African) literature review on learner leadership 36
2.3.1 Contesting views on learner participation in school leadership 37
2.3.2 Related studies on learner leadership and participation in decision-making 38

2.3.3 Challenges face learner participation in school leadership 39
2.3.4 Enabling factors that influence learner participation in the SGB 44
2.4 Namibian literature review 46
2.4.1 Learner leadership in Namibia 47
2.4.2 Democratic participation and leadership 49
2.4.3 Issues of power and leadership 51
2.5 Conclusion 54
CHAPTER THREE 55
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 55
3.1 Introduction 55
3.2 Participatory Leadership Theory (PLT) 56
3.2.1 Critique of Participatory Leadership Theory (PLT) 61
3.3 Critical Theory (CT) 62
3.4 Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) 64
3.4.1 The first generation of CHAT 65
3.4.2 The second generation of CHAT 67
3.4.3 Relevancy of CHAT for this study 70
3.4.4 Contradictions and tensions for this study 73
3.5 Conclusion 73
CHAPTER FOUR 74
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY 74
4.1 Introduction 74
4.2 Research paradigm 74
4.3 Research design for the study 78
4.4 Research methodology 81
4.5 Selection of participants 82
4.6 Research methods 84
4.6.1 Semi-structured interviews 84

4.6.2 Questionnaires....85
4.6.3 Documents reviews....86
4.6.4 Focus group discussions....86
4.7 Data analysis....87
4.8 Issues of trustworthiness....88
4.8.1 Credibility....88
4.8.2 Transferability....88
4.8.3 Dependability....89
4.8.4 Confirmability....89
4.9 Ethical issues....89
4.9.1 Ethics approval....90
4.9.2 Consent....91
4.9.3 Anonymity....92
4.9.4 Privacy....92
4.9.5 Voluntary participation and protection against harm....92
4.10 Limitations of the study....93
4.11 Conclusion....93
CHAPTER FIVE....94
LEARNER LEADERS' CONCEPTUALISATIONS, PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES OF THEIR ROLES IN THE SCHOOL....94
5.1 Introduction....94
5.2 Findings from the Focus Group with the learner leaders....95
5.2.1 Biographical data of participants....95
5.2.2 The learner leaders' conceptualisations of their roles....95
5.3 Election of Learner Representative Council (LRC) and participation....117
5.3.1 How learner leaders were elected....117
5.3.2 Number of learners who are members of the current Learner Representative Council....121

5.3.3 Number of learner leaders in the governance structures of the school 122

5.4 Views regarding learner participation or non-participation in certain committees 124

5.5 Support of learner leaders 126

5.5.1 Training workshops attended after the election as learner leaders 126

5.5.2What are your views regarding the quality and relevance of the training you received 126

5.5.3 Other forms of support to develop learner leadership skills 126

5.6 Learner leaders' experiences 128

5.6.1 Experiences regarding roles as learner leaders 128

5.6.2 Challenges related to power relations and conservative attitudes of adults regarding learner leadership 129

5.6.3 The impact the school board meetings have on learner leaders' learning 130

5.6.4 Support from the school authorities to promote maximum learner participation in the school board 131

5.6.5 Views on the prohibition of learner leaders from handling school finances 131

5.6.6 Other experiences learner leaders shared 133

5.7 Constraints faced by learner leaders and possible solutions 134

5.7.1 The constraining factors that influence learner participation in school leadership structures 134

5.7.2 Possible solutions to constraints on learner leadership 136

5.7.3 Learner leaders' views on what should be done to promote learner leadership in rural schools 137

5.8 Conclusion 139

CHAPTER SIX 140

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS' CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF LEARNER LEADERSHIP, PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING IN SCHOOLS 140

6.1 Introduction 140

6.2 Findings from the semi-structured interviews with the participants 141

6.2.1 Biographical data of participants 141
6.2.2 Findings on the definition of a leader 141
6.2.3 How the participants understood the term “learner leadership.” 144
6.2.4 School principals, teachers and parents’ views on learner leaders taking up roles in school leadership and management 149
6.2.5 Findings on the perceptions of the participants on learner leadership 156
6.2.6 The participants’ views regarding the advantages and disadvantages of learners taking part in school leadership and decision-making 160
6.2.7 The participants’ support of the notion of learner leadership in schools 173
6.2.8 How the schools involve learners in leadership practices 186
6.2.9 How the school authorities manage the challenges of power between the school board and the learner representative councils 192
6.3 Conclusion 202
CHAPTER SEVEN 203
THE ENABLING AND CONSTRAINING FACTORS TO LEARNER LEADERSHIP 203
7.1 Introduction 203
7.2 The enabling factors to learner leadership 203
7.2.1 Learner leaders’ self-motivation 203
7.2.2 School Rules and regulations 205
7.2.3 Conducting meetings with the learner representative council members 206
7.2.4 The enabling factors on the school principals, teachers and parents. 207
7.3 The constraining factors to learner leadership 211
7.3.1 Rules and regulations 211
7.3.2 Peer pressure 212
7.3.3 Cultural belief and practices 213
7.3.4 Training provisions for the learner representative council members 214
7.3.5 Parental discouragement 215
7.3.6 Intimidation from their peers 216

7.3.7 Lack of motivation 217
7.3.8 Cultural beliefs and practices 217
7.3.9 Poverty 218
7.3.10 Language barriers 219
7.3.11 Peer pressure 219
7.4 Conclusion 220
CHAPTER EIGHT 221
DISCUSSION OF THE KEY THEMES EMERGING FROM THE FINDINGS 221
8.1 Introduction 221
8.2 Key themes that emerged 221
8.2.1 Learner leaders' conceptualisations, practices and experiences of leadership 221
8.2.2 School principals, liaison teachers and parents' conceptualisations of learner leadership, participation and decision-making in schools 229
8.2.3 Enabling factors to learner leadership 233
8.2.4 Constraining factors to learner leadership 239
8.3 Conclusion 247
CHAPTER NINE 248
REFLECTIVE SUMMARY OF THE THESIS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH 248
9.1 Introduction 248
9.2 Reflective summary of the thesis 248
9.3 Conclusions 251
9.3.1 Learner leaders' conceptualisations, practices and experiences of leadership roles in schools 251
9.3.2 School principals, teachers and parents' conceptualisations of learner leadership, Participation and decision-making in schools 252
9.3.3 The enabling factors to learner leadership 253
9.3.4 Constraining factors to learner leadership 254
9.4 Recommendations for further research 256

9.4.1 Recommendation for policymakers 256
9.4.2 Recommendations for school principals, teachers and parents 257
9.4.3 Recommendations for learner leaders 258
9.4.4 Recommendations for enabling factors to learner leadership 259
9.4.5 Recommendations for constraining factors to learner leadership 260
9.5 Contribution to new knowledge 261
9.5.1 Contribution to the field of leadership in education 262
9.5.2 Contributions to education policy 263
9.5.3 Methodological contribution 263
9.6 Implications for further research 264
9.7 Conclusion 265
REFERENCES 266
APPENDICES 278
APPENDIX 1: PERMISSION LETTER FOR THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION 278
APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET TO THE PRINCIPAL 281
APPENDIX 3: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR TEACHERS 284
APPENDIX 4: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR LEARNERS 287
APPENDIX 5: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR THE SCHOOL BOARD (PARENTS) 289
APPENDIX 6: PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM 292
APPENDIX 7: TEACHER CONSENT FORM 294
APPENDIX 8: LEARNER LEADERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRES (2021) 296
APPENDIX 9: PRINCIPALS' QUESTIONNAIRES LEARNER LEADERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRES (2021) 301
APPENDIX 10: PRINCIPALS' SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW 306
APPENDIX 11: TEACHERS' INTERVIEW 308
APPENDIX 12: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS 310

APPENDIX 13: SCHOOL BOARDS' CONSENT FORM.....313

APPENDIX 14: SCHOOL BOARDS' SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW.....315

APPENDIX 15: LEARNERS' CONSENT FORM.....317

APPENDIX 16: PERMISSION LETTER.....319

PERMISSION LETTER 2: FROM SCHOOL 1 320

PERMISSION LETTER 3: FROM SCHOOL 2 321

PERMISSION LETTER 4: FROM SCHOOL 3 322

PERMISSION LETTER 5: FROM SCHOOL 4 322

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study by exploring the background that informed the need for this study. The discussion also provides a brief history of the Namibian Education system, particularly with issues of democracy and learner representation (or lack of), juxtaposed against the cultural beliefs of people living in the rural areas, which are where the study is located. One of the policies that this study will focus on is the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 which is aimed at providing a uniform system in the educational leadership and management of Namibian schools and closing the imbalances of the past. In addition, I explore the studies conducted in learner leadership to show the rationale thereof. This chapter also describes the learner leadership problem that shows this study's significance. The chapter includes the study's objectives, the critical research questions, a discussion of the key concepts used in the study and its delimitations. Finally, the outline of the study is presented.

Informal observations supported by the literature and research conducted in Namibia by Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) and Uushona (2012) suggest that people in rural areas are sceptical of the leadership of young people. The context and cultural issues mostly influence these perceptions, hence the quotation below:

> On cultural and traditional grounds, older adults do not discuss important matters in the presence of children. Doing so now would tarnish the respect children must accord their elders and bring about decay and swamp in the traditional value system.
>
> (Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008, p.3).

In the context of this kind of thinking, the issue of learner participation in school leadership structures in some of the rural and multiple deprived secondary schools in the Ohangwena region is the focus of this study. People in rural areas think less of what the government policy says about learner participation and consider what is mostly practised in their context and cultural grounds. This study considers how learner leadership is conceptualised and practised with learner leaders known as Learner Representative Councils (LRCs). Other stakeholders in

education, such as principals, teachers and parents, perceive learners as immature to participate in school decision-making (Uushona, 2012).

Despite this, many Namibian children have been denied the right to free expression and participation in decision-making in the country's post-independence history (Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN), 2001). Traditional attempts were made at the time to integrate learners into school leadership structures. Among these initiatives are the perfect system, the Student Representative Council (SRC), and the Learner Representative Council (LRC). The perfect system consisted of senior secondary school learners who were supposed to represent the learner (Uushona, 2012). Teachers chose senior learners who, in contrast to other learners, conformed to and obeyed their rules. According to Uushona (2012), the perfect body's roles were to inform the school authorities about the wrongdoing of other learners.

Uushona (2012) and Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) argue in Namibian studies that the prefect system was an undemocratic body that promoted social injustice among learners. This system was designed to represent the school leadership rather than the learners. As a result, before Namibia's independence, learners rejected the prefect system as undemocratic and replaced it with SRCs, which served as learners' representatives shortly after independence (Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008). However, Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) contends that learners did not accept SRCs as their representatives because they were not elected but rather nominated by teachers and had little influence in school decision-making, making the body illegitimate to represent them. The Student Representative Council was a short-lived operational learner body in Namibian schools that existed from a few years after independence until the Education Act No. 16 of 2001 was promulgated by the Government of the Republic of Namibia (Uushona, 2012).

Before Namibia's independence, the Namibian education system was characterised by top-down bureaucratic management, undemocratic participation, and policies that constituted social injustice by largely protecting the privileges of minorities (Pomuti & Weber, 2012). Following Namibia's history, schools were regulated by the Education Act No. 16 of 2001, which mandated all secondary schools from Grade Eight to Grade Twelve to establish a Learner Representative Council as a legitimate body that regulated all learners' affairs (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 2001). The formation of the Learners Representative Council consolidates an understanding of participatory democracy through shared and

distributed leadership cultures of all stakeholders in education, such as teachers, learners and parents, to practice their leadership within school leadership structures (Amadhila, 2018; Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008; Uushona, 2012).

However, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2022) emphasises children's rights to actively participate in all matters affecting them, prompting international interest in using learner perspectives in developing democratic schools (Nthontho, 2017). According to UNCRC Article 12, children have the right to express their opinions in all matters affecting them freely, which should be done according to Schools should provide opportunities for learners' voices to be heard in matters affecting their lives and the lives of their peers. Furthermore, learners should participate in school leadership and management through structures such as Learner Representative Councils (LRCs), school boards, and management committees, to name a few. Similarly, Article 13 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to free expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and communicate information to express their opinions freely. These articles obligate all countries that have ratified the United Nations Convention (UNC) (2022) to ensure the full implementation of these rights.

Similarly, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (1990) recognises the need for appropriate measures to promote African children's rights and welfare. Taking this a step further, Article 4 (1) of the ACRWC states that any person or authority dealing with children should always act in the child's best interests. This means that schools or school leadership structures should consider learners' interests when taking action on issues that affect them. In Article 4 (2), the ACRWC (1990) urges countries to provide opportunities for learners' views to be heard, while their representatives and authorities should consider them following the provisions made through appropriate laws. Furthermore, Article 7 of the ACRWC (1990) advocates for children to be granted freedom of expression to communicate their views and to be free to distribute information as prescribed by law.

Given the preceding, when Namibia gained independence in 1990, a "Towards Education for All" policy was enacted to translate its educational philosophy into implementable policies. To consider what education means for all Namibians, this document enshrines the major goals of education, such as access, equity, quality, and democracy (Ministry of Education and Culture

(MoEC), 1993). However, the focus of this study will be on what learner leaders perceive their roles to be and what they practised and experienced while performing duties assigned to them as LRCs. Because Namibia is a democratic society that values its citizens, it gives learner leaders equal access to make decisions in all aspects of their lives, regardless of age (MoEC, 1993). To regulate education in the country, the Namibian government passed the Education Act No. 16 of 2001, which provides accessible, equitable, and democratic education services (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 2001).

Furthermore, according to this law, every state secondary school must establish a legitimate body of learners known as the Learner Representative Council, which must be formed annually during the last school term. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2022), learners in Namibian schools can also elect their representatives or body known as the LRC. The elected body is responsible for promoting the best interests and welfare of the school and its learners.

Despite the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (2022) and the Namibian Education Act No. 16 of 2001, many learners in some schools are still denied the opportunity to practice and exercise their rights to express themselves (Kayumbu, 2017). According to Maitles and Duchar (2006), schools should create spaces for learners to participate in school leadership and management, allowing for the democratic participation of learners in school leadership structures. Furthermore, democratic participation allows learners to use this opportunity to express themselves and have their voices heard when interacting with school management members. Researchers such as Mitra and Gross (2009), Groves (2013), and Tikoko and Kiprop (2011) have made a growing case for learners to be given opportunities to participate in school leadership structures.

Sadly, studies conducted in Victoria (Hong Kong) discovered that learner leaders were rarely permitted to participate in important school matters (Leung, Yuen, Cheng & Chow, 2014). As a result, according to Leung et al. (2014), schools were more inclined to tell learners and consult them rather than discuss true participation and power with them. Instead of a credible educational partner, these schools see learner councils as channels for consultation with other students. As a result of the preceding, Mathews, Moorman, and Nusche (2007) recommend

that schools increase shared leadership and collaborate effectively with all significant leadership roles with other stakeholders, such as learners.

A similar concern was raised in another study conducted in Scottish schools, where learners experienced disengagement in matters concerning them (Maitles & Duchar, 2006). As a result, Maitles and Duchar (2006) argue that those schools should create a space for students to express themselves authentically about issues related to learning and teaching. Taylor and Johnson (2002) argue that when learners are involved, they develop a sense of ownership, which contributes to developing their social and moral responsibilities. However, in most schools, learners appear to experience tokenistic forms of participatory practices due to the LRC's undemocratic management styles and school pyramid organograms that go unchallenged (Mills, 2002). These are some contentious issues on which staff members denied LRCs the opportunity to express their opinions on serious issues concerning them. As a result, I believe that school leaders should consult with learners (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004).

Similarly, Mitra and Gross (2009) contend that when decisions are made in schools, learners are mostly ignored. They also claim parents pay little attention to learners when discussing decision-making issues at home. Parents believe that learners are too young and lack knowledge when making decisions about teaching and learning during meetings (Tikoko & Kiprop, 2011; Mokena, 2011). However, they expect learners to lead in a democratic society as future leaders. Thus, researchers in the United Kingdom expressed concern about low levels of participation in political activities such as political party membership and election participation (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2003). In contrast, it is part of the curriculum that prepares learners to exercise their future political rights. Meanwhile, the DfES consultation paper "Working Together" claims that giving learners and young people a voice will help decision-makers and school thinkers figure out how to organise and provide opportunities for learners and young people to develop their skills as active citizens (Department for Education and Skills, 2003).

A similar study on learner participation in Kenya conducted by Tikoko and Kiprop (2011) suggests that learners' participation in school leadership structures may result in decisions that are detrimental to their performance. They (Tikoko and Kiprop) say those learners are barred from performing certain leadership tasks to protect the teachers' authority. Mulwa, Kimosop,

and Kasivu (2015) found that learner participation in decision-making was critical in another study on learner leadership conducted in Kenya. Furthermore, these researchers emphasised the importance of students taking a more active role in school management and decision-making.

In the South African context, the South African Schools Act No.84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996) established learner representative councils (LRCs), the only recognised and legitimate learner body to represent them. The policy was created to promote democratic governance in South African schools by defining the role of learner representatives and allowing their voices to be heard (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Meanwhile, the law regulates and promotes all stakeholders' involvement in school governance, including learners. Mabovula (2009) suggests that schools should consult with all stakeholders to promote participation and mutual understanding in schools. The participation of all stakeholders, particularly learners, strengthens/enhances the democratic process and provides school principals with excellent opportunities to listen to learners' ideas and consider their valuable input to make effective decisions (Zylfijaj, Grabi & Mahtmutaj, 2014). Furthermore, learner participation in decision-making in the investigated schools would enable the LRC to strengthen its collaboration and democratic education to prevail (Nyambisi & Mwelu, 2018).

In the Namibian context, the situation in Namibia is similar to that of Kenya, South Africa, and the other countries mentioned earlier. The Education Act No.16 of 2001 legislated the issue of learner participation in Namibia (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 2001). Section 60 (1), p.33 stipulates that:

> Every state secondary school must establish a body of learners to be known as the Learners' Representative Council, following the prescribed guidelines, which must determine a council's composition, duties, and functions.

Even though the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 specifies the role of LRC in schools, Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) discovered that some school leaders were unsure of learners' roles in school governance. Her research also reveals that adults believe learners should not participate in decision-making and should focus on their studies instead. Similarly, Uushona (2012) discovered that adult learners' leadership was not taken seriously because adults believed they could not make independent decisions. As a result, this appears to violate the Education policy, which provides for establishing a Learner Representative Council (LRC) to

legitimise learner participation. They are considered minors who should not engage in important discussions with adults.

I also learnt that some schools in the Ohangwena Education Directorate have Learners Representative Councils but no resonant tasks. I have observed a culture in many schools of displaying the Learners Representative Council names on the notice board. This practice could be deceptive if external education officials visited the school to improve learner performance. In contrast to this practice, some school principals contributed to the misinformation of those who would come to inspect the school rather than allowing fair learner participation, which contributes to the school's leadership and may help improve the performance of such schools.

Given the state of affairs in Namibian schools, the proposed study investigates the conceptualisation and practices of learner leadership in four rural secondary schools in Namibia's Ohangwena Region. The study looked into how learner leadership theory can improve school governance, leadership, and management in the secondary schools studied. Ohangwena Region has 265 schools with a total enrolment of 104 857 students and 3980 teachers for both primary and secondary schools (Namibian Ministry of Education, 2018). There are ten secondary schools in rural areas among the 265 schools; however, only four in deep rural areas will be included in this study.

1.2 Problem Statement

The deficit model of learners as too young, immature, lacking knowledge, and lacking the capacity to make decisions on their own as minors, preventing them from exercising their democratic rights to participate in school decision-making structures, prevents them from exercising their democratic rights to participate in school decision-making structures (Mokena, 2011; Tikoko & Kiprop, 2011; Uushona, 2012; Kayumbu, 2017). As a result, they are rarely permitted to participate in decision-making in various committees, such as the school board, management committee, and financial committee, where critical decisions are made. Although these learners were supposed to share their concerns with the school's leadership during the management meeting, they are being ignored when decisions affecting their lives and the lives of their peers are made (Grant, 2015). Consequently, there have been calls for learners to be allowed to participate in leadership structures and decision-making processes.

According to Christie (2010), Namibia's anti-apartheid policy, which gave rise to human rights, is no longer visible. Christie (2010) further indicates that human rights have been fought for, won, lost, and won again., Pomuti and Weber (2012) point out that the apartheid system was characterised by racial inequality, undemocratic participation, low levels of bureaucratic accountability and transparency, and top-down policy implementation with power centralised to protect minority privileges. Therefore, I argue that schools apply democratic participation, which allows learners to participate in decision-making in school leadership structures.
Furthermore, Namibia made provisions for access, equity, quality, and democracy in the education system after independence (Ministry of Basic Education and Culture, 1993) to adhere to the legal provisions made in the universal law of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (2022) emphasises the importance of those children's voices being heard and their freedom of expression is granted. Namibia's Constitution advocates for democratisation, governed by the Education Act No. 16 of 2001, which requires every state secondary school to establish a democratically elected body of learners known as the Learner Representative Council (LRC). It says that the LRC should be involved in the school's various leadership structures, including the school board.

According to the Education Act No. 16 of 2001, the school board members' functions and powers include developing the school's mission, goals, and objectives, as well as making recommendations to the Permanent Secretary (PS) for the appointment of teachers and other school personnel. Members of the school board, including learners, are required by policy to participate in the recruitment of teachers and other staff members. As a result, the policy does not specify the roles of the Learners Representative Council as the regulatory body in schools. The Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) introduces the Learners Representative Council as a legitimate body representing learners. It replaces the previously undemocratic perfect system to run learners' affairs in secondary schools through the Education Act No. 16 of 2001. Some of the Learners Representative Council's primary responsibilities include advocating for the best interests and welfare of the school and its learners. The policy also empowers the Learners Representative Council to act as a liaison between learners and school management.

Despite the Learners Representative Council representation and election being mandated in Namibian secondary schools by Act No. 16 of 2001, observations and literature appear to

indicate that school leadership in some schools do not recognise learners as partners or stakeholders, and their voices are still silenced. As previously stated, the policy regulations emphasise the power and functions of the Learners Representative Council. However, the policy does not specify how elected LRCs in Namibian secondary schools should carry out their duties to participate in democratic decision-making. Furthermore, no clear guidelines exist for how LRC should participate in decision-making structures (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 2001).

Studies conducted in Namibia (Uushona, 2012; Haipa, 2018; Amadhila, 2018) posit that learner leadership is a concept that is still under-researched in Namibia. Furthermore, Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) contends in her study that the Namibia Education Act No.16 of 2001, which provides for establishing LRCs in secondary schools, is too vague. The policy was silent on how schools should handle learner representation. Consequently, schools became unsure about the roles of LRCs on school boards. In my opinion, the policy is silent on who on the school board should participate in the teacher recruitment process. As a result of the policy's ambiguity, there is a lack of learner leadership and participation in school leadership as well as decision-making processes in some schools.

Similarly, learner participation in school boards is ineffective for various reasons, one of which is cultural beliefs that forbid children from speaking freely in the presence of elders or participating in decision-making (Uushona, 2012; Kayumbu, 2017). Thus, Uushona (2012) recommends that schools create opportunities for learner participation for learners to contribute to school decision-making effectively. I have also noticed that the intention of implementing LRCs in some Namibian schools is futile and poorly implemented, particularly in the Ohangwena Region, because learners are not allowed to participate in decision-making in school leadership structures (Kayumbu, 2017). Even in schools where LRC structures exist, learners cannot express their opinions freely. Tokenism is used in some schools where the LRC is given a portfolio to serve.

The phenomenon under discussion does not occur solely in Namibia but is a global concern (Leung et al., 2014, Mulwa et al., 2015, Grant, 2015). Similar issues can be found in the South African and Zambian contexts (Duma, 2014; Mboyonga, 2018). Existing South African literature reveals that learner voices are silent. As Duma (2015) suggests, despite guidelines for Representative Councils of Learners promoting democratic participation in governance,

learner participation in rural schools remains a concern. According to Duma (2015), the absence of learners from school governing bodies results in the systematic silence of the learner's voice. Furthermore, in a study conducted in Zambia, Mboyonga (2018) discovered a lack of opportunities for learners to express their views and grievances to school authorities.

Furthermore, in another Zambian study, Chemutai and Chumba (2014) confirm the limitations of learner involvement, particularly in matters of school finances. In my opinion, schools should involve learners in school issues that affect their lives and the lives of their peers. Learners' involvement in school matters allows them to express their concerns to management members. It allows learners to discuss their ideas with adults during a management meeting. Similarly, I believe that schools should involve learners in financial matters for the sake of transparency. Learners should be aware of whether their schools make good use of the Education Grant (EG) provided by the government for their educational needs. Involving learners in the finance committee prepares them to handle public funds when they become adult citizens in the future.

Based on the gap between the expression of rights and their implementation in practice in available studies, limited literature, and my own experience, I have been looking for their presence in school leadership structures. One of the shortcomings of formal statements was that when they came into contact with the texture of lived experience, they quickly proved to be abstract and empty vessels, demonstrating the dangers of failing to recognise the limited nature of rights (Christie, 2010). As a result, the purpose of this study is to gather opinions and experiences about learner participation in school leadership structures in four Namibian secondary schools.

1.3 Purpose and rationale for the study

This study explored how learner leaders perceive their role in school leadership. It investigates what learners practised and experienced while carrying out their mandated duties in four selected secondary schools in the Ohangwena region, Namibia. I researched how learner leadership theories could improve educational leadership and management to improve quality leadership in Namibian secondary schools. When looking for relevant literature, I discovered that nothing had been researched in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations in secondary schools in the Ohangwena Region about learner leadership contributions to school

leadership; this is the gap that I found intended to fill. The study sampled the principal of each school, a liaison teacher, four learner leaders (LRC) and two parents from four secondary schools in the Ohangwena Region.

I spent a decade as a national coordinator for the Namibia National Child Rights programme. The program allowed participants to share their knowledge and experiences regarding children's rights. Children from every country around the world have the right to participate in issues/events that affect their lives and the lives of their peers. I interacted with LRCs, teachers, and secondary school principals throughout the process. I held several meetings with learners to raise awareness about child rights. During our interactions, learners, referred to as LRCs in this case, raised concerns from their schools. Learners stated that, despite being LRCs, they did not attend any meetings in any structures. I believe that school principals, teachers, and parents at home did not regard them as valuable stakeholders. Teachers, parents, learners, business communities, churches, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are all stakeholders in Namibian education. This could reveal how schools violated learners' rights to education provision and participation. However, this study looked into the involvement of learner leaders (LRCs) in secondary schools because the LRC is the only legitimated body in Namibian schools representing other learners. The research explored the conceptualisations, practices, and experiences of learner leaders' role in school leadership structures.

As a Coordinator for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), I organised workshops to raise awareness and bring together all the school stakeholders in the Ohangwena Region. During the workshops, learners shared various ideas and experiences from their schools, which, in my opinion, demonstrated the need for a study to investigate the roles and contributions of learner leaders in secondary schools. Teachers coordinated LRC elections and directed all their responsibilities according to the learners' perspectives. This is contrary to Regulations of Education Act 16 of 2001 Section 28 (a), which states that schools must establish an election committee of four members, including a senior teacher as chairperson and another teacher, both nominated by the teaching staff and two learners nominated by other learners. Similarly, in my more than 20 years as a teacher, head of department and principal working closely with learners, I observed that schools mostly ignored learner leaders and excluded them (LRC) from various committees because they were minors. Culturally, adults regard children as minors who should not discuss issues with adults; they had to wait for the adults to give them feedback, as

they were the final recipient of the information. When I first became Head of the Department, I asked the management to include LRC on the management committee. Even though they were representing other learners, I received the response that learners could not keep things confidential because they were still young. To me, it would have been preferable if schools provided learners with opportunities to learn how to lead, but this did not occur.

Meanwhile, I spoke with a teacher who was a member of LRC during her secondary school years to learn more about how they were involved in school governance activities at the time and how they elected LRC. She stated that liaison teachers were responsible for working with LRCs and nominated them (LRCs). The teacher planned their responsibilities and assigned them to the LRCs without their knowledge. As she told me this, I asked her to explain why the teacher should plan what the LRC would do rather than the LRC coming up with their activities. They were told they were too young to participate in decision-making and that their responsibilities were to study and not do anything else. I also spoke with one of our principals, who shared his perspective on the phenomenon under consideration. He appeared to recognise the significance of learner leaders in the classroom. He believed that learner leaders had an advantage in personal development because they addressed sensitive issues and kept things confidential when dealing with sensitive issues, such as when a teacher impregnated a learner or when a teacher arrived at school under alcohol.

However, he felt that being a learner leader was a burden when he was assigned additional responsibilities. He assumed that learners felt unique to some extent; others attending classes while performing duties as LRC members might outperform them. He also stated that LRC members might fail to balance their commitments to being a learner and LRC members, which requires a significant amount of time and may impact their academic performance. Furthermore, he stated that he had a similar problem to the phenomenon under discussion. Some schools did not provide opportunities for learner leaders to express their opinions and experiences with their roles in school governance. He suggested that schools give learners opportunities to express their opinions and share their concerns with management members during meetings.

Similarly, the literature on learner leaders' participation in decision-making would be based on the democratic participation of learners in schools. The democratic orientation allowed learners

to participate in decision-making and express their opinions and experiences to understand their roles better (Barth, 2001). Previously, principals served solely as the primary decision-makers at the school level (Grants & Nekondo, 2016). Researchers from the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia proposed that many schools worldwide allowed for greater participation of all stakeholders, including learner leaders, in decision-making (Matthews. et al., 2007). According to Mokena (2011), supported by Somech (2002), the democratic orientation was about moral imperatives if the opportunity to participate in decision-making was provided for individuals to exercise their rights, particularly learner leaders in secondary schools. It is recommended that schools encourage learners to participate in educational matters and to be seen as people whose opinions matter (Grant, 2015).

This study uses these experiences of learner leaders to gain an in-depth understanding of the enabling and constraining factors towards learner participation and leadership structures of the researched schools. The study also allowed me to investigate how principals, teachers, and parents perceive the phenomenon of learner leadership to understand better the significance of learners' participation in decision-making and leadership in the researched Ohangwena Region schools. As a result of my personal and professional experiences, I sought to understand how to improve LRC participation and contribution within school leadership structures. This research examined how learner leaders perceive their roles in school leadership structures. It went on to investigate the practices and experiences of learner leaders while carrying out their responsibilities to comprehend democratic participation in decision-making in rural and multiple deprived secondary schools. The theories used in this study were Participatory Leadership Theory (PLT) and Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). These theories were used to discuss learner leadership issues observed in some secondary schools and to improve educational leadership and management in the researched schools.

1.4 Significance of the study

This study aimed to incorporate what learner leaders (LRCs) perceived as their roles in the context of rurality and secondary schools in the Ohangwena Region that suffered from multiple deprivations. The study delved deeper into their (LRCs') practices and experiences while carrying out their mandated duties. The researcher conducted this study after discovering a gap in the literature regarding learner leaders' conceptualisation, practices, and experiences in secondary schools, particularly in rurality and multiple deprivations. Grant (2015) and Grant

and Nekondo (2016) supported these findings by stating that there is limited literature in this niche area, particularly in countries such as Namibia and elsewhere in the world (Mokena, 2011; Mboyonga, 2018; Mulwa. et al.,2015; Leung. et al., 2014; Maitles. et al., 2006; Duma, 2014; Mncube, 2012; Wood, 2011; Phaswana, 2010).

Although many studies have been conducted internationally, regionally, and nationally, none have been conducted in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations in Ohangwena Region secondary schools. One Namibian study constantly argued for learner participation and leadership development for learner leaders (LRC) in urban secondary schools, as prescribed in the Education Act No. 16 of 2001. The study's findings revealed that leadership was understood in traditional practices (Uushona, 2012) that required solely principal leadership. Uushona (2012) discovered in his study that LRC in urban secondary schools did not represent learners' interests because they were not involved.in crucial decision-making platforms.

In support, Da Silva (2018) found that learner leadership was associated with formal leadership positions, such as learners who served in the school's LRC, in his study on leadership development within LRC in a rural secondary school. Thus, Da Silva makes recommendations in his study for schools to establish leadership clubs as a strategy to develop learner leadership among rural secondary school learners. Furthermore, researchers from Namibia, such as Amadhila (2018) and Haipa (2018), advocate for formal intervention in developing LRC voices and leadership in a newly established school and a Namibian secondary school, respectively. No research focused on the conceptualisations, practices, and experiences of learner leaders' roles in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations in secondary schools in the Ohangwena Region.

Therefore, this research focuses on implementing a policy that promotes the school's and its learners' best interests. That was consistent with the LRC's powers and functions as outlined in the Education Act No. 16 of 2001, which states that LRCs aim to promote the best interests and welfare of the school and its learners; to provide cultural, sport, and social activities for learners; and to improve learners' health and welfare.

Furthermore, the study may assist Namibia's Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture, particularly policymakers, in developing guidelines for learner leadership in schools. The

guidelines would assist all stakeholders who work with LRCs, such as principals, teachers, and parents, in understanding the significance of their roles. The guidelines would also guide school leaders, particularly principals who work directly with LRCs. Furthermore, it would provide principals with a clear focus when appointing liaison teachers who guide LRCs during nomination and elections following Education Act No. 16 of 2001.

This study would also serve as a stepping stone for school leadership to include principals, teachers, and learners in school leadership structures. It would also identify tensions and contradictions that facilitate or hinder learner leadership development in secondary schools. The positive implication of this study is that learners will positively influence decision-making if schools allow them (LRCs) to participate in drafting school policies, formulating school rules, and serving in various school structures.

Learners who are LRCs members of the school board should be involved in the School Development Plan, including the drafting of school policies, according to Education Act No. 16 of 2001. If LRCs were given opportunities to participate in school leadership committees, they would be able to share the concerns of other learners they represent with the school leadership and thus help to resolve them. The Education Policy (Act No. 16 of 2001) encourages schools to create opportunities for learners to express themselves rather than adults viewing learners as citizens in waiting (Maitles & Deuchar, 2006). Therefore, the study's objectives and critical research questions are highlighted in the following section.

1.5 Objectives of the study

The following research objectives guided this study:

1.5.1 To explore the learner leaders' conceptualisation, practices and experiences of their roles in school leadership and management in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations at four secondary schools in the Ohangwena region, Namibia.

1.5.2 To investigate the perceptions of school principals, teachers and parents concerning their understanding of learners' participation in decision-making and leadership in the researched Ohangwena Region schools.

1.5.3 To determine the enabling and constraining factors that influence learner participation in school leadership structures in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations at four secondary schools in the Ohangwena region, Namibia.

1.6 Critical research questions

The following critical research questions underpinned this study:

1.6.1 What are the learner leaders' conceptualisation, practices and experiences of their school leadership and management roles?

1.6.2 How do principals, teachers and parents perceive learner leadership and participation in decision-making and leadership in the researched Ohangwena Region schools?

1.6.3 What are the enabling and constraining factors (if any) that influence learner participation in school leadership structures?

1.7 Discussion of key concepts used in the study

This section discusses key concepts used in the study to facilitate a common understanding of the phenomena under discussion. The concepts discussed include school leadership, management, participatory democracy in schools, learner leadership, rurality and multiple deprivations.

1.7.1 School leadership

To understand what leadership and management are all about, this section discusses school leadership and management. Leadership is a complex phenomenon in any organisation that requires the influence and inspiration of its members (Northouse, 2018). According to Yukl (2013), leadership is a social process or relationship that occurs naturally within a social system and spreads among its members. Yukl (2013) adds that it is a concept that different people use to influence others and facilitate individual and collective efforts to achieve shared goals. I also agree with Yukl (2013) when he says that in leadership, both the leader and the followers must agree on what and how to do it. This enables the leader to create action space for the overlooked stakeholders, in this case, learners, and to foster relationships between adults and learners. Other researchers see leadership as a multifaceted and complex phenomenon (Wajdi, 2017; Algahtani, 2014). However, for this study, the researcher employs Harris (2014) and Spillane et al. definitions of leadership (2003). Harris (2014) defines distributed leadership as producing high-quality leadership practices that test the distribution of leadership roles and interactions among individuals. The study also used Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond's (2003) definition of leadership as a process in which leaders interact with all stakeholders in a school.

Furthermore, school leadership entails influencing others in the educational context to achieve predetermined goals (Mullins & Christie, 2016). According to Connolly, James, and Fertig (2017), school leadership refers to the leadership of someone in a senior position in a school. For example, in countries such as England, the United States, Australia, and Denmark, school leadership refers to individuals in positions such as principals (Kandjengo & Shikalepo, 2020). This implies that traditional leadership focuses on the positional quality of the person at the top of the hierarchy (Townsend, 2011; Vaeta, 2015). Because, as Kandjengo and Shikalepo (2020) argue, leadership focuses on change, current school leadership should encourage learner leaders to practice leadership to effect change.

The interaction of learner leaders with other school leaders impacts achieving desired goals (Connolly et al., 2017). The definitions given above, in my opinion, are consistent with my study because they support my arguments that promote the conceptualisation of learners' participation in decision-making in school leadership structures, as required by law (GRN, 2001). Learner leaders can influence leadership by interacting with other stakeholders and supporting one another to achieve goals. This occurs when the school provides a platform for learners' voices to be heard, as well as a provision for all stakeholders to share leadership responsibilities (Kandjengo and Shikalepo, 2020). (Grant and Nekondo, 2016). As a result, leadership in schools can be practised by anyone, regardless of position in a school.

1.7.2 School management

Management appears to be used interchangeably with leadership; however, these two concepts are distinct. Leadership is regarded as one of the primary responsibilities of a manager to achieve organisational goals (Yukl, 2013). Management is when a person in executive, administrative, or supervisory positions directs a group of people or an organisation (Algahtani, 2014). According to Algahtani (2014, p.74), management is defined as:

> The responsibilities usually aligned with task-oriented are to develop staff through mentoring and coaching people with high potential in resolving conflicts to maintain ethics and discipline.

Essentially, management is the concept associated with any organisation's upkeep. For example, Grant (2008) confirms that management is the concept that preserves, maintains and stabilises an organisation. Management, in my opinion, is part of an activity that implies the

organisational structure to meet the organisational purposes and goals as planned. When it comes to school, school management is regarded as the heart of the institution, and it is where all decisions are formed. Furthermore, management entails planning, controlling, coordinating, and leading organisational activity to achieve its goals (Van der Westhuizen, 2014). In his view, Van der Westhuizen (2014) notes that if there is supervision or delegation of trusted people, the achievement of organisational goals becomes a reality

This study discusses how school management keeps the activities associated with organisational structure going (Connolly et al., 2017). This study advocates for schools to organizational structures that provide a welcoming environment for learner leaders to practice their leadership roles. Schools in rural areas, particularly those in multiple deprived contexts, should include a functional system allowing other individuals' participation, contribution, and involvement, including learner leaders (Mullins & Christie, 2016). As Lumby (2017) suggests, management practices of this type may also aid schools in preventing power abuse.

Similarly, schools that involve other stakeholders in school management see management as coordinating, directing, and guiding others to achieve organisational goals. Many learner leaders, in my opinion, do not practice this as leaders in rural secondary schools. For example, when schools assign responsibilities to Learner Representative councils and class monitors, the school expects them to enact functions such as policing teachers who do not arrive on time for lessons, monitoring other learners who make noise in class, and controlling those learners who do not clean the classrooms, to name a few.

Kolodziejcyk (2015) contends, drawing on the literature to strengthen the effectiveness of learner leadership in schools, that school management entails creating organisational structures, controlling, allocating resources, and monitoring policy compliance to produce good results. Furthermore, good management schools share and distribute management functions among all stakeholders (Kandjengo & Shikalepo, 2020). Establishing shared responsibilities enables learner leaders to gain opportunities for their voices to be heard and improve learners' academic results. In contrast, school management pays lip service to management while leaving students to do the dirty work teachers despise, such as chasing learners to class, organising anti-litter campaigns, and policing (Uushona, 2012). As a result of

understanding the origins and definitions of leadership and management, I discuss the concept of participatory democracy in schools in the section below.

1.7.3 Participatory democracy in schools

In general, democracy necessitates a government system that allows citizens the freedom to pursue their desires (Fayemi, 2009). As a result, the definition of democracy in simple terms is popular government rule, also known as popular sovereignty. Grant (1995) defined democracy as "direct, participatory, and representative forms of rule by the people." The term democracy is derived from two Greek words: demos (people) and kratos (rule) (Nwogu, 2015). The above definition of democracy is also applicable to the Namibian context, as stated in her policy titled "Towards Education for All", which states:

> Democracy is our commitment to developing an education system that will play a central role in transforming our society. To teach democracy, we must be democratic. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993.p.41)

Nowadays, democracy has a variety of positive connotations that connect it to positive images around the world. As a result, according to Nwogu (2015), some political systems advocate democracy with no little rule as a democratic system. However, the purpose of this study was not to provide a detailed description of democracy but rather to provide an understanding of how this study used the concept of participatory democracy throughout.

The concept of participatory democracy in schools has gradually gained traction in contemporary leadership thinking and policy. In their study, Linington, Excell, and Murris (2011) propose that participatory democracy is the idea that people should rule through participation rather than representation. Although participatory democracy is widely perceived as a political concept, Linington et al. (2011) argue that it also includes moral principles such as freedom of expression and equality of opportunity in schools and spaces for learners to participate as citizens in contexts that are meaningful to them. In a separate study conducted in Brazil, Aragonés and Sanchez-Pagés (2008) define participatory democracy as a process of collective decision-making that combines elements of both direct and representative democracy, allowing citizens to have the power to decide on policy proposals while politicians take on the role of policy implementation.

I chose the above definitions to apply to Namibian educational institutions where schools advocate for the democratic participation of all stakeholders, such as teachers, learners, and parents, in decision-making. In this case, I want to focus on the Learner Representative Council, which is the legitimate body mandated to represent other learners but is frequently excluded from management and school board meetings where governance decisions are made. Taking this a step further, Edelstein (2011) proposes that learner participation is a tool for articulating learning democracy through government processes. This tool allows for the collection and discussion of learners' wishes both in the classroom and outside of the school environment. Furthermore, Flutter (2007) asserts that the voice of the LRCs can only be heard when schools, particularly rural and multiple deprived secondary schools, involve all learners in all school decision-making areas.

To promote learner leadership in schools, leadership theories should embrace learner leaders' participation in school leadership and management to share leadership responsibilities and achieve common goals. Schools are also encouraged to foster student leadership development by providing forums for learners to express themselves and be heard (Grant & Nekondo, 2016). Learner Representative Councils in schools that are aligned with educational policies represent democracy and encourage learner participation in school activities (Kandjengo & Shikalepo, 2020). As a result, drawing on literature from Namibia and elsewhere, this study suggests that shared and distributed leadership discussions are the best way to practice participatory democracy in schools.

1.7.3.1 Shared leadership

Leadership influences the success and failure of any organisation, including schools (Kocolowski, 2010). As a result, it becomes more difficult for anyone to possess all the necessary skills and abilities to lead a school competently (Kocolowski, 2010; Mokena, 2017). Namibia implemented various educational reforms in its education system after gaining democratic dispensation in 1990. The government introduced and implemented several policies and laws to create the educational framework for Namibia's effective education system. The Education Act 16 of 2001, which has significantly impacted how schools should be governed and managed, was one of the remarkable policies. The Education Act No. 16 of 2001 emphasised the importance of schools transitioning from hierarchical school management to school-based management (Mokena, 2011; Mokena, 2017). For schools to respond to the

changes embodied in the Education Act, the shared leadership approach had to be implemented in the school system to address the implications of those changes.

The shared leadership approach has been used since the 1950s, as Goskoy (2016) posits. Gronn (2002) indicates that various scientists have researched the shared leadership approach in education since the 1990s. Despite numerous studies (Small & Rentsch, 2010), an integrative definition of shared leadership has remained elusive (Kocolowski, 2010). As a result, I provided the definition of shared leadership suggested by the previous researchers. Additionally, Goskoy (2016) defines shared leadership as a participatory perspective in which individuals and situations interact with one another in a study conducted in Turkey. Goskoy (2016) further states that schools should not limit the practice of shared leadership to the knowledge and skills of a single leader. In this case, principals should allow all other stakeholders to share their leadership skills with school management; specifically, these were the learner leaders who made up the majority of the school, in my opinion.

Similarly, Bakir (2013) defines shared leadership as a modern approach involving voluntary cooperation and interaction resulting from all stakeholders' experiences and a sense of responsibility. According to Bakir (2013), the knowledge and competencies of all stakeholders about the topic to be carried out are important elements of shared leadership. Thus, in his opinion, a culture of collaboration prevails, as evidenced by shared leadership behaviour among all stakeholders.

According to Huang (2013), shared leadership is a collective leadership in which stakeholders make decisions collaboratively. One of the benefits of shared leadership is that knowledge and power are distributed among stakeholders, allowing for quick decision-making. This type of leadership does not necessitate a top-down approach to providing direction. The shared leadership validates the top-down hierarchical approach to transformational leadership, allowing for LRC leadership development. The above definitions encompass the entire situation, including rurality and multiple secondary school deprivation in the Ohangwena Region. Furthermore, as stated in the preceding definitions, it encourages school leaders to recognise the collective leadership for all stakeholders to participate in all decision-making affecting teaching and learning. In contrast to the definition of shared leadership, this study

will discuss distributed leadership as a form of participatory democracy in schools in the following section.

1.7.3.2 The distributed leadership

Distributed leadership is a new concept still in its early stages (Dampson, Havor & Laryea, 2018). According to Williams (2011), distributed leadership originated in educational leadership in the mid-1960s and possibly earlier. Although it has long been a dominant leadership concept in organisational theory, it rose to prominence in 2000. (Harris, 2011). As a result, the terms distributed leadership and shared leadership have been used interchangeably. Some authors, such as Pearce (2004), refer to it as shared leadership, while others, such as Gronn (2002), refer to it as distributed leadership.

Furthermore, distributed leadership intersects with others, such as empowerment, democracy, and collaborative leadership (Yukl, 2013). This study intended to discuss distributed leadership as a form of participatory democracy in schools rather than to describe and compare the concepts that overlap with distributed leadership. Consequently, the discussion began with a definition of distributed leadership, followed by how leadership in schools should be distributed democratically.

Distributed leadership emphasises leadership practice that is distributed across leaders, followers, and situations, and it incorporates the human activities of multiple groups of individuals for the execution of leadership tasks (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004). According to Gronn (2000), distributed leadership opens the door to a more collective and democratic form of leadership. Dampson, Havor, and Laryea (2018) suggest that distributed leadership is a shared leadership that culminates the debate that everyone is a leader and should be given leadership opportunities based on their position. Dampson, Havor, and Laryea (2018), in their opinion, confirm Spillane's (2008) work by arguing that distributed leadership is a tool and vocabulary that defines leadership practices in schools. Thus, Grant (2006) suggested that distributed leadership involves expertise where it exists, not solely through people in formal organisational positions (Grant 2006, p. 513). According to the definition above, distributed leadership entails relinquishing some authority and power, such as the power of a school's principal (Harris, 2011).

While general understandings argue that individuals should lead others to effect change (Hoy & Miskel, 2012), some theorists, such as Coleman and Early (2005), argue that school leaders should distribute leadership among all stakeholders (teachers, parents, and learners) rather than a single leader (the principal). As a result, through distributed leadership, every person in a school has the potential to exercise leadership practices in the facilitated, orchestrated, and supported manner proposed by (Harris, 2008).

When Namibia gained independence, it established various documents and policies to govern the country. The Constitution was one of the important documents that were established. The acceptance of the Constitution to govern the country was based on democracy, equal rights, equal citizenship, freedom of expression, and human rights protection (Williams, 2011). Furthermore, the Education Act No. 16 of 2001 manifested schools to establish the LRC as the legitimate body. It regulated the democratically elected LRC and the representation of learners in school boards in all secondary schools in Namibia (GRN, 2001). The Education Act No. 16 of 2001 recognises learners' right to participate in decision-making and their freedom of expression. Schools should provide space for these learners to practice their leadership as a form of distributed leadership for them to exercise their rights. On this note, distributed leadership in schools recognises the potential of the person in the school's hierarchical position and decision-making to consider the core roles of learner leaders and the capabilities of all stakeholders in school leadership structures (Harris, 2011).

Consequently, Leithwood and Mascallin (2008) advocate for school leadership to shift from traditional leadership to multiple sources of influence and agency leadership. The role of distributed leadership in school leadership is defined as the interaction of school leaders, followers, and the situation in which they find themselves (Spillane et al. 2001). Learner leaders can also carry out the required leadership practices if the school leadership creates spaces and opportunities for them to do so. Although anyone with potential can take the lead, there are some constraints to the distribution of leadership in schools.

For distributed leadership to function and thrive, those in the school's hierarchical/formal leadership roles must create cultural conditions and structural opportunities. According to Harris (2008), it may also be a different agenda for those to whom leadership is distributed. Therefore, I contend that learner participation in school leadership and management aims to

present current leadership thinking, emphasizing the importance of participative and collaborative approaches to leadership.

1.7.4 Learner leadership

The field of educational leadership has a vast literature, and most of it focuses on the person of a leader, attempting to identify traits and attributes that person possesses (Grant & Nekondo, 2016). According to Grant (2015) and Uushona (2012), learner leadership was not common in schools worldwide except in Namibia. The deficit model of learner leadership in some rural and multiple-deprived researched secondary schools in the Ohangwena Region prompted me to investigate and review the literature on how learner leaders conceptualise and experience their school leadership roles. Thus, the discussion begins with a definition of learner leadership, learner voice and agency, and current perspectives on learner participation in school leadership.

Researchers have used the term "student leadership" in the international literature to refer to the leadership of young people (Black, 2014). Concerning learner leaders, various concepts such as student leadership, student voice, pupil voice, and student leaders have been used (Mitra, 2006; Collins, 2007, Mitra & Gross, 2009; Black, 2014). Learner leadership, on the other hand, refers to the leadership of young people who are still in school in Namibia (Grant, 2015). Learner leadership is defined as shifting from traditional thinking to contemporary leadership perspectives. Learner leadership, according to Grant and Nekondo (2016), is leadership that is not limited by formal authority and can be exercised by individuals and groups other than the principal. In addition, Uushona (2012) defines learner leadership as a pupil leadership system found in all schools in which learners actively participate in activities in a direct capacity. Furthermore, Mitra and Gross (2009) propose that it is a type of leadership that encourages collective participation when sharing school decisions that promote learner voice to shape their (learners') lives and the lives of their peers.

Despite that, Black (2014) posits that the term ‘learner leadership’ is interchangeable with learner agency, learner voice and learner participation. Consequently, this study uses the term to mean leadership exercised through learner participation in school decision-making. As such, the study discusses learner voice as a concept to define learner leadership.

Learner's voice is a concept that can be applied to any discussion of learner leadership. Although student's voice is commonly used in international literature, learner voice can also

describe ways in which learners can share the decisions that shape their lives and the lives of their peers (Grant, 2015; Mitra & Gross, 2009). Because Namibia is a democratic state, I chose learner voice to describe democracy in Namibian education and the potential for learner agency (Grant, 2015). On numerous occasions, schools were advised to create avenues for learners to participate in matters affecting them for democracy to prevail (Amadhila, 2018). According to Fielding (2001), young people are used as a source of information rather than as a driving force to effect change in schools. In line with Fielding's argument, Mitra (2006) advocates for developing leadership capacity among learners for their voices to be heard. Furthermore, I argue that schools should listen to learners and give them opportunities to express their views on current issues in the classroom.

I have provided a brief overview of learner leadership as defined by various researchers. Therefore, I expanded on the distinction between learner leadership and general leadership in schools.

1.7.4.1 The differences between learner leadership and general leadership in schools

The issue of learner leadership is a topic of discussion in African schools and a concept that has recently emerged worldwide (Uushona, 2012). Learner leadership in schools refers to learners' actions to address issues that affect them and can disrupt their learning. One example of learner leadership is when the class captain reminds other learners to clean their classrooms. The action taken by the class captain promotes a friendly learning environment, which influences the school's performance. This is consistent with the findings of a study conducted in a Namibian secondary school by Kalimbo (2018), which revealed that class captains assisted other learners in taking their responsibilities seriously.

Another example would be when a group of learners noticed that they were not performing well academically and were dissatisfied because it affected their learning and school performance. They can act by discussing it with the principal's office to reach an amicable solution. The principal should then involve the management team and the LRC to make a collective decision. Kalimbo (2018) agrees with the above sentiments, stating that the class captain should assist other learners struggling with their subjects. He also encourages class monitors to play an important role in influencing and motivating other learners to succeed academically. Although LRCs were still regarded as leaders with positional power, he believed that the school leadership should advocate for leadership development in all learner leaders, including class captains.

Therefore, Uushona (2012, p.21) defines learner leadership as:

> … a relational process involves interaction and building relationships with other students, it involves external community, it has an outcome of developing leadership skills in students, it involves many types of leadership, and it may develop through participation.

In support of the definition of learner leadership presented above, learner participation can be viewed and understood through the provision of learners' rights and responsibilities as enshrined in global policy provisions on children's rights as stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2022). It can also be seen through educational policies that guide learner leadership and engagement within school structures (Uushona, 2012). Furthermore, secondary schools in rural areas should follow the provisions outlined in the policies on children's rights outlined above. As a result, the following section discusses the rurality concept.

1.7.5 Rurality

Rurality is a multifaceted concept based on stereotypes (Christiansen, 2015). Several rural education researchers have found it difficult to develop a universal set of characteristics to describe or define the concept of rurality. However, this study defines rurality in terms of place, population, geography, socioeconomic status, and emotional state. Abdulwakeel (2017) defines rurality in a study conducted in Nigeria as where humans settle and occupy a small landscape mostly dominated by fields, pastures, wood, and forests. Similarly, Chibu (2013) defines rurality as a place-based homeliness shared by people of common ancestry or heritage. Consequently, people in that context live in traditionally and culturally defined rural areas. The earlier definition applies to the Namibian context because Namibia has a context similar to that of many countries, such as South Africa and Nigeria. Namibia has many secondary schools associated with rural contexts, and many of these locations are densely forested. Many people in this area rely on crop fields and share cultural and traditional legal norms and values (Chibu, 2013).

According to Moletsane, Juan, Prinsloo and Reddy (2015), rurality can also be defined from a set of characteristics of geographical distances, such as the accessibility of the service to

schools and health facilities, to mention a few. In my view, the definition of rurality mentioned above applies to many people in Namibia, especially in Ohangwena Region, where the study was conducted. The researched areas experienced difficulties accessing services such as schools, hospitals, roads, portable water and other social services (GRN, 2009). The GRN, through its National Housing Policy (2009), showed further that most learners from the Namibian context usually live far from cities where taxis were available. Thus, they had to walk long distances through thick bushes and gravel roads at some points. Despite that, rurality can also be described from the emotional distances in which the traditional and cultural practices tend to marginalise mostly women and girls (Thomson, 2009).

However, the United Nations (UN), through its document of Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDG) (2015), enshrined 17 goals to move forward the Agenda 2030. SDG goal 4 ensures inclusion and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities that specify targets to accomplish agenda 2030. Among the targets is the call for eliminating gender disparities within its nations (United Nations, 2015).

In line with the above notion and from my observations, when learners elect LRCs in schools, they (learners) tend to elect more males than females for reasons only known to them. And also, most of the schools in this context have poor infrastructures and limited resources, which affect teaching and learning in schools (Government of the Republic Namibia, 2009). Due to the ideological distance embedded in the legacies of colonialism and apartheid (Ministry of Basic Education and Culture, 1993), globalisation tends to sustain the marginalisation of rural communities and schools (Moletsane et al., 2015). Therefore, the above characteristics resulted in communities experiencing deprivations or multiple deprivations. Concerning the above discussions, the next section entailed the discussions of multiple deprivations used in the study.

1.7.6 Multiple deprivations

Nowadays, government agencies and non-governmental organisations have societal roles to help them meet some of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to refine the poverty reduction strategy. The paper presented at the UNU-WIDER Conference, Noble, Barnes, Wrights and Roberts (26 - 27 September 2008) showed good quality with detailed information on various issues such as income poverty, health, education, and access to services that were vital for the efforts of the poverty reduction strategy. In a study conducted in South Africa, Alderman, Babita, Denombynes, Makhatatha, Mohamed, and Ozler (2003) found that

the South African government was obliged to ensure that the financial resources were distributed in an equitable way among its citizen based on the level of poverty and disadvantaged.

This is not an obligation for South Africa alone, but all the countries have to distribute their resources equitably. As such, the Government of the Republic of Namibia, as in many other countries around the globe, has key responsibilities and objectives to implement for the quality of life of its citizens (GRN, 1993). The GRN, through its policy Towards Education for All, has alluded to the equitable distribution of resources amongst its citizens in rural and suburban areas where the most disadvantaged people reside. Although this study defined poverty, deprivation and multiple deprivations, these definitions were aligned with Namibia's context, particularly in Ohangwena Region, where the study was carried out.

In their view, Moletsane et al. (2015) posit that poverty and deprivation are often used interchangeably, but they have different contextual meanings. According to Noble et al. (2008), poverty refers to the denial of opportunities and choices of most basic human development to lead a creative life and enjoy decent living standards, dignity, self-esteem and respect from others. The above definition applies to the context where the researcher carried out this study. Most people in this context have low income and expenditure, no decent housing and lack physical facilities. Consequently, learners in this area have no access to modern standards of living; they have no access to television and limited resources, particularly in their schools. This is the most devastated area due to war during the struggle for independence.

The definition provided earlier by Noble (2008) indicates that people in this area seem to experience difficulties such as income, material, healthy, and epistemological poverty (Maringe & Moletsane, 2015). Consequently, the lack of resources in rural secondary schools, particularly physical resources, affects learners' leadership. Rural school leadership deprive learners of an opportunity to practise their leadership role similar to that of learner leaders in urban schools. Learner leaders in urban schools use the internet and other modern facilities.

However, in a situation like this, people might not experience material poverty as an example. Still, they might be deprived of certain life-defining factors preventing learner leaders from practising leadership in multiple-deprived secondary schools. Thus, Maringe and Moletsane

(2015) refer to “deprivation” as when people lack access to the assets that eradicate poverty. In this study, deprivation refers to schools that lack resources such as standard classrooms and no basic facilities such as internet, televisions, computers, sanitary facilities and potable water. The lists, as mentioned earlier, affect the service delivery in terms of the quality of education of those learners. When those learners experience all these deprivations, it results in multiple school deprivations.

In line with this, I concur with Maringe and Moletsane (2015), who suggests that making a difference between social and material deprivation is advisable to lay a foundation to articulate multiple school deprivations. The *social deprivation* includes people who experienced low income, lack of health facilities, without portable or running water, sanitary facilities, electricity and without some form of physical security to ensure the safety of learners. At the same time, *material deprivation* is referred to proper and decent standard houses to accommodate learners. This study aims not to distinguish these two kinds of deprivation but to advocate the conceptualisation of deprivation in schools. In their view, Noble et al. (2008) argue that when a certain proportion of the population experiences one type of deprivation, it is referred to as a single one.

Similarly, when the population experienced the combination of a single deprivation, it resulted in multiple deprivations. According to Noble et al. (2008), multiple deprivations are a combination of a specific form of deprivation where people in the area experiences types of deprivation. For example, the income and unemployment of the population, the standard of living and the quality of the environment in which people live contributed largely to the leadership development of LRCs in secondary schools. Additionally, in another study, Amnesty International (2008) posits that multiple deprivations refer to personal attribution, such as dignity, health or opportunities to develop oneself or society to change one’s circumstances.

The above definitions apply to the context of Namibia because many schools in the Ohangwena Region were mostly disadvantaged, including secondary schools. Most of them were not boarding schools. Consequently, learners who attended them had to walk long distances to and from their homes. According to my informal observations, parents considered mostly the cultural norms and values in this context at the expense of their children's education. Sometimes, Parents did not allow them to decide what to do, but rather to obey the instructions

from their parents. Consequently, the set of characteristics these learners experienced could be defined as multiple deprivations.

1.8 Delimitations of the study

Enslin (2014) states that the delimitation of the study is about specific and definite choices the researcher makes on the scope or parameters of the research study. For this study, delimitation was about all the decisions the researcher took throughout the research process. It determined the boundary of the study that allowed the researcher to focus on specific concepts. Delimitations of the study include steps such as how the researcher selected the research population, the literature review and the methodological procedures followed. This study is a qualitative case study conducted in four rural and multiple deprived secondary schools in Ohangwena Region, Namibia. The researcher engaged with learner leaders (LRC) with two years of experience, teachers who have worked with LRCs for three years, and the principal of each school. The study's findings would not be generalised because that was not the purpose of this study.

1.9 Organisation of the thesis

This study is divided into nine chapters as follows:

Chapter One introduces the study and outlines the background that formed the basis of the study. This chapter further discusses the problem statement of the study, the purpose and rationale for the study, the significance of the study, the objectives of the study, and Critical research questions. Furthermore, I discussed the key concepts used in the study and the delimitations of the study.

Chapter Two reviews international, continental and national literature pertinent to learner leadership and learner participation in decision-making in school leadership structures.

Chapter Three provides the theoretical framework that underpins this study. The framework comprises the Participation Leadership Theory, Critical Theory and the Cultural Historical Activity Theory, which advocates for learner leadership and participation in decision-making in secondary schools. This chapter further advocates that leadership should involve all the stakeholders and be shared among all school members.

Chapter Four describes the research design and methodology considering the research paradigm, the research design, the research methodology, selection of research participants, how the data was generated and analysed, issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study.

Chapter Five deals with data presentation and descriptive analysis of the learner leaders' conceptualisations, practices and experiences regarding their roles in school leadership in the researched schools. The data was generated from the field through focused group discussions, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and document reviews. In this chapter, I attempt to make sense of data, what it means or suggests, and what is to be made of it all. I also make larger meanings about the problem under investigation (learner leadership) based on the personal views of learners. Also, I compare and contrast the findings of my study with past studies (Creswell, 2007).

Chapter Six deals with data presentation and descriptive analysis of the perceptions of school principals, teachers and parents about learner leadership and participation in decision-making at the researched schools. The data was generated from the field through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and document reviews. In this chapter, I also attempt to make sense of data, what it means or suggests and what is to be made of it. I also make a larger meaning about the problem under investigation (learner leadership and participation) based on research participants' personal views and compare and contrast my study's findings with past studies (Creswell, 2007).

Chapter Seven deals with data presentation and descriptive analysis of the enabling and constraining factors on learner participation in school leadership at the researched schools. The data was generated from the field through focused group discussions, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and document reviews. In this chapter, I also attempt to make sense of data, what it means or suggests and what is to be made of it. Based on the research participants ' views, I also make a larger meaning about the problem under investigation (learner leadership and participation). I also compare and contrast the findings of my study with past studies (Creswell, 2007).

Chapter Eight dwells on an evaluative analysis of the findings that gave rise to the major themes/recurring concepts/world views/perspectives from all the types of participants in the study: the learners, the school principals, the teachers and parents. The interpretations/findings will be compared/contrasted with relevant literature and theory.

Chapter Nine explores the research findings and compares and contrasts them with the relevant theory and other existing studies (theoretical analysis). This chapter also presents conclusions of the study (based on how the study answered the key research questions, how the themes confirm or refute existing views on the subject under investigation (learner leadership and participation), how the themes extend current views/knowledge on the subject under investigation; what are surprising/different elements that seem to emerge from the study; the recommendations, as well as suggestions for future research, are also discussed here.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter explored the study's background on learner leadership and participation. The study hopes to establish the relevant studies and findings relating to the study. The chapter discusses the preliminary literature that reveals undemocratic participation in many rural secondary schools. Consequently, learners have been deprived of their rights to participate. Therefore, it is evident that many issues constrain learner leadership in secondary schools in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations. The issues include learner participation as the window dressing, being too young, immature, lacking knowledge, and they cannot take decisions on their own as minors and which prevents them from exercising their democratic rights to participate in school decision-making structures. Therefore, the study must explore what learners conceptualise as their roles and what learner-leaders practise and experience while carrying out their roles. The shortage in the literature on the conceptualisation, practices and experiences of learner leaders in secondary schools in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations brought the significance of the study. The chapter presents the research objectives and the critical research questions to guide this study. The key concepts used in the study, the delimitations and the organisation of the thesis are presented. The next chapter provides the literature review.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter (Chapter One) was an introductory chapter that laid up the scene for my study. This chapter reviewed international, continental and national literature on learner leadership. It explores learner participation in school leadership, particularly in rural secondary schools in Namibia. To understand what learner leaders, contribute to secondary school leadership, the study reviewed the empirical evidence from previous studies. Evidence from previous study help to understand what learner leaders conceptualise, practice and experience in their leadership role and its influences on educational leadership and management as a field. Various literature sources illustrate that learner leadership is a global concern in developed and developing countries (Grant, 2015; Grant & Nekondo, 2016).

Several studies from Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Canada, the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Lesotho, South Africa and Namibia have been reviewed to understand the trends and debates on learner leadership around the globe. This chapter reviewed the literature to address issues covered in the study's objectives and critical research questions. The chapter started by explaining learner leadership to enable the readers to conceptualise the word learner leadership in this study, where it originates, the challenges and possibilities of learner leadership and how the learners gain a voice. Therefore, this section started to review international literature on learner leadership.

2.2 Review of international literature on learner leadership

Following the definitions provided in 1.7.3.1 of the previous chapter, I extend my discussion by indicating that the term “learner leadership” stems principally from the concept of the rights-based approach (UNCRC, 1989). According to Theron and Botha (1990), learner leadership is a system of the leadership of the learners found in every school using which learners actively participate in activities in a directive capacity (p.145). The definition above considers learner participation in a directive capacity, including management. It tends not to consider the participation of learners in their capacity as valuable stakeholders.

Therefore, it is arguable that since there is no clear definition of learner leadership, the study sought the definitions using the characteristics of learner participation. In his presentation, as cited in Uushona (2012), Mordaunt (2009, p.2) summarises the leadership characteristics by defining student leadership in Australia at the University of Victoria: Student leadership can be defined loosely as an organic, dynamic and relational process. This involves interactions and building relationships with other students, peer leaders and other members of the university and external community with the outcome of developing leadership. Student leadership may also have many types of leadership, including educational, political, social and recreational leadership.

However, Black, Walsh, Magee, Hutchins, Berman and groundwater–Smith (2014) define learner leadership as the concept that constitutes learners' voice, collaboration with adults and leadership. Various researchers, such as Holdsworth (2000, p.358), suggest the spectrum of leadership, student voice and participation that encourages learners to change from speaking out to decision-making with the implementation of actions thereof. Meanwhile, Mitra (2006) suggests the type of learner leadership that builds capacity for leadership development. Therefore, the study reviewed and debated the trends in the next section.

2. 2. 1 Trend and debates about learner leadership

The UNCRC (2022) finds it necessary through Articles 12 and 15 that calls for children's right to participation and freedom of expression to express their views when practising and to experience their leadership roles. It urges signatories to implement these rights to realise children's rights. Learner leadership then emerges from the rights based approach, replicating the importance and potential of learners to play a major role in making decisions that affect them.

Furthermore, the UNCRC (1989) highlights the rights of children to participate in matters that concern them and recommends learner participation in school governance in all matters affecting their school life. Article 12 of the UNCRC further allows children to express their views freely and to be heard. Furthermore, article 13 allows children's rights of freedom of expression and freedom of speech to communicate information through any media of their choice.

Leung, Yeun, Cheng and Chow (2014) conducted a study in Hong Kong, revealing that some Hong Kong schools focus more on informing and consulting learners. This process is done through formal and control channels such as the Learners Council, which are not likely to involve learners. Consequently, learners' participation in school matters is often limited to the bottom of the participation ladder. This is the position where learners need to be involved mostly because it is where school rules are formulated. In addition, Leung et al. (2014) reference the scope of participation that learners have to participate in and share the powers with teachers or the principal when dealing with operational matters as stipulated in the policy framework. In some countries, such as the UK, the role and importance of the learner's voice seem to gain recognition (Whitehead, 2009).

Because of Whitty and Wisby (2007), school leaders understand learner voices when learners can express their views in the decision-making of matters that affect them. However, schools should not only use the voices of learners for the sake of it, but they should also provide avenues for learners to participate actively in decision-making where they can give their opinion and consider them as valued stakeholders. Space provision requires learners to play an active role in their education and schooling. Consequently, schools become more responsive in sustained and mutinied ways to learners' voices. In support of this claim, learners must demonstrate an understanding of adults' role in providing and supporting their learning throughout school (Wood, 2011). Moreover, Manefield, Collins and Moore (2007), in their study conducted in Australia on students' voices, found that the views and opinions of learners in schools were often discounted as having less legitimacy than those of the adults.

Thus, it is arguable to concur with Mitra (2006) in his study conducted in Australia, which suggests the need for stakeholders to accept the concept of the learner's voice before accepting learners as key players in their education. As Lansdown (2001), cited in Wood (2011), points out, learners make better decisions due to their views, knowledge and experiences following their situation. In critique, learners are powerful contributors to decision-making who should not be regarded as beneficiaries of educational change but rather as participants throughout the changing process (Fullan, 2001).

However, Grooves (2013) conducted a study in the United Kingdom. They noted that the engagement of the Learner Representative Council in one of the schools in the United Kingdom

increases with high degrees of enthusiasm, which improve learner voice in the school. One of the heads of the department that participated in Grooves's (2013) study suggests creating more leadership opportunities across the learner body. Equally, Simmons, Graham and Thomas (2015), in discussing an ideal for locating learners' voices, point out that those learners have more of a say in decision-making when there is an aspiration to hear their voices. Simmons et al. (2015) state that learners want the opportunity to say what is in their minds and should give them more freedom of speech for matters that relate to them.

In their study in Hong Kong, Leung et al. (2014) find some enabling and constraining factors towards learner participation in school governors. They reveal that some of the learners in Hong Kong believe that learner participation in the leadership structures involves significant issues in schools and that learner participation in school governance is valuable. Thus, they suggest that schools provide learners with a communication channel and space to actualise their participation.

Contrary to that, Leung et al. (2014) further show some constraining factors that limit learner participation in schools. One of the constraining factors that learner leaders face is that teachers do not provide leadership support to learners to promote and encourage learner leadership in schools. This is due to a lack of enthusiasm, training and professional knowledge in ensuring learner leadership support and practices. Therefore, these findings critique that schools do not encourage learner participation but tokenism at the bottom of the ladder instead of the participation of all stakeholders.

According to the findings of various studies reviewed earlier in most countries internationally, learner leadership is still a concern. Therefore, in the next section, this study reviews the literature from the continental perspective.

2.3 Continental (African) literature review on learner leadership

This section discusses the views of various researchers who conducted their research in countries within Africa, such as Kenya, South Africa and Zambia, to mention a few. Various researchers from the continent recognise the importance of learner leaders (Grant, 2015), while others do not. This study reviews the perceptions of various stakeholders on learner participation, constraints and enablers from the continental perspective in the following section.

2.3.1 Contesting views on learner participation in school leadership

Continentally, many researchers such as (Mncube & Harber, 2013; Grant, 2015; Mulwa et al. 2015; Nthontho, 2017; Mboyonga, 2018) view learner leadership as a concern in many African countries. According to Mncube and Harber (2013), schools include learners in school governance as a display of actual decision-making, as Mncube (2012) posits. In a study conducted in South Africa on student participation in school governance, Duma (2015) reveals that rural learners and principals often hold each other at arm's length while involving learners in the governance of rural schools. The study findings assert that the school principals and learners are not sure of the roles each should play. The study further reveals that principals perceive learners violate their sense of professionalism if the school practices too much involvement of learners in the school governance.

In another study also conducted in South Africa, Mncube (2012) shows that some schools actively involve learners in school governing bodies, particularly in asking questions during the appointment of teachers. According to Mncube and Harber (2013), the active participation of learners depends on the opportunity and training offered to them for their empowerment. The inclusion of learners as interview panellists indicated to teachers about learner representation in schools. The study furthermore considers learner voice as essential in terms of the appointment of teachers because they participate fully in the final decision makings. Mncube (2012) in his study further indicates that the issue of training for learners and their contribution to the development of democracy helps the spreading, deepening and consolidation of democratic practices in schools and society. It is on this note that he suggests that schools should provide opportunities for learner governors to play their role of being a voice of other learners.

Mncube (2012) reveals that learners who are the majority of the school constituency should be given an avenue to practice their leadership role through distributed leadership as a form of democratic participation in decision-making and policy implementation. According to Mncube and Naicker (2011), a study conducted in South Africa indicated that learners do not participate actively in SGB, citing that learners' participation is tokenistic. However, Mncube (2012) alluded further for learners not to be seen as window dressing or tokenistic during the school governing bodies because this was one of the functions of the school governing bodies.

However, in their study, Mncube and Harber (2013) found that some schools engage learners in the school finances committees for transparency. As a result, schools reduce too much unrest and boycotts of classes due to the lack of transparency. This is similar to a study conducted in Kenya that confirms the learner participation in the decision that deals with the budget allocation for the learners' council in South Africa (Alexander, Onyango & Kyalo, 2019). Moreover, Strydom (2016), in her study conducted in South Africa, reveals that some schools exclude learners from the decision-making structures because they are regarded as immature, incompetent and vulnerable to create reliable decisions. Thus, it is arguable that schools use age as a yardstick to determine who should and should not enter decision-making forums.

Besides that, in their study conducted in South Africa, Mncube and Harber (2010) argue that school leaders that listen to learner leaders encourage learner participation by giving them more power and responsibility for developing democratic values. Mncube et al., in their study, further argue that democratic structure and its processes in schools promote school work effectively. During the process, schools develop learners to be more democratic when practising their roles in schools. Furthermore, Mncube and Harber (2013) assert that democratic participation does not prevail in some schools because schools do not allow all the stakeholders to air their views, especially learners. Instead, the school principals take all the decisions. On this note, Mncube (2009) suggested that schools listen to learners to encourage their participation through empowerment that leads to better functioning of schools. Learners, in this case, LRCs, feel empowered if schools allow them to exercise their rights and roles that, in the end, can influence important decision-making in schools (Yukl, 2013). The study views the perceptions of teachers and parents on learner leadership, and it reviews further the study related to the leadership of the learners and their participation in the section below.

2.3.2 Related studies on learner leadership and participation in decision-making

Learner participation in decision-making presents many challenges to learners and the school community. Some of the experiences challenge the effective participation of learners in school leadership structures. Literature reveals that learners in some secondary schools are mostly faced with challenges. These challenges include knowledge of how to participate, cultural beliefs, lack of confidence in learners, limitation to freedom of expression, socio-economics and lack of space to discuss what matters to them (Duma, 2015; Nthontho, 2017; Hunt, 2014; Grant, 2015). Despite that, learners' participation can also benefit them and the entire school.

Therefore, this section reviews the enabling and constraining factors that influence learner participation in school leadership structures.

2.3.3 Challenges face learner participation in school leadership

Many countries around the globe implement school governing bodies to democratise schools. However, there might be a contradiction between western and African traditions of democracy impacting learner participation in schools (Mncube & Harber, 2013). Mncube (2008) finds that learner voice can only be effective when they attend the proposed meeting with an agenda formulated. In a similar study conducted in South Africa, Msimanga (2015) also urges learners to contribute when given a chance in meetings. Furthermore, schools that accord opportunities to learners tend to practice more democracy in their leadership structures (Msimanga, 2015).

Nthontho (2017), in his study conducted in South Africa, reveals that learners were still side lined when schools made decision-making that affected their education. The denial of the rights of learners to participate in decision-making becomes an obstacle to their democratic participation and freedom of expression per the requirements of national regulations such as SASA and international conventions. It concurs with article 29 (d) of the Convention, which stipulates that education should be geared towards preparing the child (UNCRC, 2010:28). Moreover, learners learn their rights and duties through the democratic decision-making process within their schools as well as in their communities.

Similarly, Hunt (2014), in his study conducted in South Africa, discovers that learners are limited in their potential to express ideas and decision-making. Furthermore, democracy in schools is paid lip service when allowing election for learner representative councils by creating spaces for council members. This becomes a barrier to the rights of learners in exercising their rights to freedom of expression which is part of participatory democracy in most countries, if not all.

Mncube and Harber (2013), in their study also conducted in South Africa, indicate that the findings are inconsistent with the western democracy that underpin the education policy such as SASA and SGB. On this note, the study reveals that rural schools do not encourage learner participation. Instead, schools recognise the importance of culture in education, whereas culture plays a negative role in school governing bodies. In their study, Mncube and Harber's

(2013) findings show that the chairperson of the school board encourages learners in rural school governing bodies to speak, although it takes learners more time to do so. The study findings further indicate that learner leaders in some schools are too reluctant to participate. Through observation, the study reveals that learners do not fully utilise opportunities to participate in school governance matters. Instead, learner leaders sometimes ask teachers to do it on their behalf.

According to Mokoena (2011), in his study conducted in South Africa, learners in some schools were denied opportunities to school decision structures with adult governors to fill the gap between the professional knowledge of principals and teachers' experience and the layman's knowledge of learners, which affects the power relationship. He further reveals that adult governors rooted the cultural expectations towards learners who they perceived as minors with a lack of experience for constructive contribution in the decision makings.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Mokoena (2011) in South Africa reveals that learner participation is insignificant in issues that directly affect their lives. He further argues that schools exclude the learner leaders from the disciplinary hearing of teachers and learners for security reasons. The exclusion of learners from the discussions of issues that affect them directly leads to the potential for chaos and disruption in some schools.

Mncube and Naidoo (2014) also conducted a study in one of the South African Schools to reveal that principals comprise all that the school can do, including the existence of democracy, shared decision-making structures as well as representation. To practice learner participation, schools should invoke the learners' leadership and treat them as persons whose ideas matter (Grant, 2015). According to Grant (2015), schools should therefore prepare to move from sole leadership to participatory leadership that involves all the stakeholders, as Yukl (2013) posits it.

In another study conducted in a secondary school in Kenya, Mulwa Kimsop and Kasivu (2015) reveal that principals and boards of governors are the main decision-makers in all areas of school management. The study further finds that there is limited learner participation in decision-making in the management and welfare of learners that directly affect them.

In their study, Mncube and Naidoo (2014) reveal that learners are present in the School Governing Body meeting with limited participation in crucial issues. Their study reveals that learners are only consulted and informed on minor issues without being involved in the shared decision-making process with adults. This is an indication of the minimal learner participation in shared school governance. Therefore, it is arguable that culture plays its leading role there.

Many previous studies report culture impacts learner participation in African countries, particularly in rural settings which are culturally bounded (Msimanga, 2015). A study by Mncube and Harber (2013) on learners' democratic involvement in South Africa reveals that learners in an African culture do not engage freely in discussions and dialogue with adults. The findings of their study allude that in African democracy, only adults sit under a tree, pointing to the non-attendance of representative elections, limitations in participation and the barring of learners from such deliberations.

In a similar study, Fayemi (2009), conducted in Kenya on Towards an African Theory of democracy, reveals that Western democracy and African democracy differ in democratic practices in various cultures and political societies. The study further finds that culture is one of the challenges that constrain learner participation in school governing bodies in some schools because, in African culture, learners should not communicate with adults; it shows disrespect for adults.

In a study conducted in Zambia on participatory school governance, Chiwela (2010) indicates that learners in a Zambian context are brought up to believe that they should remain silent in the presence of adults. Therefore, these findings affirm that learners become reluctant to speak during the SGB meeting because adults are unhappy with those who express their views. Consequently, that indicates that learners who question adults during meetings show disrespect according to the cultural attitude of adults.

Another study conducted in Uganda on pedagogical renewal in Sub-Sahara Africa by Altinyelken (2010) finds that children in the traditional culture of Uganda are brought up to respect adults and those in authority. The findings reveal that in traditional Ugandan culture, adults regard children's behaviour as inappropriate if they ask questions or challenge them. Consequently, cultural practices in many countries present barriers to understanding learner

participation in decision-making because adults view the roles of the learners in their society as immature and young to do so (Mncube & Harber, 2013).

Additionally, Mabovula (2009), in his study conducted on giving a voice to the voiceless, discovers that learners in rural schools have limited freedom to present their views in the presence of adults, but rather to ask teachers to do it on their behalf while in the SGB. According to Mncube (2013), this study's findings associate parents' cultural attitudes. The study indicates that only the teachers talked, and learners acted as recipients. Consequently, the study reveals that in some rural schools, learners had to remain silent and wait for the SGB's chairperson to instruct them to do so. Therefore, it is a call for parents to alter their cultural attitude towards learner leaders to allow them freedom of speech to communicate their ideas freely.

Another challenge that learner leaders in rural areas face is the socio-economic that prevent them from effectively participating in school governing bodies (Mncube & Harber, 2013). The study implies that the social and economic challenge affects mostly learners who walk long distances to and back from schools, which happens in rural schools. This affects learner leaders because most of these learners in rural schools come from low-income families, which impacts their freedom of expression. Their findings (Mncube and Harber, 2013) indicate that learner leaders feel offended when the school board members discuss learners who do not pay school development funds.

In a study conducted in Kenya on the Extent of Student Participation in the management of school finances and physical resources in secondary schools, Alexander, Onyango and Kyalo (2019) argue that learner participation in decision-related to school finances and physical facilities is still a critical aspect in some of the secondary schools in Kenya. In addition, learner leaders face the challenge of not being involved in managing school finances, except when they complain about poor food quality supplied to the learners in schools with dormitories. As a result, the school managements are too disinclined to the involvement of learners in critical decision-making zones, particularly in secondary school leadership. In their study, Alexander et al. (2019) further add that too lowly representation of learners is observed in the school board and staff meetings.

In another study conducted in Kenya on the extent of learner participation in decision-making in secondary schools, Tikoko and Kiprop (2011) found that learners lack involvement in decisions concerning school fees and disciplinary matters for students or teachers and interviewing teachers. The study further reveals that principals and teachers perceive that learners should only be involved in the issues related to learning. The study furthermore reveals that learners are excluded from the crucial decision-making areas of the school because they lack expertise in technical tasks. Tikoko and Kiprop (2011) further find that learners consider the core issues and avoid decisions on affairs they know nothing about.

Another constraint to learner participation in decision-making was the school's hierarchical tradition (Hunt, 2014). Hunt's (2014) study further finds that LRCs take the discussed problem to the school board for the final decision that excludes their voice. Hunt furthermore states that there are tensions in some of the schools in South Africa, which blame the disruption of the traditional hierarchy in schools that allow learners authority to make decisions.

In a similar study, Duma (2011) conducted a study in South Africa, revealing that some schools still feel that the South African School Act dictate that the Representative Council of Learners is the only recognised and legal representative body for learners in schools. The study further articulates that teachers and principals must be allowed to nominate some members of the Representative Council of learners. However, this is against what the law stipulates, such as the South African School Act and the Provincial Gazette (5946), that other learners elect learners from grades eight to twelve. Duma (2011), therefore, in his study, finds that some of the schools do not consult learners when making decisions that affect learners following the requirements of the government policies.

It is therefore arguable to say that, in most cases, teachers always have to tell learners what they should do, which does not concern them, but it can be something different. I concur with this notion in line with what one of my colleagues who was an LRC member shared with me: their activities were imposed on them instead of themselves to initiate what to do. For example, teachers must develop the duties and responsibilities that LRCs have. However, the policy which mandates learner-representative councils stipulates clearly, what the powers and functions of LRCs can be. Some of their (LRCs) responsibilities are to ensure that other

learners do not make noise during classes, to police teachers who come late to their lessons, to ensure that learners clean their classes well, and so on.

Despite that, Mafora (2013), in his study conducted in South Africa on learners' and teachers' perceptions of school leadership, notes that some schools in South Africa lack fairness in transforming schools because of the limitations of the leadership practices of school principals. As a result, principals fail to create an environment for justice to prevail (Mafora, 2012 & Tarter, 2004). Therefore, the next section reviews the enabling factors influencing learner participation in school governance.

2.3.4 Enabling factors that influence learner participation in the SGB

Grant (2015) studied invoking learners' voices and developing leadership: what matters to learners in South African and Namibian schools. However, her study conducted in South Africa revealed that the phenomenon of learner leadership was an area which was overlooked. Grant (2015) further suggested that schools introduce strategies such as learner leadership clubs to create a space for learner voice and leadership development. As Grant (2015) suggested, the mechanism of clubs minimises the distraction to enticement and development leadership and surfaces the importance of healthy relationships among learners and their teachers.

Similarly, Nthontho (2017) conducted a study on children as stakeholders in education; South Africa suggests an increase in learners' participation in decision-making to enable them to obtain confidence and competence as future adult leaders. In addition, the space created enables learners to align it with their intrinsic motivation and desires to succeed and achieve goals. Nyambisi and Mwelu (2018) studied participatory governance anxiety in Kenya. They find that school principals perceive learner participation as more about the rights of learners for their education. Thus, principals in some schools feel that if school leadership allows learner leaders to participate in school decision-making actively, it will lead to the loss of the authority of school principals (Nyambisi & Mwelu, 2018).

Furthermore, in his study, Nthontho (2017) notes that learners can present and participate cheerfully in actions and make decisions that make a difference to them as LRCs and to other learners. When schools provide necessary space for learners in rural schools, it enables schools to develop the necessary frameworks and communication avenues to develop learner leadership

in those rural secondary schools. Duma (2014) conducted a study in South Africa on learner participation in school governance, revealing that learner leaders should focus on achieving effective educational and social outcomes for learners. This finding further indicates that schools should create leadership programmes that prepare learner leaders to establish effective environments and include all learners.

However, Grant (2015) adds that schools should not only focus on the formal position such as Learner Representative Council in schools. In her study, Grant (2015) argues that establishing leadership clubs as an extra-mural activity offers a space for developing learner voices into what matters to them. This is done to practice leadership to effectuate learners' potential while young. Mulwa et al. (2018) also argue that participation in any decision-making is one of the enabling factors that strengthen the commitment to understanding participatory democracy in schools and improve learners' academic performances. Although schools in Kenya demonstrate the inclusion of learner participation in the decision-making process to a certain extent, Mulwa et al. (2018) argue that learner participation in decision-making increases only when schools establish more participatory structures.

Contrary to that, schools in Kenya could not practice participatory leadership because most schools employ a perfect system as the main structure used in the decision-making in their schools (Mulwa et al., 2018). Furthermore, it was discovered that teachers are responsible for selecting prefects in Kenya according to their performance and good behaviours. Consequently, their study concludes that the decision-making process is not considered participatory since the necessary structure, the representative student council (SRC), is not established. Nyambisi and Mwelu (2018), in their study in Kenya, affirm that learners are not represented in the board of management where crucial decisions are taken. It happens because most researchers discover that some schools opt for prefect systems that are against the law (Mulwa et al., 2018; Nyambisi & Mwelu, 2018).

Nwankwao (2014) conducted a study in Nigeria, showing that learner participation in decision-making on infrastructural facilities is too low. Thus, he suggests that learner participation in decision-making needs to be encouraged so that their contribution can also act as a guide when school leadership takes final decisions on matters that affect their school's well-being. Similarly, Mboyonga (2018) conducted a study in Zambia, which shows that there is no learner

representation in academic and financial committees because learners are framed as minors and thus immature to handle such portfolios. Consequently, there is little participation of learners in school finances matters. Mboyonga (2018) argues that schools should encourage the involvement of learners in decision-making to improve school leadership practices. This could enable schools to model their leadership in a democratic form and appreciate the voices of all stakeholders, including learners, instead of being tokenistic.

However, in his study, Mboyonga (2018) finds some factors constraining learner participation in school governance. These factors include bureaucracy, adult domination, tokenism, teacher opposition, lack of feedback and training and periodic meetings. In his view, the eventful academic calendar is the main cause of those factors. Furthermore, Mboyonga (2018) suggests that schools allow learners' participation in school leadership structures to go beyond tokenism. Doing that enables schools to improve participative and democratic leadership in schools.
Additionally, the findings from the study that Mboyonga (2018) conducted encourages schools to appreciate the learner voice as one of the primary focus of learners in schools that are centred on the lives of the learners. The study further reveals that training should allow learners to participate effectively in the school governing body. This study reviews what other scholars find continentally and will therefore review learner participation in the Namibian perspectives in the next section.

2.4 Namibian literature review

Learner participation in some Namibian school leadership has not been explored much (Uushona, 2012). Researchers such as Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008), who conducted a similar study, make a call for further exploration of the topic.

In her study, Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) states that:

> She challenges the researchers in ELM to pursue this topic further. The scarcity of literature on this phenomenon does not provoke anger well for the encouragement of contemporary leadership approaches. As Namibia is trying to overhaul its educational system with ETSIP and another related program, learner involvement in school governance could be one solution to our educational problem (p. 88).

On the same note, Uushona (2012) finds out that learner participation in school leadership is not encouraging. He, therefore, recommends that wherever the shortfall of learner leadership

exists, the school should embrace democratic, distributed and participative leadership practices to give learners opportunities for leadership growth. On this note, I decided to take up this challenge and explore learner participation more, though it is done from the context of rurality.

2.4.1 Learner leadership in Namibia

Historically, in Namibia, after independence, many people, including learners, were denied democracy and social justice (Da Siva, 2018. p.3). During that era, Namibia has been following the South African apartheid system that is characterised by bureaucracy, hierarchy and non-participation in school governance. When Namibia obtained her independence, the country changed its education system to a more democratic education system. Namibia then introduces the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 as a policy that guides its education system. The Namibian Education Act no. 16 of 2001 prescribes State Secondary School learners who are LRC members through the idea of democratic participation to be part of the school governance (GRN, 2001).

According to the Namibian Education Act No. 16 of 2001, Section 60 prescribes that every state school must establish a body of learners to be known as the Learners' Representative Council as prescribed in the guidelines that determine the composition and duties of such body. A Learners' Representative Council is constituted annually in terms of section 60(1) and section 27(1) of the Namibian Education Act (2001). The LRC should be constituted annually during the last school term and should be done before the final examinations commence.

According to the Namibian Education Act (2001) section 27(2) stated that the LRC must be composed of:

> An equal number of elected boys and girls, except where a school enrols only boys or girls, and which number is one member for every 40 learners of the school, rounded off to the nearest even number; a teacher designated by the principal from amongst the senior staff members of the school to be the liaison teacher between LRC and the school management, and who may attend any meeting of the LRC but has no right to vote.

Section 28 of the NEA (2001) further states that:

> The principal must appoint an election committee consisting of four members, a senior teacher as chairperson and another teacher, both nominated by the teaching staff, and two learners nominated by the learners.

However, although learners were legally accepted as school board members, several researchers Amadhila, 2018; Da Silva, 2018; Kayumbu, 2017; Mbishi, 2012 show that learners are not fully involved in decision-making, especially in crucial issues as was recommended.
According to Kayumbu (2017), in her study also conducted in Namibia, learner school board members are not involved in the decision-making that concerns staff members and other learners. In my view, it is arguable that perhaps school authority excludes learners from crucial decision-making because adults do not trust learners due to their maturity. Other school board members may perceive learners as minor and lacking confidentiality. This shows that learners are not acknowledged as equal participants in decision-making due to unequal power relations between teachers and LRC members. On this note, the author (Kayumbu, 2017) recommends the Namibian Education Act 16 of 2001 to reinforce learners' participation and raise awareness of the real value and importance of learners as leaders in the school.

Additionally, Haipa (2018) conducted a study in Namibia and discovered that learner leadership was understood in formal positions such as LRC. In a study also conducted in Namibia, Da Silva (2018) affirms that learner leadership was associated with formal leadership positions, particularly for those learners who serve as LRC in their schools. This boosted LRC to regard themselves as leaders due to their formal position of guiding and leading other learners in the school.

Furthermore, Uushona (2012), in his study conducted on learner leadership in a Namibian secondary school, reveals that learner leaders are assigned only to responsibilities such as overseeing the adherence of other learners to the policies that regulate the learner community in hostels, dining hall, classrooms as well as in the entire school ground.
In his study, Uushona (2012) further argues that LRCs in school control other learners to ensure positive behaviours and initiate ways of improving school performance academically. However, the learner leadership role is relatively more evocative of traditional learner leaders and is not involved in crucial decision-making issues (Uushona, 2012). A similar study was conducted by Amadhila (2018) on a formative intervention for developing learner-

representative council voice and leadership in Namibia's newly established secondary school. According to Amadhila (2018), learner leadership is a structure of the LRCs in the school. This council is regarded as giving authority to a group of learners representing other learners in the school. In her study, she further indicates that the findings show that learner leadership is a policing role of LRC to help teachers maintain order and discipline in the school.

Thus, Kalimbo (2018) conducted a study on class monitors in a Namibian secondary school and found that learner leadership is more about the involvement of learners in the management affairs of the school. Based on that, it indicates that learners' positions give them the power to control others. His study further suggests that learners are denied the opportunity to participate because of traditional leadership practices and cultural beliefs. Consequently, learners are regarded as mere children and confined to formal leadership structures and policies. Pursuing this further, in the context of Namibia, learners do not take part in crucial decision-making, including the interview for the appointment of teachers and during the disciplinary hearing of both teachers and learners. In corroboration with the above sentiment, researchers such as (Amadhila, 2018; Da Silva, 2018; Uushona, 2012) confirm that LRCs in Namibia are not fully accorded full participation in key decision-–making.
Similarly, in her study, Amadhila (2018) indicates that learners, to some extent, believe in having equal contributions with other members. Moreover, their views are mostly not considered in real decision–making. Consequently, the learner's voice is silent because of a lack of fair chances for the learners to express their views.

However, in his study, Da Silva (2018) posits that the responsibilities cited in most of his findings are more management tasks and not leadership practices. In support of what Da Silva mentioned, this still prevails in most of our Namibian secondary schools. Consequently, this shows that there is still room to improve the current situation in some of the Namibian rural secondary schools.

2.4.2 Democratic participation and leadership

When Namibia gained its independence in 1990, the country made many efforts to transform society. One of those aspects is education for Namibian society as stipulated in the document *Towards Education for all*. As I indicated earlier in Chapter One of this study, the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture established this document in 1993. This is a plan that the Ministry

put forward to guide the schools and officials through the four major goals such as democracy, quality, access and equity.

The Namibian government indicates that education should be free for all citizens irrespective of age, colour, race or religion (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 1990). Then, it is through the process of the election that Namibia demonstrates equal participation of all stakeholders to guarantee it becomes a democratic country. Since democracy is one of the four major goals of education in the country, education further allows participatory democracy in the leadership of schools. Participatory democracy in school allows all stakeholders to participate, including learner leaders, particularly those in rural secondary schools.

This study echoes the words of the first president and founding father of the Namibian nation and the Republic of Namibia in one of the conferences held at Etosha in 1991, as cited in Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) that:

> It is [my] belief that no true reform in education, or in any other area for that matter, can take place without the full participation of everyone at the grassroots level within the educational communities throughout Namibia (p. 24).

Moreover, the policies such as the Namibia Education Act and document such as *Towards Education For All* that the country placed as guidelines for education reform do not stipulate clearly how learner leadership should be practised in schools. That could be why principals and learner leaders often hold each other at arm's length, unsure of the roles that each other should play (Duma, 2015: Mncube & Harber, 2015) posit it.

However, the Namibia Education Act no. 16 of 2001 emphasises that all secondary schools, including combined schools from the eighth to twelfth grade in Namibia, should establish the Learner Representative Council. This should be done in agreement with the guideline set, and it should be done before the last school semester in which learners write their final examinations. The Namibia Education Act make this provision to allow humble time for the learners to practice their leadership if schools provide the opportunity for them to participate.

Despite that, no other section references learners involved in a participatory leadership capacity or any explanation bearing the roles and functions of these learners to confirm participatory

democracy. However, the notion of democratic participation in Namibian schools has been emphasised through education policy and contemporary leadership thinking. Furthermore, the Namibian Education Act envisions a leadership that accommodates all the stakeholders in the school leadership structure, including learners. However, from an informal observation, this is not practised in some of the secondary schools in the Ohangwena Region.

Previous researchers such as Kayumbu (2017), Da Silva (2018), Amadhila (2018), Uushona (2012), and Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) who conducted various studies in Namibia recognise the exclusion of learner leadership in secondary schools. The previous researchers then encourage schools to implement broad participation and contemporary leadership.

Way of thinking. The contemporary issues imply the challenging, controversial process of democratic participation of learners in decision-making and the imbalances of power among the stakeholders. However, the cultural attitude of parents and teachers who perceive learners as immature, young and incompetent impact learner participation. Based on the information about the perception of teachers and parents with more power than learners led to the issue of power concerning leadership to be discussed in the next section.

2.4.3 Issues of power and leadership

The issue of power is a vivid concept that requires discussions about its nature and how it is connected to school leadership in schools (Jwan & Kisaka, 2017). In corroboration with UNCRC, the governments of various countries must adhere to the enactment of the UN charter on the child's rights. This requires those countries to adopt democratic principles that should be carried out in the child's best interest (UNCRC, 2022). Despite this, too often in schools, the literature reveals that adults in leadership positions do not allow learners to participate in the school leadership structures (Mboyonga, 2018). Therefore, this section reviews what power is, who has power and who enacted power.

This study defines power as the legal authority given to the board members such as parents, teachers and learners (LRC) as school board members. The school board is empowered through the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 to administer the affairs and promote the development of the school and the learners of the school. According to Joubert and Bray (2007), power is defined as the skills and abilities of the board members that originate from an

assortment of sources, for example, legal and cultural norms, beliefs, values and socio-economic rules to execute their powers and functions, and to get other stakeholders to carry out what they are requested to do.

According to the Namibian Education Act no. 16 of 2001, the powers and functions of the school board are to develop the mission, goals and objectives of the school; to advise the school management on the extra-mural curriculum of the school and also to recommend the permanent secretary the appointment of teachers and other staff members at the school. However, amongst all the power and functions stated above, the Namibian Education Act no. 16 of 2001 does not stipulate clearly who should carry out those functions. The Act remains silent and allows the principals and learners to hold each other at arms' length, as Mncube and Harber (2012) posit.

This is the claim I am making that learners are mostly excluded from participating in most of the school governance in some of the schools due to the perceptions of teachers and parents. This echoes the similar problems which Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) expressed in her study on how teachers and parents perceive the roles of LRC. Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) posits that:

> It would be unfortunate for any organization to experience mistrust among its members, especially in a school situation with different levels of operation. The element of mistrust seems to have characterised secondary schools for years, in some cases for envious reasons, but how does it come about that after many 'democratic' policies have been in existence, there is mistrust (p.74)?

According to the study, learners feel they are not recognised as equal partners as opposed to the teachers and parents. Consequently, this came about because adults do not consider themselves people whose ideas matter. Their contributions are not taken seriously as their ideas are not implemented, unlike other stakeholders such as parents and teachers. Mncube's (2009) findings of the study conducted on perceptions of the principal's role in democratic school governance in South Africa confirm that in some schools, the principals place themselves at the forefront of decision makings regardless of the cultural context in which they operate.

Similarly, a study by Mncube and Harber (2013) revealed that some school governing bodies situated the principal in the most powerful positions instead of promoting democracy in schools. Furthermore, Da Silva (2018) argues for an inclusive democratic participative that

promotes learner participation in school leadership structures. However, most parents and teachers in rural schools often tell learners that they should be recipients of the information and decision taken. Additionally, the issues of powers emerge in the study that Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008) conducted in Namibia, indicating that parents view learners as just kids. Therefore, they should not attend meetings that adults feel seem inappropriate. In another study conducted in Namibia, Da Silva alluded that learner leadership were understood from the management perspective and equated with the formal authority of LRCs in the school.

Numerous works of kinds of literature on learner participation internationally, continentally and nationally have commented on the inclusion of learners in decision-making in schools ((UNCRC, 2022; Leung et al., 2014; Simons et al., 2015; Mncube & Harber, 2013; Strydom, 2016; Kayumbu, 2017). According to Mncube and Harber (2013), participation in schools to demonstrate democracy, learners should play a major role in policy making and implementation, decision-making and other forms of distributed leadership because they are the majority of the constituency in comparison with the other members of the school board. Schools, in my opinion, should value them as equal partners and provide opportunities for them to participate in school leadership and decision-making structures. Many of the reviewed studies indicate the benefits of including learners that advantage the institution and learners in their capacity (Msimanga, 2015).

At the same time, the reviewed studies find significant differences regarding learner participation around the globe. Among the differences included the cultural aspects, in which teachers and parents valued that learners should not discuss crucial issues with adults and should not ask questions in the presence of adults (Chiwela, 2010; Mncube & Naidoo, 2014). The literature above refers to the African democracy that says that learners should not look adults in the eyes, contrary to American democracy, which refers to eye contact (Fayemi, 2009).

In all studies that I reviewed both internationally, continentally and nationally, I did not come across any study researched on what learner leaders conceptualise to be their role and what these learner leaders experience and practice while carrying out their leadership roles entrusted to them as learner leaders in Namibia, neither in Ohangwena region where the study takes place. The shortage in literature in the Namibian context forced me to borrow literature from

international and continental studies. This is the gap I intend to fill and contribute to the knowledge in the leadership, management, and policy studies literature.

2.5 Conclusion

In summary of the literature reviewed, the study reviews what other researchers sought to be challenges and enablers that influence learner leadership in schools, the perception of teachers and parents about learner leaders, and the issue of power relations in schools. According to the findings of the studies reviewed, learner participation is still a concern in secondary schools, particularly in the context of rurality. The following chapter presents and discusses the theories that underpin this study.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter reviewed the literature on learner leadership internationally, continentally and nationally. This chapter provides the theoretical frameworks that guide this study. A theoretical framework underlies the study's structure (Bell, 2010). In their study, Sefotho and Du Plessis (2018) refer to theoretical frameworks as the theory the researcher chooses to apply to guide her in the study. Researchers use a theoretical framework to explain a particular phenomenon or event. Bezuidenhout (2014) posits that researchers use a theoretical framework to shape the scope of their studies, providing the guiding principles and specific perspectives through which researchers investigate a particular topic. Furthermore, Bezuidenhout (2014) states that the theoretical framework provides the concepts the researcher needs to focus on, the aspects to include in the investigation of the study, how to collect, analyse and interpret the data of the study as well as the identification of the new issues and concepts to include in the study.

For this study, it is important to provide a theoretical framework that serves the purpose of learner participation by providing the lenses to view and analyse the actual conceptualisation, practices and experiences of learner leaders' roles in school leadership and management. This study utilises three theories which are the Participative Leadership Theory (Yukl, 1998), the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engstrom, 1999) and the Critical Theory (Anderson, 2000), as appropriate frameworks for this study. I chose the three theories to supplement each other to clarify the issue under discussion in this study.

The Participatory Leadership Theory seeks what learner leaders conceptualise as their roles while practising and experiencing it in school leadership and management. The Critical Theory helps to understand how the parents, principals, and teachers perceive learner leadership and participation in the Ohangwena Region researched schools. CHAT seeks the enabling and constraining factors influencing learner participation in school leadership structures. The study

assumes that adults (teachers and parents) perceive learners as too young, immature, incompetent, and vulnerable to create reliable decisions.

Despite that, many leadership theories exist in the literature, such as contingency, trait, and great man theories. Therefore, through exploring various theories, I have adopted three theories, as I indicated above, that underpin this study and then dig deeper into each of these theories in the next paragraph.

3.2 Participatory Leadership Theory (PLT)

The origin of participative leadership theory was experienced in 1973 when Professor Victor Vroom and Phillip Yetton issued the Normative Model of leadership behaviour, which explored the effect of involving stakeholders in decision-making (Mate, 2017). Consequently, their findings suggest the formation of participative leadership theory, proposed by Yukl (1998), a democratic leadership style.

The Participatory Leadership Theory (PLT) emphasises leaders' efforts to accommodate all stakeholders in decision-making (Yukl, 2013). It aims to the nature of involvement and participation in decision-making of all organisational stakeholders to have the opportunity to experience leadership that determines their role and accomplish meaningful work. According to Nyabisi and Mwelu (2018), Participatory Leadership Theory can be explained as a proactive approach to management based on empowerment, consultation and commitment. As the name implies, participatory leadership theory can also be defined as a unity of participation in an organisation's decision-making (Banjarnahor, 2017). This theory advocates that school leadership should involve all stakeholders, including learner leaders, and provide opportunities to participate in decision-making. The participatory Leadership Theory bases its assumptions that when those who implement the decisions are involved in the decision-making process, they improve their understanding and accept issues under discussion (Nyabisi & Mwelu, 2018).

The Participatory Leadership Theory requires an organisation leader to understand the subordinate's genuine involvement. In the context of the school, learner leadership is still wishful thinking. The school authority does not consider learner participation in decision-making a serious concern. As a result, the school principal, who works as the sole leader, may not consider the involvement of learner leaders when schools make decisions. In the critique

of the above statement, schools should invite stakeholders, especially learner leaders, to share their ideas with other stakeholders in the decision-making (Northouse, 2018).

Although the theory was propounded in America, learner leadership is a global concern which affects participation and democratisation in decision-making in secondary schools, including Namibia (Duma, 2014; Mulwa et al., 2015; Amadhila, 2018). Before Namibia obtained its independence, schools had a form of prefects' system representation nominated by the school authority. However, post-independence Namibia advocated a democratisation policy regulated by the Education Act No. 16 (2001). Although Namibia Education Act No.16 of 2001 stipulates the role of LRC in schools, learner participation is still a concern in some secondary schools, specifically in Ohangwena Region, where the study was conducted. Learner leaders are not sure of their roles in school governance. For instance, adults perceive learners as minors who should not have any discussions with adults on important issues that affect them and their peers.

The Namibian Education Act (NEA) no. 16 of 2001 aims to establish new governance structures that involve all stakeholders' participation in schools' decision-making process. The NEA ensures that schools hold the democratic elections of all stakeholders in the school board structure. The NEA further encourages parents to constitute the majority of the board while only two Learner Representative Councils represent learners who constitute the majority of the school. It implies that schools should include learner participation in all the decisions made and not only representations. Although parents and teachers form the majority of the school board, they must ensure that learners are included in their meetings and have the right to participate in the decision. The attendance of the Learner Representative Council in the school board meeting becomes meaningless without their involvement in the decision taken.

The Namibia Education Act no. 16 of 2001 is associated with participatory democracy as it includes moral principles, such as freedom of expression and equality of opportunities in schools. I suggest that schools create spaces such as the school board for learners to participate as meaningful citizens in their context (Linington et al., 2011). The school board members are responsible for electing the executive members for the portfolio of the chairperson, secretary and treasurer of the board. It is, therefore, arguable to say that learners as members of the SB take part in the exercise of electing school board members into those portfolios. Equally, their

responsibilities are to represent the interest of those who elected them to the structure and the parents.

Through consultation with teachers, learners and parents, the school leadership obtains ideas and opinions from learner leaders and integrates those ideas into the school's decision-making process. According to Zylfijaj et al. (2014), school leadership should listen to learner leaders and consider their valuable participation to make effective decisions. Also, school leaders obtain learners' opinions, which creates a friendly environment. It is, therefore, an encouragement for schools to provide structures which allow learner leaders to participate in the decision-making process. One would argue that schools involve learners at the beginning of the decision-making to advocate effective school leadership.

The central point of Participatory Leadership Theory is to involve all the stakeholders and the application of democracy in schools. Democracy is one of the core values of PLT that promote the stakeholders' ability to deliver input into the managerial decisions of schools. To ensure participatory democracy in schools, principals should move away from the hierarchical and authoritarian forms of school governance to a system that promotes collaboration, participation and democratic education, as posited by Nyambisi & Mwelu (2018).

Participatory democracy in schools encourages all stakeholders to dedicate themselves to tasks and to bring forth creative ideas (Zylfijaj et al., 2014). Contrary, one may find it imperious to know whether the school operates within participative or democratic practices to understand learner participation in the leadership of the school. Participation within these two practices varies in terms of learner leadership. According to Coleman (2005), participative leadership overlap with democratic leadership. However, this study implies using Participative Leadership Theory to conceptualise learner participation in school decision-making. Therefore, I argue that the School Boards (SB) in some of the secondary schools are dominated mostly by principals, teachers and parents and exclude Learner Representative Councils who form the majority of the school.

While generally providing a critique of leadership inclusive of learner leaders because they are regarded as immature and young, many participative theorists urge schools to allow learners to participate in decision-making in school leadership structures. Schools should provide avenues

for learners to express their views freely in matters that concern them. The space created allows learners to have a say and collaborate with their teachers at school and parents at home to encourage learners to speak out about what matters to them (Grant, 2015). In countries such as Kenya, some schools experienced unrest attributing learners to their actions due to a lack of consultations for decision–making (Nyambisi & Mwelu, 2018). Consequently, the increasing insistence on learner participation in decision-making results in strikes and riots. Schools are then urged to avoid the learner consultation method to claim that the learner was part of the decision-making process. According to Duma (2015), schools do not regard learners as valued members of the governing bodies by excluding them from the decision-making process and making them not part of the process. Thus, this study needs to study the structural perspectives of learner leaders, particularly those in a rural secondary school context. The structure allowed spaces for learners to participate specifically in matters which affect them directly to promote good governance in schools.

I posit that Learner Representative Council in rural schools are excluded from the crucial decision-making process because of the perception that they grew up in a context where schools are poorly resourced. Schools in which they are learning are dysfunctional. Furthermore, since schools consider them as minors, immature and young, it limits learners in the handling of democracy. For example, some schools exclude learners from attending crucial decisions such as hearing for teachers. From the unconfirmed assumption, adults may bribe learners easily when someone offers them something to reveal what was discussed in the meeting.

However, Lamb (2013) suggests that participative leaders should involve all stakeholders in decision-making to improve commitment and collaboration, resulting in productive and effective leadership. School leadership should create a structure for learners to participate effectively in decision-making. Learners' participation increases their motivation to discourage unwanted behaviour amongst other learners. Schools should create a structure that includes sports committees, school boards, and management.

When the school includes them in various committees, they may contribute meaningful ideas to the school's existence. As a result, such a school experiences academic progress as well. On this note, Nyabisi and Mwelu (2018) contend that school principals who allow learner

participation in decision-making yield a stronger chance of success at effective school governance.

In support of the above sentiment, Oosthuizen and du Toit (1999) contend that:

> The shift to participative leadership in the workplace is both inevitable and necessary. It is inevitable because the capacity for participation is becoming more widespread. It is necessary because the issues we face in the workplace are too complex and interdependent to be solved by a few people in authority (p. 213).

The quotation above is relevant to the school context in which the principal is a single headedly leader. Thus, there is a need for all stakeholders, including learner leaders, to participate in the decision-making process in the school. Even though the above sentiment refers to the staff members in the school context, it is also relevant for this study, where learner leaders are the focus of the study. When learners are not consulted, it may result in riots and strikes because learners feel unvalued. Learners need to have a forum for presenting their views and sharing them with the school management.

The Participative Leadership Theory aims to empower stakeholders who were denied access to them. The participation of all stakeholders, including learners, who are the primary focus of this study, increases school effectiveness and democratic principles. Yukl (2013) posits that a democratic society upholds the right of people to influence decisions that will affect them in various ways. For example, when the principal is no longer the only person to decide what should be decided upon. As Nyabisi and Mwelu (2018) argue, learners have both the need and right to be involved in school governance as part of the learning process. In their view (Nyabisi and Mwelu 2018), schools should create a structure such as LRC where they (learner leaders) should be consulted and allowed to practice and experience leadership.

Some countries such as El Salvador, Nicaragua, Tanzania and Uganda decentralise the decision-making authority to school councils (Mulwa et al., 2015, Indryanto, 2005, Samad, 2000). Indryanto (2005), as cited in Mulwa et al. (2015), alluded to the intention of transferring the decision-making authority to increase the voices of the stakeholders. The voices of stakeholders, such as learner leaders, enhance learner participation in school leadership structures.

3.2.1 Critique of Participatory Leadership Theory (PLT)

Participatory Leadership Theory has many flaws that may affect the proper participation in the decision-making process in school depending on who has the power to do so, as Coutts (2010) argued. According to Kara and Loughlin (2013), the potential of Participatory Leadership Theory for the stakeholders to influence each other depends on the perceptions, preferences and beliefs of leaders. This can be compared with what teachers and parents perceive learners as too young, immature, lacking knowledge and capacity to make decisions on their own as minors. The perceptions of adults such as teachers and parents denied opportunities to learners which prevent them from their democratic rights to participate in school decision-making structures (Mokena, 2011; Uushona, 2012). Thus, learners are hardly allowed to participate in various school leadership structures, for example, the school board and school management, to mention a few,

Another constraint of PLT is that it does not work well if those consulted lack the necessary skills and knowledge to make key decisions. For example, learners in some schools, particularly in rural Ohangwena researched secondary schools, do not participate in the recruitment process of teachers, the disciplinary matters of both teachers and learners, as well as in financial matters (Kayumbu, 2017). Technical decision matters such as the recruitment of teachers, a disciplinary hearing of teachers and learners, and financial matters were regarded as crucial and technical decision areas (Mate, 2013).

Existing literature around the globe revealed that learners were often not consulted (Whitehead, 2009) nor involved in the decision-making process (Uushona, 2012). In their study, some researchers, such as Tikoko and Kiprop (2011), revealed that adults perceive learners as people who lack knowledge and skills when making such technical decisions.

I discussed learner leadership in schools in terms of learner participation in decision-making and leadership in the researched Ohangwena Region schools using the participatory leadership theory. However, the participatory theory does not give me an in-depth understanding to explain the ongoing perception aspects of leadership and management structures as well as the interactions between these aspects. Therefore, I adopted the Critical Theory, as I explained below.

3.3 Critical Theory (CT)

Critical Theory signifies the school of thought that destabilizes the dominant mode of understanding to surface the underlying assumptions and explicitly render power relations (Tatli, 2012). It is a theory that emerged in the twentieth century when the Frankfurt School was associated with the Institute of Social Research at Frankfurt University (Scherer, 2009). Then, three generations of Critical theorists emerged from the Institution. In the 1930s, the first generation was prominent by scholars such as Marx Horkheimer, Theodor Adorn, and Herbert Marcuse to promote Critical Theory and Marxist philosophy (Garlitz & Ko¨gler, 2015). In 1971, the second generation, represented by Jürgen Habermas, emerged following the death of Adorno in 1969 and Pollock in 1970, respectively (Corradetti, 2013).

Then in 1984, Habermas hired Axel Honneth as an assistant professor and began their collaboration at Frankfurt school. A year after the retirement of Habermas, Honneth proponents the third generation of Critical Theory in 1996 to identify experiences in social reality within societies (Fleming, 2016). The generation was established to create an intellectual space for critical theory to pursue freedom and justice (Garlitz & Ko¨gler, 2015). However, this study intends not to provide the history of how critical theory was formed but to justify why I opted to use the third generation of critical theory.

In line with what the critical theorists argue, this study relates learner leadership to how it is perceived in the minds of adults such as teachers, parents and school principals in the rural and multiple deprivations context. The social and economic environment of many of the settings of the schools is mostly subjugated by the culture of the society in which schools find themselves, which has not been socialised to account for the position of learner leaders. Consequently, various school stakeholders automatically discount the learner leaders' fixed point and the advantage their unique perspectives can bring to the school (Horsford, 2012). On this note, I use the lens of Critical Theory third generation to unmask the deeper perceptions and surface the underlying assumptions to promote learner leadership and democratic activities within our school leadership and management structures.

Based on this, I opted for the fourth generation of Critical Theory (CT) for two reasons. The first one is a theoretical framework concerned with empowering human beings to break

perceptions from teachers and parents. It also helps to break constraints placed on learner leaders by culture, environment, social, economic and various committees within the school leadership structures (Abromeit, 2014). Similarly, I argue for schools to transform the leadership knowledge about the objective of the schools to bring about changes like learner leadership in a practical sense of rural secondary schools, as Abromeit (2013) posits. Secondly, the critical theory seeks not only to "study and understand the society, but it also helps to critique and change the society" (Patton, 1999, p.131).

In hindsight, Critical Theory attempts to destabilize the dominant mode of understanding by surfacing assumptions. It allows emancipating learner leaders from being silenced and excluded in the decision-making process (Harmey, 2014). I, therefore, conjecture that Critical Theory holds the social reality and the totality of learner leaders and the social processes that constitute them (Thompson, 2017).

There are two concepts central to Critical Theory Third generation. The two concepts are recognition and identity. Recognition is a concept used in conflict, such as human emancipation in society (Corradetti, 2013). Honneth uses this term to describe how the dominant party maintains control over subordinate groups in social institutions (Flemming, 2016). I define recognition as a resolution to a critical perception of injustice and disrespect of those who were denied what they deserved under certain social, cultural and economic conditions (Garlitz & Ko¨gler, 2015).

Regarding learner leadership, recognition characterises when learner leaders fight for emancipation to represent the subjective experience of the power imbalances within the school leadership and management structures. As such, recognition helps the learner leaders realise their self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem to claim their identity as part of the school leadership where they could practice and experience their leadership roles (Thompson, 2017).

The third generation of critical theory is important in this study as it provides me with the lens to view schools as a social institution where power struggles between the dominant group and the subordinate group. Although this study might not change adults' perception regarding learner leadership in schools, I believe that the learner leaders who took part in this study are transformed and empowered to view their context positively.

As critical theorists placed it, I also argue that recognition or power is reinforced in schools employing representation, socio-economic stratification and government regulation of circular policies, and cultural standards (Talti, 2012) as some of the schools' roles and regulations are imposed on them without their consent. I decided to use critical theorists' ideas because even if learner leaders are perceived as immature, too young and lacking knowledge, all hope is not lost in oppression. Still, they see emancipation and liberation as possible because of the existence of the human agency, which is when individuals act to resist sources of oppression (Struble, 2013). They claim their identity as leaders in their own right when they establish self-confidence with leadership practices within their schools, self-esteem and self-respect which are the key forms of recognition. Borrowing from Antonio Gramcis on his valuable contributions, which state that "an individual is an active rather than a passive agent even in the face of extremely oppressive conditions" (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999. P.29). Based on these reasons, I believe the learner leaders in this study might emerge victorious with their future leadership practices.

I unpacked learner leadership in schools regarding learner participation in decision-making, leadership and management in the researched Ohangwena Region schools using the participatory leadership theory. I also use critical theory to explore the in-depth understanding that explains the ongoing aspects of leadership structures and interactions between these aspects. However, it does not give me the language to explain the cultural and historical constraints and enables learner participation in the decision-making structures of the school. Therefore, I adopted the Cultural Historical Activity Theory, as explained below.

3.4 Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

The study proposes using the Cultural Historical Activity Theory initiated by Lev Vygotsky (1978) as the First Generation of CHAT in the 1920s. Vygotsky suggests for tools to mediate all activities. Then Vygotsky's colleague Leont' eve theory developed further in the early 1930s and was analysed as a collective process that includes the interconnection between an individual's action and that of a community (Engeström, 2008; Chilvers, 2011). Historically, Engeström (2000) accentuates CHAT as a theoretical framework that evolves the collective activity system as the prime unit of analysis concerning other activity systems. Activity in

CHAT refers to what people do collectively that is modified and influenced by the culture, history and context in which the researched schools are situated.

CHAT is therefore defined as the multidisciplinary approach that uses tools to tackle the theoretical and methodological questions that social science researchers come across (Engeström, 1999). Hence, CHAT is used in many fields (Lompcsher, 2006). According to Grant (2017), CHAT is defined as the holistic theory of Practice. CHAT examines the contradictions and tensions within the human activity system and has a possible solution to those contradictions and tensions perturbing human activity (Engeström, 1987, p.61). The implications of contradictions and tensions for this study are discussed in section 3.2.3.

It follows then that CHAT aims to picture the original genetic form of human activity and analyse it in its dynamics and transformations, evolution and historical change. In his view, Engeström (2008), the Activity Theory consists of three generations of research: first generation, second generation and third generation. However, this study's aim was not to describe the three generations but to explain how the study utilises CHAT to analyse the data generated during the study. It is, therefore, useful to indicate that the second generation frames this study. I also find it necessary to discuss the history of CHAT, starting with the first generation, to understand how the second generation underpins this study.

3.4.1 The first generation of CHAT

In the early 1920s, the Russian psychologist Lev Semonovich Vygotsky brought the Marxism theory into psychology and termed it the first generation of CHAT (Engeström, 2001; Sannino, 2011). Consequently, Russian psychology experiences some challenges due to disagreement on the appropriate methodologies when studying psychology as a science. The government then entrusted Vygotsky to reformulate psychology. As a result, Lev Vygotsky, Alexander Luria and Aleksei Leont' eve introduced CHAT to meet the challenges of the 21st century (Tobach, 1999; Yammagata-Lynch, 2010; Sannino & Engeström, 2018).

The first generation was created based on mediated action (Lektorsky, 1999; Stetsenko, 1999). According to Engeström (2008), Vygotsky brought together the cultural artefacts and human action triangularly to be articulated as the triad of the subject, object and artefact. Vygotsky proposed that the culturally available tools mediate the relations between the subject and object

(Mbelani, 2014). Vygotsky never proposed activity as the basic unit of activity, but his focus was mainly on an individual's mind (Sannino & Engeström, 2018).

However, as historically described, CHAT was developed in 1920 through a Marxism Theory. To unpack the Marxist theory, Marx considered the idea that humans master nature through their activity and thereby become creators of the world rather than simply passive subjects shaped by the environment (Chilvers, 2011). That is, human effort is goal oriented or object-oriented. The human is the subject in the transaction, while the goal is the object.
Below is the figure that illustrates the first generation of CHAT as Vygotsky's concept of mediated actions.

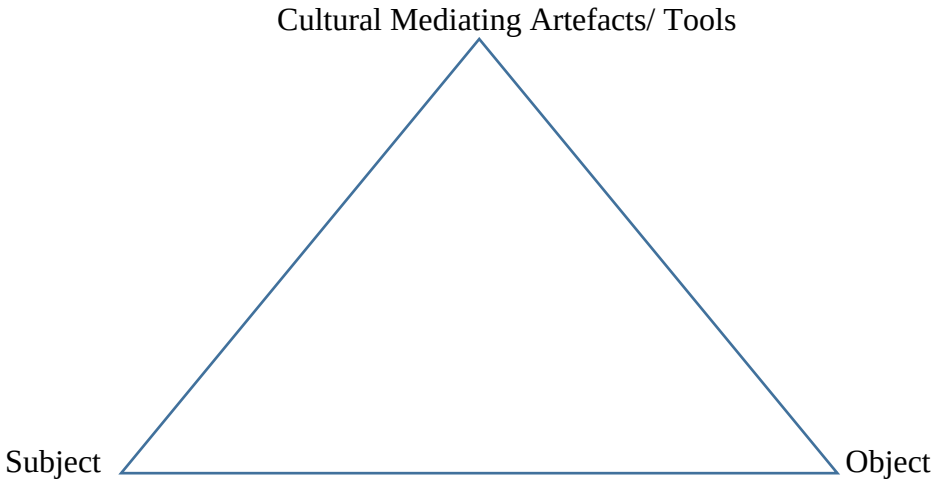

Figure 3. 1. The first generation activity system (Adapted from Engeström, 2001)

Humans use cultural tools or artefacts to work towards a goal. Therefore, the subject, the object and the tools are intricately linked in a transaction of mediated practice. Vygotsky termed this development the first generation of CHAT (Engeström, 2001).

Figure 3.1, shown above, indicates that the first generation was limited to an individual's mind, and its primary unit of analysis was mediated action. Vygotsky uses the concept of mediation action to describe human consciousness development. The human consciousness interacts with the historically developing cultural tools in an environment and results in the findings of an individual new meaning in their worlds (Stetsenko, 1999; Engeström, 2001). The culture in the mediation action explains the historical origination of the activity system, such as the learner representative council. Historically, Learner Representative Council is the legitimate body that

each secondary school should establish as the Namibia Education Act no. 16 of 2001 prescribed. Each of the secondary schools has a way of implementing such guidelines. This shows how the schools have carried out the activity through the artefacts, for example, meetings, internal memos and the application of school rules.

Due to limitations in the first generations, the unit of analysis remains focused on individuality and lacks subjectivity (Sannino, 2011; Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). It has a limitation for this study because the first generation focuses on the subject, artefacts and object and does not consider other significant elements such as division of labour, community and rules. Therefore, on this note that Engeström developed the described framework for culturally mediated action that evolves the collective action into the second-generation CHAT, which is discussed in the next section.

3.4.2 The second generation of CHAT

The second generation of CHAT shifts the focus from an individual to human development to focus on the relationship among different activity system components. It was brought about since the first generation of CHAT based on the object-oriented action mediated by cultural tools and signs (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). The triangular action model does not theoretically integrate the mediation of other human beings and social relations (*ibid*. p. 4).

In the early 1930s. Aleksei Leont'ev introduced CHAT in the work of psychologists in Russia to develop it further from individual to collective activity systems. Hence the work of Leont'ev largely stimulates the second generation to overcome the disintegrations of the social relations with human beings in the first generation. Leont'ev (1978) contends that the role of society in an activity system cannot isolate human activity from social relations. The concept of activity in which the division of labour separates various goal-oriented actions combined and collectively serve an object.

Moreover, Engeström notes the importance of adding three more social elements: the rules, community and the division of labour to emphasise the importance of analysing the interaction amongst components. Consequently, Engeström adds three more components, such as the rules, community and division of labour, to expand the idea of the first triangle of Vygotsky to form the second generation of CHAT.

Components of the second generation of the activity system explained above are graphically illustrated in the diagram below:

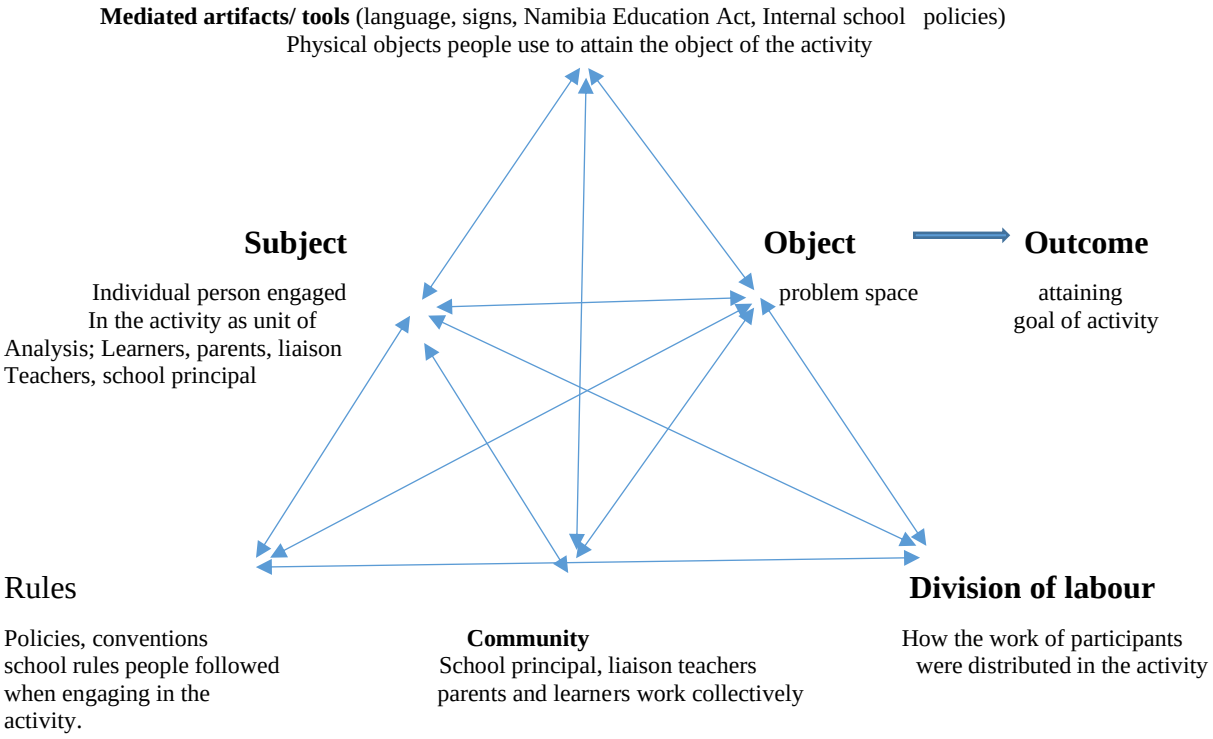

Figure 3.2 the second generation of the CHAT activity system (Engeström, 1987)

The second generation comprises the mediated artefacts/tools that refer to the minutes of various meetings held in the selected researched schools. For example, minutes of the school board, minutes of the school management, and minutes of the LRCs' meeting. In those minutes, the secretary for the school board, the management, and the LRCs must indicate how members participated during those meetings and what each said. The artefacts/tools also refer to the letter inviting LRCs to the meetings and the agenda for the meetings. These tools enable the LRCs to participate in various leadership structures of the schools. The Learner Representative Councils should not only participate, but schools should ensure that these learner leaders are involved in decision-making.

Furthermore, tools/artefacts shape the learner leaders' interactions with reality and reflect on the experiences of others who tried to resolve similar problems earlier. Tools such as their leadership profile and job descriptions help the Learner Representative Councils to integrate

with the community in a problem space. Such integrations contend that leadership development is the outcome that is the objective's desired goal. Also, the artefacts/tools inform a person how schools should practice learner leadership, specifically in rurality. Resources and tools used in the activity vitalise the essentiality by regulating and giving direction to the learner leaders to conceptualise their leadership in schools (Vennebo & Ottesen, 2012).

On this note, tools/artefacts help generate knowledge and an understanding to enhance leadership practices and experiences in learner leaders and the entire school. Schools create tools such as internal school policies to transform the leadership development of learner leaders in the school and carry with them a particular culture – the historical remnants from the previous action (Spillane et al., 2004, p.9).

Whereas the subject represents the Learner Representative Council (LRCs), the focus of this study and a unit of analysis. The Namibia Education Act no. 16 of 2001 stipulates that each secondary school from the eighth to the twelfth grade must establish the LRCs as a body that advocates the participation of learner leaders in the leadership structures of the school. However, the policy documents, particularly in the Namibian context, for example, the Education Act, no. 16 of 2001, did not stipulate clearly how the subject LRCs should operate as members of various committees. Consequently, the silence of the Education Act leaves the subject in a dilemma. As such, these dilemmas force the school to develop its own rules, such as the school's internal policies to govern LRCs, depending on its unique environment.

Object refers to the space where the problem in the activity system is redirected. The space provided allows members of the system to integrate. The LRCs, liaison teachers, parents and the school principal integrate this space for learner leadership development using the mediation artefacts/tools. The integration in this system space then takes the initiative to implement the focal role of leadership development within the activity system. Due to this reason, the problem space in which the learner leaders integrate with other members of the community invites an interpretation for personal making sense and societal transformation for learner leadership development.

Whereas the rules refer to policies that guide LRCs, such as Education Act no. 16 of 2001 and its regulations, internal school policies, school rules, cultural norms, and CRC conventions that

enable or constrain actions within the activity systems. These rules govern the conduct of people who engage in the activity system. However, the policy documents in the context of Namibia (Education Act no. 16 of 2001) do not stipulate how the LRCs should be involved in the various leadership structures. Furthermore, the rules enable or constrain the LRCs in carrying out their leadership practices and their experiences about their roles. For example, crucial decision-making is made when learner leaders want to share their concerns during the management or school board meeting. The LRCs always referred to how the traditional culture within their context plays its roles. Adults informed LRCs that according to their traditional cultural norms and values, children should not discuss anything with adults; it is taboo. For this reason, learner leaders tend to withdraw their valuable suggestions they could share with other school board members.

The community refers to the school principals, teachers, parents and learners who are not part of the Learner Representative Council.

Finally, the division of labour refers to various portfolios or roles allocated to LRCs, including different members /groups that constitute the community. The division of labour also relates to the roles that an individual member of the system applies to help the LRCs through multiple transformations

3.4.3 Relevancy of CHAT for this study

The CHAT theory was relevant to this study because CHAT was useful for the context where the activity took place, the history of their cultures and the complexity of real life. For example, in the case of this study, the unity of analysis was learner leaders who were in a rural secondary environment where schools were poorly resourced. The background of the researched secondary schools and other factors could not be isolated from the integration of the human activity system. Therefore, Chat helped me with the language to understand the school as a social unit with its organisational cultural set-up, history and rules to add potential values to learner leaders' role in the decision-making process. CHAT also helped me to identify the enabling and constraining factors (if any) that influence learner participation in school leadership structures.

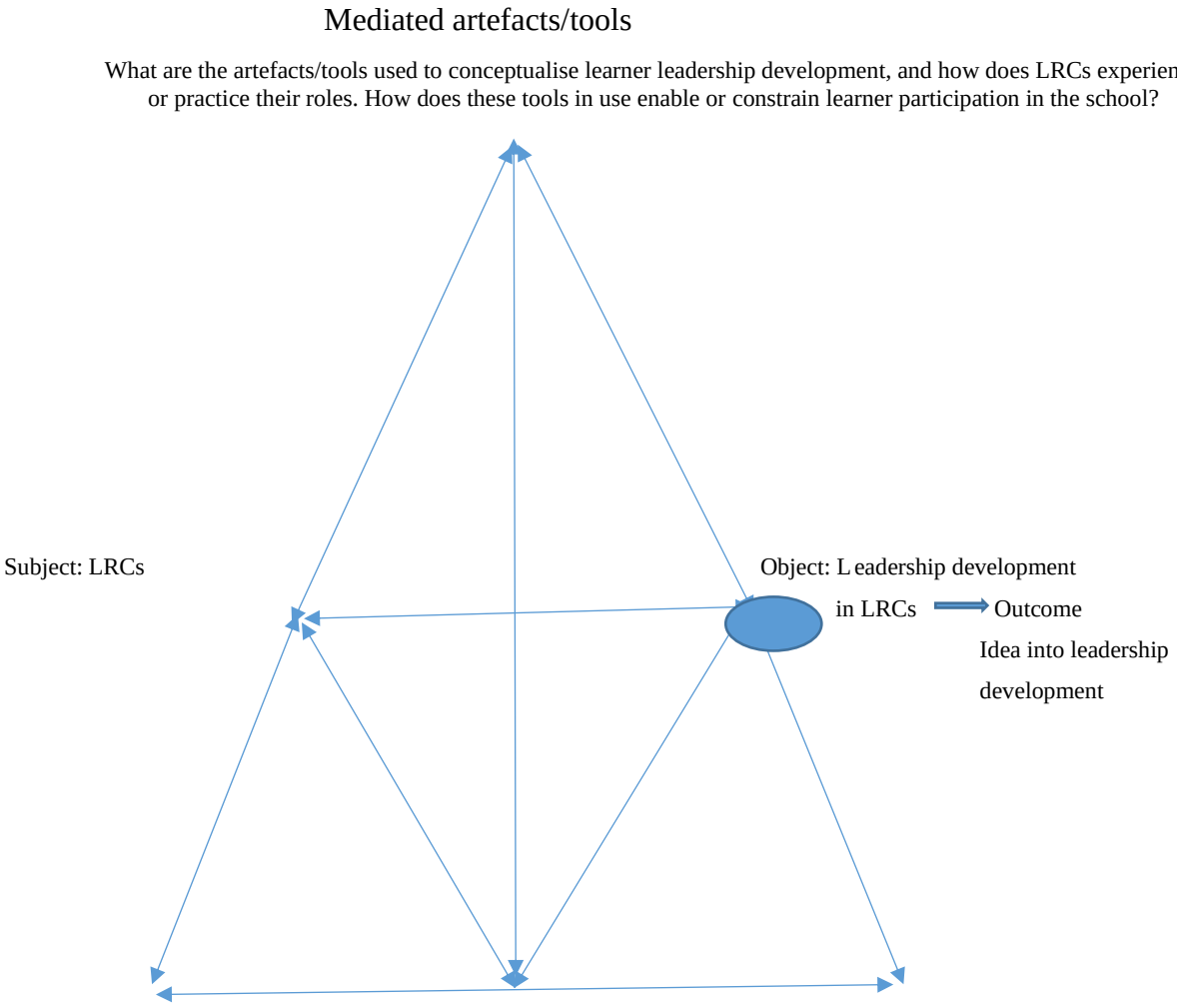

Figure 3.3 different elements portraying a second-generation activity system applicable to LRC leadership developments (adapted from Engeström, 1987).

Further, this study uses the second generation of CHAT (Engeström, 1999) to address the cultural aspects that participative leadership theory cannot do. This study employs three theories: PLT, CT, and CHAT, as both seek to involve all stakeholders. However, Participatory Leadership Theory describes how the participants in rural secondary school context participate in the school leadership and management structures. To support this notion, Yukl (2013) argues for all school stakeholders to have an opportunity to practice and experience meaningful determination about their roles. He further notes that their involvement helps the school

management to accomplish its tasks. Despite that, PLT and CT do not provide the language to use when analysing the data collected from the researched rural secondary schools.
In comparison, CHAT is used in this study to provide the background of how the activities have been done culturally. Furthermore, CHAT gives the history of activity, which enables or constrains factors that influence learners' participation in school leadership structures. The three theories are good for this study because PLT helps explore how learner leaders who were previously disadvantaged and denied access can be empowered to participate in decision-making. Critical Theory is good for this study because it helps me to investigate the perception of parents, teachers and principals towards the leadership and management of the schools.

Having worked in the context of rurality, I know some rural secondary schools do not provide space for these learners to express their views. To some extent, schools convene meetings to discuss crucial issues in the absence of learners. According to unconfirmed observations, parents do not allow learners to discipline a teacher in their presence because this shows disrespect. Consequently, CHAT provides an understanding of the connection between the different actors that construct school leadership structures as avenues for expressing their views and exercising the agency of learner participation.

The study employed Cultural Historical Activity Theory as a useful language tool to explain how learner leaders can be a mediating cultural tool for enabling learner participation and agency through school governance in which learner leaders are part. The theory is also important for this study because it stresses the role of cultural and historical factors that shape human activity, built on constraining factors and agency (Daniels, 2008). Therefore, CHAT helped me understand how cultural and historical factors shape stakeholders' leadership perceptions and learner participation in school governance in rural secondary schools.

According to Roth (2004), the Cultural Historical Activity Theory provide tools to locate and articulate internal contradictions and design concrete collective actions to eliminate them. For example, if adults told learners, it was a norm, they should not discuss crucial issues with young people. CHAT enabled me to identify these as constraining factors or contradictions between different parts of the activity system. Therefore, CHAT helps this study surface and understand the enabling and constraining factors influencing learner perception of school governance.

3.4.4 Contradictions and tensions for this study

Every school has policies and rules that govern how the school operates. The regulations include the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, internal school policies, and school rules to fully allow various stakeholders to implement their leadership practices. The purpose of developing these policies is to ensure that the school's activities run smoothly. However, most schools may not correctly implement those rules and policies. If learner leader expresses concern to the other school board members, they (LRCs) are told that they are too young and immature to make decisions. Their role is to study, not make decisions for the school, even though they are the representatives of other learners who have given them the representation mandate. The refusal to allow these learner leaders to participate in decision-making contradicts what the law states.

According to the Education Act, no.16 of 2001, section 60 stipulates that every school with the learner representative council is a duly body that mandates learner representation in secondary schools the grades eight to grade twelfth. These learners (LRCs) should not only be allowed to sit in the meeting, but schools should allow them to participate in the decision-making process. This means that the school principal fails to inform the school board members that the law made a provision for the learner representative councils to table the concerns on behalf of their peers. So, there is a contradiction between what is being practised and what the law is saying. These kinds of contradictions impact the leadership roles of learner leaders.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter adopted the Participatory Leadership Theory, Critical Theory and Cultural Historical Activity Theory to underpin this study. The PLT emphasises all stakeholders' involvement in providing space for Learner leaders. The Participatory Leadership Theory focuses more on collaboration, involvement and empowerment of all the stakeholders. However, the PLT does not provide an in-depth understanding that explains the ongoing aspects of leadership structures and interactions between these aspects and the language to analyse my data. Hence there was a gap that Critical Theory and CHAT filled. Therefore, Critical Theory underpin this study to discuss how adults in the Ohangwena researched school perceive learner leadership. The study uses CHAT to identify the enabling or constraining factors influencing learner participation in school leadership structures. In the next chapter, I present the research design and methodology utilised throughout the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the theoretical framework that underpins this study. This chapter outlines the methodological components used to respond to the critical research questions of the study. The chapter accomplishes this through the discussion of the research design and methodology that entails outlining the research paradigm, the research design, the research methodology, the selection of research participants, data generation methods, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, ethical issues, limitations of the study and the conclusion.

4.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm is a philosophical worldview or set of beliefs that dictate the nature of knowledge that a researcher brings to the study (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014; Bryman, 2012). Likewise, Creswell (2014) posits that the paradigm is a tradition in which a researcher applies a specific way of studying a particular phenomenon relevant to the study. To understand why researchers, use paradigms in research, du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) posits that paradigms help determine the questions worthy of investigation. Furthermore, du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) avers that paradigms present the processes required to provide answers and solutions to the questions posed. Additionally, Kamal (2019) posits that paradigms form the basis of practice and direct the researcher towards suitable methodology and research methods (Kamal, 2019). The major paradigms or worldviews include positivism, interpretivism and critical paradigms (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Bertram & Christiansen, 2015).

As a researcher, it was important to explicitly decide on the type of paradigm the study could draw on to generate philosophical and methodological assumptions. Having read about the various research paradigms and what could assist the researcher, this study was located within the emancipatory paradigm to explore how the school learner leaders conceptualise their roles. This paradigm also enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of power issues between the various stakeholders; how the principals and teachers perceived learner leaders while practising and experiencing their leadership and management roles in the researched schools. In addition,

the emancipatory research paradigm was deemed appropriate as it helps in the knowledge production to benefit the disadvantaged people in this study – these were learner leaders (Ann-Noel, 2016). This researcher further avers that emancipatory research aims to empower its research participants, such as the principals, teachers, parents and learner-leaders. This paradigm, I believe, is relevant and aligned with my study objectives because it aims to empower, critique and transform society concerning how it perceives the role of learner-leaders in democratic schools.

Further, I found this paradigm applicable to this study because it helps me to recognise the power imbalances and oppression within the school leadership structures (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015). In addition, the study seeks to empower the learner-leaders while practising their roles in school leadership in secondary schools. The emancipatory research paradigm aims to empower learner-leaders who, in my observation, are denied opportunities to practice their leadership skills.

According to an unconfirmed observation, learner leaders in some secondary schools experience unequal power relations, hampers their right to participate in the decision-making deliberations. Despite the establishment of the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, which prescribes learner representation, some secondary schools' leadership and management structures do not recognise learner leaders as leaders in their own right (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 2001). On this ground, they (learners) could not claim their identity as leaders who speak for the voiceless (Grant 2015). This shows that learners were not likely to have a sense of power as teachers and parents. Therefore, I argue for learner leaders to consider the possibility of rational emancipatory conditions better. Through emancipatory processes and principles, schools can build on democracy at the school level, establishing participatory leadership within and beyond.

This study develops subjective meanings from the participants' experiences through social interactions. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), Nieuwenhuis (2014) and du Plooy-Cilliers (2014), emancipationists believe that the knowledge of reality is socially constructed and reality is experienced based on how people perceive it. Moreover, this study discusses the issue of learner participation through the aspects of historical, social and cultural environment through the data generated from learner leaders, parents and teachers at the researched schools. The findings from this study will not be generalised beyond the community under study. The

interpretation made within the emancipatory paradigm is also similar to the context of rurality and multiple deprivations, where the meanings and understandings made in this study were located in a particular moment at a particular time (Kamal, 2019).

The advantages of the emancipatory paradigm were that the data generated is trustworthy, provides an in-depth understanding of what prevails in a particular context, and advocates for social change (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Further, this paradigm provides an understanding of historical and cultural norms of how an individual experiences the context of that society. However, the disadvantage of the emancipatory paradigm is that the data collected is un-generalisable (Scotland, 2012). This study will empower the research participants at the end of the study and change the myth of leadership practices amongst the participants at schools (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Pursuing this further, the study discusses below the philosophical assumptions of emancipatory paradigms such as ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodological assumptions.

Ontologically, the researchers with the emancipatory paradigm believe that there is multiple reality concerning many social realities within political, historical, cultural and economic values to understand the bases of differences (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In the same vein, Scotland (2012) states that ontological assumptions are all about the perceptions we make to believe something is real and what constitutes reality. Furthermore, du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) and Creswell (2013) posit that reality is socially constructed and shaped by historical, social, political, cultural and economic values. This construction depends on the meaning of how the research participants attribute to their own experiences through their interaction with each other (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015).

In her view, du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) claims that reality is fluid and fragile, thus suggesting that reality changes if people who experience it change too. In this study, reality can change if new leadership development occurs in the context of rurality and multiple deprived secondary schools under study. The perception of participants living in the researched environment would also have an opportunity to change and experience reality differently. It enables the researcher to understand how to make meanings of the data collected and consider forms of reality. The ontological stance in this study helps me take a position regarding the participants' perceptions and experiences regarding how things work in their contexts. Furthermore, participants in this

study experience reality differently (du Plooy-Ciliers, 2014), leading to the emancipation and construction of multiple realities (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Scotland, 2012).

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018), epistemology is the study of nature and form of knowledge. Similarly, Kivunja et al. (2017) state that epistemology is about how someone comes to know the truth. Likewise, Scotland (2012) views epistemological assumptions which pertain to how knowledge was created, obtained and transferred. Taking this point further, the researcher in this study does not participate to accumulate knowledge for the sake of knowing and understanding, but the knowledge generated should be geared towards the empowerment of the research participants, especially the learners, parents, teachers and principals of the schools under study. In the same vein, the study should therefore have a practical value in transforming the leadership practices in the researched schools (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). On this note, as a researcher in the qualitative study, I get close to the participants being studied to assemble subjective evidence based on individuals (Creswell 2013). This establishes the relationship between the researcher and the participants through interaction at the researched schools during the data collection, thus its relevancy to this study. With the epistemological view of things, it helps the researcher to get the meaning and reasoning about the human behaviour and experiences of the participants on learner leadership in the context in which the study was conducted.

Axiology is the study of values and value-judgement (du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). Furthermore, du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) suggests that researchers believe in the value-laden (objective) or value bound (subjective) of the context they are conducting their studies. Likewise, Heron (1996) defines axiology as the inquiry process in which researchers are valued in society. Similarly, according to Kivunja et al. (2017), axiological position in the emancipatory paradigm refers to the ethical issues a researcher needs to consider when planning the study, such as freedom, equality and emancipation. In the study conducted by Kivunja et al. (2017), they posit that ethical issues consider what values are attributed to the different aspects of research, participants, data and the audience to which we shall report the results of our research. These researchers further suggest that researchers should demonstrate an understanding of right or wrong when conducting a study and human dignity and respect for human rights to make their choices. For this study, I highlight this part of value more on the ethical considerations sub-section in the methodological section 10.9, outlined later in this chapter. Therefore, I

consulted the participants (LRC, parents, liaison teachers and principals) of the four rural secondary schools because of their different backgrounds, power and beliefs, culture, norms and values they possess. It includes the interpretation of a researcher as well as those of the participants in the study. Therefore, in the next paragraph, I will discuss the methodological assumptions.

The methodological assumptions of the emancipatory paradigm refer to the idea of a multi-faceted reality that can be investigated from different angles of different methods (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Researchers within this paradigm suggest using mixed methods research to increase the trustworthiness of a study. However, for this study, I opted to use the qualitative research methodology, which emphasises words instead of numbers during the generation and analysis of data. I used methods that would help me to gain an in-depth understanding of human experiences and meanings that help me to take actions and put them into practice (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). The researcher becomes part of the study; thus, such a researcher aims to study reality subjectively.

In this study, I interacted with the participants in their natural settings through interviews and engaged with them through focus groups, where the participants experienced the problem under study (Creswell 2014). The involvement of participants shows the interactive relationship between the researcher and participants to demonstrate the inclusion of diverse voices from the margin (Mthiyane, 2019). Furthermore, I used various methods to acquire knowledge and understand the participants. With this methodological view of the study, learner leadership was a phenomenon I investigated from multiple perspectives, such as the four LRCs, one liaison teacher from each school, the principal heading each school and parents. This was executed through manifold ways such as semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, focus groups and document analysis. In the next section, I discuss the research design for the study.

4.3 Research design for the study

A research design has many definitions, as discussed here under. According to Flick, Kardorff and Steinke (2018), a research design is a plan to collect and analyse data to make it possible for the inquirer to get answers to the questions the researcher posed. Likewise, Creswell (2014) defines it as a kind of investigation within qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approach that offers specific direction for procedures in a research design. It includes the

aspects of data collection and analysis. There are various research designs, such as ethnography, case study, phenomenology, narrative and grounded theory designs. Therefore, I opted for a case study as a research design for this study. The case study includes descriptive case studies, exploratory case studies, descriptive case studies, and multiple-case (collective) studies (Merriam et al. 2016). Having read about all the different case studies, I chose the descriptive case study because I wanted to understand the real-life contexts of the learner leaders in rural and multiple deprived school contexts. The type of case study chosen enabled me to explain and have an in-depth understanding of the learner leadership notion in some of the Ohangwena Region researched schools.

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018), a descriptive case study described learner leaders' leadership practices and experiences in rural and multiple deprived secondary schools. Additionally, a descriptive case study was helpful because it allowed the researcher to explore the case of learner leaders from four researched schools through detailed, in-depth data collection using multiple sources of information such as questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and the document review (the minutes for the meetings of the school management, school board, Learner Representative Council, Education Act No. 16 of 2001 and Internal school policies).

The descriptive case study also helps to explore learner leaders' conceptualisations, practices and experiences and perceptions of principals, parents and teachers towards learner leadership and participation in decision-making in the four researched schools. Furthermore, I selected to undertake a case study to find out the enablers and constraint factors that influence learner participation in school leadership structures. Therefore, I employed a case study because it provides a bounded system (Merriam, 2009). My study sought to fully understand what learner-leaders conceptualised, practised and experienced as they exercised their leadership roles in the researched rural secondary schools. The descriptive case study helped me to focus on the four selected researched schools as a unit of analysis for this study. The design helped me to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study.

Employing this design also allowed me to involve several knowledgeable participants who worked directly with learner leaders (Merriam et al., 2016). Further, the descriptive case study design allowed me to obtain insights, discover and interpret instead of hypothesising the

phenomena under study (Merriam, 2009). In this study, a case study that was explored was a group of learner leaders from the learner representative councils who were elected from the learner constituency within the schools. The learner representative councils provide their experiences and practices when serving on the school board and other school leadership structures. This was triangulated against the data obtained from the other research participants, teachers and parents. I also obtained insights from their lived experiences of serving on school boards and through the practices of their leadership roles within the schools. The interpretation of context differentiates a case study from other research designs. It allows the researcher to unearth the interaction of enabling and constraining factors that influence learner leadership in schools (Merriam et al., 2016).

I also chose the descriptive case study design as a boundary that directed my understanding of how to bring about social change that benefited the participants who were understood to have little power or opportunities open to them (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). A case study helped me to consider the importance of the meaning that humans create through their interactions. As a result, I established a close collaboration with my research participants, encouraging them to share their experiences with me freely (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). The descriptive case study also enabled me to generate data and analyse the contexts of the participants, in this case, in the rural and multiple deprived secondary schools. I built themes and patterns into categories by establishing the data into more manageable information units (Merriam et al., 2016). Finally, it enabled me to obtain rich descriptive data from the participants. I sought to understand the reality of participants to gain more understanding of their experiences and meanings that help them take action and put it into practice. In this case, I tried to visualise the participants' life experiences by understanding what it was to be a learner-leader in rurality and multiple deprived environments. This helped me to understand the real-life situation of the participants.

Besides the above reasons, Savin-Baden and Major (2013) suggest that a descriptive case study has the following advantages hence its adoption in my study. They state that it is flexible because it allows a researcher to employ various research goals and approach research from a philosophical stance of a researcher’s choice. Secondly, it focuses on a particular phenomenon or situation under research (Merriam, 2009). Similarly, Merriam (2009) alludes that the specifics of the focus promote the case study to be a good design for practical problems that arise from everyday practice. This study focused on Learner Representative Council, who were

denied access to participation and leadership practices in schools. Thirdly, a case study as a form of qualitative study produces a rich descriptive study derived from gathering data. Fourthly, it is heuristic, meaning that it illuminates readers' understanding of the subject of a study. Lastly, a descriptive case study is unique and determines its capacity to understand a particular context differently from another (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Therefore, it has more concrete knowledge that resonates with human experiences; more contextual in which experiences are embedded in context and more developed by reader interpretation where readers bring their own experiences rooted in the context and the experiences that readers bring to the case studies. Despite that, some challenges face case studies. One of the disadvantages of a case study is that it requires a researcher sufficient time to complete and undertake a study. I interviewed the principals, parents, teachers and learner leaders to deliberate on their perceptions of learner leadership and school decision-making. A focus group with the learner leaders was organised, and all interviews were carried out within a limited time.

4.4 Research methodology

Research methodology is the guiding system for solving problems which include appropriate research methods for generating and analysing data to produce knowledge about the phenomenon under study (du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014). Equally, Scotland (2012) refers to methodology as the strategy behind the choice and use of a particular method. Similarly, Guba and Lincoln (2011) state that methodology is the way of asking how inquirers go about finding out what they believe and what should be known. This implies that methodological assumptions impact methodological choices that require the researcher to consider different research methods for a particular study. Further, according to Cresswell (2014), research approaches are categorised into three approaches such as the quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approach that researchers use to study a topic. However, for this study, I used qualitative research because this approach helped me explore and understand the meaning an individual ascribes to a social or human problem performed in a natural setting (Creswell, 2014).

Furthermore, a qualitative research approach also helped me to gain an in-depth or detailed description of participants' feelings, opinions and experiences, as well as the interpretation of their actions (Rahman, 2017). The participants described their situation through a qualitative research approach, which helped me better understand learner leadership rather than explaining

human behaviour (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative approach also allowed me to interpret the meaning of the data generated and the final written report with a flexible structure.

However, I was also aware of its disadvantages: it could not be generalisable, and the findings could not be extended to a wider population with the same degree of certainty as quantitative analysis (Atieno, 2009). This was never my intention, anyway. As a researcher within the qualitative approach, I focused on the meanings and understandings of the way how the parents, liaison teachers and school principals perceived learner leaders who had few opportunities to take part in the school leadership structures and their participation in decision-making processes due to them being young, thought to lack the knowledge to make meaningful decisions on their own. As an insider researcher, I was also interested in how the learner-leaders experienced and practised their leadership roles within the school leadership structures. As a former school principal who worked at a secondary school for many years, I was interested in finding out the enablers and constraining factors that influence the participation of learner leaders in school leadership structures. As an insider researcher, I was also the primary instrument of data generation and analysis for this study. I applied the inductive process to organise concepts into workable themes. Thus, in the next section, I discuss the selection of participants.

4.5 Selection of participants

The selection of participants is the method of choosing participants for the study, which helps the researcher to determine who to participate depending on the research questions and problem statement (Pascoe, 2014). For my study, I selected four rural and multiple-deprived secondary schools from ten schools in Ohangwena Region. The schools were chosen in rural areas with multiple deprived secondary school contexts. I requested the Ohangwena Directorate of Education to provide statistics on rural and primarily multiple-deprived schools. The reason for selecting secondary schools and not primary schools was because secondary schools officially have learner-leaders and therefore sought to explore the conceptualisation and practices of the work they performed and how other stakeholders perceived them. In each school, I selected four members of the Learner Representative Council, two parents**,** one liaison teacher and the school principal. These made a total of eight research participants per school. I chose the four learner representative councils per school because they are eligible and experienced representatives of the learner in a school. Teachers were chosen based on working

directly with learner-representative councils. At the same time, the parents were chosen since they chair the school board meetings and represent the parents of the learners attending the researched school. The principal of each school was chosen based on their knowledge and practical experience in working with learners as heads of the schools.

This study set criteria for selecting participants so that only Learner Representative Council members with two years of leadership experience were allowed to participate. I asked the principals to assist me with selecting liaison teachers, learner leaders and parents because I did not know everyone in the regions. The principals helped me select knowledgeable liaison teachers who had been working with learner leaders in rural and multiple deprived secondary schools for three years. I asked the principal to select the chairperson and long-serving school board members. According to Pascoe (2014), the participants to be included may possess many elements. Thus, those who did not meet the criteria were not included, thus reducing the number of participants to a manageable number. This was important because it was impossible to select everyone in the school due to the large population in the region.

There are two types of research sampling: probability and non-probability sampling. Examples of probability sampling are simply random, systematic, stratified, and multi-stage cluster sampling. On the other hand, non-probability sampling includes accidental, convenience, purposive, quota, snowball, and volunteer sampling (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Moreover, the purpose of this study was not to list or describe the type of sampling in research but to focus on the type of sampling appropriate for my study.

Due to time and financial constraints, I used purposive sampling to complete this study to select the four secondary schools. Purposive sampling allowed me to focus specifically on learners with experience in LRC structures. Another reason was that not all the secondary schools were situated in deep rural contexts and experienced major difficulties in their environment. Therefore, only LRC members, parents, teacher liaisons and school principals from secondary schools with similar contexts participated in the study. The study used pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and protect the rights and dignity of the participants. The data generated through this study would not be generalised to other regional schools but would be used only for the four researched secondary schools (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Hence the total number

of participants was brought to twenty-eight. The next section discusses the research methods used in this study.

4.6 Research methods

Research methods are the fact-finding techniques used to obtain data (Jacobs, 2016). Similarly, Van As and Van Schalkwyk (2008) state that the best method in qualitative studies is to create various data sources. This study used semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, document analysis and focus group discussions. These methods helped the researcher concentrate on understanding and interpreting meanings in human behaviours (Newman, 2000). This study generated all the data in the Oshikwanyama language (a vernacular language), which was later translated into English. I transcribed the data first in the Oshikwanyama before translating it into English. As the participants said, this was done to avoid the misconception of ideas. Using a vernacular language enabled participants to express themselves without the possibility of misconception and language barriers in finding appropriate words in English. The disadvantages of translation are time-consuming (Hamutenya, 2013) and might weaken the value and quality of the data generated (Kayumbu, 2017). The section below discusses the methods used to generate data in the next paragraph.

4.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

An interview is a process of conversation in which the researcher and participants engage with each other focusing on the questions related to a research study (Merriam et al. 2016). The main purpose of interviews is to obtain information from participants that a researcher cannot get directly from the participants' minds. There are three types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. The structured interview questions are prepared and determined before the interview and asked in chronological order. Thus, it may not allow a researcher to access participants' perspectives and understanding of the study (Merriam et al., 2016). Merriam et al. (2016) further describe a semi-structured interview as a conversation where an individual respondent defines the world in distinctive ways.

Therefore, this study employed the semi–structured interviews with school principals, liaison teachers and parents. Because of John and Weller (2002), semi-structured interviews usually promote face-to-face and one-on-one interaction between the researcher and the participants.

Similarly, Cohen et al. (2011) claim that semi-structured interviews allow the participants a substantial degree of scope.

The qualitative case study recommends using a semi-structured interview strategy to use many individual interviews. According to Cohen et al. (2013), three in-depth interviews with each participant are appropriate to collect the case study data. However, I used three series of semi-structured in-depth interviews for this study. The semi-structured interviews were for each school's principal, a parent and a liaison teacher. During the interview, I encouraged principals and liaison teachers to describe their perception of learner leadership and participation in decision-making in the researched schools. I considered human dignity and respected their rights during the interview, and the interview questions were based on the emancipatory paradigm. The interview was conducted in the Oshikwanyama language and translated into English later because of the reality and multiple deprived contexts to allow the participants to express their views freely. The study, therefore, discusses the questionnaires in the next paragraph.

4.6.2 Questionnaires

A questionnaire is when the respondents are required to record their responses to the sets of questions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). I used questionnaires with the principals and liaison teachers from the researched schools in this study. The advantage of using the questionnaires is that it was more reliable because it was anonymous, they reassured greater honesty and were more economical regarding money and time. However, its disadvantage was that it was too low in terms of the percentage of returns. The questionnaires were distributed amongst four school principals and four liaison teachers who were the selected participants during the process and ensured that they understood the questions. This study constructed two sets of questionnaires, one for the principals and the other for liaison teachers. The questionnaire for the principals focused on implementing learner leadership principles in schools. The questionnaires focused on how leadership principles were handled. It also focused on the challenges experienced during the implementation process to develop good relationships based on participation and leadership. At the same time, the questionnaires for the teachers focused on their views concerning the school management team in implementing the learner leadership principles, how the school management team should demonstrate learner leadership and participation in decision-making as well as what the teachers experienced in putting into

practice to promote collaboration amongst teachers and learner leaders. The data collected from the questionnaires were generated using open-ended questions and thematically analysed.

4.6.3 Documents reviews

The study used document analysis to explore the roles of learner leaders in school leadership. In a case study, document analysis is perceived as a reliable source of data, for example, minutes of the meetings, circulars and policies (Cohen et al., 2018). For my study, I reviewed minutes of the school board, school management and LRC meetings. I also reviewed the Namibia Education Policy Act No.16 of 2001 and the schools' internal policies. I reviewed these documents to determine whether the researched schools implemented these policies following the government policies and how they implemented them. These documents provided me with insights into the participants' practices. The method was used to access the number of meetings where the learners were directly involved and to show their contributions. The document analysis helped to check the credibility and dependability of the data generated through the focus group discussions.

The advantage of using documents in a research study is that it enabled me to obtain data on the context within which learner leaders operate and provide background information about learner representative councils in rural secondary schools (Bowen, 2009). I used documents to review to assist me in understanding the history and operation of the learner representative council (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, document review helped me to formulate questions for the interview, questionnaires and focus group discussions; it was also an unobtrusive source of information (Creswell, 2014). I used document review to verify findings from other sources (Bowen, 2009). However, the disadvantage of document review was that it required me to search for information in a hard to find places (Creswell, 2014). In the next paragraph, I highlighted the focus group discussions.

4.6.4 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions are conducted between the researcher and a group of knowledgeable people about the topic under investigation (Merriam et al., 2016). Since the focus group composition is between four and twelve (Merriam et al., 2016), the study comprised four groups of four Learner Representative Council members from each selected secondary school (Cohen et al., 2018). In this study, four members of the Learner Representative Council from each researched school participated in the focused group discussions to share their views and

experiences of their work. The advantages of the focus group discussion were that it focused on the interactive discussion through which data was generated and was different from what was generated through individual interviews (Cohen et al., 2018). The focus group's disadvantages were that it was too small and might not be representative enough; some participants might find it difficult due to the rural multiple deprivation contexts in which learner leaders find themselves; the outspoken individuals might dominate the discussions (Nieuwenhuis, 2014). To remain focused, I will invite all the participants to attend the discussions at the school. If I find out that there is domination from one of the participants, I will encourage everybody to participate in the discussions to maintain focus.

4.7 Data analysis

Data analysis is classifying and interpreting linguistic materials to make statements about implicit and explicit magnitudes and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it (Merriam et al., 2016). In my study, the data was analysed during and after the collection. This study used the inductive method of data analysis to interpret the conceptualisations and meanings that participants made regarding learner participation in school leadership and management.

In line with the qualitative case study, this study analysed data using thematic analysis and applied the following steps of the case study.

Step 1: all the information collected was brought together for analysis. According to Yin (2018), the data organised in this way was called a case study database to allow the researcher to locate specific data during the intensive analysis.

Step 2: I transcribed the data and took it back to the participants for member checking.

Step 3: it was the coding process. Merriam et al. (2016) state that coding is when some shorthand is designed and assigned to various aspects of the data. The study used analytical coding to interpret and reflect on meanings (Richards, 2015, cited in Merriam et al., 2016).

Step 4: I used the coding process to generate small themes for a research study. Consequently, the themes generated appear as major findings in the qualitative case study and are used as headings in the finding section (Merriam et al., 2016).

Step 5: the data analysis involved an interpretation of the findings. In the next paragraph, I discuss the issue of trustworthiness.

4.8 Issues of trustworthiness

This is the researcher's procedure to determine the accuracy and consistency of the findings (Creswell, 2014). Further, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) posit that trustworthiness in qualitative research is fit for the data recorded and what is researched in natural settings. According to Creswell (2014), the trustworthiness of the qualitative study regards matters of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In the section below, I discuss each criterion used to determine the trustworthiness of my study.

4.8.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the notion that research findings are convincing and represent a sense of reality from the participants (Savin-Baden, 2013). Additionally, Nieuwenhuis (2016) suggests that credibility is about how accurately the researcher interprets the data provided by the participants. To ensure credibility as a qualitative researcher, I spent sufficient time with the participants during the data generation stage to better understand them, which increased my insights into their practices and experiences. I used member checking to determine the accuracy of the study's findings by taking back the major findings (Creswell, 2014). I allowed participants to comment on the findings when the follow-up interview was conducted with them. I used a triangulation strategy to ensure credibility to check the information collected through different methods for consistent evidence across data sources. The above strategy helped the researcher verify the data gathered with the participants.

4.8.2 Transferability

In qualitative research, the reader has to decide the degree of the similarities and connections between elements of the study and their context (Savin-Baden, 2013). The qualitative researcher should consider typical participants of the phenomenon under study. I considered a complete understanding of the studied context (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). However, I provided detailed descriptions for other researchers to draw commonalities and what could be similar in other cases. Moreover, to ensure transferability, I provided evidence using detailed and thick descriptions to convey raw data of the phenomenon under study that could be applicable for future research (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I selected purposive sampling to maximise specific data in the context in which the data was collected and characterised the

sample data directly related to the research questions (Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams & Blackman, 2016).

4.8.3 Dependability

Another strategy which was used to determine trustworthy of the study was dependability. Nieuwenhuis (2016) posits that dependability is the strategy employed to determine the quality of integrating the data collection method and the data analysis. The data collection method used in this study yielded the data analysis strategy, which brought consistency to the findings. If the researcher uses the same method to collect data in the qualitative study, it does not give the same results. However, consistency prevails. For this study, I provided a thick description to maintain the research findings' consistency and reliability (Moon et al. 2016). I followed a useful suggestion from Moon et al. (2016) that, as a researcher, I provided all the procedures to be followed when collecting data and documented the research design, methodology and methods employed, including the details of data collection.

4.8.4 Confirmability

Bertram and Christiansen (2014) contend that it is good to improve confirmability when the research process is transparent. The reader is responsible for checking whether researchers have reached the same or similar conclusions. Furthermore, Koonin (2014) suggests that the researcher should articulate how well the data collected underpin the findings and the researcher's interpretation. Similarly, confirmability is the extent to which the participants shape the findings, not the researcher's bias or interest (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). To ensure confirmability, I ensured that the results/ findings were linked to the conclusion of my study (Moon et al., 2016). I made sure that I gave the reports on the steps taken to manage both the ontological and epistemological position of the research to ensure results were based on the experiences of the research participants (Moon et al., 2016). I also provided the methodological description to answer my research questions.

4.9 Ethical issues

Ethical considerations are the main features of meaningful research (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015). It is a set of rules which guide researchers when conducting research (Uushona, 2012). Ethical considerations provide the primary obligation to respond to research questions and pursue factual knowledge based on robust evidence to make a significant contribution to knowledge (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Research participants were given a platform

during the interviews and focus group discussions to air their views on all aspects sought related to this study. As a researcher, it is of utmost importance to abide by the moral principles that guide my behaviour and of the participants. This means that the ethical behaviour of an individual researcher should be a major concern that requires the ethical behaviour of a researcher to be well scrutinised. I consider the ethical issues to protect the participants' identity (Maree, 2016). Thus, I sought permission to conduct a research study in writing from the Regional Director of the Directorate of Education, Ohangwena region. I was granted permission to conduct the research by the Education Director. I then prepared consent letters for the participants I interviewed. In the consent letter, I guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity to the participants. Further, I explained to the participants that they were participating voluntarily and could withdraw from participation at any time they wished to do so. I also explained those ethical issues to all the participants at the beginning of the interview, emphasising the issue of confidentiality and anonymity at the end of each interview. Upon my arrival at each school, I explained to the school principal the purpose and the potential value of this study to the case study school. Therefore, I discuss the ethical considerations that I took into account under the following headings: approval, consent, anonymity, privacy, voluntary participation and protection against harm in the next section below:

4.9.1 Ethics approval

The researcher submitted the Ethics application form to the Higher Degrees Ethics Research and Clearance Committee (HREC) at the University of Witwatersrand of South Africa for their consent. The university ethics committee verifies whether the research under consideration conforms to ethical standards, including professional, legal and social accountability issues.

4.9.1.1 Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture

The researcher applied and obtained permission to conduct the study from the Regional Director of Education for the Directorate of Ohangwena Region in Namibia before commencing the data generation process. I submitted a letter to the Director of Education requesting permission to research the selected Ohangwena researched schools. This permission was granted before the beginning of the study.

4.9.1.2 Permission to conduct research at schools

I also applied and obtained permission from the four school principals of the selected secondary schools to conduct this study at their schools. The letter sent to the schools requested them to either agree or disagree to participate in the study.

4.9.1.3 Liaison teachers and Parents

The school principals also introduced me to the liaison teachers and parents who were the chairperson of the school boards from each selected secondary school I approached to participate in the study. I then obtained permission from them in each school. The letter sent to the liaison teachers and parents requested them to agree or disagree to participate in the study.

4.9.2 Consent

When doing research, the researcher follows certain procedures of the research methodology before commencing with the collection of data (Tulyakul & Meepring, 2020). One of the steps is consent which allows me to get permission from participants who form part of the study. I must give the relevant information to the participants to give informed consent to participate in the study (Ganglury, 2016). This means that I have to provide all the information about my study for participants to make an informed decision on participating in my study. The information in the informed consent includes transparent and adequate information such as the research process, the rights of the participants, potential risks, confidentiality and the benefit of the participants (Nambiar, Christopher, Mammeni, David, Kang & David, 2012).

Through informed consent letters, I assured schools and participants of participating voluntarily in the study. I informed all the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I informed and explained the procedure, benefits, potential risks and alternatives in carrying out this study. I explained fully when the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group and document review take place. Letters were forwarded to the principals, teachers, parents, and guardians of the under-aged learner. For LRC, I will inform their parents and ask for permission from their parents or guardians if they are minors to participate in this study. I will ensure that all the participants in this study have signed the letter of consent. I will also ask permission to use the phone to record the interactions and ensure that the information assembled will remain confidential.

4.9.3 Anonymity

Anonymity in research is an ethical rule researchers use when conducting human studies to protect their participants' privacy (Williams, Burnap, Sloan, Jessop & Lepps, 2017). This study refers to anonymity in data collection without obtaining any identified personal information. This is to ensure the safeguards and personal information that participants would not reasonably disclose information to others or the public. I, therefore, used the names of the selected schools and participants anonymously and kept them confidential. I explained the purpose of the research and the data handling to ensure that my study did not cause any harm to the participants because the findings will only be used for this study; findings will not be published anywhere. Hence no real names of the schools and participants were used in this research. I gave the four selected schools and participants pseudonyms to protect their identities. I guaranteed the participants that I would use pseudonyms to protect their identities and prevent their names from tracking back to the study (Creswell, 2013, Bertram & Christiansen, 2015).

4.9.4 Privacy

In research, privacy is defined as the ethical rule which the researcher applies to protect the rights of the participants and respect their autonomy (Williams et al., 2017). Privacy is used to ensure that information shared by the participants with the researcher is protected against outsiders. In line with the above, I guaranteed in writing to the research participants that all information gathered during the research was for the PhD study and the publications that could emanate from only. I also informed the research participants that I would not share any information with anybody who did not participate in this study. All the information and data gathered will be securely stored. Participants will be allowed to review the transcripts during the analysis. The participants will be free to remove or add any information they are not satisfied with or feel was left out.

4.9.5 Voluntary participation and protection against harm

Voluntary participation is defined as the major issue when conducting research which denotes a person has an intelligently clear way to consent (Akaranga & Makau, 2016). Additionally, the research participants should be invited to participate with a clear understanding that they were under no circumstances to coerced them (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Thus, in my view, voluntary participation is when the participants take part in the study at their own will. This allows participants in the study to make the right decisions to form part of the study

or not. Hence in this study, the participants chose to participate voluntarily. Furthermore, participants in the study were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any harm.

4.10 Limitations of the study

The study's limitations were constraints experienced during the research study (Enslin, 2014). The examples of limitations in my study included sufficient time to do the fieldwork as I am a full-time employee of the Namibian Ministry of Education, access to information, financial resources and unexpected issues such as COVID–19. Furthermore, being a student at Wits University in a foreign country, I am limited to seeing my supervisor face to face due to COVID–19, I have to rely on email communication. Therefore, the limitations identified above guide the researcher when reporting the findings of the study and support the trustworthiness of the research findings of a study. Hence the study becomes more manageable (Enslin, 2014). The results of the study were based on the response of those participants who were interviewed, thus cannot be generalised. The recommendations were only applicable to the four selected researched schools, although they might have implications for other rural and multiple deprived secondary schools not directly affected by this study.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter explored how the study was designed and conducted. It focused on research on the research design and methodology used in the study with the support of literature to justify the relevancy of the methods employed in the study. The study highlighted the usage of qualitative research methodology with esteems to data collection in this study. This study uses the emancipatory paradigm to accommodate the entire project, outlined in great detail. The study uses data collection methods such as questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and document reviews. The data collection methods were used to ensure that the data collected was reliable and valid, as they were most appropriate for this study. This chapter explained how participants were sampled and selected. Furthermore, this study addresses the ethical considerations before commencing the data collection process. In the proceeding chapter, I present the findings of the data generated and a discussion thereof.

CHAPTER FIVE
LEARNER LEADERS' CONCEPTUALISATIONS, PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES OF THEIR ROLES IN THE SCHOOL

5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter was devoted to the research design and methodology which underpins this study. This chapter deals with data presentation and descriptive analysis of the learner leaders' conceptualisations, practices and experiences regarding their roles in school leadership in the researched schools. The data was generated from the field through focused group discussions and document reviews. In this chapter, I attempt to make sense of data, what it means or suggests, and what is to be made of it all. I also make larger meanings about the problem under investigation (learner leadership) based on learners' personal views, and I compare and contrast the findings of my study with past studies (Creswell, 2007).

This study aimed to explore the learner leaders' conceptualizations, practices, and experiences of their roles in school leadership and management in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations in four secondary schools in Ohangwena Region, Namibia. The study explored this by investigating parents', liaison teachers, and school principals' perceptions of learners' participation in decision-making and leadership in the researched Ohangwena Region schools. The research also indicated the enabling and constraining factors that influence learner participation in the school leadership structures of the researched schools. The important document known as the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 guided this study.

The study's findings were derived from the critical research questions, "What are the learner leaders' conceptualisations, practices and experiences of leadership? The themes this chapter discusses are the learner leaders' conceptualisations, practices and experiences of leadership as prescribed by the Namibia Education Act (NEA) No. 16 of 2001. The participants in this study were referred to Learner Representative Councils as LRC1, LRC2, and LRC3… up to LRC13. The focus group was coded using the pseudonyms FG1, FG2, FG3 and FG4 for all four researched secondary schools. The four researched secondary schools were coded as Shifitu (S), Tulipamwe (T), Haindongo (H) and Puma (P) Secondary Schools. After giving an overview of this chapter, I present the data generated from the focus group with learner leaders in the section below.

5.2 Findings from the Focus Group with the learner leaders

5.2.1 Biographical data of participants

Thirteen learner leaders took part in the focus group to share their conceptualisations, practices and experiences of their roles in the school. In terms of gender, six male and seven female learner leaders participated in the set of four focus group discussions. LRC1 and LRC2 were fifteen years old, LRC3 – LRC12 were at the age of eighteen years, and LRC13 was at the age of twenty years old. Almost all learners had no experience in the school board but had served in the learner representative council for more than two years, except one learner with one year of experience in the school board. Next, I present the responses to the learner leaders' conceptualisation of their roles.

5.2.2 The learner leaders' conceptualisations of their roles

The learner leaders' conceptualisation of their roles was divided into sub-sections: What do they understand their role as learner leaders? What were the challenges/ benefits to them and the school? I also asked them to share whether they have read their roles as stipulated in the NEA. The learner leaders were also asked to elaborate on whether they thought they had roles to play regarding the conditions of teaching and learning at school. And lastly, I asked them to share what they learned from being learner leaders. In this regard, the learner leaders responded to those questions as indicated below.

5.2.2.1 Learner leaders' conceptualisations of their roles as learner leaders

The Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 sets clear guidelines on the power and functions of the learner representative council in secondary schools. Concerning this matter, I asked them about conceptualising their roles as learner leaders. In this case, the learner leaders from focus group one from Puma Secondary School said the following:

LRC1, a focus group one, said:

> *I used to feel proud to lead my fellow learners and direct them to do what is right* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Another focus group (LRC2) had this to say:

> *I used to be happy and proud to be in front of others, correcting them and vice versa* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Also, LRC3 from the same focus group said:

> *I feel it is important to be a leader to correct one another and put the school where possible* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

On a similar question, LRC4 said:

> *I find it good to be a leader of others because it paves the way towards future leadership. It is good to lead others and correct each other* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Another focus group was held at Tulipamwe Secondary School, where the learner leaders participated. When I asked them a similar question, they had this sentiment to say:
LRC5 said:

> *I understand being a learner leader at our school is important because it is difficult if the school does not have learner leaders to lead other learners. After all, they hardly approach their teachers to inform them about their problems or concerns* (30 August 2021).

Furthermore, LRC5 said:

> *As a learner leader, you are free to explain things to your fellow learner. Then you help them where you can. Where you cannot, you can consult your fellow learner leaders to solve that person's problem* (30 August 2021).

On a similar sentiment, LRC6 said:

> *I understand it this way: learner leaders at school some learners may not be able to approach a teacher to raise their concerns, but such a learner can approach one of the learner leaders at a school to inform that leader about his concern. Then a learner leader can approach a teacher or a principal for his problem to be solved* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Whereas LRC7 said:

> *I understand that it is important to be a learner leader because when we are at school, we have distinct issues. Some learners are too small but do not know how to do things independently; instead, you find them fighting against each other (*FG2, 30 August 2021).

Further, LRC7 said:

> *As learner leaders, we are responsible for supporting them when they fail to do their work. If one learner is not feeling well, we are responsible for reporting that learner to the principal's office. It is the important thing to be a learner leader at school.* (30 August 2021).

LRC8 said the following:

> *Learning to be a learner leader is important because even when decisions are made at school, learner leaders have good ideas to bring about development at school or even to support the given advice* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Furthermore, LRC8 said:

> *If there are learner leaders at school, they can search for advice from their fellow learners. They bring the information collected together for what could be discussed further* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

In another focus group, four participants from Haindongo Secondary School said the following, and in this case, LRC9 from focus group three had this to say:

> *I am proud and happy to be a learner leader because it is important. The school and the classes are full, but I feel lonely there. In that sense, I believe it is significant, and I am proud and happy as a result* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

Another participant from focus group three, LRC10, said the following:

> *As a member of the LRC, I feel a sense of pride because the school has many learners, even in classrooms, but my peers have elected me to lead them. I also feel proud because I am at a school with many learners and in charge of them (*FG3, 06 September 2021).

On a similar sentiment, LRC11 said:

> *I am happy because I was elected. We had too many candidates at the time of the nomination, and I am grateful that the majority of the learners voted for me. They believe I can lead them, and I am honoured that they chose me. They think of me as trustworthy. From the looks of it, you should be a good candidate for the learner representative council* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

LRC11 further said:

> *You can join without knowing what education means to you, but you may end up understanding it better, and you are free to ask questions about anything you don't understand. I also feel proud when I am in charge of other learners. I also understood my roles in terms of the roles that LRCs should play at school* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

Whereas LRC12 said the following:

> *I am proud to be a learner leader who guides other learners because it changes my character. Perhaps you were an ill-mannered learner, but the opportunity to lead other learners may have changed your behaviour* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

Furthermore, LRC12 said:

> *I also believe that leading others is good because it trains you for life, and we never know what our future holds. We may also become future leaders, as is the case at this time. I believe it is good when other learners express their feelings to you, and then you listen to them, advise them, and correct them when they make mistakes* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

LRC 13 was the sole participant in the focus group of four from Shifitu Secondary School, even though each group was planned to consist of four participants. In this regard, this was what he had to say:

> *I feel proud to be the LRC. I do not think that I have a problem. I am free to be a member of the learner representative council. Be it to practice what should be done or do everything that needs to be done, I normally do it freely (*FG4, 13 September 2021).

The responses provided by Puma, Tulipamwe Haindongo and Shifitu Secondary School focus group participants suggested that the learner leaders conceptualise their roles as important things to do that shape them to be future leaders. The learner leaders felt very proud to lead others and honoured to correct one another and guide others. They cited that it is significant because being a learner leader paves the way for future leadership. According to the study, learner leaders conceptualize their roles in school leadership and management as essential. The learner leaders stated that they help their peers who rarely approach their teachers or the school principal's office to inform them about their peers' problems. The participants also revealed that they have good ideas for making valuable contributions to the school's development decisions if the school could provide them with an opportunity. They registered their happiness as being valuable leaders of tomorrow.

As alluded to in chapter two, the study acknowledged that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2009) has emphasised through articles 12 and 15 children's rights to participation and freedom of expression, respectively, in all signatory countries. It is interesting to note that the convention disagrees with the findings shown in this study. Previous researchers confirm in their study that schools in some countries increase the high degree of enthusiasm for the learners' voices. The findings of this study corroborate the idea of Groves (2013) and Jeruto and Kiprop (2011), who suggested an increasing call for learners to be accorded opportunities to participate in leadership structures. In comparison to what the literature said, I tend to believe that schools in Namibia were also expected to honour the provision made in the above articles to allow learners an avenue to practice their leadership roles, particularly in the rural secondary schools where the study was conducted.

This study's findings also corroborate the Participation Leadership Theory that underpins this study. The theory emphasizes the efforts of leaders to accommodate and involve all stakeholders in the school's leadership and decision-making structures (Yukl, 2013). Therefore, the involvement of the learner leaders creates a great opportunity for them to conceptualise and experience leadership roles to accomplish meaningful work and advocate for the empowerment of learner leaders in schools.

Having presented what, the learner leaders understood to be their roles as learner leaders, I now present responses on the advantages or disadvantages of learner leadership to them and the school.

5.2.2.2 Learner leaders' views on the advantages/disadvantages of learner leadership

I asked whether there were advantages or disadvantages to them and the school. Regarding this, the learner leaders indicated that there were challenges and benefits regarding learner leadership in rural secondary schools. Participants from focus group one held at Puma Secondary School said the following:

In this case, LRC1 from focus group one held at Puma Secondary School said:

> *The advantage of being a learner leader is to assist teachers in managing learners regarding noise-making or putting them back in class. However, there are also some disadvantages that your fellow learner may despise you* (FG1, 25 August 2021.)

Another LRC2 from focus group one said the following:

> *There are challenges and benefits in leadership. The advantages are that the school can be in good order, reflecting a good image to passers-by, whether the school is in order and whether learners are quiet in their classes. Moreover, the disadvantages are that sometimes, learners tend to be rude towards LRCs, and at times, not all of them will take what you are telling them to do* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Whereas LRC3 had this to say:

> *The advantages of leadership roles are that learners need to lead themselves. If a learner needs certain information from teachers and is not comfortable approaching that teacher, I can consult a teacher on their behalf. The disadvantage is that not everybody loves us being learner leaders; some wish us misfortune* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

In a similar case, LRC4 from the same focus group said the following:

> *Learner leadership in school is important, in my opinion. It has advantages and disadvantages. The advantage of being a learner leader is to help teachers to put learners in classes while teachers are busy with official work. The disadvantages are that some learners behave badly towards us, not knowing that we are there for them* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

LRC4 further said:

> *Some learners use abusive language and do not want to listen to us. Some learners do not want to follow our instructions because they are bigger than us. These learners are not aware that leadership has nothing to do with age. These learners' behaviour is due to different social backgrounds* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

LRC1 also showed that it is a good thing for learner leadership in schools, and she said the following:

> *The school's advantages are that it assists with keeping all learners in classrooms during the lesson. It benefits the school in a way that even parents will be impressed to see all learners quietly seated in their classes. However, the disadvantage of being a learner leader in rural schools is that the disadvantages can outweigh the benefits and tempt one to drop out of school* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

I also asked the focus group two participants from Tulipamwe Secondary School the same question, and they said the following. With this regard, LRC5, a participant from focus group two, said the following sentiment:

> *It is so advantageous if there are LRCs at school because it is easy to control that school. However, the disadvantage that affects learner leadership at school is when you are the LRC, and some learners do not feel good when you are elected. Sometimes they treat you badly, throwing spoken words at you, and they do not want to follow when instructed to do something* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Further, LRC5 said:

> *Learners feel that you are provoking them, and they use bad words that you cannot lead them because you are just a learner like them, and the difference is only that you are wearing a different uniform, but still, you are a learner like them* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Another focus group two participant, LRC 6, said the following**:**

> *If there are LRCs at school, the school can establish committees to generate income for the school coffers under the learners' leadership." However, the disadvantages are that when we are members of the LRC, there might be a certain person to who you give or tell some information, and that person does not want to accept it as it is* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

On the same sentiment, LRC7, a focus group two participant, had this to say:

> *The advantages of having LRC at school benefit the school since they can establish a committee for the health and welfare of the learners, for example, the committee that would work with COVID issues* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

LRC7 further said:

> *There are also disadvantages when it comes to our education as learner leaders. You might have a test the next day, but you must attend a meeting while your fellow learners prepare themselves for the test. When the meeting is done, you have to*

*walk a long distance, and by the time you reach home, you are tired. You will not be energetic enough to prepare for that test (*FG2, 30 August 2021).

Furthermore, LRC8, another focus group, said the following**:**

The advantage of being an LRC member is to speak out about the concerns or problems that affect learners when they are informing someone who is an LRC member for that leader to tell the teachers. Then teachers will know what issues affecting learners are available at school to resolve them. Then it becomes easy for the teacher to know that there are learner issues and how they can resolve them. Teachers and learner leaders mostly resolve the matter of concern (FG2, 30 August 2021).

LRC8 further raised the disadvantages that learner leaders are faced with, and she said the following:

One of the disadvantages I foresee when you are an LRC member is that there are sometimes misunderstandings between learners and LRC members or teachers at that particular school (FG2, 30 August 2021).

I also discussed with four learner leaders from Haindongo Secondary School focus group three, and they had the following sentiments to say:

LRC9 from focus group three said the following:

One of the first advantages of having an LRC at school is that they normally wear a different uniform than the other learners. Even when the school receives visitors, especially during COVID–19, you are very different from your fellow learners. You might find yourself standing at the school's gate sanitizing those people when you arrive (FG3, 06 September 2021).

LRC9 further said:

Also, we have been schooling, but we have never seen the former LRC receive visitors in such a manner. Another advantage we have experienced is that this is

> *the first time our school has received researchers like this, interviewing them the way we are. I believe the future holds good things for us because we have only recently begun and are already experiencing the available changes* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

However, LRC9 showed that despite the advantages of being an LRC member in a rural secondary school, there are also some disadvantages. In this regard, LRC said the following:

> *The disadvantage is when people in senior year disrespect us. When you tell them to do something, they do not do it. I believe they disregard it and speak ill of us. They appear weak because they participated in the election process but were not elected. As a result, as an elected LRC member, they usually spit bad words at you. These, in my opinion, are some of the drawbacks of learner leadership in schools* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

Another participant in focus group three at Haindongo Secondary School, LRC10, took note of the advantages of learner leadership in rural schools, and he said the following:

> *One of the benefits I have noticed is that when you are in a school like this one, it is true that we are different with different uniforms, and you look good as a result. Another advantage is that you may be in class, and when the school receives a visitor, you are directed to do everything, which is an advantage, in my opinion. It is advantageous that if something happens at school, it is usually handled by the LRCs* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

Moreover, LRC10 also indicated the disadvantages that influence learner leadership in some of the researched schools. In this case, she had this to say:

> *I did not notice any disadvantages, except that some people nominated to participate in the election were not elected. For example, when we dressed in the LRC uniform, they were always cursing us and telling us that they would not do what we told them to do, even if we put on our yellow uniforms. That is one of the disadvantages I have discovered thus far. They are envious of us simply because they did not participate in the election process* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

LRC11 from focus group three revealed some advantages of learner leadership in rural schools. In this regard, this was what he had to say:

> *There are advantages to leading others, for example, if the school has certain rules and regulations. We must inform our classmates that we should try to arrive at school on time or as early as possible. It is our responsibility to remind them to arrive on time for school. Another advantage of being a learner leader is that leading others changes people's personalities and behaviours* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

On a similar sentiment, LRC11 indicated that learner leadership has disadvantages in rural secondary schools. In this regard, LRC11 had the following to say:

> *One of the disadvantages is that we are all different in that some learners have good manners while others have bad manners. There will be times when you tell a learner to tuck in their shirts, but the learner will say ah, they are saying that they are LRC, and a person must lead things which need to be done. I'm not sure if my classmates do not understand the roles of learner leaders or if they do not understand how things work* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

Further, LRC11 said:

> *Another disadvantage is that if you decide not to wear the LRC's uniform because of those who were saying bad things to you because of the uniform, when you talk to your fellow learners, they will regard you as if you are not a leader, even though they know you were elected by a majority of the learners* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

LRC12 from Haindongo Secondary School focus group three has revealed some advantages of being a learner leader, and she had the following to say:

> *Being a learner leader is good because it shows that your fellow learners trust you. After all, they elected you, and perhaps it is because of your behaviours, knowledge, and other things that most of what you do in education is because of those things. Being a learner leader is beneficial because it allows you to represent*

other students at school meetings. Instead of having all learners attend such a meeting, we must choose one of the learner leaders to represent us all. That is also when you normally advise your fellow learners about things you know were poorly implemented (FG3, 06 September 2021).

LRC12 also highlighted some of the disadvantages of being a learner leader, and he said the following:

The disadvantages of being a learner leader are that there are too many challenges. One of the challenges includes being elected as a leader at your school, and some of your classmates are older than you while others are your friends. When you are given the responsibility of monitoring the noisemakers and the up and down movements during study time, your friends and those older than you begin talking about you in bad faith, shouting at you, and sometimes discouraging you, and you begin to wonder why you became a member of the LRC. Even so, it makes no difference because you know a majority elected you, so all you have to do is carry it out (FG3, 06 September 2021).

LRC12 further said:

Another disadvantage was that if you arrived on time at school, teachers might delegate responsibility to you while they were at a meeting. Then you inform the other learners that they must perform the morning devotion while you lead them, stop making noise and remain in the proper line. However, not every learner comprehends why you did so. Some learners may intimidate you and even attempt to beat you, but as a leader, you know that such incidents may occur. You only need to do the right thing, and you can take their names to the principal's office or wherever you want to (FG3. 06 September 2021).

Another focus group four participant, LRC13 from Shifitu Secondary School, showed the challenges he faced as an LRC member, and he said the following:

The challenges I am facing are from my fellow learners when you are telling them that they should do this and that. They just answered me badly, and some may not even respond to what you are telling them to do. Some fellow learners respond in

the way they feel you are nothing to them, and they regard you as a person who likes to be in front of them all the time. These are the challenges that I am facing from other learners. So far, I did not experience any challenge from the school regarding my role as a learner leader. My responsibility as a learner leader does not prevent me from doing my school work as expected (FG4, 13 September 2021).

Findings in this study seem to suggest that there are advantages for schools that permit learners to practice their leadership skills. In the current study, the responses provided by the participants show that the advantages of having learner leadership in school allowed learner leaders to speak out about the concerns of the voiceless who were unable to approach teachers. In these instances, the learner leaders highlight their uniqueness by wearing different uniforms. The participant further indicated that it allows them to contribute to the health and welfare of the learners. Moreover, the findings seem to suggest that learner leaders approaching teachers on behalf of their fellow learners could be the only opportunity granted to them for their voices to be heard in the school.

However, despite their happiness and advantages of being a learner leader, the findings seem to suggest that most of the learner leaders were only used for policing other learners and teachers without participating fully in the decision-making structures. The study further found that the learners disrespected and spit bad words towards the learner leaders. This indicated that the learner leaders could not yield positive results in leadership skills.

A study by Nthontho (2017) around children as stakeholders suggested increased learners' participation, enabling them to obtain confidence and competence as future adult leaders. The learner follows the notion that learners who were the majority of the school constituency should be given avenues to practice their democratic participation in the decision-making making process (Mncube, 2012). This confirms the findings from this study that the learner leaders felt empowered if schools provided an opportunity for them to practice their rights and roles that, in the end, influenced important decision-making in schools (Yukl, 2013).

Similarly, participants believed that a lack of information was to blame for the lack of implementation of the learner leadership concept in rural schools. It is counter to learner leadership enablers in the form of constraints on learner leadership. This study revealed that

bullying from learners older than the learner leaders, throwing bad words and shouting at them, was sometimes discouraging for the learner leaders, who started to wonder why they became learner leaders.

Having presented the advantages or disadvantages of learner leadership to them and the school, I now present the responses on whether they have read what was stipulated in the Namibia Education Act in the next section.

5.2.2.3 Learners' views on the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001

In response to the question on whether they had read this law, all the learner leaders indicated that none had read or heard about the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001. They were only informed about their responsibilities by the liaison teachers. The education policy just revealed to them the liaison teachers that the education policy stipulates their roles, but it was never presented to them.

In this regard, LRC13 said:

> *No, I did not read the Namibia Education Policy, and I do not think I can say anything about the Education Act No. 16 of 2001. A teacher who works with us did not explain it* (FG4, 13 September 2021).

Another focus group participant from Haindongo Secondary School, LRC9, echoed this sentiment, and this was what he had to say:

I suggest that it could be because we have only been learner leaders for a short period. I believe they did not give it to us so we could read it at home. Perhaps they will still give it to us (FG3, 06 September 2021).

On a similar sentiment, LRC8 from the Tulipamwe Secondary School focus group had this to say:

> *No, we did not read the Education Act No. 16 of 2001. However, I want to emphasize on it a little bit that we started this role in the year with COVID – 19 situations. We were elected to start with our work in totality, and the pandemic constrained us. We could not go ahead with our work as entrusted to us* (30 August 2021).

Furthermore, LRC8 said

> *I think that was one of the challenges which constrained us from reading the act, but we are willing to read it, and we will see if our principal will give us such an opportunity to read it* (30 August 2021).

The findings seem to suggest that the learner leaders were never informed of what the policy regulating the learner representative council body representing learners in schools was saying. I believe that the information from the policy could have enabled them to conceptualise what was expected from them and establish a well-informed understanding of the learner leadership concept in rural secondary schools and the importance of learner participation in school leadership structures. The denial of their rights to information and freedom of expression becomes an obstacle to their democratic participation as per the requirements of the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 2001).

The findings from the document review also support this. Document review was one of the data collection methods I used. When I went to collect data, I asked the school principal to provide me with documents such as the Namibia Education Act, internal school policies, the Learner Representative Council constitution, school board, management, and Learner Representative Council minutes of their meetings. The goal of the document review was to determine learner participation in the schools' leadership and decision-making processes. However, none of the schools I contacted could provide me with the documents I needed to review.

Having presented their knowledge of the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, I present the roles they think they could play concerning teaching and learning at school.

5.2.2.4 Learner leaders' views on their roles in teaching and learning at school

In response to the question, I asked on the roles learner leaders play in teaching and learning, the learner leaders from the Puma Secondary School focus group (LRC1) said the following:

> *We play the role of correcting learners at lower grades regarding subject matters. Conversely, we also learn from young fellow learners by interviewing them and conducting research. This plays a good role in education. We often research subjects like History and Geography. Sometimes, we used to be tasked to find the*

total number of learners at lower grades until we counted the whole school FG1, 25 August 2021).

Another focus group, LRC2, had this to say:

We play a major role by assisting the grade 8 learners with their homework or any other form of correction with the feeling that we are their leaders. We assist where we can (FG1, 25 August 2021).

LRC5, a focus group participant from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

As a learner leader at school, I learned that you have to adhere to all the school rules and regulations set up at school and lead by example to your fellow learners, so they do not disobey the rules. For example, wearing the school uniform properly encourages other learners to follow suit and value the learners' identity (FG, 25 August 2021).

In addition, LRC6 from the Tulipamwe Secondary School focus group indicated that adherence to the school rules improves school performance. In this regard, this was what LRC6 had to say:

When everyone adheres to the school rules and is implemented satisfactorily, teachers and LRC will not waste much of their time or resolve conflicts among learners. This helps us know that once rules and regulations are established at school, all the learners are learning well, which helps us excel in our examinations. Then if you are a member of the LRC and you are performing well, it gives a good example to your fellow learners to perform as well (FG2, 25 August 2021).

Another focus group from Tulipamwe Secondary School said the following:

As a learner representative council member, I have a role to play in gathering information about how teachers perceive our education. For example, some teachers came to classes late, and some never did. So, I have to report those teachers to the principal's office, and the principal will talk to them. Then at the

end of the day, these teachers change their attitude or the way they teach us (FG2, 25 August 2021).

LRC9 from Tulipamwe Secondary School had this to say:

I believe I play a role in my learning because whenever a teacher comes to class to teach, I ask them where I went wrong so that I can understand. For example, if we did not start with study time, we stayed for about 20 minutes after classes to be reviewed by our teachers to see where we might have fallen behind. As a learner leader, it is also my responsibility to ask my fellow learners to implement what they bring to our attention; perhaps there is a teacher who missed his class, or the teacher is unwilling to assist learners (FG3, 06 September 2021).

LRC9 further said:

*As a learner leader, I also help to ensure that the school has enough exercise books for all learners. The exercise books are given to learners in the junior grades before being given to learners in the senior grades. Regarding such a thing, teachers have asked us to give our opinion, and then we decide whether the junior or senior grades should be given first (*FG3 06 September 2021).

LRC10 from the Haindongo Secondary school focus group has also shown what her role could be as a learner leader, and she said the following:

I believe I have a role to play at our school, and I am aware of it because I could have spent my entire life in the same grade. I play it because I am no longer in first grade, where it all began. I take my education seriously and have never received a failing grade since first grade. Even when my teachers grade my work in my subject, I receive high marks. In the future, I want to be one of the world's best leaders. I am carrying out my responsibilities because my performance is an example to other learners (FG3, 06 September 2021).

On similar sentiment, LRC11 from the focus group had this to say**:**

> *I believe I play a role in learning because we were elected as LRCs based on our performance, which means I am one of those learners who can lead others and participate in educational matters. When I think about it, I think I play this role better because I understand most of what our teachers say when they teach us. If something is going on in class, I should be part of it. (*FG3, 06 September 2021).

Another LRC12 from the Haindongo Secondary School focus group said the following:

> *I believe that playing a role is very important because if you are in a class and you are one of the few who know nothing, your classmates may wonder how this person is a leader and he knows nothing. Even at the end of the year, especially if you are in the senior grade where most of the LRC are housed, the more the LRC, the better their performance* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

LRC13 took note of the role he could play, and this was what he had to say:

> *I play my part when it comes to my learning. I cannot provide you with anything concerning our responsibilities because we were not told what our roles are. I was elected in 2018, but I cannot recall whether there were other LRCs unless if maybe they were already elected before me* (FG, 13 September 2021).

The question of the roles the learner leaders play in teaching and learning seems to be difficult to answer for most of the participants. Only a few participants could repeatedly identify the same contribution they could make towards teaching and learning. Common roles in teaching and learning include learner performances, adherence to school rules and regulations, and information gatherings (Da Silva, 2018; Mulwa et al., 2018; Uushona, 2012).

Having discussed the roles, the learner leaders could play, I present what they have learnt from being learner leaders.

5.2.2.5 What learner leaders have learnt from being leaders

The learner leaders indicated that they had learnt many things that helped them absorb ways to engage with various people and handle situations. In this case, this was what LRC1, a focus group from Puma Secondary School, had to say:

> *I learnt how to be with and serve people. I have also learned how to help people with different hardships and difficulties. You can help people with different problems without revealing their confidentiality and gossiping about them (*FG1, 25 August 2021).

Another focus group LRC2 from Puma Secondary School said the following:

> *As a leader, I have learned how to be with people, be in front of people, and be patient with different challenges, to be strong, to be patient with all people, or everyone, to counsel others, and how to handle undisciplined learners* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Whereas LRC3 from the focus group also said the following:

> *Being a member of the LRC, I have learned how to lead. Even if I become a leader in the future, I will know how to go about it. I have learned that leading people where they are supposed to be is not difficult (*FG1, 25 August 2021).

Likewise, LRC5, a focus group from Tulipamwe Secondary School, had a similar sentiment, and she said the following:

> *During the short period that we have been learner leaders, we learnt that you could speak in front of people because in this kind of leadership, you do not need to be part of the leadership, and you are not participating. Thus, it helps you not have fears about presenting even a topic in front of a certain group of people when addressing a general public or even during the assembly point when you are at the morning devotion* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

LRC5 further said:

> *You developed qualities you did not possess before; at least you have moved one step forward* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Whereas LRC6, another focus group from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

> *Being a member of this body, I learnt how to lead people. I learned this through the LRC body, and you become a person who can lead others because you are used*

to speaking in front of others and leading others, unlike your fellow learners, who may scratch their hair due to a lack of experience. This allows me to lead others in our society and villages (FG2, 30 August 2021).

LRC7, a focus group, had this to say:

During my leadership, I have learnt how to speak in front of others, for example, to organise meetings or discussions. I also learnt that one of us could be taken out of the group of learners to speak in front of other learners or at a certain event. Still, due to shyness, that learner may start by scratching their hair or turn to the other side because that learner is not used to speaking in front of people or maybe he has never done it before (FG2, 30 August 2021).

LRC8, a learner leader from Tulipamwe Secondary School, took note of what he learnt and said:

I learnt to be a learner leader and how to behave when you are amongst your fellow learners because you know that even when you become a learner leader, you were not elected by both learners, but the majority elected you. For example, when you start showing a bad attitude towards those who did not elect you, it is not a good thing, as you know there are challenges in life (FG2, 30 August 2022).

LRC8 further said:

I have noticed that if, for example, a learner had no intention of electing you, you may find that learner always crushing on you, teasing you, or bringing bad things towards you. I learned how to behave in a similar situation (FG2, 30 August 2021).

LRC9, a focus group participant from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

As a learner leader during my time in the office as a learner representative council member, I learned that sometimes you have to deal with schoolwork and take care of other learners during lessons because of the entrusted responsibilities of a learner leader. If the bell for study, for example, has rung, you must instruct them to return to their classes and supervise them during study time. This hinders your ability to study for schoolwork (FG3, 06 September 2021).

Furthermore, LRC9 said:

> *It also emphasizes the importance of managing your time and dividing it according to your roles and responsibilities. For example, you may be writing an exam with only one book you did not touch or finish due to a lack of time, and you may be merely guiding other learners. I also learned to present myself in public, lead others, and pose as a leader (*FG3, 06 September 2021).

On a similar sentiment, LRC10, a focus group from Haindongo Secondary School, had this to say:

> *I learned that as a learner leader, but let me say that I will continue to learn because we are only getting started. I have used it when considering how I should carry out my responsibilities as a learner leader. In this lesson, I learned that for the teacher to respect me, I must first respect them. Then you must respect your fellow learner leaders and be aware of the learner representative council body's responsibilities. I must also be mindful of the responsibilities that I will bear* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

LRC10 further said the following:

> *I would also like to emphasize that as a learner leader, you learn a lot, particularly about speaking English. You must understand how to speak it. You came across something new and took mental note of it. Because you will be giving people feedback on what was discussed when you return from a certain workshop. You become an experienced learner in listening and following things (FG3, 06 September 2021).*

LRC10 from Tulipamwe Secondary School also indicated that he learnt what forms part of his responsibilities, and this was what he had to say:

> *You did not learn anything if you did not bring anything back. This means that when you return with something, you have mastered listening to and following directions* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

On the same note, LRC11, also a focus group participant from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

> *We have only started with these leadership roles, but we learn a lot because some of our fellow learners have leadership understandings. Still, they lack an understanding when it comes to educational matters. If you are not afraid of standing in front of other learners, you will become an expert. I was nervous standing in front of them, but as an LRC member, I gained experience. Another thing is that you learn how to speak English, for example, if you are sent somewhere by your teachers, or when the school sends you as the school's representative, you learnt something through that, and you are also trained to be a good leader in that way (*FG3, 06 September 2021).

Whereas LRC12, another focus group from Tulipamwe Secondary School, had the following to say:

> *I have learned to stand in front of others and wear the school uniform properly. I also learned how to respond appropriately when asked to do so and how to perform well. I also learned how to respect others and interact with guests, which is what we are doing now* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

LRC13, a sole focus group from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

> *I learnt how to live with others, and you can advise your fellow learners. I also learnt to speak in front of other learners without fear* (FG4, 13 September 2021).

Most participants indicated what they learnt from being learner leaders in rural secondary schools. This included self-confidence, serving and leading others, leadership qualities and behaviours, controlling and supervising. This finding concurred with Nthontho's (2017) findings which showed that the opportunity for learner participation in the decision-making structures enables learners to obtain confidence and competence as future leaders.

Next, I present the election of the learner representative council and participation.

5.3 Election of Learner Representative Council (LRC) and participation

The Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 determines the procedure to be followed during the election of the learner representative council. The Act stipulates the guidelines that only a learner who will be in one of the two highest grades at the school in the following year may be nominated for the election. The learners participating in the election should be an equal number of boys and girls except when the school enrol boys or girls only.

In response to the question, I asked the learner leaders how they were elected from each school and how many were elected per researched school. The study used the interview questions below to guide the focus group discussions to provide answers about the election and participation of the learner representative council members.

5.3.1 How learner leaders were elected

In response to the question on how learner leaders were elected, a Focus Group 1 participant from Puma Secondary School said the following:

When we were elected to be LRC at school, there were six LRC portfolios to be filled during the LRC election, of which each portfolio was stood by four nominees and only one candidate to be elected. We stood in front of other learners to manifest. On the next day, learners were given ballot papers to elect those they felt were fit for the portfolios (FG1, 25 August 2021).

LRC2 from Puma Secondary School Focus Group 1 has this to say:

> *Firstly, we were nominated in our classes by our classmates and our teachers. We were requested to represent the given portfolios while still at the class level. We were also asked if we could stand in for those tasks. That should come from your heart. Then, after accepting the nomination, you will be informed that you will present the portfolio, for example, for the president or vice president, and then be given that portfolio* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Another focus group, LRC3, also from Puma Secondary School, echoed the sentiment and had this to say:

> *I remember that after you were given those portfolios, you presented your speech at the assembly point under the portfolio the whole school and the teachers gave you. We nominated learners who took portfolios such as president, sport, entertainment, etc. The president would be the one who rules all the portfolio holders* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Whereas LRC4, a focus group from Puma Secondary School, indicated the process of how they participated in the election of the learner representative council.

> *I also remember that after you were given your portfolios, you had to think about whether you could take it or not or wanted to be given the portfolio of the president or not. If you do not want to accept it, you decline it, and then you will be replaced by someone else. Then, once you are given your portfolio in your classrooms, you present it at the assembly point under your portfolio, which your fellow learners gave you. You then give your speech and tell the whole school about the portfolio you intend to take, your roles, and your promises* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

LRC4 further said:

> *When we are done with that, after a day, the responsible teachers move around our classes with the ballot papers with all the names of the LRC nominees. Since each portfolio has four candidates, all voters elect one learner. Teachers moved around the classes with the ballot papers in classes, and then people ticked those who came up with the majority votes. The nominee who emerges victorious then takes up that position. Then, when the election results are out, the school principal's office has to announce all the names of the successful candidates at the assembly point* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

On similar sentiment, LRC5 from the Tulipamwe Secondary School focus group explained how the election process took place, and this was what she had to say:

> *If I could remember it very well, the election was like this: those elected came from the last two higher grades. During the election, members of the election committee spearhead the election process, such as two teachers and two learners, and each*

gender was represented. The committee requested each class have eight learners. Four boys and four girls were willing to participate in the election to become learner leaders. Then the committee brought those names to the office (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Furthermore, LRC5 said:

When it was discovered that the nominated number went far beyond the required one, it was decided to take the names of those learners who appeared mostly in almost all grades. Some of the learners nominated in many grades collided when they came out with the same number of votes. Those who came out with the highest votes were considered a head boy and head girl, while others with the same vote were then placed for re-election (FG2, 30 August 2021).

LRC5 further said:

There were times when the committee found out that there were four girls, and some of them had similar votes, and it would not be seen who could be the head girl. Thus, the election had to be re-run throughout all the grades, and then the person with high votes will be taken as a head boy or a head girl. We used the ballot papers during the election process. Then it took two weeks before the results were out. When the results came out, the lockdown was also announced. When school resumed, the grades resumed gradually, but they did not resume simultaneously, which was why some LRC members were not here (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Another focus group LRC9 from Haindongo Secondary School said the following:

First and foremost, we were just nominated in class that this one could become a leader by our fellow learners. Then we were told to give our speeches in front of our classmates. We were also instructed to deliver our speech at the assembly point. Following that, teachers took all of the names of those nominated to begin the election process. Normally, the school used the ballot papers during the election. The image of the candidate to be elected appeared on the ballot papers.

We used a tick to indicate who was elected, but if you did not elect me, you put a cross (FG3, 06 September 20221).

LRC9 further said:

After the election, teachers total and count the votes to determine who received the most votes. Then teachers assign us to positions that we must fill. All of the teachers at the school meet to decide who should fill a particular position on our behalf. However, when we were delivering our speeches, we were already given the position for which we were competing, such as who would be the head boy or head girl, and so on. After the election, we were only assigned to those positions (FG3, 06 September 2021).

Furthermore, LRC9 said:

Our school had a school election committee, but learners were not part of this committee because this was done solely by the teachers. Learner leaders were not explained why learners were not included on the election committee, and we did not inquire why this did not occur (FG3, 06 September 2021).

Also, LRC13, a focus group from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

Like the day I was elected, I was on my way home. There was a parent meeting where people were electing who to become school board members. Some of the teachers were sent to follow me to our house. Luckily, they found me on my way home and got me back to school. That is when I found parents in their meeting. Then parents were told I was elected to become a member of the learner representative council. I do not know who elected me because I already found people done with the election process (FG4, 13 September 2021).

LRC13 further said:

When I arrived at the school, the principal informed me that they had a meeting where people were electing new school board members. Then he informed me that I was elected as a member representing the learner representative council. We do

not have a learner representative council; thus, I do not have other members of the LRCs except myself (FG34, 13 September 2021).

Additionally, LRC13 said:

No other members were elected, but I only used to hear those who were members before me. They are no longer here. Thus, their names do not exist at this school, and I cannot tell how they were elected. Now I only attend the school board meeting and do not participate in any decision-making or contribute anything. For me, it is only to see whether the school is clean, to approach the principal's office and tell him about our needs, for example, we need to do the cleaning campaign. So far, I did not participate in any school leadership structures such as management, finance or sport committee (FG4, 13 September 2021).

There seems to be a general understanding concerning the procedure for selecting the learner representative council in the researched school. However, the study's findings suggest that the election was not procedurally as stipulated in the Namibia Education Act. There was a contradiction between what the Act recommends and what happened during the election process. According to the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, the nomination and election of the learner representative council is an internal matter that does not require the involvement or influence of a third person (GRN, 2001). Of this sentiment, learners were given portfolios by their teachers contrary to the act.

Having presented the election procedure, I will present the learner-representative council's composition in the next section.

5.3.2 Number of learners who are members of the current Learner Representative Council

When I asked a question on the composition of the Learner Representative Council in the researched schools, the participants responded that the school's enrolment must determine it. Thus, their composition where different from one school to another. In this regard, LRC1 from Puma Secondary School focus group one said the following:

Our learners' representative council comprises six members, with an equal number of elected boys and girls (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Whereas LRC6 from Tulipamwe Secondary School said:

> *The learners' representative council composition has eight members with an equal number of boys and girls* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

On a similar sentiment, LRC10, a focus group participant from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

> *The learner representative council at our school is composed of eight learner leaders* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

LRC13, a focus group participant from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

> *I am the only one who was hand-picked as a member of the learner representative council in the entire school* (FG4, 13 September 2021).

The composition of the learner representative council differs from one school to another. According to the Namibia Education Act, the composition of the learner representative council must be an equal number of elected boys and girls, except where a school enrol for only boys or only girls and which number one is one member for every 40 learners of the school (GRN, 2001.p.19).

5.3.3 Number of learner leaders in the governance structures of the school

The focus group participants had different views when I asked the learner leaders about the number of learner leaders who participated in the available committees at the researched schools.

In this regard, LRC3, a focus group one participant from Puma Secondary School, said the following:

> *When the election took place, because we did it before the lockdown, we were just given responsibilities. For example, you were responsible for finance, parents' meetings, school board meetings or teachers' meetings. Thus, that could not happen due to the outbreak of COVID – 19 and the whole country faces a lockdown. Therefore, we did not attend any meeting of that nature, particularly in the meeting with the parents* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Furthermore, LRC4, another focus group also from Puma Secondary school, said the following:

> *Previously we had attended the parents' meetings or when the visitors came to our school, even in the learner representative council meeting with the liaison teacher. Most of us have never attended meetings where people could make decisions in various school leadership structures (*(FG1, 25 August 2021).

LRC7, a focus group from Tulipamwe Secondary school, had this to say:

> *Only the head boy and head girl sit in meetings, especially for parent meetings. None of the LRC members sits in management or on the school board committee. We do not know anything about the decision-making structures that exist at our school* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

A focus group, LRC8 from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

> *I have been a member of the learner representative council for three years now. Still, I have observed no learner leader involved or participating in a decision-making structure since then. Eventually, I was called once to attend the parents meeting to represent my fellow learners, but not to participate in whatever the parents were discussing and making decisions* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

On a similar sentiment, LRC10 from Haindongo Secondary School had this to say:

> *Regarding the school management and board meetings, the school normally invites the head boy and head girl to represent other learners. However, they only go to listen rather than participate in the discussions to provide feedback to their fellow learners* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

Furthermore, LRC10 said the following:

> *The elderly management and school board committee members only wanted to know where the learner leaders did not get the information right and disseminate it. The committee representatives have never contributed or initiated anything in these structures. They were not part of any decision-making structures* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

Whereas the focus group four participant, LRC13 from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following sentiment:

> *I was never allowed to sit in any of the school leadership structures, for example, the management committee, school board or finance committee, since I was the only member of the learner representative council in the whole school* (FG4, 13 September).

The responses provided by most focus group participants (seven out of thirteen) from the researched schools suggested that none of the learner leaders participated in the school board and decision-making structures. The findings from this study suggest that the denial of the rights of the learners to participate in various structures indicates discrimination amongst the school board members and decision-making structures in some rural secondary schools. The study further showed that the learner leaders, particularly the head boy and head girl, were only allowed to sit and listen to collect the right information for dissemination purposes. I believe that learner participation does not occur in the researched rural schools. The argument corroborates the findings generated from the focus group. However, this is contrary to the Namibia Education Act, which shows that the powers and functions of the learner representative council body were to promote the best interest and welfare of the school and its learners (GRN, 2001).

Having discussed the number of learner leaders sitting in various structures, I now present the views of learner leaders regarding learner participation or non-participation in the recruitment panel for teachers.

5.4 Views regarding learner participation or non-participation in certain committees

The focus group participants gave varying views in response to the question of participation in certain committees. In this regard, LRC3, a focus group participant from Puma Secondary School, said the following:

> *We are suggesting that both teachers, learner leaders and learners should work together for us to succeed in our education. As learner leaders, we propose that the school provide opportunities for us to participate in various committees because, at many times, it is only the liaison teacher who decides whether the learner leaders should participate* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

In another focus group, two participants, LRC6 from Tulipamwe Secondary School, commented on the sentiment above. In this case, LRC6 said the following:

> *We have an idea of some of the learner representative council to represent us during the interview process. They can include even two of us, especially the head boy and the head girl. While we get this opportunity of being LRC to represent other learners, we also want to know how things happen when teachers are interviewed. Perhaps we may succeed in future and learn how people ask questions during the interview* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Whereas LRC8, a focus group two participant from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said:

> *We suggest that when teachers are recruited for employment, there should be LRC members, especially the head boy and head girl, to represent us* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Another focus group three participant, LRC11 from Haindongo Secondary School, had this to say:

> *There was no participation from learners in the teacher recruitment process. However, we have some proposals for a teacher who will be appointed to be similar to the previous teacher. We haven't put it into action yet, but it's on our to-do list. We only said it to ourselves and never said it aloud* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

Also, LRC13 from the Shifitu Secondary school focus group said:

> *I have never participated in the recruitment of teachers; however, I am suggesting that it is good to represent learners in the teacher recruitment process. I am also suggesting that the committee allow us to be members of the panel like any school board member* (FG4, 13 September 2021).

Regarding the question on the views of learner leaders on the recruitment of teachers, most participants showed that there was no learner participation during the interview process. The findings suggest an avenue to practice their leadership skills and learner representation amongst the panellists. In the next section, I now present the support of learner leaders.

5.5 Support of learner leaders

5.5.1 Training workshops attended after the election as learner leaders

In response to the question on training workshops attended, the learner leaders indicated that they did not receive any training since the beginning of their terms in office. However, one of the participants from Puma Secondary School showed that they were informed about the training, which could not be materialised due to the coronavirus. In this regard, LRC2 from Puma Secondary School focus group two had this to say:

> *If I can remember very well, no training was provided because the lockdown started when we were about to go for the training. We hope the training will still come because we were already informed that we were supposed to get trained. However, the lockdown came, and perhaps they will still do that for us* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

5.5.2 What are your views regarding the quality and relevance of the training you received

When I asked the focus group participants, most indicated that they could not provide any views regarding this question since they were not yet trained. However, LRC13 from Shifitu Secondary School focus group four said the following:

> *I am unable to give you any view, but it is good to be trained because it could have helped me to provide the relevant answer as I am discussing things with you now; I could have been in the position of knowing what I am talking about* (FG4, 13 September 2021).

5.5.3 Other forms of support to develop learner leadership skills

In response to the question on support, participants from various focus groups provided what they felt could help them to develop their leadership skills. In this case, LRC4, a focus group participant from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

> *We need to introduce the plan of action because we received many complaints from our fellow learners at various times. During the week, we need at least a day when the learner leaders could meet with their liaison teachers to reconcile all the problems collected from their fellow learners. They look at how these problems could be resolved by all the school learners* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

On a similar note, LRC7, a participant from the Tulipamwe Secondary School focus group, said the following:

> *I think the school should give us essential needs such as the advice in the absence of training on how things should be done. The most important thing is to provide us with the Education Act No. 16 of 2001 for us to familiarise ourselves with the roles and responsibilities of the LRCs and the importance of such a body, particularly in rural schools* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Whereas the focus group (LRC8) had this to say:

> *We need to know about our rights, what must be done for us, and what cannot happen. We should consider our rights when teachers talk to us as learner leaders and also with our fellow learners to inform them about how the school and its learners maintain the learner leadership concept in rural secondary schools* (FG2, 25 August 2021).

Furthermore, LRC8 said:

> *The Learners should be informed on how to work with the learner representative council members and what should be done to enable the learner leaders to practice their leadership effectively. Because if things are not discussed in how they should be done, then learner leaders may feel embarrassed, resulting in a situation where the learner leader, as a person, gives up, and it is not good to do that* (FG2, 25 August 2021).

LRC11, a focus group from Haindongo Secondary school, said the following:

> *If teachers could give us any support or motivation, I think it would boost the knowledge and experience of the learner leaders. The motivation from our teachers enabled us to practice our leadership roles effectively. It also helps us to conceptualise what the roles and responsibilities of the learner leaders are all about since we came from different houses with different backgrounds and were raised differently* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

Also, LRC13 from the Shifitu Secondary School focus group felt that things do not work well when you are the only member of the learner representative council, and he had this to say:

> *I think there is a need for other learners to join me as members of the learner representative council for us to discuss issues related to our roles. For example, we could have discussed something together and forwarded the information to the school principal's office if something happened. Perhaps there might be a teacher who is not fulfilling his teaching role. We could have advised each other on what should be done* (FG4, 13 September 2021).

5.6 Learner leaders' experiences

5.6.1 Experiences regarding roles as learner leaders

Most of the learner leaders who participated in the discussions of the four focus groups indicated that they did not gain any experience. In this case, all the focus groups from Tulipamwe Secondary School and three participants from the Twafikama Secondary School focus group said they had no experience.

However, LRC 1, a participant from a focus group from Puma Secondary School, said the following:

> *I have experience because I can assist my fellow learners when they have matters that concern them. I know how to work with them and what I should do to help them with a certain thing, for example, when they want to approach their teachers* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

On a similar note, LRC10, a focus group from Haindongo Secondary School, had this to say:

> *As learner leaders, we must be aware that we are attending school at the village school. As a result, not all of our parents who live in those villages understand educational issues. Some rural parents do not care when the learners are absent from attending their classes* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

LRC13, a focus group four participant from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

> *I have experience talking to my fellow learners about how to tell them to do something, be it that the teacher told me to inform them about something to be*

carried out, or I can also tell them to do something without fear (FG4, 13 September 2021).

The participants appeared to have difficulty answering the questions, as most indicated that they were unsure of their roles in teaching and learning. Having presented their role, I am now presenting the challenges the learner leaders may face in their roles in the school board meeting if any.

5.6.2 Challenges related to power relations and conservative attitudes of adults regarding learner leadership

Regarding power relations and conservative views towards the participation of learner leaders, all the participants from Focus Groups Two, Three and Four showed that they did not sit in any structural committee at their schools. It is, therefore, on this basis that they could not share any challenges they experienced concerning their roles as a result of power relations. However, two learner leaders from Puma Secondary School focus group one shared the challenges they experienced during their tenure as members of the learner representative council.

In this case, LRC1, a focus group one participant from Puma Secondary School felt that parents who attended the meetings with them had a different understanding from theirs, and he had this to say:

> *The challenge we have experienced so far is when you are in a meeting with parents. Parents prefer to do things according to their understanding without considering us as leaders. The misunderstanding between parents and learner leaders becomes a big challenge* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Furthermore, LRC1 said:

> *You often find the parents telling you that during their time in school, they listened to what older people were telling them to do, forgetting that their time is completely different from ours. Our time came with some development and many things too. Thus, it is difficult for us to re-look at some of the school rules and make some of the laws lenient, especially those that have existed for some years* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

On a similar note, LRC2, also a participant from Puma Secondary School focus group one, said the following:

> *Learner leaders have not listened to this during the school board meeting. As a result, it becomes a big challenge because if we happen to have our ideas as learner leaders or the ideas collected from our fellow learners to share in the meeting with the parents and liaison teachers, then we may find them unwilling to consider our point. This brings us to the misunderstanding between learner leaders, parents and teachers, but since you are the small child, this forces you to slow down and accept what the older adults are saying, although that is not what we want as learners. However, you have to do it to show respect to them* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

LRC2 further said:

> *Our parents normally think children nowadays are rude compared to when they were raised. I believe that during their time, they did things according to their parents' instructions because no development was happening then, and then it came in slowly. However, children are now moving along with contemporary issues that yield development* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

The findings suggest that learner leaders face the challenge of power from adult school board members. The adult school board members used cultural influence to undermine the learner leaders' rights to actively participate in all matters concerning them, as alluded to in UNCRC article 12 (UNCRC, 1989).

After discussing the challenges that learner leaders faced, I presented the number of school board meetings attended and the impact made, as well as the experience gained regarding the attitudes of adults from the school board meetings, in the following section.

5.6.3 The impact the school board meetings have on learner leaders' learning

The responses provided by Puma, Tulipamwe, Haindongo and Shifitu Secondary Schools participants suggest that they did not sit in any school leadership structures as stipulated in the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001. It was, therefore, difficult for them to indicate any experience gained in that regard. The findings indicate a lack of learner participation in school leadership and decision-making in the researched schools. This impairs young people's ability

to lead. It also disputed the powers and functions of secondary Learner Representative Councils under the Namibia Education Act No.16 of 2001. (GRN, 2001).

5.6.4 Support from the school authorities to promote maximum learner participation in the school board

The Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 has clear guidelines on the members who should participate in the School Board. Regarding this matter, I asked the participants how they have experienced support from the school authorities to promote their maximum participation in the school board. The participants responded that they could not answer that question because they did not know what the school board members normally discussed during their meetings. All the participants had the same answers.

5.6.5 Views on the prohibition of learner leaders from handling school finances

The NEA No. 16 of 2001 indicates the powers and functions of the School Boards and limitations towards the learner leaders. The Act prohibits learner leaders from handling the finances of the schools. In response to the question, I asked them whether they understood why they were prohibited and what their views on this were; some of the focus group participants presented their views as follows:

In this case, LRC1 from Puma Secondary School focus group one said the following:

> *It is not proper for the school to allow the learner leaders to keep school finances safe; it becomes a challenge to that learner. For example, when a learner becomes a treasurer of the school board, that learner may not know how to handle such funds, even recording how the money was spent. In my view, I think we should be allowed to participate in how the money should be spent* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

On the same question, LRC2, a focus group from Puma Secondary School, responded in this way:

> *As a learner leader, I believe that the lawmaker had done the right thing when the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 prohibited learners from handling finance. The learner leaders might not handle the school finances properly because they have never worked with money. However, I suggest that learners need to be involved in committees that handle money at school for them to participate and share their ideas with the committee members.* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Furthermore, LRC2 said:

> *I believe that learner participation in finance committees increases our chances of gaining experience on how money should be handled. For example, most of the time, when boys go to soccer, the school provides food, but money is always with the teacher accompanying the players instead of a learner leader responsible for the sport. It becomes a challenge since we are unsure how the money was spent* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

On the sentiment above, LRC3 from Puma Secondary School focus group one participant responded this way on a question about financial matters:

> *The school violated our rights when it excluded us from financial matters. Thus, we differ in the ways monies are spent. For example, soccer players may need boots and attire to replace the old ones. Thus, the learner leaders who are responsible for the sports committee have to ensure that they share that with the school board members to release the money to buy the correct sports attire and food and to cater for transport those learners to the venue where the tournament would take place* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

LRC4, a focus group one participant from Puma Secondary School, said the following:

> *As learner leaders, we have a responsibility to provide the right information. For example, we should give the total number of attires the school should buy for these sizes. We are doing this because you find out that if you did not give the number of attires you need, you might be giving the wrong sizes for soccer or netball (FG1, 25 August 2021).*

Further, LRC4 said:

> *I believe we have to ensure that we give the exact and accurate information regarding our demands in terms of finance. Moreover, we must participate in decision-making on financial matters but not in the safekeeping of money* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

LRC5, a focus group three participant from Haindongo Secondary School, had this to say:

> *Learners should not be involved in finance handling, as this would increase the theft rate. For example, there are Juke Box machines in the vicinity, and you are entrusted with the handling of finances, and you may be alone or with a teacher. You might be tempted to use some of that money by the time you pass by those Cuca shops. This could jeopardize your status as a learner leader* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Whereas LRC13, a focus group four participant from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

> *I understand that a learner does not need to work with money. When a learner is handling money, he may pay attention to money handling instead of his school work. He may spend much of his thoughts on that responsibility. It is time-wasting, and it may spoil him and become a thief. This happens because he normally sees the money, but it is not his money, and he does not have it yet but wants it* (FG4, 13 September 2021).

Furthermore, LRC13 said:

> *A learner leader who handles school finances might steal other people's property. It becomes a big challenge since it promotes theft amongst learner leaders who handle school finances because he knows the advantage of having money. Therefore, I am just saying that learners should not participate in money handling but should be allowed to participate in the decision-making process during the discussion of school finances* (FG4.13 September 2021).

Having presented the professional support of the learner leaders from the authority about participation in the school board, I now present what was not discussed concerning their experience as learner leaders.

5.6.6 Other experiences learner leaders shared

When I asked the focus group participants from all the researched schools about other issues I might not have asked, most participants indicated that almost everything was asked. However, one learner leader from Puma Secondary School focus group one, LRC3, said the following:

*We need to understand the Namibia Education Act No.16 of 2001 to take note of our roles and responsibilities and to learn what to do and what should not be done. But if we do not know it, we may do things unrelated to our roles and carry out duties against the law (*FG1, 25 August 2021).

5.7 Constrains faced by learner leaders and possible solutions

5.7.1 The constraining factors that influence learner participation in school leadership structures

When I explored the experience of the learner leaders, I asked them to spotlight constraints they faced, if any, that influenced their participation in school leadership structures. In this regard, LRC1, a focus group one participant from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

The constraining factors could be when you are busy doing your educational matters in class and find some learners moving up and down during lessons. You must stop what you were busy with and tell those learners to return to their classes. If you are lucky and one teacher also observes their movements, he may assist you by telling them they should not move around the school because teachers are busy with something else (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Whereas LRC2, also a focus group participant from Puma Secondary School, said the following in response to the question:

*The challenges that we are facing are that we have various responsibilities. Some of the responsibilities are to ensure that learners study while in their classes; to control the movement of learners to and from the toilet facilities; and around the schoolyard (*FG1, 25 August 2021).

LRC2 further said:

*You may find some learners disrespect you when you instruct them to or not to do something. Then we need to have a rule which informs those kinds of learners who disregard the instruction of the learner leaders (*FG1, 25 August 2021).

In addition to that, LRC4, another focus group from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

I think there are many challenges that we are faced with. One of the challenges is when you are telling your fellow learners to remain in their classrooms, but they

deny it, or sometimes they shout at you that they cannot be told by the learner leaders (FG1, 25 August 2021).

LRC4 further said:

While you are busy chasing learners back to their classes, the liaison teacher asks why your fellow learners are just moving outside their classes. Therefore, in that way, I face a big challenge from both sides: the learners and the teachers' side (FG1, 25 August 2021).

On a similar sentiment, LRC5, a focus group from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

*Sometimes, we inform our fellow learners about our roles and responsibilities. In return, some learners might tell you they did not carry you in their pockets upon arrival at school. Thus, I think schools must establish strict rules that govern and protect LRCs when carrying out their roles, just like the class rules (*FG2, 30 August 2021).

LRC6 from the Tulipamwe Secondary School focus group said the following:

As elected LRC members, we experience many challenges from our fellow learners. Our fellow learners think we are very important because we were elected as members of LRCs. However, we do not show off and only fulfil our role as entrusted by most of the school learners (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Whereas LRC7 also, a participant from the Tulipamwe Secondary School focus group, responded in this way:

I want to add to what my fellow LRC6 had said: our fellow learners felt uncomfortable with us when we were elected as LRCs, but we did not elect ourselves to those positions (FG2, 30 August 2021).

On the question I asked, LRC9, a focus group participant from Haindongo Secondary School, had this to say:

> *We faced challenges because some of our fellow learners were hurling insults at us, and others claimed that the LRCs would not be allowed to enter certain classrooms. Some encouraged you to continue your responsibilities by saying that only that person and the rest of the classroom supported you. When those learners who are older than you pass by during the election, they intimidate you* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

On a similar sentiment, LRC13, a focus group from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

> *I did not face any challenges when I was an LRC member. However, the constraints that can influence the learner's leadership are, for example, culture. This happens in some instances, but sometimes it does not* (FG4, 13 September 2021).

5.7.2 Possible solutions to constraints on learner leadership

Concerning constraints on learner leadership, the majority of the focus group participants, such as LRC1, LRC2, LRC3, LRC5, LRC7, LRC8, LRC9, LRC10, LRC11, LRC12, and LRC13, indicated that they had no idea as to what could be the possible solution for the constraints they are faced with. However, LRC4 and LRC6 suggested what could be done to overcome the constraints experienced in the researched schools.

In this case, one of the focus group participants from Puma Secondary School, LRC4, said:

> *From our perspective, we can resolve these challenges if we sit in the meeting with our liaison teachers and fellow learners. We inform them that our fellow learners disguise us, and they do not feel happy sometimes when we are amongst them while leading them. They do not regard us as their leaders (*FG1, 25 August 2021).

LRC6, a participant from Tulipamwe Secondary School focus group two, said the following:

> *To resolve these kinds of issues, we take the names of the offenders to the office of the school principal. The principal would then give it to the school's committee dealing with disciplinary issues. They decide what should happen to that learner (*FG2, 30 August 2021).

In this regard, most participants (eleven out of thirteen) found it difficult to respond to this question. Only two participants (two out of thirteen) could understand the

question and suggest a possible resolution to overcome the challenges faced by the learner leaders.

5.7.3 Learner leaders' views on what should be done to promote learner leadership in rural schools

I asked the participants if anything could be done to promote learner leadership in rural school leadership structures. Six out of thirteen Focus Group participants from the researched schools could not provide suggestions that enabled learner leadership in rural secondary schools. However, seven of the thirteen participants suggested possible hints to promote learner leadership in rural schools.

In this regard, LRC2, a Puma Secondary School focus group, said the following:

> *I think there should be a master plan as to when each school should carry out its election. I am also suggesting that the learner leaders be trained shortly after the election to learn how to lead their fellow learners* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

LRC3, a focus group participant from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

> *I think the liaison teachers have to ensure that they explain the learner leaders' roles as per the education act fully." Because teachers do not give us our roles, they do not discuss the policies and guidelines that learner leaders should follow. Then if learners were not told about their expectations from the learner leaders and what we should expect from them, they would never understand the learner leadership concept in schools, particularly in rural secondary schools (*FG1, 25 August 2021)

LRC3 further said:

> *Suppose schools fail to inform learners about the importance of learner leaders participating in the school leadership structures. In that case, it might create a lot of misunderstanding about learner leadership. The learners kept on saying that we were only wearing a different uniform from them. Still, if they are informed clearly about our roles and responsibilities and their importance, they may follow easily (*FG1, 25 August 2021).

Whereas LRC5, a focus group from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

> *For learner leadership to grow further, a responsible person, specifically for the learner representative council body, should reside either at the circuit or the region. The person in charge of these responsibilities must be in charge of the LRC's training, which I propose taking place twice a year for two to three months. Hence, we are trying to perform our roles, but we are unsure about it. As learner leaders, we should understand our roles, what we should practice gaining experience from them, and what should not form part of our roles and responsibilities. This is a common misunderstanding.* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Furthermore, LRC6, another focus group from Tulipamwe Secondary School, responded to the question in this way:

*In my view, the mandatory regulatory framework which guides the establishment of learner leadership in schools does not adequately provide clear guidelines for the learner leaders to conceptualise their roles. Thus, I am suggesting that the government establish an organization that works in collaboration with schools to properly implement the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001(*FG2, 30 August 2021).

On a similar sentiment, LRC9, a focus group from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

> *Our rural schools require us to take at least two to four learners to other schools to familiarise themselves with how learner leaders practice their leadership roles in their schools. This will help learner leaders conceptualise their roles and how they should be practised. It will also help the learner representative council body in rural schools grow in leadership roles* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

Another focus group from Haindongo Secondary School LRC8 responded in this way:

> *I am suggesting that the school's leadership organise a meeting for the liaison teacher and learner leaders to discuss their roles. We also need to visit other schools in our context and learn their best practices* (FG3. 06 September 2021).

Whereas LRC13, a focus group from Shifitu Secondary School, had this to say:

> *Schools such as Shifitu Secondary School should establish different structures, including the learner representative council. The school needs to distribute the roles of the learner representative council among us. This would help us to know more about our roles and develop our minds due to the responsibility that we are carrying out (*FG4, 13 September 2021).

In this response, the participants suggested strategies that they thought could promote the concept of learner leadership in rural schools. Amongst the strategies include the master plan for election of the learner representative council, workshops, and training. Mandatory regulatory framework for learner leaders, full establishment of various structures.

5.8 Conclusion

The chapter presented what the learner leaders conceptualise as their roles, practices and experiences in various structures. They presented the enablers and constraints and how to overcome the challenges they faced. Therefore, in the next chapter, I present and discuss the school principals, teachers and parents' conceptualisations of learner-leadership, participation and decision-making in schools.

CHAPTER SIX
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS' CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF LEARNER LEADERSHIP, PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING IN SCHOOLS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented what the learner leaders conceptualised as their roles, practices and experiences of leadership in their schools. Chapter Six deals with the descriptive analysis of the findings from the school principals, teachers and parents about learner leadership, participation and decision-making at the researched schools. The data was generated from the field through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and document reviews. In this chapter, I also attempt to make sense of data, what it means or suggests and what is to be made of it. I also make a larger meaning about learner leadership and participation based on the personal views of the research participants and compare and contrast the findings with past studies (Creswell, 2007).

In this chapter, I present and discuss the data generated from four rural secondary schools in the Ohangwena Region. The study included thirty-two participants: four school principals, four teachers, four board chairpersons and four parents with long service on school boards. The study findings were derived from the critical research questions on how school principals, teachers and parents perceived learner leadership and participation in decision-making in the researched Ohangwena Region schools.

The data presented were obtained from four recorded semi-structured interviews with school principals, teachers and parents with long-serving experiences in school governing bodies; questionnaires were also used with school principals in addition to semi-structured interviews and teachers and documents analysis. Participants who participated in this study were referred to Principal as Pr1, Pr2, Pr3, Pr4; Liaison Teachers LT1, LT2, LT3, LT4; Parents as P1, P2, P3, P4; P5, P6, P7 and P8. The four researched secondary schools were coded as Shifitu (S), Tulipamwe (T), Haindongo (H) and Puma (P).

6.2 Findings from the semi-structured interviews with the participants

6.2.1 Biographical data of participants

Four principals participated in the semi-structured interview to share their perspectives on learner leadership and participation in school decision-making. In terms of gender, three male and one female school principal participated in the interviews. Pr2 and Pr4 were over fifty years old, while Pr1 and Pr3 were under forty. Pr1, Pr2, and Pr4 had more than fifteen years of experience in school board activities, while Pr2 had only one year of experience, during which time they all served as principals of the school. In addition, I interviewed four liaison teachers who participated in the semi-structured interview. In terms of gender, the study included one female and three male participants. T1 was between the ages of twenty-one and thirty years, while T2, T3, and T4 were between the ages of thirty-one and forty. T1 and T3 had five years of experience, while T2 and T4 had 12 and 16 years, respectively. I also interviewed eight parents from the schools I researched. P1 and P2 were between the ages of thirty-one and forty, while P3 to P8 were between the ages of forty-one and fifty. Two of the parents were female, while the other six were male. P1 had four years of experience in a school board, and P2 through P8 had more than ten years of experience.

Having presented the personal biographical data of the participants, I now present the responses on the definition of a leader in the next section.

6.2.2 Findings on the definition of a leader

In response to the above question, the participants (principal, liaison teachers and parents) gave their views on their conceptualisations of the leader. Twelve of the sixteen participants in this category appeared to have a broad understanding of the term ‘leader’. However, some participants had different understandings of the concept, and several definitions were provided. In this case, four of the sixteen participants did not understand the concept. The findings appear to indicate that there was a lack of understanding of the concepts of leadership. Therefore, the school authorities should raise awareness among stakeholders, particularly school principals, teachers, and parents. I would further advise the school authorities to bring in people with learner leadership skills from urban schools to train them.

In this regard, Pr1 from Puma Secondary School echoed this sentiment in an individual interview:

> *A leader is a created somebody with leadership qualities who can try to influence others. Such a leader influences others to do what he wants them to or what is right to be done* (IIP, 23 August 2021).

Another participant, LT1 from Puma secondary school, similarly defined a leader, and this is what she had to say:

> *A leader is a created somebody with leadership qualities who can try to influence others. Such a leader portrays the good character and is a role model for others* (IIP, 23 August 2021).

A school board chairperson, P1 from Puma Secondary School, participated in the individual interview, and he had this to say:

> *A leader is entrusted with leading a group of people* (IIP, 24 August 2021).

P2, a long-serving school board member from Puma Secondary School, who also participated in the individual interview, said the following:

> *Leadership entails spearheading something to lead others in your immediate surroundings. It could be when you tell them something to do or when something needs to be fixed. Leadership entails directing the actions of others or a group of people* (IIP, 24 August 2021).

On the other hand, Pr2 of Tulipamwe secondary school referred a leader to:

> *Someone leading an institution, be it a school or an organisation, whatever that person is the head of that institution* (IIT, 30 August 2021).

LT2, a participant from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said:

> *A leader initiates ideas and programs for any organisation's progress, such as a school or sets straightforward objectives that need to be achieved at the end of the day (*IIT, 30 August 2021).

On a similar sentiment, Pr3, a participant from Haindongo Secondary School individual interview, said the following:

> *A leader spearheads a company, group, house or village, country or continent. A leader is an exemplary person who intends to manage the school not in a selfish*

way but in a way appropriate according to the leadership strategies. A leader manages, supervises and leads by example (IIH, 06 September 2021).

On a similar note, participant P6, a long-serving school board member from Haindongo Secondary School, defined a leader as:

An exemplary person who can guide others, monitor how things are done, and manage the school not in a selfish way but in an appropriate way according to the leadership strategies of the school (IIH, 07 September 2021).

Whereas Pr4, a participant from Shifitu Secondary School, had this to say:

A leader is a person at the helm of an institution, actually supervising other staff members, and this person must always do things for the staff members to emulate. One of his responsibilities is to manage and ensure that the laws regarding the operation of the institutions are adhered to (IIS, 13 September 2021).

Participant P7, a school board chairperson from Shifitu Secondary School, had this to say:

A leader is someone who guides others and observes how things are done. When it comes to school leadership, the school requires the school board. Even if you have a need, you must go through them first, and then they will take your needs to the school principal's office (IIS, 14 September 2021).

The above definitions are consistent with what (Vaeta 2015; Mullins & Christie, 2016; Kandjengo & Shikalepo, 2020) proposed in their study, that a leader in a school is someone who holds a position in the school structure and influences others to achieve educational goals set up. However, in response to the above statement, the Participatory Leadership Theory that underpins this study refutes the statement, implying that a leader of an organization should portray a genuine understanding of all stakeholders' participation, regardless of their position of authority (Banjarnahor, 2017).

Most participants appear to perceive a leader as a person in a school's hierarchical position who can influence others to do what they want. Furthermore, this contradicts the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, which advocates for participatory democratic leadership to prevail in

Namibian secondary schools. At some point, the participants used the terms "leader" and "manager" interchangeably.

I presented the definition of a leader and will present how the participants understood learner leadership.

6.2.3 How the participants understood the term “learner leadership”.

The definition of learner leadership was defined differently by the participants. In response to my question about how they define learner leadership, the participants defined it as a group of learners elected into the learner representative council body to lead other learners and collaborate with the school board.

Pr1, the school principal of Puma Secondary School, participated in the semi-structured interview and felt that the term learner leadership was difficult for him. However, in this regard, he understood it in this way, and he said the following:

> *From my point of view, learner leadership is when somebody at school wants to, who has the power to lead others, feels and is willing to help others at school, even their little children. They can have somebody who has feelings and is willing to lead others, who can ask questions freely from other learners, teachers or parents* (IIP, 23 August 2021).

Participant LT1, a liaison teacher from Puma Secondary School, echoed this sentiment, and this was what he had to say:

> *Learner leadership is when the learner leaders are elected to inspire and help others achieve their goals in such a way that those leaders act as their spoke person in academic and life issues that affect them* (IIP, 23 August 2021).

On the same note, P1, a school board chairperson from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

> *Learner leadership is a process where learner leaders represent their peers and act as spokespersons of other learners. Learner leadership should be allowed in schools to allow learners to freely express themselves and share their ideas with the management of the school* (IIP, 24 August 2021).

On the same note, P2 from Puma Secondary School said:

> *Learner leadership requires learners to elect representatives who can attend to their problems during the school board meeting or in the principal's office* (IIP. 24 August 2021).

In this case, participant Pr2, a school principal from Tulipamwe secondary school, had this to say:

> *Learner leadership is when a particular group of learners is elected to lead the school in corroboration with the school leadership, such as the school board, to ensure the representation of other learners on issues that affect them* (IIT, 30 August 2021).

Furthermore, LT2, a liaison teacher from Tulipamwe Secondary School, also revealed that learner leadership is more about representing learners in decision-making structures and allows them to freely express themselves when participating in various structures in the school.

In this case, LT2 had this to say:

> *Learner leadership is a broad term that has to be defined as the responsibilities given to the learners to represent others in the decision structures of the school, such as the school board meeting, management meetings, parent meetings or extra mural activities* (IIT, 30 August 2021).

On a similar note, participant P3, a school board chairperson from Tulipamwe Secondary School, defined leadership, and this was what he had to say:

> *I believe learner leadership is when learners participate in the leadership of other learners and thus learn about their own future life. To correct others when they were doing things incorrectly. Because children, such as learners, are at such a young age, they require some advice from the elderly* (IIT, 31 August 2021).

Participant P4, a long-serving school board member from Tulipamwe Secondary, said the following:

> *In my opinion, learner leadership is when we lead learners. For example, as I previously stated, we normally observe whether learners arrive on time, come to*

school with courage every day or come late; do they come to school every day or are absent most of the time (IIT, 31 August 2021).

Furthermore, P4 said:

Learner leadership, in my opinion, occurs when learner leaders lead their peers. They lead others to ensure that they are working hard to improve their school performance; that the teachers are dedicated to their work; that the learners behave well toward the teachers; and that the learners respect their fellow learner leaders. Regarding learner leadership in schools, I believe this is what it means (IIT, 31 August 2021).

The school principal from Haindongo Secondary School, Pr3, responded to this question, and this was what she had to say:

I understand the term learner leadership to say this is a particular learner or a group of learners that others have elected that they trust to head them in learner-related issues. So, learner leadership runs in schools regardless of the school's capacity, whether a small school, a secondary school, or a combined school like ours (IIH, 06 September 2021).

Furthermore, Pr3 said:

Learner leadership allows learners to be represented or their issues to be viewed by those they trust and can reach the upper leadership in the school for them to be heard. Learner representatives can be councils, class monitors, and so on (IIH, 06 September 2021).

Another response from participant LT3, a liaison teacher from Haindongo Secondary School, suggests that learner leadership occurs mainly when learner leaders monitor and control other learners to keep noise to a minimum during class when teachers are not present.

In this regard, LT3 had this to say:

Learner leadership is when learners are entrusted with the responsibilities of keeping other learners quiet when they are making noise in class and speaking on their behalf when raising their concerns, affecting learners at school (IIH, 13 September 2021).

Participant P5, a school board chairperson from Haindongo Secondary School, had a different understanding of the concept of learner leadership, and she said the following:

> *The school should advise learners to take their education seriously and to avoid activities that do not complement their education. Because today's children do not take their education seriously, they also want to bring in things that will take them away from their education and focus on things of this world* (IIH, 07 September 2021).

Further, P5 said:

> *Instead of focusing on their education, they are preoccupied with insignificant things. These learners cause consume excessive amounts of alcohol while they are young because they are not focused on their education but rather on doing bad things, and girls become pregnant at an alarming rate* (IIH, 07 September 2021).

Whereas participant P6, a long-serving school board member from Haindongo Secondary School, had this to say:

> *Learner leadership, in my opinion, is defined as when learners are entrusted with responsibilities to deal with situations that relate to their own future life or leadership knowledge* (IIH, 07 September 2021).

Another similar sentiment was made by participant Pr4, a school principal from Shifitu Secondary School, who posited that learner leadership is the process which influences the implementation of the rules and regulations when the learner forms part of the decisions made. The participants recognised that learner leadership was an important component of school leadership and management that schools should implement.

Regarding the findings mentioned above, Participant Pr4 echoed this sentiment, and this was what he had to say:

> *Learner leadership would mean that learners should be involved with the school's leadership to ensure adherence to the school rules and regulations when they form part of the school leadership and decision-making process. It becomes easier for*

them to implement the laws and regulations and everything regarding the order of the school (IIS, 13 September 2021).

Furthermore, Pr4 said:

When they were part of the decision-making when the rules were being formulated, it became easier for the learners to behave towards fulfilling that law. If they are made, and they pull for them, it becomes a problem (IIS, 13 September 2021).

Participant LT4, a liaison teacher from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

I think learner leadership is the way that school uses for the learners to integrate with teachers to lead the day-to-day responsibilities at school. It is not only to teach or to discipline but also an everyday activity that has to be carried out on that day; you need to have learner leadership (IIS. 13 September 2021).

LT4 further said:

When it comes to the learner leadership body which is at that school assists mostly teachers when there is an activity which needs mostly the leadership of the learner if they are doing such a thing alone without the support of the teacher, particularly if they are in their classes alone because not all the time the lesson has teachers (IIS, 13 September 2021).

LT4 continued to say:

Sometimes, learners may play at the playground or during the break; all that time, they need leadership to maintain school rules by every learner whenever they are within the schoolyard or even when they are outside the school. All that needs the leadership of the learners to lead themselves. Then, they mingle with their teachers (IIS, 13 September 2021).

The responses from the participants appear to indicate that some were unfamiliar with the concept of learner leadership in schools and its application in decision-making structures.

In this regard, P7, a school board chairperson from Shifitu Secondary School, had this to say:

> *Learner Leadership is about the learner leaders standing between learners and the teacher, bringing the needs of their peers to the teachers' attention* (IIS, 14 September 2021.

Another participant P8, a long-serving school board member from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

> *In my opinion, the term Learner Leadership refers to a learner who can give others rules or who can be very naughty and lead others to do things that cannot be considered very well* (IIS, 14 September 2021).

The study found that some participants conceptualise learner leadership as one of the most important leaderships that must be practised at school. The findings suggest that learners should be involved in the school's leadership. However, findings from the questionnaires suggest that learner leadership was a concept that was not well understood by most participants, particularly in some of the rural researched schools. Three of four liaison teachers appear unsure of what learner leadership entails in some rural secondary schools. That was a similar indication from the school principals, where three out of four could not understand the definition of learner leadership.

Other researchers, such as Grant and Nekondo (2016), refute the above definition provided by most participants that learner leadership is not only about representation, but it should be a leadership practised by an individual not limited to the formal authority or position in any organisation. The responses from this cohort indicate that most participants lack an understanding of learner leadership in some researched rural schools.

After discussing how the participants understood the concept of learner leadership, I present the participants' views regarding learner leaders in taking up roles in school leadership and management with regards to the attitude of parents in rural areas about the place of learners in such societies.

6.2.4 School principals, teachers and parents' views on learner leaders taking up roles in school leadership and management

In response to the question on the views of the school principals, teachers and parents, the study discovered that they had varying attitudes toward learner leaders taking up roles in school

leadership and management. Eleven of the sixteen participants support and regard learner leadership roles as an important opportunity to practice leadership at school.

In this case, Pr1, a school principal from Puma Secondary School, echoed this sentiment, and this was what he had to say:

> *I think learner leadership is not parallel with parents leadership. Sometimes, learners want to be free, freer than their parents. Sometimes, learners do not want to agree with the leadership of the parents when they say they are in a modern time; they want to simplify the old leadership of the parents. Their time is not like the time for the parents. They want to change their feelings and leadership, and it is based on change* (IIP, 23 August 2021).

Furthermore, Pr1 said:

> *Learners at school advocate for change and freedom and want new things to happen. Regarding freedom, they want to be free from responsibilities, and some learners do not want to do anything, while some do not want to have responsibilities. Learners claim freedom everywhere in school or society* (IIP, 23 August 2021).

On a similar sentiment, LT1 echoed this sentiment, and she had this to say:

> *I think it is really good for the learners to be involved in being leaders. I believe that leadership happens in so many ways; it can be ways, not ways but places, classrooms, and administration-wise or culturally. Now in classrooms, they become leaders. For example, at our school, we have class monitors, we have chalkboard cleaners, we have book collectors, and all of those are learners acting as leaders* (IIP, 23 August 2021).

Furthermore, LT1 said the following:

> *She further indicated that some parents lack an understanding of learner leadership. Thus, they come to school, confront a teacher and shout bad words toward teachers. Parents can even stop their children from participating in such events. However, it is really good when learners participate in decision-making structures; hence, we nurture them as future leaders* (IIP, 23 August 2021).

Participant P1, a school board chairperson from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

> *I believe the Ministry of Education has stated that education should be a collaborative effort that involves all stakeholders. However, when it comes to learner leadership, learner leaders are elected to represent other learners in the learner representative council and their role in our society, but not to make decisions during the school board meeting* (IIP, 24 August 2021).

On a similar note, participant P2, a long-serving school board member, echoed the above sentiment, and this was what she had to say:

> *Learner leadership is an important concept, in my opinion. When parents see their children taking on leadership roles at school, the attitudes and behaviours of those learners in leadership positions change, even if they have bad personalities. When comparing learners who dropped out of school with learner leaders, it is clear that they are vastly different from those who do not attend school; there is always change* (IIP, 24 August 2021).

P2 further said:

> *When parents with educational backgrounds see their children taking on leadership roles in schools, especially those in positions of power, they are filled with pride. Learners who practice their leadership roles gain experience in various areas. You could tell other parents how the neighbouring schools use this type of leadership. Sometimes parents would want to discuss something about the school's features for the parents to understand what school leadership entails* (IIP, 24 August 2021).

P2 continued to say:

> *Learner leadership contributes to maintaining the relationship between the learners and their parents to further the school's development. It strengthens the bonds between teachers, learners, and parents in various school leadership structures* (IIP, 24 August 2021).

Disrespect and low-income family background were some identified findings that discouraged the learner leaders from taking up their leadership roles. In this case, Pr2 from Tulipamwe Secondary School had this to say.

> *There is a challenge from the parent's side concerning learner leaders taking up leadership roles. The parents normally tell their children that they cannot be led by their peers from a low-income family background, the child of that parent* (IIT, 30 August 2021).

Additionally, participant Pr2 said the following:

> *Culturally in any society, a member of that society does not recognise the ability of those who were born in that society. Thus, in this community, learners who come from low-income families are not recognised as learners who can lead their peers, they are very much disrespected, and it creates havoc amongst our learners since they all come from the same community. They know each other* (IIT, 30 August 2021).

Pr2 further said:

> *I believe that the involvement of the parents in school affairs causes most of the learners from the village where the school is not to show interest in the school's leadership. That was one of the factors that caused learner participation to drop or not even be available at this school at some points. However, this leadership is generally genuine and helps if such learners participate in the school leadership structures* (IIT, 30 August 2021).

However, Pr2, a principal from Tulipamwe Secondary School, took cognisance of the importance of learner leadership in rural secondary schools, and this was what he had to say:

> *The learner leaders help the school share ideas on things which matter most to them because they are in a good position since they know more about what concerns them than their teachers or other school board members. But if these learners were not allowed to air their views, it becomes hard for the school to know what concerns them, and the school may not know what could be the best work for*

these learners. Every school needs to ensure that learners actively participate in leadership roles to engage with these learners and provide space for them to practice their leadership (IIT, 30 August 2021).

On the same note, LT2 from Tulipamwe Secondary school had this to say:

It is high time that we start giving leadership roles for the young ones to practice because it yields a lot of benefits to them since they are the future leaders, and they can only be good and responsible leaders when they start leadership roles at a very early age (IIT, 30 August 2021).

Furthermore, one of the parents believed that in their culture, parents do not allow their children to discuss critical issues with them since they are not mature enough to participate in the decision-making structures. In this case, P3, a school board chairperson from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

Learners should not be permitted to contribute to school-related issues or advise the parents on how the school should be run because they are still immature enough to decide on a school. We sent them to school to learn and not to make decisions as they try to because it is not allowed in our culture (IIP, 31 August 2021).

However, Participant P4, a long-serving school board from Tulipamwe Secondary School, had a different view, and this was what he had to say:

I feel proud and honoured when learners take on leadership roles in a school board because they spend most of their time at school. Much of the issues happened mostly when the parents were at home. As a result, learner leaders as school board members are critical components of the school because they are always present. They consider everything that impacts our learners' teaching and learning and the role learner leaders should play. I believe learner leaders must take on their roles (IIT, 31 August 2021).

In response to the same question, participant Pr3, a school principal from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

According to my experiences, rural parents have different views regarding their children taking up leadership roles, and their understanding depends on their level

of education. This requires a concrete explanation that benefits society, although it was impossible (IIS, 06 September 2021).

On a similar note, Pr4, a school principal from Shifitu Secondary School, felt that it was hard to educate parents in rural areas about learners taking up their roles at school. The study's findings suggest that learners should learn it from school since everything has to start with school. In this case, Pr4 from Shifitu Secondary School said the following:

All have to start with the school to teach learners that they have to be responsible, with their responsibility and involve them in the school leadership, although there is this belief that learners should be made to adhere to the rule. Thus, educating parents on learner participation would not be easy (IIS, 13 September 2021).

Participant LT4, a liaison teacher from Shifitu Secondary School, echoed the sentiment above. Regarding the sentiment, he emphasised that schools sensitize learners about their roles as learner leaders in rural secondary schools and raise parental awareness through parent-teacher meetings. In this case, LT4 said the following:

Our parents, especially in rural areas, believe teachers should only do day-to-day leadership. Thus, it is difficult for them to accept that learners with leadership roles should participate in decision-making during the disciplinary hearings or when making decisions which relate to education or the subjects of the learners. There is a bit of conflict. However, some parents understand it when it is properly explained to them (IIS, 13 September 2021).

LT4 further said:

For example, parents from our school understand learners' participation and respect their decision. According to their understanding, the learner leaders make the decision they feel is right for them and benefit all the learners at school. Another example is that parents allowed learners to decide even their field of study. I believe all these examples helped parents understand that their children have a voice regarding school leadership and management (IIS, 13 September 2021).

One of the parents who participated in this study, P7, a school board chairperson from Shifitu Secondary School, understood it differently, and he said the following:

> *It is not recommended for the learners to take up the leadership role of the parents because parents are the leaders of the learners. They cannot practice leadership roles at school and make decisions while their parents are there for them* (IIS, 14 September 2021).

However, P8, a long-serving school board member, had a different view from the previous participants. He indicated that learners who took up leadership roles seriously changed their attitudes, even those with negative personalities. As a result, P8 seems to believe that the learner leaders become influential in changing the personalities of other learners at the school.

In this case, P8 from Shifitu Secondary School said:

> *It is significant when learner leaders take up their leadership roles in school decision-making structures. Their interaction with elders in various meetings helps them influence their fellow learners' behaviours to change, including those with bad personalities; it even changes the attitude and behaviours of those learners in leadership positions* (IIP, 14 September 2021).

Like in the previous questions, most participants find it difficult to present their views clearly on learner participation in decision-making. However, some rural parents had a cultural belief that learners should not be given roles to play because they are still young. Rather they prefer teachers to make decisions and take up leadership roles at schools on their behalf. Moreover, the study's findings seem to suggest conflicts when advocating for learner leadership and participation in taking up their leadership roles.

The findings of the questionnaires corroborate to some extent with the findings the study found in the semi- structured-interview. Four of the eight participants agreed that all stakeholders, including learner leaders, should take on school leadership roles. This means that fifty per cent of the participants agreed that the learners should take up their leadership roles.

Having presented the views of the participants regarding learner leaders in taking up roles in school leadership and management with regards to the attitude of parents in rural areas about the place of learners in such societies, I now present the perception of the principals, liaison teachers and parents on learner leadership.

6.2.5 Findings on the perceptions of the participants on learner leadership

The participants (principals, liaison teachers, and parents) from the four researched schools perceived learner leadership differently. Most participants viewed learner leadership as a critical aspect of decision-making in schools compared to others. The participants indicated that learner leadership was appropriate for schools because learners form most of the constituency and must participate in the decision-making process.

In this regard, one of the participants, Pr1, a school principal from Puma Secondary School, perceived learner leadership as a useful concept in the decision-making process, and this is what he had to say:

> *I perceive learner leadership as useful in secondary schools because it helps the leadership make sound decisions when it allows learners to express their views freely during the parents' meeting. They share their ideas with the parents after the consultation with their peers when the school invite them to contribute to the decision-making during the school board meeting* (IIP, 23 September 2021).

LT1, a liaison teacher from Puma Secondary School, was not sure of what should happen for the learner leaders to practice their leadership roles, and in this case, she said the following:

I think I am not sure of what learner leadership entails. In my view, it is good for the learners to make decisions because everything in decision-making has to do with learners. It helps them to air their views and whatever concerns them in consultation with their peers (IIP, 23 August 2021).

LT1 further said:

> *Another good point for their involvement is that they will be more disciplined. They know the school rules, especially if they are involved in making up the school rules. They will know those rules are the ones they made up, and they will be more disciplined. And also helps learners perform very well in their academic activities* (IIP, 23 August 2021).

Participant P1, a school board chairperson from Puma Secondary School, perceives that the school-going person (learner) should not be allowed to participate in the decision-making structures in the school. In this case, parent participant P1 said:

> *It is inappropriate for learner leaders to make decisions in schools because these learners ideally require the assistance of older adults (IIS, 24 August 20221).*

However, participant P2, a long-serving school board member, had a different perception. Concerning this, P2 said the following:

> *I believe learners can participate in the decision-making process when they are making the correct decisions. They can only make decisions when they have discussed the issues with teachers and the school leadership structures. Then after the discussions, the entire leadership can make the final decision. The learner leader needs to make certain decisions more relevant to them when making the right decisions (*IIP, 24 August 2021).

P2 further said:

> *I believe that the adults such as a parent, teachers and principals on the school board and the management have to discuss the matter first, and then they will invite learner leaders to participate in the meeting. Once the learners' leadership comes to the discussions, we consider what is right or good for us and agree to move ahead* (IIP, 24 August 2021).

Participant PR2, a school principal from Tulipamwe secondary school, perceives learner leadership as an essential component of the school's leadership structures and, in this regard, this was what he had to say:

> *Rural secondary schools should include all the stakeholders in the school leadership structure. For example, school leadership should provide opportunities for learners to participate in decision-making structures. Schools should not side-lined learners and consider those whose ideas do not matter or who are young. Still, we are in a democratic country where everybody has a say and needs to participate in relevant decision-making* (IIT, 30 August 2021).

Another participant LT2, a liaison teacher from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said:

> *I perceive learner leadership as a good thing to be practised at rural schools. This kind of leadership helps the school to improve learner performance if the school leadership listen and attends to what concerns the learners and involves them in the decision-making process* (IIT, 30 August 2021).

Other participant P3, a school board chairperson from Tulipamwe Secondary School, support the above sentiment, and this was what he had to say:

> *Learner leaders must participate in school decision-making structures because they are the ones in schools. They must make decisions that affect them and are in their best interests* (IIT, 31 August 2021).

Participant P4, a long-serving school board member from Tulipamwe Secondary School, gave credence to the concept of learner leadership in rural secondary schools, and she had this to say:

> *I saw it as a positive because learners have more information than parents. As a result, whatever decision they make, although not every decision they make is correct, I believe they make decisions based on what they observe at school, which requires a decision, because they are always at school* (IIT, 31 August 2021).

Additionally, Pr3, a school principal from Haindongo Secondary School, had the following to say:

> *I perceive learner leadership as part of democracy and learners' empowerment because of their rights and voices to be heard* (IIH, 06 September 2021).

Furthermore, LT3, a liaison teacher from Haindongo Secondary School, said:

> *I perceive learner leadership as a good thing because learner leaders help the school leadership to keep their fellow learners in the proper queue when eating porridge, lead another learner during the morning devotion, maintain law and order in the classes when teachers are absent from their lesson* (IIH, 06 September 2021).

One participant P5, a school board chairperson from Haindongo Secondary School, said:

> *I believe it is appropriate for learner leaders to participate in school decision-making because learners have more information than parents. As a result, whatever decision they make, although not every decision they make is correct, I believe they make decisions based on what they observe at school, which requires a decision since they are always at school* (IIH, 07 September 2021).

Another participant P6, a long-serving school board member from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

> *I believe it is the right thing to do when the learner leaders participate in the school leadership structures where decisions are made. The school must involve learners in decision-making, allowing them to participate in those decisions and all stakeholders to reach an agreement without contradicting one another. It is also significant, except when not only adults make decisions on behalf of the learners* (IIH, 07 September 2021).

On the same note, another school principal, Pr4 from Shifitu Secondary School, perceives learner leadership as an integral part of school leadership and said the following:

> *When you have learners involved in the decisions made at the school regarding their affairs, it becomes easier to implement because learners take ownership of the decision* (IIS, 13 September 2021).

Whereas LT4, a liaison teacher from Shifitu Secondary School, had this to say:

> *It is good to have learner leadership in school because the school leadership will only know what concerns the learners when they pronounce it themselves and form part of the decision-making structures* (IIS, 13 September 2021).

The study further revealed that schools should create space for learner leaders to practice their leadership in collaboration with other school board members. The space allowed the learner leaders to share with the school's leadership and management matters that concern them. In this regard, P7, a school board chairperson from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

> *It is a critical aspect where the school should involve learners in decision-making, allowing them to participate in those decisions* (IIS, 14 September 2021).

Furthermore, P8, a long-serving school board member from Shifitu Secondary School, regards learner leadership as uncalled for, and this is what she had to say:

> *I believe learners should not be allowed to participate in decision-making because they can make wrong decisions since they are too young to decide for themselves. Elders have to decide on their behalf. Thus, at school, teachers should do that for them* (IIS, 14 September 2021).

The findings from the questionnaire seem to suggest that all the liaison teachers from the researched schools agree with the interview's outcome that learner leaders should be provided with structures. The findings corroborate with what the four school principals of the researched school had echoed the sentiments indicated earlier on.

According to Section 18 of the Namibia Education Act, No. 16 of 2001, the constitution of the school board is to include two learners at the secondary schools nominated by the Learners' Represented Councils (GRN, 2001). Previous researchers such as Simmons, Grahams, and Thomas (2015) give credence to the school's leadership to provide spaces for the learners to have more say in decision-making in an aspiration to hear their voice.

The study's findings showed that schools must provide avenues for learners to practice and experience their leadership roles. This seems to be a call to all schools in rural areas to allow learner leaders to participate in decision-making structures.

6.2.6 The participants' views regarding the advantages and disadvantages of learners taking part in school leadership and decision-making

In response to a question about the participants' perspectives on the benefits and drawbacks of learners participating in school leadership and decision-making, the study participants from the researched schools had several responses. Each participant started with the advantages and later gave the disadvantages of learners participating in school leadership and decision-making structures. Regarding the advantages of learners participating in school leadership and decision-making, the study found that participants believed learners developed their leadership capabilities when involved in decision-making structures.

In this case, Pr1, a school principal from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

> *The advantages of learners participating in school leadership and decision-making structures make them practice the democratic rights to participate in shared school leadership. It is good because they equalise the education system if the learners know they represent learners in the school board. This means that there is equal power at the education level. Learners are counted as capable people whose ideas matter* (IIP, 23 August 2021).

However, Pr1 also acknowledges learner participation's disadvantages in school leadership and decision-making structures. With this regard, Pr1 had this to say:

> *I think the learner leaders are only disadvantaged when the school board excludes them from participating in a disciplinary hearing for a certain teacher due to unwanted behaviours. We could not allow them to be part of the proceedings since learners are still too young to keep things confidential* (IIP, 23 August 2021).

Pr1 further said:

> *Our school include the learner leaders in the finance discussions only due to their vote for the learner representative council as long as they inform the principal's office on time. However, they do not fully participate in the decision-making process regarding how much should be allocated to their vote. The school leadership sometimes inform them about the availability of funds on their vote to move forward their ideas to be heard* (IIP, 23 August 2021).

Moreover, LT1, a liaison teacher from Puma Secondary School, articulated the advantages of learner participation in rural secondary schools, and she said the following:

> *I think learner participation has got some advantages in rural secondary schools. The advantages are that it helps learners perform very well in teaching and learning; it improves discipline amongst the learners; it creates a sense of responsibility when assigning duties to them* (IIP, 23 August 2021).

Although the LT1 attempts to put forth the advantages of learner participation in decision-making, there are also some disadvantages. In this regard, she had this to say:

> *Sometimes, when the learners become learner leaders (LRC), other learners may bully them. They might intimidate the LRCs by throwing bad words at them while*

practising their leadership roles. For example, learners sent their fellow learners to the LRC for things that had no benefit to the school (IIP, 23 August 2021).

LT1 further said:

Some teachers disregard learners' ideas when they are brought to their attention. This kind of teacher attitude discourages learner leaders; it creates a bad image in their minds that leadership is not good and the elders do not take you seriously (IIP, 23 August 2021).

To couple the above statement, LT1 continued to say:

Sometimes parents do not want their children to participate in leadership roles, so learner leaders are denied opportunities to be leaders. This is due to the rural parents' attitude and a lack of understanding of learner leadership in our schools. I also observe that sometimes it happens due to a misunderstanding between a teacher and the parent of the learner leader. Thus, I suggest schools raise parental awareness in our school communities (IIP, 23 August 2021).

Participant P1, a school board chairperson from Puma Secondary School, with regards to the question I asked, said the following:

The advantage of learner leadership in schools is that the learner leaders, mostly at our school, democratically participate in the school leadership structures and are aware of all developments in and around the school. The second advantage is that they are free to express their opinions about what they want to happen at their school or in the education sector (IIP, 24 August 2021).

P1 also took note of the disadvantages of learner leadership in rural secondary schools and decision-making structures, and this was what he had to say:

One of the drawbacks of learner leadership in schools is that these learners are too young. Furthermore, not all information needs to be heard by the learner leaders, even if it is related to education, because some of the topics were just discussed, and they do not need to leave the meeting (IIP. 24 August 2021).

Furthermore, it said:

> *Learner leaders are too young and immature and can reveal information ahead of time because of their maturity. It means that in our culture, learners have open hearts and do not keep things confidential because they are not yet mature enough to do so* (IIP, 24 August 2021).

Another participant, P2, a long-serving school board member, suggested the advantages of learner leadership in schools, and she said the following:

> *I believe there are advantages when learner leaders make decisions. Learners may present their ideas and thoughts to the school board, which parents must scrutinize to implement what they believe is best for them. Another aspect of learner participation is that the learner leaders attend meetings, such as school board meetings, to listen to what is being discussed, specifically on items that affect them, and to provide feedback to their peers after the meeting* (IIP, 24 August 2021).

P2 continued to say:

> *Another advantage of learners participating in school leadership and decision-making is that they have freedom of speech when they meet with adults. They must be set free. This allows the learner to participate in the deliberations freely. It gives them the freedom to express their opinions or concerns, especially when they are in a group, speaking in front of older people, or on various occasions* (IIP, 24 August 2021).

On a similar note, P2 suggested the disadvantages of learner leadership in school, and she said the following:

> *Some disadvantages are that they may make individual decisions as learners without the assistance of their parents. It is also bad when we allow them to make decisions on their own because it creates negative images, and it is especially bad if they do it without the guidance of their teachers* (IIP, 24 August 2021).

Correspondingly, another participant, Pr2, a school principal from Tulipamwe Secondary School, echoed the above sentiment in response to the question I asked about the advantages of learner participation in school leadership and decision-making. This was what he had to say:

> *When the school involves the learners in establishing the school rules, it moulds and shapes them into future good leaders. This develops the leadership capabilities*

of the learner leaders because they start with leadership roles at very early ages (IIT, 30 August 2021).

Despite that, there are also some disadvantages concerning learner participation in secondary schools. In his view, Pr2 had this to say:

I think, specifically concerning the disadvantages specifically in rural secondary schools, the first thing that I should share with you is perhaps that all of our learners commute from home to school. They come from different upbringings or backgrounds. In this context of rurality, learners lack an understanding of leadership and tend to choose a person who is not capable, or with a bad attitude or ill-mannered, to become the representative of other learners in the school leadership structures (IIT, 30 August 2021).

Furthermore, Pr2 said:

Another disadvantage is that, in most cases, learner leaders, especially at rural secondary schools, are not respected in their communities. Other learners disrespect or dishonour the learner leaders who come from poor houses or poor backgrounds. Even if such a learner has an understanding of leadership, there is someone who says that person's child. The attitude of learners from wealthy families discourages the learner leaders from participating freely because of the economic set-up within their families (IIT, 30 August 2021).

Another participant, LT2, a liaison teacher from Tulipamwe Secondary School, proposed the advantages of learner participation in school leadership and decision-making, and he had this to say:

I believe that the benefits of learners participating in decision-making structures begin with learners welcoming all decisions made and taking ownership if they were involved from the start of the decision-making process. Secondly, the learner leaders consult other learners and bring collective ideas to the decision-making body where all the stakeholders are involved for them to practice their leadership roles (IIT, 30 August 2021).

LT2 further said:

Learners took ownership of all the decisions in which they formed part of it and were involved. It helps the school to implement such a decision because it was a collective decision (IIT, 30 August 2021).

However, LT2 took note of the disadvantages of learner participation in school leadership structures and said the following:

I think the disadvantage of involving learners at some point is that sometimes learners can take advantage of the situations. I learnt that these learners do not want to be under pressure; they want to relax. So when you give them that chance to make decisions, they will opt to object to many things they do not want. For example, when you initiate an internal policy where you say learners are not allowed to come with cell phones to school (IIT, 30 August 2021).

Participant P3, a school board chairperson from Tulipamwe Secondary School, concerning the question I asked, said the following:

I think learner leaders' advantages in school leadership and decision-making create awareness of their democratic, participatory rights. Learner participation improves the learner's school performances and freedom of expression when they are led by their own decisions (IIT, 31 August 2021).

However, P3 felt there were also some disadvantages to learners taking part in decision-making structures. In this case, P3 said:

The disadvantage is that when learners make decisions on their own, they may make decisions that are in their favour even if the decisions they made are bad (IIT, 31 August 2021).

P4, a long-serving school board member, highlighted the benefits of learners participating in school leadership and decision-making, and he had this to say:

I think the benefits of learner participation involve the inclusion of learner leaders in the establishment of the rules and regulations for the school. Suppose the learner leaders realize that what was established was not following the educational policies. In that case, they can inform the parents that the decision, for example,

about the sports attires, is not following the ideas shared with the school's management (IIT, 31 August 2021).

Participant P4 further said:

I also believe that learner participation in school leadership and decision-making benefits the school, particularly when teachers fail to attend their classes according to school policies and timetables, when teachers administer corporal punishment or admire them in ways that are not permitted by law, or when other incidents occur at school. It recognizes the school's administration (IIT, 31 August 2021).

Equally, P4 conjectures the disadvantages of learners participating in school leadership and decision-making structures, and he said the following:

I assert that the leadership of learners in schools has pros and cons. The disadvantage of learners participating in school leadership and decision-making is that they are still young, and tough decisions require knowledgeable and mature people in policy issues (IIT, 31 August 2021).

Likewise, Pr3, a school principal from Haindongo Secondary School, articulates the advantages of learners partaking in school leadership and decision-making, and she had this to say:

I think when learners participate in decision-making, this makes them confident in adhering to their decision and participating in such decisions. For example, if the class teacher involves learners in constructing classroom rules. They try by all means to adhere to those rules because they said it is their thing, and they do not have to transgress it. Learners' participation in decision-making structures motivates and instils confidence in the learner leaders (IIH, 06 September 2021).

Pr3 adds that:

Learners are not only groomed to be academicians but also to be future leaders with confidence who can be representatives of their societies in certain instances and make valuable decisions in those societies (IIH, 06 September 2021).

Conversely, Pr3 alludes to the disadvantages of learners' participation in school leadership and decision-making structures.

In this case, this was what Pr3 from Haindongo Secondary School had to say:

> *The disadvantages of learner participation in rural schools are that most of our learners are too young and immature to handle issues. Our learners cannot keep things confidential. For example, if we include them in the disciplinary hearing of a teacher, they can reveal such information ahead of time because of their immaturity* (IIH, 06 September 2021).

Furthermore, Pr3 said:

> *Due to their immaturity, some learners do not have strong hearts to keep things confidential. School decision-making requires a person that can maintain confidentiality in school matters. For example, a parent of a learner who has violated rules or the law should be called in during the disciplinary hearing* (IIH, 06 September 2021).

Pr3 further said:

> *Learners should form part of the decision-making process. However, some information is too private, and learners are not all raised to be secretive. So secretive revealing may be an issue when involving learners in leadership* (IIH, 06 September 2021).

On that note, Pr3 continued to enlighten how the perception of parents disadvantaged learner participation in rural secondary school leadership structures, and she said:

> *I think parents do not consider learners participating in recreation at school as a vital component of their leadership roles, for example, in the decision-making on matters such as making entertainment at school. Parents might regard it as promoting prostitution and pregnancy and abolish it without consulting the learner leaders as the representative of their fellow learners* (IIH, 06 September 2022).

With regards to the question I asked the participants, LT3, a liaison teacher from Haindongo Secondary School, suggested the advantages of learners participating in school leadership and decision-making structures in rural areas, and he said the following:

> *The advantage of participating in leadership is that you learn a lot concerning leadership. You gain experience in decision-making matters that you might use as a leader of tomorrow. Once you participate in leadership, you become a good advisor. Despite that, you can be free when people make decisions on matters that affect you* (IIH, 06 September 2021).

LT3 also suggested the disadvantages of learners participating in school leadership and decision-making structures. In this case, LT3 had this to say:

> *One of the drawbacks of being a leader is that it breeds hatred between those who lead and those who are led. We are talking about learner leaders and their fellow learners in this case. The other thing is that they can misuse their rights beyond what they were told to do, which can negatively influence learners* (IIH, 06 September 2021).

Moreover, P5, a school board chairperson from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

> *I think the advantages of learner participation in schools allow learners to share their concerns with the relevant authorities since they are the majority of the constituency. In consultation with fellow learners, the learner leaders inform the school board when bad things affect teaching and learning for discussions and decision-making. Learner participation improves the school performances of the learners* (IIH, 07 September 2021).

Another participant from Haidongo Secondary School P6, a long-serving school board member, echoes the advantages of learners participating in school leadership and decision-making structures. This was what he had to say:

> *Learner leadership has advantages because it is critical for learner leaders in authority positions to make school decisions. Learners in leadership positions should be allowed to make decisions, demonstrating that people think about both sides of the school or want to work without cohesion. All stakeholders must share their ideas equally* (IIH, 07 September 2021).

In contrast, P6 showed that learner participation in school leadership and decision-making has drawbacks. In this case, P6 said the following:

> *One disadvantage is disagreement among stakeholders, especially when attempting to make a decision, but people contradict one another. For example, if parents or school board members advise learners to arrive at school on time, not to be absent, and to follow school rules, the learner may interpret it as contradicting what they believe is best for them*. (IIH, 07 September 2021).

P6 further said:

> *The learners may believe that this is a bad thing. After all, they are forced to follow some rules imposed on them because their representatives were not involved in developing those rules. This is especially serious if parents disregard their right to participate in school leadership structures and decision-making. On the other hand, parents were only considering the cultural aspect that when a decision is made, learners should wait for their parents to act on their behalf* (IIH, 07 September 2021).

In light of the question I asked, Pr4, a school principal from Shifitu Secondary School, refers to the advantages of learners participating to the school rules where all learners participate, and this was what he had to say:

> *When everything that deals with the affairs of the learners at school is made with their involvement, it helps implement those particular rules to become easier for the school* (IIS, 13 September 2021).

Moreover, Pr4 also noted the disadvantages of learner participation. In this regard, Pr4 had this to say:

> *I have observed two things that disadvantage learner participation in our rural secondary schools. One of the disadvantages is that you may have the learners' representative council, for example, at the school board, and they are not free to participate due to how they were raised at home. It is believed to be a cultural norm that in our culture, the young one should not discuss with the older people because they are still young and immature to make a decision. Thus, learners find it difficult to oppose it* (IIS, 13 September 2021).

On the contrary, Pr4 asserts that the disadvantage could be at a general level when they are involved in decision-making. This was what he had to say:

> *I think our learners at rural secondary schools are not familiar with what the policies regulate to maintain order at the school. They can be involved in a disciplinary hearing, but you find that unless they are aware of what the law is saying, for example, if the learner does this, this is what should happen. Otherwise, they will always be sort of in support of the culprit* IIS, 13 September 2021).

Furthermore, LT4, a liaison teacher from Shifitu Secondary School, also noted some of the advantages of learner participation in decision-making structures, and this was what he had to say:

> *Learners welcomed all the decisions made when they were part and parcel of the initiation. They normally bring along their contribution, which they solicited from their peers; thus, the school would not struggle with implementing the decision* (IIS, 13 September 2021).

LT4 further said:

> *I believe that learner participation increases opportunities for learners to express themselves freely through various forums. Advantageously, learner leadership promotes practical shared leadership through democratic participation in school leadership and decision-making structures* (IIS, 13 September 2021).

LT4 noted the disadvantages of learner participation in school leadership and decision-making structures, and she said the following:

> *I think it isn't easy to include learner leaders in decision-making, especially on decisions that are a bit sensitive. These learners are too young, bully each other and do not have a level of confidentiality to keep sensitive issues. Therefore, we are scared that this information will leak before making a final decision* (IIS, 13 September 2021).

Further, LT4 said:

> *These learners in leadership roles, especially in school leadership, sometimes regard leadership as their career at a very early age. They like leadership, and such a learner practices leadership precisely. It causes them to lose track of their books, which may impact their studies. Despite that, when it comes to his studies, that learner is slowly catching up, and he feels that leading is much more important than his education* (IIS, 13 September 2021).

Another participant P7, a long-serving school board member from Puma Secondary School, said:

> *The benefits of learners participating in school leadership include learning to present themselves in front of others and their attitude as learners. If the school leadership is good enough, it helps them to improve the school's image. It greatly benefits the school's growth* (IIP, 14 September 2021).

However, P7 alluded to the disadvantage of learners participating in school leadership and decision-making structures. In this regard, P7 said the following:

> *The disadvantage is that if the school leadership is inadequate, the school will be dismantled, affecting both the school and learner performance because learners will be out of order* (IIS, 14 September 2021).

Furthermore, P8, a long-serving school board member from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

> *The benefit of learner leaders participating in school leadership and decision-making includes learning how to present themselves in front of others. Learner leadership practices help learners to be good leaders of tomorrow. It also helps to improve the school's performance* (IIS, 14 September 2021).

Moreover, P8 also probed about the disadvantages of learner participation in schools, and he said:

> *It is not good for learners to make decisions at a young age without the assistance of their parents because it creates a bad image for the school* (IIS, 14 September 2021).

The findings from the questionnaires seem to suggest that two of the four liaison teachers from the school where the study was conducted indicate that the learner leaders were not practising leadership roles but rather were given responsibilities by their teachers. The school principals of the researched schools said that the learner leaders help police teachers who do not come to their lessons on time and keep order in their classrooms.

The findings of this study corroborate the idea of Groves (2013) and Jeruto and Kiprop (2011), who suggested an increasing call for learners to be accorded opportunities to participate in the leadership structures of schools. This study found that learners in some rural schools are denied the opportunity to practice their democratic rights to participate in school leadership and decision-making structures. Namibia, being a democratic country, allows the participation of all stakeholders in the education system (GRN, 1993). It is worth noting that school leadership advocates for the involvement of all stakeholders, including learner leaders, in the school leadership structures and provides opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. (Banjarnahor, 2017). However, the learner leaders improved their leadership understanding and felt empowered when implementing the decisions they were involved in (Nyambisi &Mwelu, 2018).

The issue of learners being too young and immature has been critiqued by many studies, such as Uushona (2012) and Mncube and Harber (2013), but it is still existing in some rural secondary schools. The study's findings in Uganda confirm the cultural practices as barriers to the learner leaders in the school leadership structures. However, the findings of this study refute the recommendations of many of the participatory theorists, such as Yukl (2013), who advocate for schools to allow learners to participate in decision-making in school leadership structures. On this note, if all schools considered learners' participation in the decision-making process to share their ideas with the school leadership and management structures, it would strengthen the understanding of the genuine involvement of all the subordinates.

Having presented the advantages and disadvantages of learners taking part in the school leadership and decision-making process, I am now presenting whether the participants support the notion of learner leadership in schools.

6.2.7 The participants' support of the notion of learner leadership in schools

The findings of this study appear to suggest that all participants agreed that learner leadership in schools is a good idea. The participants suggest that learner participation in school leadership teaches learners to present themselves in front of others and be excellent and responsible future leaders. They believed that learners gain more experience when given the opportunity to practice their leadership roles at schools and the freedom to express their views freely, which improves their school performances. The participants suggest that learner leadership serves as the voice of the voiceless, allowing children to speak freely in the presence of the elderly or to participate in decision-making processes.

In this case, Pr1, a school principal from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

> *Learner leadership is democratically supported because Namibia is a democratic country. I think learners need to be part of the decision-making process at school because it is the way to practice democracy in school to ensure that decisions are taken by both teachers and learners together so that nobody feels left out* (SSIPr, 23 August 2021).

Furthermore, Pr1 said the following:

> *I support their leadership practices because having learners on the school board can cause a harmonious and very good atmosphere in the school. We support the learner leaders by giving them training immediately after their election* (SSIPr, 23 August 2021).

Another participant, LT1, a liaison teacher from Puma Secondary School, also affirmed the importance of learner leadership in rural secondary schools. In this regard, LT1 said the following:

> *I support the notion of learner leadership in schools because it helps the learner leaders be good future leaders. Despite the saying that leaders are born, not made, it is still very important for them to be guided. The leadership skills gained moulded learners to be disciplined. Their actions inspire other learners and develop good characteristics as they practice leadership at school* (SSIT, 23 August 2021).

Further, LT1 said:

> *The discipline of the learner leaders improved the learner performance of that particular school. They encourage others to do well, particularly if they know one learner is not doing right. They will tell such a learner that this is not right. They will always encourage others to do well. Learner leadership accentuates consultations with fellow learners and shares ideas through meetings* (SSIT, 23 August 2021).

Contrary to the above sentiment, P1, a school board chairperson from Puma Secondary School, indicated that he does not support learner leadership in school. In this regard, this is what he said:

> *We normally exclude the learner leaders in our discussions in the school board meeting, which sometimes does not affect the education of the learners. Still, it may consider things that relate to the hearing or warning of a certain person who misbehaves at school when he disobeys the school rules. Then we cannot invite learners to participate in such a meeting because we believe learners do not need to hear such things. Learners can bring up topics for discussion, but they are not allowed to participate in things that involve critical conversation, and thus they are excluded from critical issues* (SSIP, 24 August 2021).

On the other hand, P2, a long-serving school board member, strongly supports the notion of learner leadership in schools, and she said the following:

> *I strongly support the concept of learner leadership in the classroom because it helps learners progress when some are leading others. Learner leaders are important in schools because they promote freedom of expression. It also allows learners to freely express their opinions to teachers through the learner-representative council structure. Not every learner can approach their teacher to express their dissatisfaction or concerns about their education* (SSIP, 24 August 2021).

Participant Pr2, a school principal from Tulipamwe Secondary School, indicated that he strongly supports the establishment of learner leadership in schools in response to the question I asked the participants. This was what he had to say:

> *I fully support the notion of learner leadership in schools, and it must make our work easier. It makes our learners understand things better when informed by other learners rather than their teachers. But when the school involves learners in the initiative, it becomes easy for them to consider their ideas when involved at the beginning and implement them wholeheartedly* (SSIPr, 30 August 2021).

LT2, a liaison teacher at Tulipamwe Secondary School, vowed support for learner leadership in school. In this case, he said the following:

> *I think I support the notion of learner leadership in schools because learners need to be given responsibilities. They are future leaders. They should be shaped into responsible leaders, and it only starts when they are in school. We know leaders are groomed. When learners are in school, it is the only moment they have to be groomed as good leaders. It gives them a lot of democracy and gives them an expression of their feelings. Secondary schools are the only place where learners can express themselves and demand that their rights be respected and that justice be served* (SSIT, 30 August 2021).

Likewise, P3, a school board chairperson from Tulipamwe Secondary School, articulated the importance of learner leadership in schools, and he had this to say:

> *I strongly support the concept of learner leadership in schools because it inspires learners to take on leadership roles in the future. They learn how to present themselves in front of others, motivate one another when making decisions, and implement those decisions* (SSIP, 31 August 2021).

Similarly, P4, a long-serving school board member, acknowledges the notion of learner leadership in secondary schools, and she said the following:

> *I support the concept of learner leadership in schools. It is a good thing to have learners participating in school leadership structures. Learners are usually at*

school daily, and they are aware of all the problems that exist at school that their parents may not be aware of or that teachers may be unaware of (SSIP, 31 August 2021).

Moreover, participant Pr3, a school principal from Haindongo Secondary School, had this to say:

I strongly recommend schools involve learners in the school leadership and management structures to teach and train them to become responsible future leaders. Schools should allow learners to participate in decision-making structures (SSIPr, 06 September 2021).

On a similar note, LT3, a liaison teacher from Haindongo Secondary School, in response to the question I asked, said the following:

I support it because learner leaders become the voice of the voiceless. Thus, they helped their fellow learners speak out about their grievances on their behalf and bring feedback to them. It also brings advantages because the learner leaders participate in the decision-making; they are part of it and can share what concerns learners with the school's leadership and management (SSIT, 06 September 2021).

Whereas P5, a school board chairperson from Haindongo Secondary School, had this to say:

I support it because one of the learner representative council functions is to liaise the learners with the school leadership and management. They can make a decision informed by what is happening at school; then they can know what to do and how to do it (SSIP, 07 September 2021).

P6, a long-serving school board member, appreciates the notion of learner leadership in school, and this was what he had to say:

I support the idea of learner leaders taking on leadership and decision-making roles in schools. I support it because Namibia is a democratic country where most people place a high value on human rights. Furthermore, it is beneficial for learners to participate in a specific structure to air their views rather than only a certain group of people who are always a part of that structure and exclude others,

which disadvantages some of the members of that structure (SSIP, 07 September 2021).

Participant Pr4, a school principal from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

I fully support the notion of learner leadership in schools. The learner leaders help the school to operate, especially in terms of discipline. It also helps when responsible and well-mannered learners represent others and influence their fellow learners to behave well. The learner leaders gained leadership experience when participating in the school's leadership and decision-making structures (SSIPr, 13 September 2021).

Furthermore, LT4, a liaison teacher from Shifitu Secondary School, also supports the notion of learner leadership in schools, and this was what he had to say:

I am supporting schools to have learner leadership. In the beginning, I noticed that learners feel proud, especially when the decision is implemented and helps the school leadership and management to work easily. For example, to maintain discipline at school, or on the decision made regarding their education or the time which will be proper for them to study. They also consider the appropriate way to work when dealing with violated rules (SSIT, 13 September 2021).

Also, participant P7, a school board chairperson from Shifitu Secondary School, noted the importance of learner participation in school leadership and decision-making. In this regard, this was what he had to say:

I support it because if the school has learner leadership, it improves its image and teaches other learners how to behave at school or in their daily lives (SSIP, 14 September 2021).

On the same note, P8, a long-serving school board member from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

I strongly support the concept of learner leadership in schools because it helps learners perform and progress when there are those leading them and promotes freedom of expression. It also allows learners to freely express their opinions to teachers through the Learners' Representative Council structure. Thus, I strongly

believe it is extremely beneficial for learners to practice their leadership roles (SSIP, 14 September 2021).

When I asked the participants how they support learner leaders, they indicated that some of the schools introduce the learner leaders to the rest of the school immediately after the elections. They empower them through training and information sharing on learner leadership roles in schools. Participants encouraged learner leaders to be proud of their role as valuable stakeholders in school leadership.

Participant LT1, a liaison teacher from Puma Secondary School, further indicated how their school support the learner leaders, and this was what he had to say:

We give the learner leaders awards for participating in the school board activities as school board members (SSIT, 23 August 2021).

Furthermore, participant P1 a school board chairperson from Puma Secondary School, responded on how they support the learner leaders, and she said the following:

We encourage them to go around the school and solicit ideas from other learners about how they feel about things at school, which they can then share with the school board members. As a result, we give them the authority to report what others believe should be done. And it is critical that the board does not turn a blind eye to the concerns raised by the learners and that they respond to them promptly (SSIP, 24 August 2021).

Correspondingly, participant P2, a long-serving school board member from Puma Secondary School, responded to the question of how they support the learner leaders, and this is what he had to say:

As school board members, we support our learner leaders by sharing information about school development. We also encourage them to inspire others to take similar actions. Another thing that learners should do is help each other when they are having difficulty with their subjects and bring their peers' concerns to their teachers (SSIP, 24 August 2021).

However, there were also some schools where learner leaders were not involved in the decision-making because of the conflict within the societies, which boils down to the school. Some participants indicated that no support could be given to the learner leaders because these learners do not participate in decision-making structures such as the school board. Moreover, the school met with the whole school learners.

In this regard, Pr2, a school principal from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

> *Our school failed to allow the learner leaders to participate in decision-making. Thus, no support was given to them. We only met with them during the mass meeting for the whole school, and teachers gave what they thought should be done* (SSIPr, 30 August 2021).

Participant LT2, a liaison teacher from Tulipamwe Secondary School, had this to say:

> *Since these learner leaders are not allowed to participate, we do not have any mechanisms to support these learners to portray or show their leadership roles in this body since they are not represented. I would rather say we do not have any mechanism to support these learners to participate in any decision-making body like the school board* (SSIT, 30 August 2021).

Likewise, P3, a school board chairperson from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

> *We assist them by providing advice, such as when we hold meetings, to make it easier for them to provide feedback to their fellow learners on occasion* (SSIP, 30 August 2021).

Another participant P4 a long-serving school board member had this to say:

> *We provide them with the best possible support because we train them on how to carry out their responsibilities as leaders. You must take into account this and that. We tell them their roles, where they need to start, and where they need to end. In this way, we encourage them* (SSIP, 30 August 2021).

Whereas participant Pr3, a school principal from Haindongo Secondary School this was what she had to say:

> *After the LRC election, we introduce our learner leaders to the whole school, give them the training to empower them with different skills and encourage them to strike a balance between their education and the leadership roles they are entrusted with* (SSIPr, 06 September 2021).

In this case, LT3, a liaison teacher from Haindongo Secondary School, indicated that they recognise their learner leaders, and this was what he had to say:

> *Our school recognised the learner leaders with a certificate at the end of the year for being part of the school leadership and wearing a different uniform. Also, it encouraged them to take their responsibilities seriously* (SSIT, 06 September 2021).

Participant P5, a school board chairperson from Haindongo Secondary School, said:

> *In their meetings, the learner leaders hold their discussions. Because they were elected and entrusted with the symbolic roles of other learners, not for the entire school, and because they are the leaders of their peers, they have distinct roles to play that are distinct from other roles in the school. Thus far, no support has been rendered to them* (SSIP, 06 September 2021).

Another participant P6, a long-serving school board member from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

> *The school board encourages learner leaders to take their roles seriously and provides information about school rules and regulations* (SSIP, 06 September 2021).

On a similar note, Pr4, a school principal from Shifitu Secondary School, had this to say:

> *You can involve them in the event, such as in leadership leading the meeting depends on the type of meeting you will have, if it is not a tough meeting because remember a leader of an event or platform must have certain qualities; you look at a certain meeting, you can allow them to lead. In that way, they will develop leadership skills* (SSIPr, 13 September 2021).

In addition to that, participant LT4 a liaison teacher from Shifitu Secondary School had this to say:

> *We recognise our learner leaders as members of the learner representative councils and award them certificates of appreciation* (SSIT, 13 September 2021).

Whereas participant P7, a school board chairperson from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

> *We advise them to present their challenges when taking on leadership roles. We are behind them in whatever they do* (SSIP, 14 September 2021).

Another participant P8, a long-serving school board member from Shifitu, had this to say:

> *We assist the learner leaders when we hold a meeting and make a decision on their behalf; they can be informed that we held a meeting, and this was what was discussed for them to inform their fellow learners* (SSIP, 14 September 2021).

A study by Mncube (2012) corroborates this study's findings. The findings recognize the importance of learner training and their contribution to the development of democracy as critical to the spreading, deepening, and consolidation of democratic practices in rural schools and throughout society (Mcube, 2012).

Another study by Mncube (2013) identifies a lack of training among learners as a barrier to developing their leadership skills. Msimanga (2015) supports this viewpoint. He suggested that the best way to improve school leadership is to involve all stakeholders and provide them with the necessary support, such as training and ongoing workshops.

As a result, the current research suggests that schools should support learner leaders to promote collaboration among stakeholders, including the learner representative council members. Most schools revealed that they recognized learners when they were given awards at the end of the year for being a learner leader. The study's findings suggested that the learner leaders wear different uniforms to distinguish themselves from other learners in all the researched schools. However, it is high time that rural learner leaders require leadership skills rather than a rubber stamp of awards and wearing different uniforms, amongst other factors.

In addition to how the school authorities support the learner leaders, I also asked them about what they do to support them, and the participant had the following. In this regard, Pr1 said the following:

We advise our learner leaders on how to work in their leadership roles amongst their peers and teachers. We also invite the meeting to inform them about their roles at the beginning of the year. (SSIPr, 23 August 2021).

Furthermore, participant LT1, a liaison teacher from Puma Secondary School, said the following:

> *We motivate them through motivational speakers from other schools, especially urban secondary schools. They are always given an award for executing their duties exceptionally well. We also gave them training once a year when they started with their leadership roles, and the leadership positions and procedures were distributed amongst them* (SSIT, 23 August 2021).

Participant P1, a school board chairperson from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

> *We hold a meeting before the election of the learner leaders in which we invite all of the learners at the school and explain the importance of learner representative councils in schools, as well as the importance of electing their fellow learners to represent them in a governing body. We explain to them that you must nominate and elect someone with specific characteristics to represent others in that body. Then we allow them to vote for their representative on the school board alongside us* (SSIP, 23 August 2021).

Another participant, P2, a long-serving school board from Puma Secondary School, said the following:

> *It motivates them to improve their performance and take steps towards becoming teachers in the future. It also brings down a situation in which misbehaving learners become disciplined, which improves ethics at the school, to demonstrate their talent while in school. It encourages other learners to take on leadership roles at school, similar to their peers who were learner leaders* (SSIP, 24 August 2021).

Whereas participant Pr2, a school principal from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said:

> *We encourage them to give feedback to their fellow learners after a match, for example, if there is soccer, because we only provide an opportunity for the sports organisers and class monitors to liaise between learners and the principal's office. We do not allow them to participate in any decision-making structures of a school* (SSIPr, 30 August 2021).

Likewise, participant LT2 a liaison teacher from Tulipamwe Secondary School had this to say:

> *There is no support provided because our school does not involve the learner leaders in decision-making. You cannot support a learner to participate in leadership roles while you do not involve those learners. The moment you do not involve those learners in any structures or accommodate these learners, it isn't easy to support them* (SSIT, 30 August 2021).

Participant P3, a school board chairperson from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

> *At a specific event, we encourage and motivate the presenter. We usually tell their peers to give that learner leader a round of applause so he can feel proud of himself for what he did and to encourage him to keep doing the right thing* (SSIP, 31 August 2021).

Another participant P4, a long-serving school board member from Tulipamwe Secondary School, highlighted the word of encouragement the school board gave to the learner leaders, and this was what he had to say:

> *We advise them on how to work in their leadership roles among their peers or with their teachers. We advise them when we call a meeting to inform them of their roles at the start of the year, specifically in January when school begins with the assistance of the liaison teachers* (SSIP, 31 August 2021).

Whereas participant Pr3, a school principal from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

> *We promote learner participation among our learners by encouraging them to consider themselves essential leaders. We also motivate them to speak out their concern to express themselves freely. The most powerful encouragement tool was*

to award them a certificate of achievement for being a good learner representative council (SSIPr, 06 September 2021).

On the same note, LT3, a liaison teacher from Haindongo Secondary School, said:

We encourage them to follow the good examples of our former learner leaders who went to the university for further studies when they returned to our school for their teaching practices. We also encourage them not to fear anything when leading their fellow learners. We encourage them to behave well and dress properly to be exemplary to others (SSIT, 06 September 2021).

Participant P5, a school board chairperson from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

We encourage them to take on leadership roles at school, and we encourage them (SSIP, 07 September 2021).

P6, a participant and long-serving school board member from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

We motivate them by speaking with them at the assembly point. We do this after the morning devotion to speak about the role of learner leaders and their importance in the school when the entire school is gathered in one place. We also provide information about topics that interest them (SSIP, 07 September 2021).

In response to the question I asked, this was what Pr4, a school principal from Shifitu Secondary School, had to say:

We educate and workshop our learner representative council on their roles and responsibilities and hold meetings and various platforms on how to be good leaders (SSIPr, 13 September 2021).

Participant LT4, a liaison teacher from Shifitu Secondary School, had this to say:

We request for them to use a different uniform from the one that others are using, release from everyday responsibilities, for example, the cleaning of the classrooms and other day-to-day activities which learners carry out, and encourage them to consult their fellow learners before they bring their concerns to the school board

members, organise end of year party for them, given an award and training at the beginning of the year (SSIT, 13 September 2021).

Participant P7, a school board chairperson from Shifitu Secondary School, said:

We normally tell them that starting with leadership roles at a young age while in school is good because that is when you learn what leadership is all about, grow with it, and collaborate with other stakeholders (SSIP, 14 September 2021).

In a similar case, P8, a long-serving school board from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

We encourage them to behave well and be exemplary to their fellow learners (IIS, 14 September 2021).

Most participants suggest they organise meetings with the learners' representative council at the start of the year to motivate and train them. The participants encouraged the learner leaders to be free when talking to their teachers and fellow learners. They stated that learner leaders were encouraged to wear different uniforms than their peers. The participants believed that schools needed to provide avenues for learner leaders to express their views freely and to encourage them to research how learner leaders from other schools practice their leadership.

According to the findings from the questionnaires, three of the four liaison teachers responded to the question I asked. Two of them said rural schools need exchange programs with urban schools on radio and television. The response was similar to that of three principals, who said that the school leadership should collaborate with the learner leaders to organise exchange programs with their fellow learners in urban schools through workshops.

However, being a researcher from a similar context, I believe that the learner leaders in rural schools can't introduce leadership exchanging programs over the radio and television, considering the rural set-up and poverty amongst the majority of the community members and lack of communication connectivity. It is hard to get what is transpiring on television and the radio. I suggest exchanging programs through meetings and workshops or inviting Learner Representative Councils from urban schools to share ideas with rural learner leaders.

A study by Mboyonga (2018) revealed that schools should encourage the involvement of learners in decision-making to improve school leadership practices. It enabled schools to model their leadership democratically, allowing them to value all stakeholders' perspectives, including learners. This is when the school appreciates learners' voices as one of the primary focuses in school that is centred on the lives of the learners. However, it is worth noting in the study by Mulwa et al. (2018) that learner participation in decision-making increases only when schools establish more participatory structures and improve the learners' academic performance. Theoretically, the space created allows learners to have a say and collaborate with teachers at school and parents at home to encourage learners to speak out about what matters to them (Grant, 2015).

The study's findings showed that participation in decision-making through participatory structures allowed learners to gain experience and practice their leadership roles when involved in decision-making structures. It also boosts the learner leaders' self–confidence, discipline, freedom of speech, and empowerment.

Having discussed how the participants support the learner leaders in practising their leadership skills, I now present what the participants could do to support the learner leaders to promote learner participation in school leadership structures.

6.2.8 How the schools involve learners in leadership practices

When I asked the participants how their school involves learners in leadership roles, I got different responses from the participants. The participants suggested that most schools that involve learners in the school board meetings do not allow them to participate in discussions and decision-making. It was also discovered that, in most cases, learner leaders were not invited to attend the school board meeting.

In support of these sentiments, this is what Pr1, a school principal from Puma Secondary School, had to say:

> *We include them in leadership from the class captain already leading. We have Learner Representative Council as part of our leadership. There are clubs such as the HIV club, Debate club, and captain for sport from the learner side to help the coach and sports organisers are also learners to support leadership* (SSIPr, 23 August 2021).

LT1, a liaison teacher from Puma Secondary School, said the following:

> *As a school, we involve our learner leaders in various activities ranging from class monitors to learner representative council, school choir, sports organisers, etc. Some members of the Learner Representative Council are also members of the school board. Also, during the study, the LRCs are always distributed amongst classes to supervise other learners in a certain class. When the learners come to the assembly, the LRC ensures all the learners are at the assembly and in order* (SSIT, 23 August 2021).

Participant P1, a school board chairperson from Puma Secondary School, said the following:

> *We invite the learner leaders to the school board meeting to listen to the discussion about the budget and how the school finances should be used, but not into the decision-making process. As a result, when it comes to school financial decisions, learner leaders are not permitted to participate. However, learner leaders' participation in this regard is minimal. They can only make suggestions on how money should be handled because their participation on the school board does not allow them to make school finance decisions* (SSIP, 24 August 2021).

Whereas participant P2, a long-serving school board member from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

> *Learner leaders are included in leadership roles at our school, such as attending school board meetings. They are occasionally invited to a meeting for their voices to be heard through learner representation* (SSIP, 24 August 2021).

In response to that question, Pr2, a school principal from Tulipamwe Secondary School, had this to say:

> *We created a space for our learners to practice their freedom of speech and share their ideas through a suggestion box. Instead of using the suggestion box in the way it was intended, learners misused it, and then I, as a principal, had just decided to cancel the idea* (SSIPr, 30 August 2021).

A liaison teacher, LT2 from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

I think our school did not involve learners in decision-making structures. In one of the years when the school got an extension of the curriculum to the second grade, we elected the learners' representative council (LRC), which we only did because we felt like we had a secondary level (SSIT, 30 August 2021).

LT2 further said:

We had to elect the learner representative council, and these learners were not doing much; they were just there by name. That one is the learner representative council. We had no guiding document which gave us information about what these learners were expected to do, which means their roles were not clearly defined because we did not have that information (SSIT, 30 August 2021).

Furthermore, participant P3, a school board chairperson from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

When learners were nominated to serve on the learner representative council, they were allowed to participate in school leadership structures. They usually give their speech at a school board meeting, especially if there is a discussion about school rules. They are primarily involved in these meetings but not in the critical decision-making process (SSIP, 31 August 2021).

Whereas participant P4, a long-serving school board from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said:

The school involves learners practising their leadership roles by including them in school board and management meetings but not in a critical decision-making process. It also includes them in circuit meetings with other learners from various schools. As a result, we also include them when we hold a general school meeting to talk to their fellow learners (SSIP, 31 August 2021).

On a similar note, participant Pr3, a school principal from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

The learner leaders are encouraged to monitor their fellow learners at the assembly point, remind others to be quiet in class during lessons and study time, and supervise other learners during the school feeding program. The school involves the learner representative council members in the board meeting to listen

and give feedback to their fellow learners. Despite that, learner leaders are normally excluded from decision-making (SSIPr, 06 September 2021).

Furthermore, participant LT3, a liaison teacher from Haindongo Secondary School, said:

The learner leaders only sit in the school board meetings sometimes, depending on what would be discussed on that day, because some information advances a bit, and it is not allowed to be heard by the learners at that time. Their level of leadership is at a low rank. Their leadership does not reach the level of the parents for them to hear some of the things discussed that day that is a little secret and confidential (SSIT, 06 September 2021).

On the same note, participant P5, a school board chairperson from Haindongo Secondary School, said:

Our school includes learner leaders in the board meeting, sometimes by invitation. Only those elected through the parent's meeting and not by the representation attend such a meeting. Culturally, adult members do not sit around the table with their children for discussions since they are too young and immature; it is taboo (SSIP, 07 September 2021).

Participant P6, a long-serving school board member from Haindongo Secondary School, had this to say:

When the school decides to establish school rules and regulations, it involves learners, teachers, and parents in decision-making. This benefits the school because learners usually inform their peers not to arrive late for class. However, you must be aware that most learners are too young and not mature as adults, despite their best efforts to practice it (SSIP, 07 September 2021).

One of the participants, Pr4, a school principal from Shifitu Secondary School, had this to say:

Well, our school ensures that learners are involved in leading projects at school, for example, a cleaning campaign. They take the lead in classes; although that is an absolute responsibility, they take control of classes. Like you have individuals chosen as class representatives, they maintain order and control at the school. Most importantly, when there is conflict at school, such as indiscipline, they are

involved as it is a law. However, the school does not involve the learner leaders in any decision-making process (SSIPr, 13 September 2021).

On a similar note, participant LT4, a liaison teacher from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

I believe learners are involved in the school leadership roles, particularly if school activities, such as field activities, need to be carried out. They are included when the school establishes the rules, but they must be informed of what should form part of them. Our school also involve our learner leaders in simple decision such as the afternoon study time (SSIT, 13 September 2021).

LT4 further said:

The learner representative council members share and discuss their concerns with the school management; after that, they will make a decision and give feedback to their fellow learners about the decisions made. When giving feedback, they must do that in consultation with the teacher. However, there is a challenge when learners fail to keep the information confidential for a long period, and they find information sneaking out, which is improper (SSIT, 13 September 2021).

Furthermore, LT4 said:

Learner leaders participate in decision-making only when they give what other learners feel should be done. When they come for the meeting, they inform the meeting participants that their fellow learners feel that this and that should happen in this way. However, the decisions made by children, you know, are just children. They do not have enough experience. In most cases, they failed to carry out many activities because they lacked knowledge or their knowledge was below standard (SSIT, 13 September 2021).

Participant P7, a school board chairperson from Shifitu Secondary School, had this to say about a similar sentiment:

The school includes learner leaders in school board meetings, except when the school board holds a disciplinary meeting for a specific teacher, in which case learners are not allowed to participate. The school board denied learner

> *participation to prevent teachers from disrespected by the learners; they do not need to hear what the teacher did* (SSIP, 14 September 2021).

P7 further said:

> *When the learners attend other school board meetings, the school board allows the learner leaders to share their ideas and opinions, but they do not participate in decision-making processes; instead, they listen to and provide feedback to their fellow learners. However, learner leaders are only allowed to participate in decision-making if the school board brings cases to the meeting that affect all learners in the school* (SSIP, 14 September 2021).

On a similar note, P8, a long-serving school board member, had this to say:

> *There are learners on the school board who parents elected at a parent meeting. We enlisted the help of two learners to assist us in disseminating information to others. However, sometimes when we hold meetings, we do not include them as part of the meeting, but when we are finished, we give such information to those learners to share with others* (SSIP, 14 September 2021).

The questionnaires' findings show that some rural schools involved teachers only in the leadership and management structures to address the issues of the learners on their behalf. Two of the four liaison teachers who responded to the questionnaire indicated that such incidents implicate democratic learner participation in school decision-making. Another two liaison teachers showed that some rural schools, particularly the researched schools, do not allow learner leaders to participate in the school leadership structures to practice their leadership roles. The response of liaison teachers indicated that learners were only used as window dressing, which hinders their participation as enshrined in the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 2001).

In line with what the participants revealed, Mncube and Harber (2013) suggested that schools attempt democratic participation to allow the learner leaders to present their views in management meetings and other relevant decision-making structures. The study has confirmed the findings of Yukl (2013), who found that learner leaders feel empowered once the schools

provide an opportunity to exercise their rights and practice their roles, which influences the decision-making in schools.

According to the findings of this study, it is worth noting that some schools still have serious learner leadership issues within the rural context. Having presented the responses on how the school involved learners in leadership roles, I now moved on to present how the school authorities manage the power challenges between the school board and the learner representative council.

6.2.9 How the school authorities manage the challenges of power between the school board and the learner representative councils

According to this study's findings, most participants perceive that older people have more power than the learners' representative council. The participants suggested that, from a cultural standpoint, children should not sit around the table and discuss issues with adults, which led to adults excluding them from the school board meeting.

In this case, Pr1, a school principal from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

> *Regarding power relationships, I believe that learner leaders should respect older adults. They do not have to tell parents that they are leaders and equal to the parents despite them all being members of the school board. We resolved the issue of power by applying the education and school internal policies where learners should obey the rules and regulations of the school* (SSIPr, 23 August 2021).

Whereas participant LT1, a liaison teacher from Puma secondary school, also believed that only parents have power concerning power relations issues in some of the rural secondary schools; this was what she had to say:

> *We held a school parents' meeting. Those issues are addressed during the parents' meeting, whereby if something bad happens, it will be raised in the meeting to involve other parents who are not members of the school board to give their views. Parents can also be invited to the school for parental awareness of the importance of learner participation in school leadership. However, the learner leaders never participate in the discussions* (SSIT, 23 August 2021).

Another participant P1, a school board chairperson from Puma Secondary School, showed that learner participation in school should be practised to a certain extent, and he said the following:

> *The purpose of learner leadership in schools is to lead their peers, provide feedback to their peers when they are invited to a meeting, and bring ideas from their peers to management, the school board, or the principal. However, school board members, such as parents, have different roles because they were elected at a parent meeting where most parents gathered to elect their representatives. This indicates that parents have more power than school-going children* (SSIP, 24 August 2021).

Furthermore, participant P2, a long-serving school board member from Puma Secondary School, said the following:

> *The parents and teachers then request that the learner leaders leave the meeting so that school board members, such as parents and teachers, can make the final decision without their input. Despite this, the learner leaders leave the meeting before making a final decision. Still, only the adults, who are school board members, are required to participate and be involved in that decision because learners are too young to make decisions* (SSIP, 24 August 2021).

On a similar note, Pr2, a school principal from Tulipamwe Secondary School, believed that they had undermined the learner leaders, and this was what he had to say:

> *Due to the challenges I have experienced, we do not involve learner leaders in the school board. Perhaps we have undermined them. This is a very difficult community to work with and involve their children in the school leadership. The school's leadership observed that their fellow learners and the community disrespected learners from poor backgrounds. Learners are not involved at all, so the power relations are minimal in this regard* (SSIPr, 30 August 2021).

Another participant T2 a liaison teacher from Tulipamwe Secondary School said:

> *I think it is a matter of culture; normally, kids are not consulted in any manner, even in the house. If there is a decision to be made, parents can make a decision, and kids are directed to follow the directive. Whether the kids do not want, they have to follow, and it is an order* (SSIT, 30 August 2021).

Participant P3, a school board chairperson from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

> *We treat power equally because we do not consider which person has more power than another. When there is a uniformity of ideas, everything is fully implemented. Adults regard learners as equal shareholders* (SSIP, 31 August 2021).

Another participant P4, a long-serving school board member from Tulipamwe Secondary School, had this to say:

> *We only sit with them until we reach a consensus on which we must all agree. Because if we say that adults have much more power than learners, they will claim that they, too, have power as learner leaders under Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001. As a result, we will not be able to reach an agreement. But we all sit down and talk about what is right and where we can all agree. We do not have any disagreements or regard learners as young or immature* (SSIP, 31 August 2021).

On a similar note, Pr3, a school principal from Haindongo Secondary School, had to say the following:

> *I believe the learners that we are working with are more in rural areas, but they still have the knowledge that they have from wherever they come from. There are other schools in the same circuit, but the children on the other side are not from rural areas. So, they learn from others. However, since I came here, I have not observed the learners coming in with the parents, school board, or management to take a specific decision* (SSIPr, 06 September 2021).

Another participant, LT3, a liaison teacher from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

> *Sometimes this learner may wish to attend a school board meeting, and they try to fight and argue that they are also leaders, so they have to attend such a meeting. When people discuss confidential things, they say that if you decide to partake in a certain leadership role, you must know or learn the conditions of being a leader. Learners also have the same feeling that if you are saying it should remain in this*

meeting, we will not take it out and let it be for this meeting only (SSIT, 06 September 2021).

Whereas participant P5, a school board chairperson from Haindongo Secondary School, had this to say:

The learner leaders do not have the authority to decide what we should do. So, only the parents have the authority to make the decisions, but learners will be told and must follow their parents' instructions (SSIP, 07 September 2021).

Likewise, P6, a long-serving school board member from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

The school board deals with the issue because we are the parents' representative and the school's custodian, but this does not imply that we represent only some of the group members rather than the entire school. That is why parents claim to possess more power. Culturally, we do not share discussions with children; they must be informed of what transpired after the elderly have spoken. Thus far, the school board has not encountered the challenges of power dynamics among stakeholders (SSIP, 07 September 2021).

According to the findings of this study, the challenge in rural schools is that parents in rural schools still perceive that their children are too young and immature to advise them. All they had to do was to respect all the parents. In response to those questions, Pr4, a school chairperson from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

The learner leaders have to respect their parents; they do not have to tell parents that they are leaders and are equal to the parents in terms of upbringing. They are still young and immature to make decisions (SSIPr, 13 September 2021).

On the same note, LT4 from Shifitu Secondary School said:

Children from our environment, where we are in the rural context, have respect, and they respect every parent as their parents. It is very difficult for these learners to fight for power with adults because they are told from home that only adults lead others, not children (SSIT, 23 August 2021).

Participant P7, a school board chairperson from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

> *We do not need to include the learner leaders in the school board meeting. So, when we make decisions, those two learners don't have the authority to decide what we should do. Only the parents, however, have the authority to make decisions. Moreover, learners will be told to do this based on the information provided by their parents. As a result, they must follow their parents' instructions* (SSIP, 14 September 2021).

Another participant, P8 from Shifitu Secondary School, echoed the sentiment above, and this was what he had to say:

> *We do not include learner leaders in the school board meeting. Even those two learners do not have the authority to decide what we should do, and only the parents have the authority to make decisions. Learners have to be told what to do based on the information provided by the parents* (SSIP, 24 August 2021).

On the other hand, most participants suggest that the main challenge in rural schools was an influence from home. The parents' attitudes and beliefs at home influence the leadership practices of the learners in some rural schools. Mostly, the influence came from the parents with inadequate explanations of what it means to be a learner leader and the benefits of practising leadership roles in schools. Most participants (11 out of 16) revealed that many of the parents in rural areas were unemployed at a high rate. As a result, many of the learners were forced to wear ripped uniforms, making them the laughingstock of their peers, which discouraged them not to take up the leadership position.

Another challenge some participants considered an issue was the peer pressure the learner leaders experienced from their fellow learners. Furthermore, some of the participants (ten of the sixteen) from the researched school suggest that there was a language barrier that limited learners' ability to express themselves freely. They also indicated that the learner leaders are afraid to speak; they feel shy and are not exposed to many people, unlike other learners from urban areas.

Some participants' findings suggested that schools in rural areas developed at a very slow pace, sometimes not even at all, compared to urban schools. Poor rural development brings down

learners' level of understanding, differentiating them from urban school learners in terms of learner leadership. They also cited that schools in rural areas experienced poverty within their rural societies, which prevented them from accessing adequate infrastructure and services such as proper roads, televisions, and radios.

Most participants have observed that learners in rural schools do not watch television to gain leadership knowledge. In a similar case, some participants suggested that the learner leaders remain silent in the meeting because they were unsure of what to do. Furthermore, it was discovered that older adults on the school board stopped the learner leaders from participating in the discussions because they were too young and still under the supervision of their parents. In this regard, Pr1, a school principal from Puma Secondary School, echoed the sentiment, and this was what he had to say:

> *When some learner leaders were allowed to lead others, they said their parents told them they came to school to study. They do not accept the responsibilities* (SSIPr, 13 September 2021).

In addition, LT1, a liaison teacher from Puma Secondary School, said the following:

> *Some of the learners do not want to accept them as leaders. Their fellow learners intimidated them and treated them badly when they led them in various activities* (SSIT, 23 August 2021).

Participant P1, a school board chairperson from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

> *I think that our rural schools are faced with many challenges. Some of the challenges are that they are in secondary schools without hostels, there is a lack of learner leadership development in rural schools when compared to learners in urban schools, their low level of understanding, unsure of what to do in the meeting, modern facilities such as television and listening to the radio, and the cultural norms* (SSIP, 23 August 2021).

On a similar note, Pr2, a school principal from Tulipamwe Secondary School, echoed the sentiment, and this was what he had to say:

> *Our rural learner leaders are from villages and commute daily to and from home. Our school does not have a hostel. They commute from home to school every day.*

> *The challenges we experience in most cases seem to be influenced by home. This resulted in the inappropriateness of our school's learner leadership* (SSIPr, 30 August 2021).

Whereas LT2, a liaison teacher from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

> *The challenge I think these learners have is that they are not free to express themselves. The other challenge again that I detected when it comes to elections, they normally like to elect troublemakers because they have that confidence, especially those learners who do not care. They think they learn more, and the others will accept them more when teachers tell them* (SSIT, 30 August 2021).

In response to the above question, P3, a school board chairperson from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said:

> *The parents normally have responsibilities at home. When their children inform them that they will have the learner representative council meeting the following day, the parents tell them to finish their work at home before releasing them to do their school work* (SSIP, 31 August 2021).

Whereas participant Pr3, a school principal from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

> *Our learner leaders are challenged when they control their fellow learners because, in our culture, a child cannot tell/instruct another child of the same age to do this and that* (SSIPr, 06 September 2021).

Another participant, LT3, a liaison teacher from Haindongo Secondary School, had this to say:

> *I think our learner leaders feel shy to express themselves in English, an official language in Namibia. In most cases, they prefer to speak their vernacular language. They are not exposed to many people like other learners in urban schools. Thus, they normally get scared to be amongst too many people at a time* (SSIT, 06 September 2021).

A similar sentiment was echoed by participant P5, a school board chairperson from Haindongo Secondary School, and she said:

Most learners relinquish their leadership positions due to inexperience and peer pressure (SSIP, 07 September 2021).

Furthermore, P5 said:

Most of the learners who attend schools in rural areas face extreme poverty. This was brought up as a result of the high rate of unemployment among the parent within this environment. Some of the parents rely on pensions from the government (SSIP, 07 September 2021).

Another participant, P6, a long-serving school board member from Haindongo Secondary School, echoed the sentiment above, and he said the following:

Our rural schools are faced with many challenges. One of the challenges was the late arrival of learners to schools due to long distances. They carried their heavy school bags and walked on bad roads with a lot of sandy soil (SSIP, 07 September 2021).

On the same note, Pr4, a school principal from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

Learners were told that when the parent has said something, they to follow. Thus, when they came to school, they seemed to behave in the council the same way

In response to this question, P7, a school board chairperson from Shifitu Secondary School, said the following:

I think learners in urban schools mimic different examples from other learners by watching television and listening to the radio, which learners in rural schools do not have access to because those facilities do not exist in rural areas (SSIP, 14 September 2021).

In this regard, P8, a long-serving school board member from Shifitu Secondary School, said:

Culturally, parents in our society raise their children in a way that they should not interrupt their parents' conversation. Learners keep in mind when they come to school that it is not proper for a child to reciprocate words with adults, for example, when a parent speaks and a child responds (SSIP, 14 September 2021).

The findings from the questionnaires seem to corroborate with other methods used to generate data. Three liaison teachers out of four responded to the questionnaires distributed amongst them. Both liaison teachers said that the learner leaders in the rural schools experienced language barriers; they could not express themselves in English properly, resulting in a lack of self-confidence. This hinders learners' participation in school leadership structures. The response from the liaison teachers is similar to what the school principal said when responding to the questionnaires. Three of the four school principals said that learners at some rural schools face language barriers, shyness, and less confidence in themselves during the meetings.

The study also found that one of the challenges experienced was the attitude of teachers and parents towards learner leaders when taking up their leadership roles. This study also discovered that illiteracy and lack of awareness among the community members were two constraining factors influencing learner leadership in rural secondary schools.

Another constraining factor was the non-participation of learner leaders in the decision-making structures, which was used for policing teachers when they were absent from their lessons or for not coming to their lessons on time. It was also suggested that the learner leaders were used to monitor their fellow learners who liked to move to and from the toilet, an unnecessary move that hindered their studies and deprived them of their rights to participate in making decisions that affected them.

A study conducted by Nthontho (2017) confirms the findings of this study, namely that learners were still marginalized when schools made decisions affecting their education. Denying them the right to participate in decision-making impedes their democratic participation, as enshrined in the Namibia Education Act and other international conventions. It is consistent with UN Convention on the Rights of the Child article 29(d), which states that schools must prepare kids to practice their rights and responsibilities through democratic decision-making in their schools and communities.

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of Chiwela (2010)'s study in Zambia, which suggested that learners in most African cultures were raised to believe that they should remain silent in the presence of adults. This demonstrated that learners should not question adults during meetings to demonstrate respect following adults' cultural attitudes. The study's

findings indicate that culture was one of the main constraints because learners had limited freedom to express their opinions in the presence of adults. It made them hesitant and silent as they waited for the elders to tell them what to do.

As a result, this study's findings contradict what Cultural Historical Activity Theory suggests. The Cultural-Historical Activity Theory directs the influence of a person's position, experience, context, and the sociocultural and historical traditions in that context (Gretschel, Ramungundo, & Galvaani, 2015). However, I used this theory in this study to advocate for the shift from an individual decision-making position to a collective decision-making effort within a school leadership structure.

The study used CHAT to investigate whether the learner leaders were culturally constrained by what had happened to them due to their maturity and age concerning the history of people living in their rural context (Kayumbu, 2017; Uushona, 2012). The study also revealed that socioeconomic factors, such as learners from low-income families, discouraged them from taking on leadership roles in school because they did not practice it at home. As a result, the learner leaders are influenced by the cultural norms at home to refrain from sharing their opinions with older people at school.

On the other hand, the Cultural Historical Activity Theory develops the collective activity system as the primary unit of analysis concerning other activity systems. In this case, the Cultural Historical Activity Theory validates collective decision-making and promotes a division of labour among all stakeholders, including learner leaders in school leadership structures.

The study's shortcomings were those learner leaders faced numerous challenges, demonstrating the dangers of failing to recognise the limited nature of their rights.

The results of the questionnaires appear to indicate that power relations exist in almost every rural school. The findings support the semi-structured interview findings that learner leaders are disrespected because of their age. However, the findings disregard the learner's fundamental right to participate in issues affecting their and their peers' lives. Learner leaders should not

only be allowed to represent their peers at school board meetings, but they should also be allowed to participate in decision-making structures.

Numerous pieces of literature on learner leadership have praised the inclusion of learner leaders herein on a national, continental, and international scale. A study on learner participation by Leung, Yuen, Cheng, and Chow (2014) revealed that learners rarely participated in important school-related matters. According to Nthontho (2017), learners were still left out when schools made educational decisions. The denial of learners' rights to participate in decision-making impedes their democratic participation and freedom of expression following national regulations such as the Namibia Education Act and international conventions. Learners are expected to play a significant role in shared leadership and decision-making during school leadership, even though they constitute a small number compared to adult school board members.

Having discussed the challenges of power between the adults and the learner of power, I now present how participants support the learner leaders in practising their leadership roles in the school board.

6.3 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I presented the data gathered from the four researched schools via responses from study participants. I also presented the study's findings derived from questions I asked the participants during the semi-structured interview, questionnaires, and document review. As a result, in Chapter 7, I will discuss the enabling and constraining factors on learner participation in school leadership at the researched schools.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ENABLING AND CONSTRAINING FACTORS TO LEARNER LEADERSHIP

7.1 Introduction

Chapters Five and Six were devoted to the descriptive data presentations on the participants' conceptualisations, practices and experiences of learner leadership and participation in decision-making. Chapter Seven deals with a descriptive analysis of the enabling and constraining factors on learner participation in school leadership at the researched schools. The data was generated from the field through focused group discussions, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and document reviews. Even though the study called for a document review, none of the schools I contacted provided me with the requested information. As a result, this indicated that learner participation was low in most schools studied. In this chapter, I also attempt to make sense of the data, what it could mean or suggest and what is to be made of it. I also make a larger meaning about learner leadership and participation based on the personal views of research participants. I also compare and contrast the findings of my study with past studies (Creswell, 2007).

The study's findings came from the critical research question: "What are the enabling and constraining factors (if any) that influence learner participation in school leadership structures?" The study discusses the enabling and constraining factors based on the responses of the learner leaders, parents, liaison teachers, and school principals from the researched schools.

7.2 The enabling factors to learner leadership

The enabling factors presented by the Learner Representative Council members included learner leaders' self-motivation, school rules and regulations, conducting meetings and training provided for the learner representative council members.

7.2.1 Learner leaders' self-motivation

Participants in the focus group discussions indicated that there are factors in rural secondary schools that enable learner leadership. According to the study, all thirteen learner leaders had high self-esteem and confidence when elected to various portfolios. They believe that learner

leadership in rural schools provides excellent opportunities for learners to conceptualize their leadership roles by exercising their rights in school and freely expressing their opinions. They also felt proud and happy leading their peers and speaking up for those learners who rarely approached their teachers to express their concerns. The study also appears to imply that learner leaders' actions influence the behaviours of some of their fellow learners, and they become good learners, even academically. However, because almost all of them said the same thing, this study only used a few of the learner leaders' quotes verbatim

In this regard, LRC1, a focus group one participant from Puma Secondary School, said:

> *I feel proud to lead my fellow learners and correct them in front of others* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Similarly, LRC5, a Tulipamwe Secondary School focus group participant, stated that self-motivation and self-confidence were two enabling factors that influenced the conceptualization of their roles. It gives them the confidence to navigate the challenges they will face to understand and practice their leadership roles at school. In this case, LRC5 said the following:

> *I am proud to be a learner leader in a rural school. Some learners who hardly approach their teachers may have approached me to raise their concerns with the teachers and the school leadership* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Whereas, LRC 8, a focus group two participant from Tulipamwe Secondary School, had this to say:

> *I understood that learner leadership in a rural school helps the school when decisions are made, particularly concerning learner issues. Learner leaders can contribute good ideas to bring about development at school or even support the given advice* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

Furthermore, LRC11, a focus group three participant from Haindongo Secondary School, had this to say:

> *I am happy because I was elected. We had too many candidates at the time of the nomination, and I am grateful that the majority of the learners voted for me. They believe I can lead them, and I am honoured that they chose me. They think of me as a trustworthy person* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

On a similar note, LRC12, a focus group three participant from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

> *I am proud to be a learner leader who guides other learners because it changes my character. Perhaps you were an ill-mannered learner, but the opportunity to lead other learners may have changed your behaviour (FG3, 06 September 2021).*

The study's findings indicated that learner leaders' self-motivation increases their opportunities to participate in decision-making and allows them to gain confidence and competence as future adult leaders (Nthontho, 2017). After discussing self-motivation as an enabler, I will now present the rules and regulations in the following section.

7.2.2 School Rules and regulations

According to the study, learner leaders believe schools should have rules to guide them when they exercise their leadership roles. The school rules assist them, particularly when leading and managing their peers. In this case, LRC6, a focus group two participant from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

> *Adherence to school rules teaches us that once rules and regulations are established at school, all learners learn well and perform well in their exams. Then, if you are a member of the LRC and you are performing well, it sets a good example for your fellow learners to follow* (FG2, 25 August 2021).

The above sentiment was further echoed by LRC11, a focus group three participant from Haindongo Secondary School, who said:

> *The school rules and regulations help us inform our classmates to arrive on time or as early as possible. It is our responsibility to remind them to arrive on time for school. When adhered to properly, the rules and regulations change the learner leaders' personalities and behaviours* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

The findings appear to imply that the rules and regulations are an enabling factor in informing learner leaders to uphold the principles of the learner leadership concept when performing their leadership roles. It demonstrates that when learner leaders understand the Education Act and other related education policies, they can better carry out their leadership roles as leaders and

distinguish their roles from their responsibilities as learners. It also motivates them to excel academically and to be role models for their peers in terms of behaviour.

Having discussed the school rules and regulations, I now present the conducting meetings with the learner representative council members in the next section.

7.2.3 Conducting meetings with the learner representative council members

Every school must hold meetings with learner leaders to guide and mentor them to develop their leadership capabilities. These meetings also allow learner leaders to discuss any issue/s or complaints they have received from their peers. It is the platform where learner leaders meet with their liaison teachers to resolve any issue/s before they are shared with school leadership and management.

During these meetings, the liaison teachers guide and motivate the learner leaders and encourage them to do better when they have the necessary information. Thus, meetings should be held regularly rather than once a year to strengthen their leadership development.

With this regard, LRC4, a focus group one participant from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

> *We need to introduce the plan of action because we received many complaints from our fellow learners at various times. During the week, we need at least a day when the learner leaders could meet with their liaison teachers to reconcile all the problems collected from their fellow learners. They look at how these problems could be resolved by all the school learners* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Another focus group three participant, LRC8 from Haindongo Secondary School, had a similar sentiment, and this was what she said:

> *I am suggesting that the school's leadership organise a meeting for the liaison teacher and learner leaders to discuss their roles. We also need to visit other schools in our context and learn their best practices* (FG3. 06 September 2021).

Similarly, LRC11, a focus group of three participants from Haindongo Secondary School, echoed the above sentiment, and she said the following:

> *If teachers could give us any support or motivation, I think it would boost the knowledge and experience of the learner leaders. The motivation from our teachers enabled us to practice our leadership roles effectively. It also helps us to*

> *conceptualise what the roles and responsibilities of the learner leaders are all about since we came from different houses with different backgrounds and were raised differently* (FG3, 06 September 2021).

The findings of this study appear to support Shikalepo and Kandjengo's (2020) suggestion that the LRC meeting encourages learner leaders and adults to work together to make changes in their schools and societies. The meeting as an enabler also follows Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, which requires learner representative council members to hold at least two meetings during each school term to make LRC decisions (GRN, 2001). However, as a former school principal, I noticed that the meeting was being chaired by the liaison teachers rather than the chairperson of the learner representative council. This conflicts with the education act, which governs learner leadership in schools and states that the chairperson of the LRC must be a learner.

This study found that no evidence proved to me that meetings for the LRCs had been held during the document review because there were no minutes of the meetings presented to me as a researcher. Based on my observations, this indicated that no learner leadership existed in the researched schools. Meetings, in my opinion, are one of the most important enablers of learner leadership in rural secondary schools because they allow learner leaders to give and receive knowledge from their liaison teachers. It is a forum for learner leaders to discuss issues related to their leadership roles and school decisions that affect them. Following the meeting discussion as an enabler, I am now presenting training as an enabler for learner leadership in schools.

7.2.4 The enabling factors on the school principals, teachers and parents.

The study's findings revealed that enabling factors could assist learner leaders in participating in school leadership and decision-making processes. Meetings with learner leaders, training provisions, motivation/encouragement, and recognition are examples of enablers.

7.2.4.1 Meetings

According to the study, most participants believe school leaders should hold meetings with learner leaders before and after the election process. The meetings assist the school leadership in explaining the value of learner representative council members in the school leadership structures. It also enables the significance of electing their fellow learners for representation in

the school board. The study further indicated that learners must be informed about the leadership traits a learner leader should possess to be elected to a specific position. During the meeting, the school leadership, through the liaison teacher, explains to the learner leaders their roles if elected to those positions.

In this regard, Pr1, a school principal from Puma Secondary School, said the following:

> *We advise our learner leaders on how to work in their leadership roles amongst their peers and teachers. We also invite the meeting to inform them about their roles at the beginning of the year* (SSIPr, 23 August 2021).

Similarly, another participant P1, a school board chairperson from Puma Secondary School, echoed the sentiment, and this was what he had to say:

> *We hold a meeting before the election of the learner leaders in which we invite all of the learners at the school and explain the importance of learner representative councils in schools, as well as the importance of electing their fellow learners to represent them in a governing body. We explain to them that you must nominate and elect someone with specific characteristics to represent others in that body. Then we allow them to vote for their representative on the school board alongside us* (SSIP, 23 August 2021).

Furthermore, P4, a long-serving school board member from Tulipamwe Secondary School, said the following:

> *We advise them on how to work in their leadership roles among their peers or with their teachers. We advise them when we call a meeting to inform them of their roles at the start of the year, specifically in January when school begins with the assistance of the liaison teachers* (SSIP, 31 August 2021).

Another participant, Pr4, a school principal from Shifitu Secondary School, had this to say:

> *We educate and workshop our learner representative council on their roles and responsibilities and hold meetings and various platforms on how to be good leaders* (SSIPr, 13 September 2021).

When schools hold meetings before the election process, learners can better make informed decisions about who to vote for based on the qualities of a good leader. After discussing meetings as enabling factors, I will present training as an enabling factor for learner leadership and decision-making participation.

7.2.4.2 Training provisions

Training is a valuable enabler supporting learner leadership development in rural secondary schools. According to the findings of this study, only one of the researched schools indicated that they train their learner leaders once a year at the start of the school year. Due to rurality, three research schools could not train their leaders. As a result, the school authorities felt that, due to a lack of proper physical infrastructure, such as a road, most schools had to look for cars that could drive through heavy sandy soil. However, in my opinion, learner-leader training should be an ongoing process that allows them to acquire knowledge for future leadership growth. Furthermore, continuous training should equip learner leaders with relevant skills and knowledge that sharpen their minds and allow them to practice their leadership roles.

In this case, LT1, a liaison teacher from Puma Secondary school, had this to say:

> *We gave them training once a year when they started with their leadership roles, and the leadership positions and procedures were distributed amongst them* (SSIT, 23 August 2021).

In the next section, I will present motivation/encouragement

7.2.4.3 Motivation/Encouragement

The study's findings revealed that when schools motivate learner leaders, it improves learner performance and encourages them to become future leaders. Most participants stated that other learners were encouraged to take on leadership roles at a young age, which helps them shape and mould their future lives. The study also revealed that learner leaders were motivated to follow in the footsteps of their former learner leaders.

In this regard, P2, a long-serving school board from Puma Secondary School, said the following:

> *It motivates them to improve their performance and take steps towards becoming teachers in the future. It also brings down a situation in which misbehaving learners become disciplined, which improves ethics at the school, to demonstrate their talent while in school. It encourages other learners to take on leadership roles at school, similar to their peers who were learner leaders* (SSIP, 24 August 2021).

Furthermore, participant Pr3, a school principal from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

> *We promote learner participation among our learners by encouraging them to consider themselves essential leaders. We also motivate them to speak out their concern to express themselves freely. The most powerful encouragement tool was to award them a certificate of achievement for being a good learner representative council* (SSIPr, 06 September 2021).

Similarly, LT3, a liaison teacher from Haindongo Secondary School, said the following:

> *We encourage them to follow the good examples of our former learner leaders who went to the university for further studies when they returned to our school for their teaching practices. We also encourage them not to fear anything when leading their fellow learners. We encourage them to behave well and dress properly to be exemplary to others* (SSIT, 06 September 2021).

Another participant, P7 from Shifitu Secondary School, had this to say:

> *We normally tell them that starting with leadership roles at a young age while in school is good because that is when you learn what leadership is all about, grow with it, and collaborate with other stakeholders* (SSIP, 14 September 2021).

Having presented the motivation/encouragement, I now present recognition as an enabling factor for learner participation in school leadership and decision-making.

7.2.4.4 Recognition

The findings also revealed that learner leaders were recognized for their accomplishments. Participants believed that if learner leaders were recognized as leaders, they would be able to participate effectively. This was accomplished by providing them with different uniforms than

the rest of the school, awarding them for performing their roles exceptionally well, and releasing them from day-to-day activities such as classroom cleaning. The study also revealed that the schools hosted an end-of-the-year party for the learner leaders.

In this case, LT1, a liaison teacher from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

> *We motivate them through motivational speakers from other schools, especially urban secondary schools. They are always given an award for executing their duties exceptionally well.* (SSIT, 23 August 2021).

Another participant, LT4, a liaison teacher from Shifitu Secondary School, said:

> *We request for them to use a different uniform from the one that others are using, release from everyday responsibilities, for example, the cleaning of the classrooms and other day-to-day activities which learners carry out, and encourage them to consult their fellow learners before they bring their concerns to the school board members, organise end of year party for them, given an award and training at the beginning of the year* (SSIT, 13 September 2021).

Having discussed the enabling factors influencing learner participation in rural secondary schools, I present the constraining factors from the learner leaders, school principals, teachers and parents.

7.3 The constraining factors to learner leadership

The findings also revealed that learner leaders faced challenges that impeded their leadership roles, such as peer pressure, learners' failure to recognize learner leaders, discomfort, intimidation, and cultural influences.

7.3.1 Rules and regulations

The findings imply that learner leadership in rural secondary schools could be effective if schools made educational policies, rules, and regulations available to all students. The available school rules and regulations aid learner leaders in carrying out their leadership roles, such as informing their peers to uphold what is stipulated in those policies. Despite this, learner leaders believed that rules and regulations such as school rules, education policies, and other regulations help learner leaders understand the importance of learner leadership in schools,

particularly in rural and multiple-deprivation schools. This assists learner leaders in educating and informing their peers to arrive on time and attend their classes.

With regards to the question, I asked on the enabling factors that influence learner participation in school leadership structures, Participant LRC3 from focus group one from Puma Secondary School was quick to say:

> *We need to understand the Namibia Education Act No.16 of 2001 to take note of our roles and responsibilities and learn what to do and what should not be done. But if we do not know it, we may do things unrelated to our roles and carry out duties against the law. (*FG1, 25 August 2021).

A similar sentiment was echoed by participant LRC7 from Tulipamwe Secondary school focus group two, and he had this to say:

> *I think that the most important thing is to provide us with the Education Act No. 16 of 2001 for us to familiarise ourselves with the roles and responsibilities of the LRCs and the importance of such a body, particularly in rural schools* (FG2, 30 August 2021).

According to the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, one of the power and functions of LRC is to assist the principal and teachers in ensuring adherence to the code of conduct of the school by all learners to create and maintain an orderly and disciplined school environment conducive to learning, (GRN, 2001, p.19). I present peer pressure in the next section

7.3.2 Peer pressure

Learner leaders are faced with many challenges. The study revealed that learner leaders experience challenges when telling their fellow learners not to move around the school unnecessarily. Their peers used to shout at them that they could not tell them since they were also learners like their fellow learners. The study's findings indicated that learners refused to obey the instructions of the learner leaders.

With this regard, LRC4, a focus group one participant from Puma Secondary School, said the following:

> *I think there are many challenges that we are faced with. One of the challenges is when you are telling your fellow learners to remain in their classrooms, but they*

deny it, or sometimes they shout at you that they cannot be told by the learner leaders (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Similarly, participant LRC9 from Haindongo Secondary School focus group three said:

We faced challenges because some of our fellow learners were hurling insults at us, and others claimed that the LRCs would not be allowed to enter certain classrooms. Some encouraged you to continue your responsibilities by saying that only that person and the rest of the classroom supported you. When those learners who are older than you pass by during the election, they intimidate you (FG3, 06 September 2021).

The findings of this study concurred with the literature on a study conducted in Namibia, which discovered that peer pressure affected learner leaders' confidence in performing their leadership roles. Peer pressure is a societal role either derived from the learner leaders themselves or influenced by others (Kandjengo and Shikalepo, 2021).

Having discussed peer pressure as the constraining factor, I present cultural influence.

7.3.3 Cultural belief and practices

According to the study's findings, learner leaders are subjected to some cultural influence from parents during school board meetings. During meetings, parents do not consider the learner leaders' opinions. The learner leaders also revealed that the elderly constantly referred to their time and what was going on culturally. According to the study, children should not discuss issues with adults. As a result, there is a misunderstanding among learner leaders, teachers, and parents. It also forces the learner leaders to slow down and listen to what the elderly have to say to show respect for how they were raised.

In this regard, participant LRC1 a focus group participant from Puma Secondary School:

The challenge we have experienced so far is when you are in a meeting with parents. Parents prefer to do things according to their understanding without considering us as leaders. Sometimes, you find the parents telling you that during their time in school, they listened to what older people were telling them to do, forgetting that their time is completely different from ours (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Similarly, in LRC2, another focus group, one participant from Puma Secondary School echoed the sentiment, and she said the following:

> *Learner leaders have not listened to this during the school board meeting. As a result, it becomes a big challenge because if we happen to have our ideas as learner leaders or the ideas collected from our fellow learners to share in the meeting with the parents and liaison teachers, then we may find them unwilling to consider our point. This brings us to the misunderstanding between learner leaders, parents and teachers, but since you are the small child, this forces you to slow down and accept what the older people are saying, although that is not what we want as learners. However, you have to do it to show respect to them* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

According to O'Sullivan (2004), cultural influence is a common barrier to achieving greater participation by young people in their schooling. This is supported by Chiwela (2010), who argued in a study conducted in Zambia that children were raised to be silent in the presence of adults. This is consistent with the findings of this study, in which culture is viewed as the way adults perceive the role of the child in the context of rurality, which impedes learner participation in school leadership and decision-making. I discussed the constraining factors of learner leaders. I now present the constraining factors from the school principals, teachers and parents' perception of learner leadership and participation in decision-making.

7.3.4 Training provisions for the learner representative council members

The study seems to imply that learner leaders developed into capable leaders due to training. However, according to the findings of this study, no learner leaders were trained, depriving them of their right to information and knowledge production. Most learner leaders stated that they had received no training and lacked leadership skills that would improve their ability to carry out their leadership roles effectively.

In this regard, this was what LRC2, a focus group two participant from Puma Secondary School, had to say:

> *If I can remember very well, no training was provided because the lockdown started when we were about to go for the training. We hope the training will still come because we were already informed that we were supposed to get trained.*

> *However, the lockdown came, and perhaps they will still do that for us* (FG1, 25 August 2021).

Another focus group four participant, LRC13 from Shifitu Secondary School, echoed the importance of the provision of training for LRC in rural schools, and he said the following:

> *I am unable to give you any view, but it is good to be trained because it could have helped me to provide the relevant answer as I am discussing things with you now; I could have been in the position of knowing what I am talking about* (FG4, 13 September 2021).

According to Shikalepo and Kandjengo (2020), training was deemed necessary, but more things were required for training to become an effective enabler of leadership development. As a result, the findings of this study suggest that rural secondary schools provide these types of opportunities for learner leaders to acquire relevant skills and knowledge to conceptualize and practice their leadership roles effectively.

Having presented the enablers from the learner leaders, I am now presenting the enabling factors from the school principals, teachers, and parents.

In addition to findings from the learner leaders, the study also solicited the views of school principals, teachers and parents on the constraints to learner leadership and participation. These were parental discouragement, intimidation from their peers, a lack of motivation, cultural influences, poverty, language barriers, and peer pressure, which are discussed further in the next paragraphs.

7.3.5 Parental discouragement

Discouragement is a method of dissuading someone from doing something. The study discovered that some rural parents discourage their children from participating in learner leadership activities. Some parents tell their children that the reason for sending them to school was not to lead or be led by that person's child. In this case, Pr1, a school principal from Puma Secondary school, had this to say:

> *When some learner leaders were allowed to lead others, they said their parents told them they came to school to study. They do not accept the responsibilities* (SSIPr, 13 September 2021).

Similarly, P3, a school board chairperson from Tulipamwe Secondary School, echoed the above sentiment, and he said the following:

> *The parents normally have responsibilities at home. When their children inform them that they will have the learner representative council meeting the following day, the parents tell them to finish their work at home before releasing them to do their school work* (SSIP, 31 August 2021).

The learner leaders paid attention to what their parents told them to do. However, the parents' instructions were in contravention of the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001. Section 60 of the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 mandates that every state secondary school establish a body of learners known as the Learners' Representative Council, which determines the duties and functions of such a council (ibid). After presenting discouragement, I will present intimidation from their peers as a constraining factor in the following section.

7.3.6 Intimidation from their peers

The findings of this study showed that some of the learners at the researched schools intimidate the learner leaders by using derogatory language toward them and denying that they can be instructed or told by the learner leaders, who are also learners. Their older male learners mostly perpetrate the intimidation.

In this regard, LT1, a liaison teacher from Puma Secondary School, had this to say:

> *Some of the learners do not want to accept them as leaders. Their fellow learners intimidated them and treated them badly when they led them in various activities* (SSIT, 23 August 2021).

According to informal observations, our learners still do not understand the significance of learner participation in school leadership structures. Instead of assisting their peers, they jeopardize the learner leaders' leadership roles. In the following section, I discuss motivation as a barrier to learner participation.

7.3.7 Lack of motivation

Concerning the findings of this study, learner leaders face several constraints, including a lack of motivation. Some parents believe that a lack of motivation impedes learner leadership development in rural secondary schools. Some parents believed that learners in rural schools were less motivated because of the context in which they found themselves, resulting in low levels of understanding and uncertainty in meetings. Learner leaders could be motivated by sharing best practices with learner leaders from urban schools because their schools have modern facilities such as television and radio, which rural schools do not have.

With this regard, P1, a school board chairperson from Puma Secondary School, said the following:

> *I think that our rural schools are faced with many challenges. Some of the challenges are that they are in secondary schools without hostels, there is a lack of learner leadership development in rural schools when compared to learners in urban schools, their low level of understanding, unsure of what to do in the meeting, modern facilities such as television and listening to the radio, and the cultural norms* (SSIP, 23 August 2021).

In the following section, I will discuss cultural influences as one of the factors limiting learner participation.

7.3.8 Cultural beliefs and practices

Because of how learners were raised at home, most participants believe learner leadership is inappropriate in rural schools. Culturally, it is taboo, according to the elderly, for learners to engage in discussions with adults. As a result, learner participation in rural schools may be hampered by parental influence. In this case, Pr2, a school principal from Tulipamwe Secondary School, echoed the sentiment, saying:

> *The challenges we experience in most cases seem to be influenced by home. This resulted in the inappropriateness of our school's learner leadership* (SSIPr, 30 August 2021).

Similarly, Pr4, a school principal from Shifitu Secondary School, confirmed the sentiment and said:

> *Learners were told that when the parent has said something, they to follow. Thus, when they came to school, they seemed to behave in the council the same way at home and were not free to express their views* (SSIPr, 13 September 2021).

Another participant P8 a long-serving school board member had this to say:

> *Culturally, parents in our society raise their children in a way that they should not interrupt their parents' conversation. Learners keep in mind when they come to school that it is not proper for a child to reciprocate words with adults, for example, when a parent speaks and a child responds* (SSIP, 14 September 2021).

As alluded to in chapter two, the study's findings indicate that most learner leaders in rural secondary schools were denied the opportunity to participate in school leadership structures. This study found that adult school board members undermine the rights of learners to participate and exclude them from participating in the decision-making process.

7.3.9 Poverty

According to the participants, most learner leaders in rural secondary schools are impoverished. This is because the majority of the parents in that context are unemployed. Learner leaders typically wear worn-out uniforms, making them the laughingstock of other learners. The study revealed that poverty discouraged learner leaders from participating in school leadership structures and decision-making processes.

In this case, P5 said the following:

> *I believe learners who attend schools in rural areas face extreme poverty because most parents in this environment do not work. These learners usually wear the worn-out uniform and are sometimes afraid to stand in front of other learners to fulfil their leadership roles because they are embarrassed by their appearance* (SSIP, 07 September 2021).

The government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN), through its National Housing Policy (2009), showed that the majority of the learners, if not all, in rural areas, live far from where taxis were available. This forced learners in rural schools to walk long distances through thick bushes and from schools and impacted their teaching and learning. As

alluded to earlier in the multiple deprivation discussion in chapter one of this study, the rural school leadership deprived learners of an opportunity to practice their leadership roles compared to the learner leaders in urban schools. Rural learner leaders lack motivation, which they could obtain by watching television or other physical sources.

7.3.10 Language barriers

The study's findings revealed that most learner leaders are not free to express themselves in English, Namibia's official language. Most learners prefer to communicate in the vernacular, which is Oshikwanyama, an indigenous language. They are always afraid to speak up for fear of making a mistake. When the school sends the learner leaders to a workshop, they are expected to provide feedback on what was discussed. However, the learner leaders could not do so because of the English language. Consequently, LT2 - a liaison teacher from Tulipamwe Secondary School, had this to say:

> *The challenge I think these learners have is that they are not free to express themselves. The other challenge again that I detected when it comes to elections, they normally like to elect troublemakers because they have that confidence, especially those learners who do not care. They think they learn more, and the others will accept them more when teachers tell them* (SSIT, 30 August 2021).

Similarly, LT3, a liaison teacher from Haindongo Secondary School, echoed the sentiment and said the following:

> *I think our learner leaders feel shy to express themselves in English, an official language in Namibia. In most cases, they prefer to speak their vernacular language. They are not exposed to many people like other learners in urban schools. Thus they normally get scared to be amongst too many people at a time* (IIH, 06 September 2021).

Having presented the language barriers of the learner leaders, I present the peer pressure amongst the learners in the next section.

7.3.11 Peer pressure

According to the study, learner leaders faced challenges from their peers. Due to peer pressure, some learner leaders were forced to relinquish their leadership positions. As a constraining factor, peer pressure prevented them from effectively carrying out their leadership duties. In this case, Pr3, a school principal from Haindongo Secondary School, had this to say:

> *Our learner leaders are challenged when they control their fellow learners because, in our culture, a child cannot tell/instruct another child of the same age to do this and that* (IIH, 06 September 2021).

Also, P5, a school board chairperson from Haindongo Secondary School, echoed the above sentiment, and she said the following:

> *Most learners relinquish their leadership positions due to inexperience and peer pressure* (IIH, 07 September 2021).

From an informal observation, peer pressure was one of the biggest challenges affecting learner leaders, particularly in rural areas. The learner leaders were sometimes discouraged from taking up leadership positions due to their appearance. Hence, they relinquish their leadership positions (Shikalepo and Kandjengo, 2020). Having presented the peer pressure amongst the learner leaders, I will conclude this chapter in the next section.

7.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the chapter discussed the enabling and constraining factors of learner leadership and participation in the researched schools. This chapter presented the enabling factors to learner leadership on the learner leaders' motivation, school rules, and regulations. I also discuss the constraining factors to learner leadership considering what the learner leaders conceptualise, practice and experience in their leadership roles. This chapter further discusses how school principals, teachers and parents conceptualise the concept of learner leadership, participation and decision-making structures. Therefore, in the next chapter, I discuss the key themes emerging from the presented data.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION OF THE KEY THEMES EMERGING FROM THE FINDINGS

8.1 Introduction

The previous chapter (Chapter Seven) was devoted to the descriptive presentation of the findings and analysis of the enabling and constraining factors of learner leadership in the researched schools. Chapter Eight discusses the key themes from the findings presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven of this thesis. The chapter also dwells on the evaluative analysis of the major themes. I also offer interpretations of these themes as they directly respond to the study's research questions. I also contrast these with relevant literature and theoretical frameworks in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis.

8.2 Key themes that emerged

The key themes that emerged from this study were learner leaders' conceptualisations, practices, and experiences of leadership; school principals', teachers', and parents' conceptualisations of learner-leadership, participation and decision-making in schools; the enabling factors to learner leadership and the constraining factors to learner leadership.

8.2.1 Learner leaders' conceptualisations, practices and experiences of leadership

The learners perceive their roles as learner leaders to be the following: correcting and directing their peers to do what is right; putting the school in order; being the voice of the voiceless, making representations, approaching teachers on behalf of their peers; reporting the grievances of their peers to the principals' office and when their peers are not feeling well; participating in decision-making structures at school; influencing their peers' behaviour and contribute to the school's development.

The learner leaders believe that when they were in school, not all of them could do what the rules and regulations permitted. Some tend to disregard their rights to education and responsibilities as learners, as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). Articles 12 and 15 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

(1989) deemed it necessary to encourage learners' participation and freedom of expression. Learner leaders, according to Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, are members of the Learners' Representative Council (LRC) who were democratically elected to conduct their affairs following its constitution (GRN, 2001). However, the findings in this study reviewed that the learner leaders conceptualised their roles differently from what was stipulated in the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, a document on which the learner leaders could rely (Shikalepo & Kandjengo, 2020).

Linked to this, the study participants repeatedly stated that the learner leaders proudly felt honoured to lead, correct and direct their peers to do what is right for them to succeed with their education. Generally, the learner leaders were doing so because they had been elected to participate in activities at school. Furthermore, seven out of thirteen learner leaders felt motivated while performing their roles, which helped them to keep their school in order when necessary. At times, the learner leaders cited the significance of learner leadership in schools as a crucial aspect that paved their way for future leadership. Thus, they conceptualise their leadership roles in school leadership and management as essential.

So, the literature on learner leadership cited in chapter two showed that learner leadership viewed from a traditional leadership perspective was understood as the structure of the Learner Representative Council in a certain school and formal leadership positions (Amadhila, 2018; Da Silva, 2018). Similarly, Uushona (2012) also states that the learner leaders were only assigned responsibilities, for example, to oversee the adherence of other learners to the policies that regulate the learner community in classrooms and the entire school ground. This showed that learner leadership was more evocative of traditional leadership relatively than contemporary leadership views, that learner leaders were not involved in crucial decision-making issues (Uushona, 2012).

Additionally, the majority of the learner leaders from the four researched secondary schools demonstrated that they assist their fellow learners in approaching their teachers and speaking on behalf of those who rarely present their issues to their teachers. This was done to ensure that their roles as leaders were carried out following UNCRC (1989) article 12, which emphasizes the right of children to express their voices and be heard freely. Also, the learner leaders felt they could play a major role in communicating matters that concern them and their peers

(Grant, 2015; Grant & Nekondo, 2016). Thus, schools should provide learners with a communication channel and space to actualise their participation (Leung, Yeun, Cheng and Chow, 2014).

Furthermore, this study noted the condition in rural areas where the learner leaders serve as the voice of the voiceless in the researched secondary schools. The challenge raised by the participants from the four researched schools was that some learners were not free to approach their teachers and raise their concerns. When this happened, the learner leaders occasionally represented their peers' concerns to teachers or school leadership. Their fellow learners sometimes could not approach their teachers whenever they had a complaint. The learner leaders are also faced with the unavailability of the learner representative council's constitution in the school. It also hindered them from practising their roles, leaving them to rely on the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 only.

Further, the earlier scenario prompted some learner leaders' efforts to improve their relationships with teachers and learners at school. Consequently, it becomes two-way traffic, with some learner leaders reporting that they advise teachers, learner leaders and their peers. However, schools should not only use the voice of the learners for the sake of it, but they should provide avenues for learners to participate in decision-making actively. In these spaces, it is where learner leaders can freely express their opinions on issues that are important to them and be considered valuable stakeholders (Grant, 2015).

Another finding of this study was that of the representative role that helps improve the dialogue between learners and school management as well as the decision-making structures in the school. Furthermore, representation allows the democratic participation of learners to prevail at school meetings. The representation of learners in various structures helps the learner leaders air their grievances on matters affecting them. The challenge was that, being elected as a learner representative at their school, some of the learners who were older than them began talking about them in bad faith, which sometimes discouraged them. They started to wonder why they became a member of the learner representative council.

A study by Mukiti (2014) states that the role of the learner representation council was to air their views on matters affecting them. This helps the school leadership consider the learner

leaders' simple ideas while engaging in school decision-making structures. As has been alluded to in chapter two, Mukiti (2014) argues that the school leadership should create a room for the learner leaders to air the grievances of other learners to the teachers and for school leaders to take proper actions for possible solutions. However, this was not the case in the researched schools. Learner leadership is still wishful thinking, and the learner leaders were denied opportunities to participate fully in decision-making.

Viewed from a Participatory Leadership Theory, the learner leaders in the researched schools had no idea what their roles could be. Before Namibia gained independence, schools had no democratic system that could offer space for learner leaders to conceptualise their leadership roles. Consequently, after independence, the system of education changed to a democratic system that allowed all the stakeholders to be involved in the school leadership structures through the provision made by the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001. The NEA made a provision for the learner leaders to form part of the school board and participate actively in decision-making processes. However, learner participation and involvement could not be materialised in their schools.

Despite that, the non-participation of the learner leaders affected the conceptualisation of their leadership roles. The learner leaders envisioned the conceptualisation of their roles as important to them, for example, when leading their peers, representing them in decision-making structures which could pave the way for future leadership. A study by Yukl (2013) laments that school leaders should make efforts to include all stakeholders, including learner leaders, in decision-making structures. Thus, involving learner leaders in school leadership and decision-making improves understanding and acceptance of issues in their life (Nyambisi & Mwelu, 2018).

Furthermore, Yukl (2013) argues for democratic societies, such as schools, to uphold learner leaders' rights to influence decisions that will affect them in a variety of ways, according to Participation Leadership Theory, particularly when the school principal, teachers, and parents are the sole decision-makers at the school. The school leadership must provide an opportunity for learner leaders to use the various decision procedures to influence school decisions. It implies that learner leaders, like any other leaders in the school, be given equal access to decision-making structures, as Gill (2011) proposes. While leadership in rural secondary

schools is limited to the principal, teachers, and parents, learner leaders have been left with little knowledge to assist them in realising what to conceptualise and experience as their leadership roles. When contrasted with the learner leaders from the urban secondary schools, it showed that the learner leaders from the urban secondary schools are more elevated than the learner leaders from the rural context. Moreover, some learner leaders appeared to understand their roles from a different perspective, though not everything they did fit into them.

Another remarkable finding from this study was what the learner leaders practice as part of their leadership roles. The finding was remarkable because the learner leaders did what they did without realising it was part of their roles. This indicated that, while the learner leaders could not conceptualise their roles, they had little idea of what to practice. Moreover, the learner leaders could not conceptualise their roles and hardly knew what to practice. Moreover, the theme learner leaders' practices emerged from this study seems to include: consulting their peers when issues affecting them and their peers arise; monitoring the movement and behaviours of other learners; assisting teachers in creating and maintaining orders and discipline amongst learners; keeping learners in the classrooms, minimises the noisy pollution in classrooms; monitoring the behaviours of other learners; uses of positional powers to control other learners and the establishment of school committees.

A study in Hong Kong by Leung, Yeun, Cheng, and Chow (2014) states that schools in that country were more concerned with informing and consulting learners than giving them real participation and power. As alluded to in chapter two, a similar study conducted by Zylfijaji, Grabi, and Mahmutaj (2014) on consultation indicated in their study that school leaders should consult with learner leaders and consider their valuable contributions when making decisions. This is similar to what the learner leaders responded to regarding their leadership practices, although they did it from a different angle. The learner leaders seem to believe they should consult with their fellow learners and other relevant stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, and school leadership, before making any decisions.

Furthermore, some learner leaders from two researched schools reported that they consult their peers to gather information and share it with school leadership. The participants also believed that they normally consult their fellow learners to back up their knowledge which they would use during their engagement with the school leadership, which happened occasionally. Further,

it assists them in preparing to present to school leadership structures and their participation in decision-making processes on issues that affect them.

Although some participants were aware of the consultation process, this study noted that most participants could not conceptualise the importance of consultation in leadership and the leadership roles they should play. The challenge raised by seven learner leaders from the four researched was that not everybody at their school loves them as learner leaders, and some of the learners wish them misfortune. When this happened, the learner leaders had no option but to practice whatever they thought was best. This might hamper the essentiality of learner leadership in schools.

The challenge was that the learner leaders who understood consultation as an essential component of their leadership roles could not practice it because school leadership underestimated their rights to participate in decision-making structures. To overcome this challenge, the school leadership should run away from the traditional leadership practices and cultural belief that says learners are mere children, as Kalimbo (2018) posits it.

Another finding related to learner leaders' practices was monitoring other learners' movements and behaviours at the school. The Namibia Education Act No.16 of 2001 requires every state secondary school to establish a Learner Representative Council as the highest body of elected leaders of the learners to assist the principal and teachers in creating and maintaining an orderly and disciplined learning environment (GRN, 2001, p.19). The study found that a small number of learner leaders from the researched schools reported that they were tasked with assisting their teachers by keeping learners in the classrooms and avoiding up-and-down movement to and from the restroom. While the majority of learner leaders were tasked with monitoring the behaviour of other learners to ensure they were behaving appropriately to maintain acceptable behaviour standards (Kandjengo & Shikalepo, 2020). This allows them to improve the school's performance and discipline among their peers because all learners focus on what they are doing.

School committees were another important recurring category under the theme of role conceptualisation. This study was conducted during the outbreak of COVID-19, and schools were required to ensure that the health and welfare of the learners were well taken care of. The study's findings indicated that schools needed to form various committees within the school.

According to Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, the LRC must establish various committees for specific functions that will be chaired by the LRC and will include other learners who are not members of the LRC as members (GRN, 2001. P.19).

One of the established committee's functions was to improve and maintain the school environment and facilities; to provide cultural, sports, and social activities; and to improve the health and welfare of students. Sometimes, a lack of knowledge resulted in the learner leaders' lack of conceptualised leadership roles. As a result, the learner leaders had to consider how to generate funds for the school account from the cultural and sporting activities they organized to benefit the teaching and learning process as part of their leadership practices. The scenario above arose because the learner leaders were unsure of the leadership practices, they should employ to fulfil their leadership roles.

Although learner leaders were allowed to organize such activities, they were not directly involved in decision-making structures where major decisions were made. Rather than fully participating, they were tasked and delegated at some point to sanitize everyone who entered the school grounds during COVID time. That was hazardous to their health. This type of leadership practice contradicts the participatory leadership theory. According to this theory, the school should hold a meeting where all stakeholders are present to define what each stakeholder should do properly.

From the participatory leadership theory perspective, school leadership should distribute tasks among stakeholders and practice shared leadership amongst the stakeholders during the structural meeting. However, most learner leaders in the researched rural school did not see it as part of their leadership responsibilities. This occurred due to the school leadership's failure to bring the Namibia Education Act to the attention of the learner leaders and make it available as a guiding document. As a result, it implies that schools do not include all stakeholders in school leadership and decision-making structures, particularly learner leaders. Learning leaders may also gain experience when actively practising leadership roles as they become part of the structures.

Another remarkable finding that emerged under leadership practices was the leadership traits that include self-confidence, accommodativeness, listening skills, fearlessness, and respect.

These characteristics depict leadership characteristics to strengthen learner leaders' abilities to practice their leadership roles. The finding is noteworthy because these characteristics depict leadership traits that can be used to strengthen learner leaders' abilities to practice their leadership roles. In this regard, self-confidence as an emerging trait assists learners in being confident in the competencies and skills they should acquire. The leadership characteristics help learner leaders define and set boundaries when performing their roles. This boosts their confidence in their ability to carry out their leadership responsibilities and make sound decisions, as Northouse (2018) posits. Kalimbo (2018) states that certain traits and skills are frequently used to describe and distinguish leaders from non-leaders. This was an example of what happened to the learner leaders who tried to identify themselves as leaders.

Furthermore, the leadership characteristics assist learner leaders in determining their ability to influence other school board members, such as parents, teachers, and school principals, if given the opportunity. Moreover, while learner leaders attempted to demonstrate an understanding of their potential roles, they were only given limited opportunities to participate in simple tasks such as hand sanitization during COVID time, monitoring others during and after the break, and supervising their peers while cleaning their classrooms to ensure that all classes were locked up.

Most learner leaders from the four researched schools indicated that the school leadership could not provide avenues for them to participate in critical decision-making structures. This was one of the challenges experienced by most learner leaders who had no leadership experience due to their non-participation in decision-making structures.

Furthermore, linked to the above scenario, the findings refute and conflict with the mandatory requirements of the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, which states that in secondary schools, there should be no more than two learners from the learner representative council may serve on the school board (GRN, 2001). However, this was not the case at some of the researched secondary schools where the school board was the highest decision-making structure.

A study conducted in Kenya by Nyabisi and Mwelu (2018) found that schools that included learner leaders in decision-making easily implemented the decisions made, allowing the learner

leaders to improve their understanding and acceptance of the issues under discussion. Thus, schools that invite learner leaders to participate in decision-making structures are noteworthy, especially in rural and multiple-deprivation secondary schools.

Because of the Participatory Leadership Theory advocates for all stakeholders, including the learner leaders, to actively participate in school leadership and decision-making structures. The learner leaders should then be allowed to put their leadership skills into practice to define their roles and complete meaningful work (Yukl, 2013). This provides learner leaders with knowledge and skills to apply as future leaders and instils self-esteem within themselves.

Another finding that emerged was the leadership experiences that the learner leaders acquire through leadership practices. Most learner leaders revealed that they could not gain experience because they were not involved in any decision-making structures and that most of their peers were unsupportive. Besides that, not all learner leaders understood their roles, and only a few (four of the thirteen learner leaders) from three schools understood what they should do. As a result, they had difficulty exercising their leadership roles as learner leaders. This was made impossible because the learner leaders were unfamiliar with the Education Act No. 16 of 2001, the only document on which they could rely. They could only do what the liaison teacher told them to do.

However, due to a lack of experience, the learner leaders used their positional power to control their peers, particularly during morning devotion, distribution of soft porridge during break time, and mostly in the morning hours at the gate to monitor the late arrival of other learners to school. At times it was an inadequate opportunity for the learner leaders who could not go through the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001. They could not improve their leadership skills. Due to a lack of knowledge of management roles, they were unsure whether they managed their fellow learner appropriately.

8.2.2 School principals, liaison teachers and parents' conceptualisations of learner leadership, participation and decision-making in schools

Another finding in this study was school principals', liaison teachers', and parents' conceptualisation of learner leadership in rural secondary schools. It was established in chapter six above that the school principals, teachers, and parents of the researched schools view

learner leadership as more about monitoring and controlling other learners to ensure adherence to the school rules and regulations. They further understood it as a means of assisting teachers in certain activities, particularly keeping others quiet in the classrooms, queuing properly during the distribution of breakfast in the morning as well as in the morning devotion, collecting exercise and homework books, cleaning the chalkboard and sanitising people at the school entrance. Also, it was conceived as a policing role to assist the school principal in monitoring and controlling teachers who miss or arrive late for their lessons. Although this claim might be true, it is contrary towards the NEA that regulates the education system in Namibia.

According to the regulations of the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, the learner representative council had the following powers and functions: they must promote the best interests and welfare of the school and its learners; they must liaise between learners and the school management; they must undertake projects aimed at improving and maintaining the school environment; they must improve the health and welfare of learners provided the school principals approved those projects. Furthermore, the regulations stated that learner leaders should assist the principal and teachers in ensuring adherence to the school's code of conduct to create and maintain an orderly and disciplined learning environment. (GRN, 2001, p.19). Coupled with these, the NEA section 18 (1) (d) states that, in the case of a secondary school, the Learners' Representative Council should nominate no more than two learners to form part of the school board members' constitution (GRN, 2001, p.17). The Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 also made a provision for school principals to designate a teacher from the senior staff members to liaise with the LRC and the school management and who may attend the meetings of the LRC without voting rights.

The remarkable finding that emerged from this thesis was the representational roles. The finding is remarkable because the learner leaders indicated that one of their key leadership roles would be representational. The majority of participants from the four researched schools believed that the active leadership roles of learner leaders should be more about representational roles. Most participants from the four researched schools believed that the learner leaders' active leadership roles should be more about representational roles. Learner leaders serve as representatives for their peers, acting as a conduit for their grievances to the school leadership. The school principals, teachers, and parents from three of the four researched

schools also conceptualise it as a way of giving a voice to the learner leaders to bring their concerns, have their voices heard, and provide solutions. Whitehead (2009) conducted a study in the United Kingdom highlighting the roles and importance of the learner's voice. Mukiti (2014) states that some Kenyan school principals invited learner leaders to report other learners' grievances that required management's attention to their offices; this is where the Learner Representative Council could air their grievances.

A study by Uushona (2012) and Amadhila (2018) states that learner leadership was perceived as empowering a group of students to represent others in the school and act as leaders. They also claimed that it was interpreted as a policing role for LRC that assists teachers in maintaining order and discipline in the school. The concept of learner leadership in school was strongly supported by principals, teachers, and parents because it was viewed as a means of allowing the learner leaders to practice democracy in school and ensuring that the learner leaders were shaped as future leaders. Furthermore, it was conceived as a means of promoting freedom of expression and being the voice of the voiceless; reducing the workload of school principals; improving learner performance; and liaising learners with school leadership, as supported by NEA No. 16 of 2001.

The study's findings revealed that parents, teachers and principals viewed learner leadership as essential in rural secondary schools. Hence it gained popular support from the majority of the participants. Participants believed that learner leadership is part of the constitutional rights that grant learner leaders democratic rights to participate in shared school leadership structures. Although Namibia adopted a constitution that enshrined the principle of democracy and human rights (through Act No. 8 of 2014) for all citizens, including learner leaders, to be treated with dignity, this section was not surely taken into account. Thus, participatory democracy in this context considers the idea of people ruling through participation rather than representation, as is the case with learner leaders (Linington, Excel & Murris, 2011).

However, according to NEA No. 16 of 2001, learner leaders in some rural secondary schools were not afforded the same level of participation and involvement in decision-making as other school board members. The roles of learner leaders who are members of the school board are not explicitly defined in Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001. As a result, school leaders abused their authority over school decision-making. Learner leaders were thought to play their

leadership roles by freely expressing themselves in front of other learners but not by actively participating in critical decision-making in schools.

In the preceding scenario, learner leaders' rights were violated due to school principals', teachers', and parents' cultural attitudes when they were excluded from decision-making and perceived as immature and young. It was discovered that learner leaders became less interested in participating in school leadership because of the cultural beliefs and practices of the school board's elderly members. This was an indication that learner participation occurs to a certain extent. As a result, participatory democracy was not widely used in the researched schools.

Wood (2011) claims that learners make better decisions due to their perspectives, knowledge, and experiences concerning their situation. Similarly, researchers such as Grooves (2013) and Simmons, Grahams, and Thomas (2015) contend that the participation of learner-representative council members and an ideal for locating learner voices increases the high levels of enthusiasm and aspiration to hear their voices.

On the contrary, Duma (2015) argues that school principals in some rural schools in South Africa perceive learners as violating their sense of professionalism if school leadership allows too much involvement in school leadership. As a result, while involving learners in school governance in rural schools, some principals and learners frequently hold each other in arms. In other countries, such as Kenya, school principals see learner participation as more about the learners' educational rights. The school principals believed that allowing learner leaders to participate in school decision-making structures actively would result in the school principals losing authority (Nyambisi & Mwelu, 2018). It resulted in school riots in some cases.

According to Critical Theory, the study linked learner leadership to how it was perceived by school principals, teachers, and parents. In the context of rurality and multiple deprivations, adults perceive learner leaders as minors, too young and immature to make decisions on their own. As a result, they should be informed about various leadership activities that they should engage in. Most schools in this type of context have been subjugated by the culture of the society in which they find themselves, which has not socialised to account for learner leadership positions and consider the unique perspective that learner leaders can bring to the school. As Honneth (2004) proposes, principals, teachers, and parents should consider these

learner leaders' identity formation and recognition to achieve communication agreement cooperatively within the school leadership structures.

As a result, when school principals, teachers, and parents recognize learner leaders as people whose ideas matter and who can be allowed to participate in critical decision-making structures, it helps to empower them from the injustices of being silenced and excluded from the decision-making process as Harmey, (2014) argued, especially in the school board where they are legally a part of it (GRN, 2001). These allow them to claim their identity as members of school leadership structures and practice and experience their leadership roles as leaders. This may not change the perceptions of school principals, teachers, and parents, but it may transform and empower learner leaders to think positively about their context.

8.2.3 Enabling factors to learner leadership

Another strongly emerged theme was the enabling factors for learner leadership in schools. The enabling factors that emerged from this study include self-motivation, school rules and regulations, meetings, training provisions, motivations/encouragement and recognitions.

Self-motivation as an enabling factor promotes learner participation in school leadership structures in the researched rural Ohangwena secondary school. Odanga (2018) showed that self-motivation is associated with self-discipline, a capacity to control one's thoughts, speech and deeds to attain the desired achievements. It allowed learner leaders to freely express their opinions on issues that concern them and share those opinions with school authorities. Furthermore, self-motivation caused learner leaders to become self-driven when performing their leadership roles, which helped them achieve academic success. Thompson (2017) found that empowering learner leaders builds self-motivation into self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-respect. Thus, when learner leaders are motivated, good leadership practices result.

The self-motivation of learners was coupled with the motivation that school principals, teachers and parents considered as an enabling factor that emerged from this study. The school principals, teachers and parents showed that learners' motivation improves learner performances and encourages them to become future leaders. A study by Kirea (2015) showed that motivation and confidence were considered to play a central role in building essential skills that create the growth of trust and build an effective relationship between teachers and learners.

This is similar to what twelve of the sixteen participants (principals, teachers and parents) vividly echoed that the motivation of the learner leaders enabled them to practice their leadership roles. Motivations assist learner leaders in recognizing the valuable contributions they can make to their leadership development. This enables them to improve ethics and learner behaviours throughout the school. They indicated that the learner leaders encouraged other learners to take on leadership roles at a very young age, which helped them shape and mould their future.

Motivation was another tool that could be used in conjunction with this study. It allowed the school to provide a history of former learners' accomplishments. Some rural secondary schools used motivation to shape how learner leaders interact with reality and reflect on other people's experiences, such as the former Learner Representative Council (c.f chapter 3). The former learner leaders' activity impacts how they conceptualise and practice their leadership roles. This appears to be an advantage that learner leaders may have regarding leadership practices. The motivation of the learner leaders also increases the opportunity for them to experience other enabling factors they had never thought of.

Despite this, some learner leaders from two of the four schools studied reported feeling less motivated, a social factor that could have allowed them to gain more leadership experience. This would necessitate schools taking steps to mediate these students' non-participation in the school's leadership and decision-making structures. As a result, self-motivation influenced their leadership practices in schools. However, in my experience as a former principal in a rural setting, I have noticed that learner leaders' motivation broadened good leadership practices in secondary school. That is, learners' motivation enabled them to open up their minds to ensure self-esteem and self-confidence as the pivotal role when performing their leadership roles. One concrete example is when the school leadership invites learner leaders from urban schools to share best practices with learner leaders from rural secondary schools.

Furthermore, according to the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), learner leaders use self-motivation to boost their courage in carrying out their leadership roles. They felt proud and happy for being learner leaders in their schools, influencing most of their academic performance. CHAT recognizes that each learner leader has personal experiences that shape

their roles in their schools and communities. Their leadership experiences allow them to grow as leaders in their respective schools.

Another sub-theme from this study was the school rules and regulations that guide learner leaders in their leadership roles, such as leading and managing their peers. This was revealed by all the participants in the study, who reported that all of the four secondary schools where the study was conducted did not fully engage learner leaders in establishing school rules. It was only done by the school authority, which included members of the school board, such as parents, teachers, and the school principal, who then endorsed it to the learner leaders for implementation. As a result, the school leadership viewed it as the learner leaders' duty and obligation to put what they were given into action. Furthermore, three of the four principals of the researched school state that schools that practice participatory democracy do not struggle with decision-making implementation, as opposed to schools that exclude them from the decision-making process.

In a similar study conducted in Tanzania, researchers such as Kambuga and Omollo (2017) state that learner leaders do not maintain democratically an orderly atmosphere that is participatory for all members of the school. Most participants believed that allowing learner leaders to participate in developing school rules and regulations allowed them to exercise democratic leadership practices. The school rules allow them to do so and take ownership of their decisions because they are a part of the decision-making process. On this basis, most learner leaders believed that School rules help them to endorse the principles of participatory democracy in the Ohangwena researched schools. Kennedy (2018) found that the learner leaders, as the representative of their peers, should be involved in establishing the school rules and regulations on which the school operates to maintain discipline among the learners. Notably, some parents were pleased and proud to see their children leading their peers while adhering to school rules and regulations.

Surprisingly, the older adults in the school leadership and decision-making structures through establishing school rules were proper in their eyes, unlike in the eyes of the learner leaders. As a result, they failed to provide an opportunity for the learner leaders to participate in developing the school's rules and regulations. Based on informal observations, it awoke feelings among learners who were not members of the learner representative council that the learner leaders

were not fairly representing them in the entrusted leadership roles assigned to them. Although the claim might be true, the findings of this study appear to indicate that learner leaders were only given things to implement without their voices being heard through participation, involvement, or consultations.

According to the Cultural Historical Activity Theory perspective, school rules and regulations are tools that schools use to regulate and direct the learner leaders when practising their leadership roles (Engeström, 2000). This enables them to mediate the idea of developing leadership practices in schools. It should be done methodically to identify learner leadership that will result in leadership practices in a school (Grimalt-Alvaro & Ametler, 2021). The rules assist the community, in this case, are the school principals, teachers, learners, and parents, acting toward the goal and regulating the division of labour among stakeholders. The division of labours referred to the roles that each participant played. While participants were aware of school rules and regulations, the data clearly show that meeting was one of the enabling factors influencing learner leadership in school leadership structures.

Another finding emerging from this study was the meeting. Most participants agreed that school and learner leaders should meet before and after the elections. This would assist the learner leaders in better conceptualising their leadership roles, which would benefit them at the end of the process when practising their roles. Meetings with the learner leaders would be the appropriate platform for the school leadership to explain the roles and responsibilities of the learner leaders in detail. It was also regarded as a venue where learner leaders could learn how to air grievances while performing their duties. Furthermore, meetings strengthened the relationship and engagement between learner leaders and older people in the school authority, which may result in changes in school leadership.

The findings of this study corroborate the findings of Shikalepo and Kandjengo's (2020) study in Namibia, which stated that LRC meetings provided a good platform for communication between LRC members and anyone entrusted with meeting administration. Mncube and Harber (2013) found that the governing body's chairperson encouraged learners in rural school governing bodies to speak during meetings (ibid, chapter two). Giving learner leaders a voice on the platform encourages them to think about and practice their leadership roles in schools (Grant, 2015). Meetings in some countries promote learner leaders' voices when they work

with their liaison teachers, parents, and school principals to bring about internal and external changes that benefit their schools (Mitra and Gross, 2009).

A Learners' Representative Council must hold two meetings during each school term, according to Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, and the secretary of the LRC must keep the minutes while the chairperson presides over the meeting (GRN, 2001. p. 19). Although the meeting procedure was stipulated in the Namibia Education Act mentioned above, the study findings revealed that no LRC meeting occurred at most of the researched schools. The researcher confirmed this during the document review, which was used as one of the research methods during the data collection period. The researched schools could not provide the researcher with proof of the minutes taken during the LRC meetings. The meeting minutes could reveal whether the learner leaders were allowed to participate in the discussion and who said what during the meeting. However, the findings of this study revealed that meetings held in some of the schools limited the learner leaders' ability to carry out their leadership roles because learner leaders were not involved in structural meetings such as school board meetings, as required by the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001. Except for the head boy and head girl in some cases, the participants in this study confirmed that learner leaders did not fully participate in structural meetings.

Some learner leaders, particularly the head boy and head girl, were invited to attend the meeting; however, none of them was allowed to participate in any decision made but was instead cautioned to listen carefully and provide proper feedback to their fellow learners on what was endorsed into them following the meeting. In these circumstances, the school leadership violates the meeting procedures outlined in Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001.

According to CHAT theory, meetings are one of the tools that school leaders should use to strengthen learner leadership practices in schools. Thus, during the meeting, the liaison teachers should discuss their leadership roles with the learner leaders. When learner leaders are supported by school leadership and collaborate, they can influence school leadership. For example, if the learners misbehave, the learner leaders can speak to their peers during the meeting and inform them about the school rules that govern their attitudes and behaviours. Then they can advise the school leadership and the principal on how to change the behaviours of their fellow learner leaders.

Another finding that emerged from this study was the training provisions. The training provisions to support leadership development in learner leaders were also one of the enabling factors. It became clear that learner leaders should be trained immediately following their election, and this should be an ongoing process. The participants thought the school should train learner leaders more than once to encourage them to improve. Also, the school leadership should view training as an essential component that can shape learner leaders' leadership skills. Thus, all the school principals, teachers, learner leaders and parents from the researched schools appear to suggest that training boosts learner leaders' confidence and self-motivation to conceptualize, experience, and practice their leadership roles.

However, the study's findings revealed that four of the eight liaison teachers and principals from the investigated school provided learner leaders training to develop their leadership abilities. Their claims, however, contradict the responses the researcher received from the learner leaders. According to the findings of the learner leaders, no training has been provided to them thus far.

Training is an important enabler that assists school leaders in developing leadership skills. It assists them in increasing their confidence and effective leadership concepts, experiences, and practices in their leadership roles. The training was evidenced in England and South Africa as an essential component for the school governing bodies to achieve their objectives (Mncube & Harber, 2013). According to Shikalepo and Kandjengo (2020), learner-leader training enabled them to change their attitudes, skills, and behaviours. Mboyonga (2018), who conducted a study from Zambia, also affirms training as a means for learners to gain effective participation in the school governing body. Kuranchie and Affum (2021) discovered that training learner leaders enabled them to effectively lead learners from diverse socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. It is worth noting that learner leaders may benefit from training in conceptualising their roles as leaders to influence learner participation and decision-making in the school. However, no training was provided to learner leaders in any of the four explored schools, according to the analysis of the document review.

Concerning CHAT, training is a tool that school leaders can use to improve learner leaders' potential leadership practices. It enabled learner leaders to produce good leadership practices through motivation. As a result, learner leaders use the skills they learned during training to realise the capabilities and benefits of learner leadership in schools. The school leadership should then train the learner leaders to assist the school leadership in influencing their fellow learners' behaviours to change their personalities. It allows them to demonstrate their ability to conceptualize and practice their respective school leadership roles.

Another finding that emerged as an enabling factor was recognition. The study's findings revealed that learner leaders were recognized through awards for achieving and performing their leadership roles exceptionally well as learner leaders. It was discovered that learner leaders were recognized in their own identity as learner leaders, so they were encouraged to wear a different uniform than their peers, were awarded as best leaders, and enjoyed an end-of-year party. Although recognition emerged as an enabling factor, I did not come across a study that investigated recognition as an enabling factor that influences learner participation in school leadership structures in any of the studies I reviewed. As a result, the findings of this study on recognition could not be compared with the previous literature.

Because of the CHAT theory, recognition emerged as a tool to strengthen the concept of learner leadership in rural schools. It allowed the learner leaders to improve their morale and empathy while conceptualizing and experiencing their leadership roles. Learner leaders benefit from recognition as they integrate with other community members such as the principals, teachers and parents. Learner leaders can persuade school leaders to change some of the procedures. After discussing the enabling factors that influence learner participation in school leadership, I will move on to the constraining factors.

8.2.4 Constraining factors to learner leadership

One of the key themes that emerged from this research was the constraints of learner leadership. The study's findings revealed several factors that limit learner leadership in schools. As discussed further below, this includes rules and regulations, peer pressure, cultural beliefs and practices, training provisions, parental discouragement and intimidation, a lack of motivation, poverty, and language barriers.

The constraining factor that emerged from this study was the rules and regulations. The study's findings revealed that all the researched schools had the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 and its regulations. However, the learner leaders revealed that the school authority failed to bring the NEA No. 16 of 2001 to their attention. This jeopardises the learner leaders' rights and responsibilities to conceptualise the practices and experiences of their school leadership roles. Furthermore, the learner leaders could not fulfil their leadership roles as defined in Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001. Because the learner leaders were unfamiliar with the provisions of the Education Act, they were unsure of their responsibilities. The rules and regulations in the process constrained them. Moreover, the learner leaders relied solely on the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001.

The Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 established the rules and regulations governing the LRC regarding nomination, elections, powers, and functions (GRN, 2001). Because the rules were not clearly defined, it was up to the school leadership and principals to establish the rules for how the learner leaders should exercise their leadership roles in schools. Consequently, it impedes learner leaders' democratic participation in conceptualising and practising their leadership roles (Nthontho, 2017). Various researchers in Namibia, such as Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008), Uushona (2012), Kandjengo and Shikalepo (2021), have reported on the issue of a lack of policies on learner leadership in secondary schools several times in their studies, but it is still existing. The lack of a document guiding the roles of LRCs, such as the Namibia Education Act, limits their leadership practices.

From a theoretical framework perspective, I would point out that the learner leaders' unfamiliarity with the rules and regulations outlined in NEA No.16 of 2001 runs counter to what they should be conceptualizing, practising, and experiencing as part of their leadership roles. According to CHAT, the rules and regulations assist learner leaders in conceptualizing what needs to be done and gaining experience that results in leadership practices in the school. As a result of the lack of access to the NEA, no leadership roles could be exercised in this case. This makes it difficult for learner leaders to practice their leadership roles effectively and efficiently and recognize their limitations. The contradictions encountered in the activity system hampered learner participation in school leadership structures.

Another finding that emerged as a constraining factor was peer pressure. All the participants reported that learner leaders were subjected to peer pressure from their peers. This happens when their peers tell them to do something. Their fellow learners usually yell at them and refuse to follow their instructions. As a result of their peers' denial, learner leaders may decide not to continue in their leadership roles. Shikalepo and Kandjengo (2021) conducted a study in Namibia and found that learner leaders experience peer pressure as a social factor that affects LRC differently depending on an individual's cultural beliefs. Similar findings were reported by Richard (2012), who discovered that peer pressure was a constraining factor for not wanting to be different or risk their social positions as leaders in an Australian study.

According to the CHAT theory, peer pressure constrained the learner leaders to practice and experience leadership roles. The challenge was that the learner leaders were not performing their leadership roles as they should have been. Their peers disregard their instructions and refuse to accept them as leaders. Moreover, their peers prevent learner leaders from carrying out their responsibilities as mandated by NEA No. 16 of 2001. Consequently, their fellow students, who are members of the community, hinder the smooth operation of the school's activities.

Furthermore, the learner leaders felt intimidated and mistreated while participating in various activities. The school leadership should then educate the learner constituency to ensure that NEA No. 16 of 2001 is implemented fairly. They should educate them through meetings to raise awareness within school societies. As a result of this constraint, the learner leaders relinquished their leadership roles.

Another recurring finding from this study was the cultural beliefs and practices which emerged as a constraining factor. According to most participants, adult cultural beliefs and practices hampered learner leadership in school. The findings demonstrated unequivocally that adults on the school board did not value learner leaders as equal members of the school board. They considered them too young and immature to raise important issues and were the minority on the school board. As a result, there is confusion among the school principals, teachers, learner leaders and parents about what the culture says about children not discussing issues with the elderly.

Various research findings from several countries revealed that culture as a barrier to learner participation played a negative role in learner participation in many countries (Mncube, 2012). Mncube (2012) discovered that children had been raised and socialized, so they do not deliberate issues with adults. It does not show respect, but rather to be quiet in front of them. These findings are consistent with Mncube and Harber (2013), who found that traditional African culture contradicts democratic participation practices in various cultural societies. Chiwela (2010) reported similar findings in a study conducted in Zambia that learners were raised to remain silent in the presence of adults. This made the learner leaders hesitant, even though they were allowed to express their concerns.

From a theoretical perspective, CHAT helps people understand how things have been culturally practised in the rural context. All the learner leaders revealed that they were not allowed to express their opinions following the history of how children were previously raised in their community. In the past, children were not allowed to discuss critical issues with older people, which was taboo (Shekupakela-Nelulu, 2008; Uushona, 2012). It is like they do not show respect to the adults. This study employs past information to identify tensions and contradictions that limit learner leaders' ability to influence school leadership toward their leadership roles' conceptualisations, practices and experiences.

The study's findings revealed that learner leaders were constrained by culture because they were always referred back to what was going on in the adults' time, and thus they were not consulted. In a nutshell, learner leaders face challenges that prevent them from exercising their leadership roles. As a result, when elected to leadership roles, it was difficult for the learner leaders to express their opinions and participate in the decision-making process. As a result, there is a conflict between what is practised and what the law states, which impacts the learner leaders' leadership roles.

Another sub-theme that emerged as a constraint to learner leadership in rural secondary schools was a lack of learner leaders' training. Despite claims by parents, teachers, and school principals that they support learner leaders through training, all the learner leaders revealed that no learner received leadership training in the schools studied. As a result, the learner leaders lacked leadership skills, making it difficult to improve their leadership abilities. Mncube (2012) reported that learner leaders could participate actively in school leadership when schools

provided them with training. A similar study (Mncube and Harber, 2013) also considered training the most effective form of participatory democratic weapon schools should employ to empower learner leaders.

However, schools tend to overlook the importance of learner leaders' training because even when schools provided training, it was done as a one-time event rather than an ongoing process. Furthermore, this study discovered that a lack of training hampered the efficiency and effectiveness of learner participation in school leadership structures. According to CHAT theory, training is a tool that school leadership should use to operate effectively and for learner leaders to gain experience to establish leadership practices. If rural schools could provide learner leaders with training, it would help to solidify the learner leaders' roles in influencing school leadership on learner performance and behaviour.

Another recurring finding as a constraining factor was discouragement from the parents. According to the study, some rural parents discourage their children from participating in school leadership structures. Due to the rurality context, parents informed their children that they sent them to school to learn, not to participate in leadership activities led by that person's child. Parental discouragement is deemed to be a societal factor that affects learner leaders individually based on parental influence. It discouraged learner leaders from taking on leadership roles because they may believe they are less important in society. That is why most of those discouraged by their parents quit their leadership roles and positions at school. This hampered positive leadership practices and limited their participation in school leadership and decision-making structures.

From the theoretical perspective, Learner leaders' societal roles cannot be separated from their social relationships. According to the findings of this study, some parents believe that their children's responsibilities at school should be limited to their roles at home. This parental behaviour demotivates learner leaders from actively participating in their leadership roles. To bring the contradictions to light, the school should increase parental awareness to improve their understanding of learner leadership and school participation. This would help learner leaders deal with parental discouragement and consider schools a social unit where community members interact.

Another finding from this research was the intimidation or bullying of learner leaders by their peers. According to the studies reviewed (Jan & Hussain, 2015; Mabatha, Monjai, & Skosana, 2013), peer intimidation and bullying are both intentional and harmful. It is a limiting factor that creates a barrier to learner participation, negatively impacting school leadership and learner leaders.

One of the study's key findings was that the learner leaders were intimidated by their peers, who shouted at them, intimidated them, and treated them poorly. Male learners older than the learner leaders were found to be more intimidating to others, jeopardising the learner leaders' leadership roles. This violates the Government of the Republic of Namibia's (2014) constitution, which states that all Namibian citizens, including learner leaders, have the right to be treated with dignity. It creates an unsafe environment for learner leaders to practice their leadership roles diligently.

Moreover, according to the CHAT theory, all the learner leaders who participated in this study revealed that most lost self-esteem due to peer intimidation, which interfered with school leadership practices. Peer intimidation contradicts the NEA, which requires the learner leaders to "promote the best interest and welfare of the school and its learners" (GRN, p. 19). Moreover, Mabatha et al. (2013) proposed an intervention to reduce intimidation in their study. The intervention to counter peer intimidation necessitated the involvement of school principals, teachers, and parents. This would assist learner leaders in delaying their decision to leave their school leadership positions.

One of the significant findings that emerged from this study was poverty. Poverty among learner leaders was identified as a geographical and socio-economical factor in rurality and multiple deprivations. The study found that most rural secondary school learner leaders lived with their grandparents and unemployed parents. As pensioners and vulnerable members of school communities, these were the people who relied heavily on the government's assistance. In this setting, learner leaders had difficulty accessing roads and other essential social services (GRN, 2009). Learner leaders in rural areas who commute to and from school come from various backgrounds. They walk long distances through dense bushes, which becomes even more difficult during the rainy season due to a lack of school hostel facilities in that context.

Furthermore, the Namibia National Housing Policy (2009) reported that the majority of learners, including learner leaders, in the Namibian context lived far from cities where taxis were available. This is similar to the school context where the learner leaders who participated in this study attend to their learning. The learner leaders who participated in this study revealed that they were made the laughingstock of other learners due to poverty, which discouraged them from participating in school leadership and decision-making structures.

Mr P4, a long-serving school board member at Haindongo Secondary School, claims that the learner leaders wear worn-out uniforms, which gives such a learner a bad image. Mrs P2, the school board chairperson at Haindongo Secondary School, confirmed the above scenario and stated that most of the learners in their environment are poor, making them feel humiliated by their appearance. They were pleading with the government to implement strategies to alleviate poverty in their community and align it with Sustainable Development Goals (2015) to move forward the Agenda 2030 as an effort to poverty reduction strategies as enshrined United Nations.

Marine and Moletsane (2015) reported similar findings in the South African context, finding that people experienced various types of poverty, such as income, material, health, and epistemological poverty. The mentioned social deprivation is similar to the context and conditions learner leaders face in Namibia, particularly in the Ohangwena researched schools. The research schools face the challenge of being among the disadvantaged schools due to the lack of hostels in those schools. Furthermore, in that context, people occupy traditional and culturally defined spaces statutorily designated as rural schools.

Because of the CHAT theory, learner leaders in rural areas with multiple deprivations experience poverty in their surroundings. This economic factor has historically influenced their leadership positions, especially wearing worn-out uniforms. It makes it difficult for them to participate in various school activities that could lead to leadership positions. This is a contradiction in and of itself and interferes with their interactions with the other school board members.

Another remarkable finding from this study was a lack of motivation, which hampered learner participation in school leadership structures. Most participants from the researched schools

revealed that learner leaders in rural schools were less motivated due to the context of rurality and multiple deprivations such as a lack of hostel, television, radio, computer, and good access road. The lack of television and radio in rural areas discouraged them from taking on leadership roles, just as it does for other urban learners.

Furthermore, Mr Pr2, a school principal at Tulipamwe Secondary School, claims that the attitude of learners from wealthy families discourages learner leaders from freely participating due to their families' economic situation. Mr P7, a long-serving school board member at Shifitu Secondary School, confirmed the above scenario, stating that learners in urban schools mimic different examples from other learners by watching television and listening to the radio, which learners in rural schools do not have access to because those facilities do not exist in rural areas.

According to CHAT, schools should use motivation to encourage learner leaders to take on leadership roles effectively if they can participate in school leadership structures. The study's findings could imply that sharing best practices with fellow leaders from other schools with modern facilities can motivate students. This was confirmed by the study's participants, who included parents, teachers, and school principals.

One of the recurring findings among the learner leaders in rural secondary schools was language barriers. Most participants revealed that learner leaders with limited English language skills were hesitant to express themselves freely in Namibia's official language when delivering speeches during the assembly. In most cases, they prefer to communicate in their native language (Oshikwanyama, an indigenous language in Namibia). The data collected during the study revealed that learner leaders faced significant language barriers when expressing their opinions. According to Mr LT2, a liaison teacher at Tulipamwe Secondary School, students in rural schools are not free to express themselves in an official language. Mr LT3 confirmed the above scenario and stated that the learner leaders are hesitant to express themselves in English, Namibia's official language, and prefer to speak in their vernacular language.

According to the findings of this study, learner leaders in rural schools were not exposed to as many people as their counterparts in urban schools. The school administration should make time for these leaders to practice their public speaking skills. As a principal in a rural school, the school leadership must frequently force the learner leaders to use

the little knowledge they have in terms of speaking skills. According to informal observations, some learner leaders implemented a speaking policy at their schools, but the learner leaders were unable to implement it due to shyness. Kandjengo and Shikalepo (2021) discovered that poor English language skills discouraged learner leaders from participating in activities requiring interaction. Because of their fear of speaking in the official language, they felt uneasy in their leadership roles.

8.3 Conclusion

The major themes from the study's findings were presented in this chapter, guided by the critical research questions that shaped the study, the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, and the theoretical framework presented in Chapter Three. The proceeding chapter (Chapter nine) presents a reflective summary of the thesis, conclusions, recommendations, contribution to knowledge and implications for future research.

CHAPTER NINE

REFLECTIVE SUMMARY OF THE THESIS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

9.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the key emerging issues based on the study's findings. Following careful analysis of the data presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, as well as the themes in Chapter 8, certain clear lessons emerged. Chapter Nine presents a reflective summary of the thesis; conclusions of the study based on how the study answered the key research questions, provides recommendations, argues for the contribution that the research is making; and concludes by discussing possible implications for future research on learner leadership in Namibian rural schools.

9.2 Reflective summary of the thesis

This study was divided into nine chapters and narrated in the following order to address the objectives mentioned above:

Chapter One was an introductory chapter and outlined the background that formed the basis of the study. This chapter highlighted the importance of learner leadership practices in secondary schools in Namibia and the impact they would have on school decision-making structures. It has laid the foundation for the entire study by providing the general background and overview of the key aspects of the study. The chapter further discusses the problem statement of the study, the purpose and rationale for the study, the significance of the study, objectives of the study. Critical research questions have been presented. Furthermore, I presented the discussion of the key concepts used in the study, and the delimitations of the study and organisations of the thesis have also been provided.

Chapter Two is devoted to reviewing international, continental and national literature pertinent to learner leadership issues and participation in decision-making in school leadership structures. My study aimed to explore the learner leaders' conceptualisations, practices and experiences of their roles in school leadership and management. I further organised the literature review chapter into three sections. The first section was on the international literature

related to learner leadership to track the trends and debates about learner leadership. In this study, I discussed policies on child rights because learner leadership was developed from the right-based approach. This was followed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on children's rights to understand the learner's rights to participate in decision-making.

Furthermore, the second section was based on the continental literature about learner leadership, contesting the views on learner participation in school leadership. This was followed by related studies on learner leadership and participation in decision-making, challenges faced by learner participation in school leadership, and the enabling factors influencing learner participation in the school governing body. Lastly, I reviewed the National (Namibian) literature on learner leadership in Namibia, the impact of democratic learner participation and leadership, and issues of power and leadership in rural secondary schools. I believe there was a need to discuss those policies fit the rural and multiple deprived contexts. I evaluated and analysed the major themes that emerged from Chapters Five, Six and Seven to incorporate some facets of the existing literature in the discussion. The themes that emerged were used to respond to the critical research questions of the study. I assumed that all secondary schools in Namibia had an understanding of the learner leadership concept since Namibia is a democratic country which allows all the stakeholders to participate freely and practice their leadership roles, including the learner leaders.

Chapter Three provided the theoretical framework that underpins this study. The framework comprises the Participation Leadership Theory, Critical Theory and the Cultural Historical Activity Theory. In this chapter, I commenced with the Participatory Leadership Theory, which sought what the learner leaders conceptualise as their roles while practising and experiencing leadership in schools. Then I proceeded with the Critical Theory, which helped me to understand how the school principals, teachers, and parents perceive and conceptualise learner leadership, participation and decision-making in schools. Furthermore, I have also discussed Cultural Historical Activity Theory, which sought answers about the enabling and constraining factors of learner leadership in rural secondary schools. I used these three theories to complement each other to analyse better and understand the phenomenon of learner leadership in schools. Whatever the other theory complemented the shortcomings in one theory.

Chapter Four described the research design and methodology, considering the research paradigm, the research design, the research methodology, selection of research participants, how the data was generated and analysed, issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study. The study sought to explore what the learner leaders conceptualise as their roles while practising and experiencing their leadership skills. It also sought to establish how the school principals, teachers and parents perceive learner participation, leadership and decision-making in school.

Chapter Five dealt with data presentation and descriptive analysis of the learner leaders' conceptualisations, practices and experiences regarding their roles in school leadership in the researched schools. The data was generated from the field through focused group discussions and document reviews. In this chapter, I attempted to make sense of data, what it means or suggests and what is to be made of it all. I also made larger meaning about learner leadership based on the personal views of learners and also, and I compared and contrasted the findings of my study with past studies.

Chapter Six deals with data presentation and descriptive analysis of the conceptualisations of school principals, teachers and parents about learner leadership, participation and decision-making at the researched schools. The data was generated from the field through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and document reviews. In this chapter, I also attempted to make sense of data, what it means or suggests and what is to be made of it. I also made a larger meaning about learner leadership and participation based on the personal views of research participants and compared and contrasted the findings of my study with past studies.

Chapter Seven deals with data presentation and descriptive analysis of the enabling and constraining factors on learner participation in school leadership at the researched schools. The data was generated from the field through focused group discussions, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and document reviews. In this chapter, I also attempted to make sense of data, what it means or suggests and what is to be made of it. I also made a larger meaning about learner leadership and participation based on research participants' personal views and compared and contrasted my study's findings with past studies.

Chapter Eight dwells on an evaluative analysis of the findings that gave rise to the major themes from all the types of participants in the study: the school principals, the teachers, the learners, and the parents. The interpretations were compared and contrasted with relevant literature and theory. I evaluated and analysed the major themes that emerged from Chapters Five, Six and Seven to incorporate some facets of the existing literature in the discussion. The emerging themes were used to answer the study's critical research questions.

Chapter Nine explored the research findings and compared them with relevant theories and other existing studies. This chapter further presented conclusions of the study based on how the study answered the key research questions; how the themes confirm or refute existing views on learner leadership and participation; how the themes extend existing knowledge on learner leadership; what were surprising/different elements that seemed to emerge from the study; the recommendations, as well as suggestions for future research, are also discussed here. As a result, the study was concluded by providing a reflective summary of the entire thesis. In addition, I summarized the findings in light of the research questions. I also discussed my contribution to new knowledge.

9.3 Conclusions

The findings of my study brought me to the conclusions that I present below:

9.3.1 Learner leaders' conceptualisations, practices and experiences of leadership roles in schools

The themes, conceptualisations, practices, and experiences of learner leadership emerged from data analysis from learner leaders. The analysis of this theme revealed that participants saw their leadership roles as essential. Through representational roles and being the voice of the voiceless, they see their leadership roles as central to their mandate. Furthermore, the learner leaders saw learner leadership as a two-way street. They see it as being made available if they practice their leadership roles. They believed that they had the potential to play a significant role in communicating issues that were important to them and their peers.

As a result, it paves the way for their future leadership development as decision-makers in school leadership structures. The conceptualizations of learner leaders' roles were similar to the findings of the study conducted by Mukiti (2014), who states that one of the learner leaders'

roles was to express their opinions on issues affecting them. However, the learner leaders could not practice their leadership roles and gain experience because they were denied full participation in the decision-making process. The consequences of such omissions make it difficult for learner leaders to take appropriate action for potential solutions. I believed that participatory democracy was only partially taken into account in some rural secondary schools, which put them in an awkward position. This is in direct opposition to what Namibia considers democracy in the education system under the NEA No. 16 of 2001.

9.3.2 School principals, teachers and parents' conceptualisations of learner leadership, Participation and decision-making in schools

The school principals', teachers', and parents' conceptualisations of learner-leadership, participation, and decision-making in schools, were produced by consolidated data analysis from three sets of participants. The analysis of this theme showed that most participants believed that learner leaders should play active roles in representative roles. They (school principals, teachers and parents) conceptualise it as giving a voice to the learner leaders to bring their concerns and that of their peers for possible solutions. Mukiti (2014) states that school principals should invite learner leaders to report other learners' grievances to their office to bring them to the management's attention so that the learner leaders can air their grievances. In support, Uushona (2012) and Amadhila (2018) argued that learner leadership be viewed as an empowering method of learner leaders representing others in schools and acting as leaders.

Moreover, in terms of representation, all participants strongly support learner leadership in schools. Learner leadership, according to school principals, teachers, and parents, is part of the constitutional rights that grant learner leaders democratic rights to participate in shared leadership. Linington, Excel, and Murris (2011), on the other hand, considered participatory democracy to prevail through participation rather than representation alone in their study. Because they were minors, too young and immature to make decisions independently, school principals, teachers, and parents believed that learner leaders should not be allowed to participate in critical decision-making in schools. This is in contrast to Critical Theory, which considers their value recognition as learner leaders and identity formation.

Furthermore, I believed that democratic participation was lacking in some rural secondary schools. Learner leaders were not permitted to participate in critical decisions such as financial

matters, teacher recruitment, or teacher hearings. Still, they were only allowed to participate in shallow decisions, such as representing others in various structures without participation in the discussions. All participants agreed that no learner leader was allowed to participate in critical issues in any of the four schools studied because their ages were too young, immature and lacking confidence. As a result, adult school board members had little faith in the learners' leadership.

9.3.3 The enabling factors to learner leadership

Four participants developed the enabling factors for learner leadership through consolidated data analysis. The analysis of this theme revealed that learner leaders become self-driven due to self-motivation while performing their leadership roles, resulting in academic success. The school principals, teachers, and parents demonstrated that learner leaders' motivations improve learner performance, encouraging them to become future leaders.

Moreover, all the participants in this study showed that schools did not engage the learner leaders in the establishment of the school rules in comparison with the school principals, teachers and parents. In addition, the learner leaders took ownership when democratically participating in formulating the school rules. This could enable the school leadership to recognize the important contributions the learner leaders make to their leadership development that could improve ethics and the general learner behaviours in the school.

According to Kirea (2015), motivation is critical in developing essential skills that foster trust and effective relationships between teachers and learners. Similarly, Kennedy (2018) proposed that the learners' representative council be involved in developing school rules/policies to assist the school in maintaining discipline among the learners. This corroborates with the Cultural Historical Activity Theory, which describes self-motivations as a tool that schools could use to boost and maintain the learner leaders' courage to practice and experience their leadership roles. It made the learner leaders feel happy and proud and influenced most of their peers' academic performances.

Furthermore, most participants indicated that meetings allowed learner leaders to air their grievances and share them with management members. It was also stated that the meeting was a platform for them to strengthen their relationship and engagement (school principals,

teachers, learner leaders and parents). Regardless, the school leadership should allow someone to take minutes during the meeting to document learner participation in decision-making and school leadership practices. Kandjengo and Shikalepo (2020) confirm that meetings are a good platform where learner leaders can express their grievances. Furthermore, Grant (2015) stated that meeting is an avenue that encourages learner leaders to experience and practice their leadership roles in schools. This corroborates with the CHAT theory endorsed in this study that strengthened learner leadership practices in schools.

Furthermore, all of the school principals, teachers, learner leaders, and parents who participated in this study agreed that providing training to learner leaders would boost their morale, confidence, and self-motivation to conceptualize, experience, and practice their leadership roles. Furthermore, the participants believed that providing pieces of training gave learner leaders the courage to develop leadership abilities and skills that shaped them as future leaders. According to Mboyonga (2018), training enabled learner leaders to participate effectively in school governance due to the skills they gained. According to Kuranchie and Affum (2021), training gives learner leaders the confidence to effectively lead their peers through difficult socio-cultural and economic backgrounds in the school context. The scenario above is consistent with CHAT, which links training to tools that school leaders can use to strengthen learner leaders' potential leadership capabilities. It also allowed the learner leaders to assist the school leadership in changing the attitudes of their fellow learners while performing their leadership roles.

9.3.4 Constraining factors to learner leadership

The constraining factors to learner leadership emerged from consolidated data analysis from four participants. The analysis revealed that all of the school principals, teachers, parents, and four learner leaders from one of the schools had the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 available at school but had failed to bring it to the attention of the learner leaders. The learner leaders claimed that access restrictions to the NEA No. 16 of 2001 jeopardize their democratic rights and responsibilities to conceptualize their leadership practices and experiences in school leadership roles. Furthermore, the NEA No. 16 of 2001 left the powers and functions of school principals, teachers, and parents undefined, allowing them to define and establish the rules that guide the leadership roles based on what works best for them.

According to Mncube and Naidoo (2014), doing so would result in the principals being comprised of everything the school could do, such as democracy, representation, and shared decision-making structures. Grant (2015), on the other hand, believes that schools should prepare to transition from sole leadership to participatory leadership, which advocates for the involvement of all stakeholders in schools, including learner leaders. This contradicts the CHAT's demand that rules and regulations be available to all stakeholders. The rules allowed learner leaders to conceptualize their leadership roles and gain experiences that would result in leadership practices, which is how learner leadership came to be in schools.

The consolidated data analysis showed that all the participants believed that learners in schools perceived the learner leaders as not their leaders because they yelled at them and refused to follow their instructions. The participants also believed that the school board members did not value the learner leaders as equal partners. They are too young and immature to raise significant issues and are the minority on the school board. Also, the learner leaders felt oppressed by the adults because they were always referred back to how things had been culturally practised in their context. Furthermore, they felt more discouraged when their parents always told them their role when they were sent to school. Despite that, parents believed that children's responsibilities at school should be limited to their roles at home and do minimal school leadership work.

Furthermore, participants believed that poverty was one of the major concerns for people living in rural areas. The majority of rural secondary school learner leaders indicated that geographical and socio-economic factors have the greatest impact on them. As a result, rural residents had difficulty accessing essential services such as proper roads, clinics, and school hostel facilities (GRN, 2009). All of the participants agreed that dense bushes and long walks to and from schools had an impact on the appearance of learner leaders. Because of these factors, all learner leaders felt it was inappropriate for them to participate in leading others due to their worn-out uniforms, making them a laughingstock. One of the school board's long-serving members confirmed the scenario, stating that most learners felt humiliated by their appearance. As a result, the parents pleaded with the government to work toward Agenda 2030 to reduce poverty among their children (United Nations, 2015). This is a theoretical contradiction in and of itself because it interferes with their interactions with other members of the school board and their fellow learners.

Similarly, most participants believed that the learner leaders' English language skills were limited. Language speaking skills, according to participants, discourage learner leaders from freely expressing themselves in English when delivering their speech during the assembly point. Because of their lack of English language speaking skills, they felt uneasy and shy in front of their peers and found comfort in using indigenous languages. According to Kandjengo and Shikalepo (2021), poor language skills discourage learner leaders from participating in activities requiring interactions. As a result, the learner leaders were uncomfortable in their leadership roles.

9.4 Recommendations for further research

The findings of this study revealed that the participants had different perspectives on learner leadership in the context of rurality and multiple deprivation secondary schools in the Ohangwena region in Namibia. The study found that in some rural schools, learner leaders were not fully engaged in decision-making structures. Despite this, the study's findings revealed that participants encountered various enabling and constraining factors that influence learner leadership and participation in school decision-making. Furthermore, this research would make two types of recommendations to school principals, teachers, learner leaders, and parents, as well as implications for future research.

9.4.1 Recommendation for policymakers

According to the study's findings, all participants from the four schools believed they complied with the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001. They are critical in ensuring that schools have learners' representative council members, as required by the act and its regulations. It should increase the number of learner representatives from two to four as representatives of their peers in the school board structures. However, participants felt that the act did not explicitly define the stakeholders' roles in school learner leadership. As a result, they were futile, lacking adequate knowledge and understanding. The study discovered a gap between the expression of rights and their implementation in practice. The learner leaders indicated that the policymakers should change the procedures for nominations and elections for the learner representative council. They made this recommendation based on the NEA No. 16 of 2001, which stipulated that only a learner in one of the two highest grades the following year could be nominated for secondary school. According to the findings of this study, policymakers should change the

guidelines for learner leaders to begin with their leadership roles at the primary level at a young age.

One of the challenges confronting the participants in implementing the policy enshrined in the NEA No.16 of 2001 regarding the promotion of the best interests of the school and its learners. This corresponded to the learner leaders' powers and functions. However, not all stakeholders were familiar with the learner leadership guidelines in school. The Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture should therefore develop guidelines to assist all stakeholders, including school principals, teachers, and parents who work directly with learner leaders, in understanding the significance of their leadership roles in schools.

9.4.2 Recommendations for school principals, teachers and parents

The study found that all participants from all four researched schools indicated that NEA No. 16 of 2991 was available at schools. Furthermore, NEA No. 16 of 2001 required a principal to appoint a teacher from among the senior staff members of the school to act as a liaison between the school leadership and learner leaders. What came out was that the school leadership did not bring the action to the attention of the learner leaders. I recommend that school principals and liaison teachers who work directly with learner leaders ensure that the act reaches all learner leaders in the schools and that they are properly guided through it. The school leadership should consider the learner leaders who are school board members to participate and be fully involved in decision-making structures, regardless of age.

Furthermore, some school principals and teachers recommend that learner leadership is important because it helps the school improve learner performance when the school leadership listens to them and allows them to have a voice. Furthermore, teachers assert that it is beneficial for learner leaders to practice their roles because schools will only know what concerns them if they say it themselves. However, most of the participants believed that the learner leaders' roles were the representative role of their fellow learners because the learners elected them.

On the other hand, parents believe that learner leaders require the assistance of the elderly, such as school principals and teachers, to discuss issues of concern before they are presented to the school board. Furthermore, parents believe that the discussion should take place because adults make up most of the school board and should make decisions on behalf of learners who are too

young to make their own. I recommend training for parents to fully understand the leadership roles and the importance of learner leaders serving on the school board.

The findings of the study revealed that learner leadership brings in a great impact on learner leaders' participation in school leadership structures. I would recommend that schools include learner leaders in their decision-making structures rather than just representation. It improves the behaviours of the school's learner leaders. Learner leaders should be included in all school decision-making structures, and school principals should provide opportunities to practice their leadership skills. This would allow them to gain experience and improve their molars by representing their peers in various structures.

However, school principals and teachers face difficulties in implementing NEA No. 16 of 2001 in terms of the powers and functions of learner leaders in carrying out their leadership roles. The NEA N0. 16 of 2001 and its regulations did not explicitly simplify learner leaders' roles. As a result, the regulations left everything in the hands of the schools, resulting in loopholes during implementation. This study also recommended training for school principals and teachers to address the lack of knowledge and understanding in the NEA No. 16 of 2001 implementers.

9.4.3 Recommendations for learner leaders

The findings from the learner leaders' conceptualizations, practices, and experiences with their leadership demonstrated that they saw it as essential in schools. They claimed to be motivated when carrying out their roles outlined in the education act. However, not all learner leaders can carry out the duties and responsibilities outlined in their roles and responsibilities. The learner leaders demonstrated that they assisted fellow learners in approaching their teachers on their behalf. Furthermore, they believed they could play a significant role in communicating issues important to them and their peers (Grant, 2015). On this basis, I would advise school leaders to create a space where learner leaders can channel their ideas and make their participation a reality.

Furthermore, this study's findings revealed that all schools do not have a constitution for learner leaders, which impedes the practices of their leadership roles and forces them to rely on the NEA No. 16 of 2001. When learner leaders are properly guided on what the content of the

constitution entails, it helps them understand their leadership roles better. Without this document, the learner leaders had no choice but to practice what they thought was appropriate to demonstrate their leadership abilities. As a result, I recommend that schools make the learner leadership constitution and other relevant documents, such as the NEA, available in their classrooms.

The study's findings revealed that learner leaders were not fully participating and involved in decision-making. This could not happen because parents felt they were too young, immature, and lacked leadership knowledge. They experienced a lack of understanding of their leadership roles and gained less support from their peers. This resulted in them not being given adequate opportunities to view through the NEA No. 16 of 2001. At times they could not be allowed to participate in managerial roles. In return, they use their positional power to control others and do what their liaison teachers could tell them. I would advise schools to engage with learner leaders and include them in decision-making structures per the NEA No. 16 of 2001 and its legislation for democratic participation to prevail in the education system.

9.4.4 Recommendations for enabling factors to learner leadership

The findings from this study showed that all the participants believed that learner leaders should become self-driven when they are well motivated to perform their leadership roles, resulting in academic success. The learner leaders felt empowered when they were self-motivated. This further improved their self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect. The participants showed that motivation assisted the learner leaders in recognising the valuable contributions they could make to their leadership development, which helped them improve their ethical and leadership behaviours. I believe schools should encourage learner leaders that leadership should start within themselves to enable them to practice their leadership confidently.

Furthermore, the majority of participants suggested that schools should meet regularly. They asserted that this would be an appropriate platform for learner leaders to share their perspectives on issues that are important to them and their peers. They further clarified that meetings helped to strengthen the relationship between learner leaders and school leadership, which could lead to changes in school leadership. As a result, I recommend that meetings be held before and after the election to provide all stakeholders with the necessary knowledge

about the learner leaders' leadership roles and responsibilities. In addition, all participants agreed that the school leadership should provide learner leaders with training more than once to encourage them to do better. I recommend that school leaders organise ongoing training for learner leaders to develop the necessary leadership skills. It would assist them in expanding their knowledge to conceptualise what they believe to be their roles while practising and experiencing their leadership roles.

9.4.5 Recommendations for constraining factors to learner leadership

The findings of this study revealed that the NEA No. 16 of 2001, which was available in schools, did not clearly define the roles of school principals, liaison teachers, learner leaders, and parents in school decision-making. The participants mentioned above' undefined roles left everything in their hands to practice what was good in their eyes. If the act could formalize the roles, it would assist school principals, liaison teachers, and parents in doing and adhering to the proper procedure. The learner leaders stated that the school administration failed to bring NEA No. 16 of 2001 to their attention.

This makes it difficult for learner leaders to conceptualize their leadership roles and rights. It also introduces uncertainty into their leadership roles, previously constrained by the rules and regulations. I believe that school leaders should bring the NEA No. 16 of 2001 to the attention of all learners in schools so they can understand the leadership roles of the learner leaders they would elect as their leaders. This would also make school work easier if all learners understood the rules and regulations outlined in NEA No. 16 of 2001. It would also assist the school in reducing the peer pressure that learner leaders face from their peers, as well as what it means once learners are elected to learner leadership positions.

The participants further demonstrated that the school community is experiencing poverty as a geographical and socioeconomic factor in their environment, which significantly impacts the learner leaders while performing their leadership roles. The study's findings revealed that learner leaders who rely heavily on pensioners are a laughingstock among their peers due to their worn-out uniforms. Furthermore, all participants demonstrated that learner leaders in their community walk long distances and face challenges during the rainy season due to a lack of school hostel facilities, road accessibility, and other essential services. The factors mentioned above discourage learner leaders and significantly impact their leadership practices. To reduce

poverty in this community, I recommend the government implement the strategies enshrined in the United Nations under the Sustainable Development Goals. I also recommend that the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) fund learner leaders from rural and multiple deprivation areas to eradicate poverty and inequality among them.

Furthermore, the study's findings revealed that adult school board members did not regard learner leaders as equal school board members. Participants believe that children should not discuss critical issues with the elderly because they are minors, too young and immature to raise important issues. Furthermore, the learner leaders evidenced that whenever they expressed concerns, they were directed back to what had occurred during their time in school. I would advise parents to move with time; they should not refer learners back to their time because educational policies, regulations, and school rules also change.

The study findings further showed that most participants indicated that learner leaders in most rural secondary schools lacked English language proficiency skills. They are shy when speaking English, especially during morning assemblies where the school encourages them. Most participants also demonstrated that the learner leaders were hesitant to express themselves in English, Namibia's official language, and preferred to use their native language (Oshikwanyama, an indigenous language in Namibia). For this reason, I recommend that schools organise events that expose learner leaders outside the school by engaging them in exchanging leadership programs and letting them share best practices with their fellow learners from urban schools. This can boost their confidence when they learn it from other learners. The school leadership can also encourage them to practice their public speaking skills during the morning assembly.

9.5 Contribution to new knowledge

This study aimed to explore how learner leadership was conceptualised, practised and experienced in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations at four secondary schools in the Ohangwena region in Namibia. In this chapter, I also argue for this study's contribution to new knowledge.

9.5.1 Contribution to the field of leadership in education

Previous research has shown that learner leadership is a concept that is still under-researched in Namibia, as indicated in chapter one, and nothing has been done on learner leadership and participation in school leadership and decision-making processes. Few studies in Namibia have looked into leadership development within learner-representative councils. My findings should broaden and deepen my understanding of the phenomenon of learner leadership in education.

Conducting this study in Namibia should add new knowledge to ongoing debates about learner leadership in Namibia, especially in rurality and multiple deprivations. The Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture is currently working to transform Namibia's education system, including learner leadership in schools. The findings of this study are timely and relevant because it is a priority of the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture to improve the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001 on the unspecified roles of school principals, liaison teachers, learner leaders, and parents in terms of the school board. The findings of this study also suggested that the number of learner leaders who attend school board meetings be increased, as should their terms of office. The findings of my study would provide insight into how the challenges identified by the participants in this study could be addressed. As a result of the shortage of literature on learner leadership, I believe that this study's contribution has increased the impact of learner leadership in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations.

Furthermore, the findings of my study add to the body of knowledge by demonstrating the importance of learner leaders' leadership roles in rural schools. They perceive that through representational roles and being the voice of the voiceless, they see their leadership roles as central to their mandate, and thus learner leadership was viewed as a two-way street in schools by learner leaders. This study was conducted in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations. It has shifted from commonly practised learner leadership roles to learner-focused leadership. Because rural schools and learners feel empowered to take up leadership roles, this perception of learner leaders' leadership roles is similar to Uushona (2012), who argued that learners' participation in decision-making strengthens their commitment to understanding participatory democracy in schools and improves learners' academic performance.

However, Kayumbu (2017) asserts that learner participation should be reinforced to raise awareness of learners' true value and importance as school leaders. Mulwa et al. (2018) support

this argument by stating that school leadership should allow learner leaders to contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes. Awareness of this should motivate policymakers and other key stakeholders to develop guidelines that specifically address the issue of learner participation in school leadership and decision-making structures to improve learner leaders' leadership practices.

9.5.2 Contributions to education policy

The study's findings are extremely beneficial to society because learner leadership in schools is one of the foundations of school leadership when allowed to participate in decision-making structures. Policymakers can use the study's findings in the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture to inform a review of existing policy. They also show that policy implementation and compliance are critical to any organization's success. If policy reforms are to have the desired impact, the gap between the expression of the rights of the learners and their actual delivery should most likely be closed. To ensure full learner participation in school leadership and decision-making processes, schools should bring the NEA No. 16 of 2001 to the learners and provide training for all stakeholders, such as school principals, liaison teachers, and parents.

The findings of my study also contribute to the body of knowledge by revealing that the participants' understanding of learner leadership is critical in rural schools. They saw learner leaders' leadership roles as representational and being the voice of the voiceless, and they saw learner leaders' leadership roles as central to their mandate.

9.5.3 Methodological contribution

The study's major methodological contribution when investigating the phenomenon of learner leadership in Namibia was using a qualitative case study design and other methods for triangulation to ensure trustworthiness. Using various data generation sources aided me in gathering detailed information for my study. Because the participants were interviewed in their context, they were free to express their opinions on what they perceived to be the roles of learner leaders. As stated in chapter four, the emancipatory paradigm contends that knowledge of reality is socially constructed and reality is experienced based on how people perceive it. This prompted the researcher to investigate how learner leaders perceive their roles and how school principals, teachers, and parents perceive these learners (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Nieuwehuis, 2014). The data generated by emancipatory research is reliable, provides an in-

depth understanding of what truly exists in a given context, and advocates for social change (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015). This allowed me to comprehend the historical and cultural norms that govern how an individual perceives the context of that society.

Semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask follow-up questions that probed the participants' responses to develop and clarify them. It also assisted me in obtaining information from participants that a researcher cannot obtain directly from their minds. I also used the focus group discussions held between the researcher and a group of knowledgeable learner leaders about the subject under investigation (Cohen et al., 2018). I used the questionnaire in this study to collect information that the interview did not provide. Because it was anonymous, I used a qualitative method to ensure greater honesty and reliability. I used the questionnaire in this study to collect information that the interview did not provide. Because it was anonymous, I used a qualitative method to ensure greater honesty and reliability. I had chosen document review as a method of triangulation to provide evidence that would breed credibility. The questionnaires and document review findings let me confirm or refute what the interview participants said.

I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework informed by the emancipatory paradigm to develop codes and sub-themes, which were then organized into themes based on their relationships and comparisons from the four participants I had (Yin, 2018). Following this categorization was the strength of my research, and using triangulations may help to overcome doubts about the findings' credibility.

9.6 Implications for further research

This was a small qualitative study which utilised the case study design to explore the conceptualisations, practices, and experiences of school principals, liaison teachers, learner leaders, and parents regarding learner leadership practices in four researched schools in Ohangwena Region, Namibia. The results of this study cannot be generalised beyond this study. Still, I would recommend researchers conduct a quantitative study so that the results can be generalised to other schools. The findings of this study showed that the current education act requires only secondary learners in their last two grades to participate in school leadership and decision-making, leaving out primary school learners. Because the policy did not provide for learners at the primary level to participate in school leadership and decision-making

structures, I recommend that another qualitative study be conducted at a primary level to investigate the learners' perspectives on what they perceive to be their leadership roles.

Some barriers to learner leadership practices were noncompliance with policy implementation and English language proficiency skills. More research was needed to identify effective policy implementation and learner-leader role practices in rural schools. According to the study, adult school board members served three-year terms, whereas learner leaders served one-year terms. This may impact the learner leaders' leadership experiences; therefore, another study was required to determine the impact of learner leadership practices and experiences in school leadership and decision-making to expand on this study's findings.

9.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided a reflective summary of the study, conclusions drawn from the findings, recommendations for future investigations, contributions to knowledge, and implications for future research. I am confident that the research findings and discussions will assist the four schools in creating a new situation that includes learner leaders in school leadership and decision-making structures. I also hope that the recommendations presented in this thesis will entice potential researchers to investigate and expand on the abovementioned topics. Furthermore, meetings and training for all stakeholders could be the most important and effective way to make learner leadership practices a useful concept in schools.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PERMISSION LETTER FOR THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

10 April 2020

The Director of Education, Arts and Culture
Ohangwena Education Directorate
Eenhana
Namibia

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: **REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

My name is Olivia Ndalikutala Shinana, and I am a PhD student at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. I am required to conduct research as part of my degree fulfilment. Please be informed that I have sought the necessary ethical clearance from the Wits School of Education, and permission has been granted.

I request permission to conduct research at four selected secondary schools in Ohangwena Region. My study targets the Learners Representative Council, liaison teachers, parents (school board chairpersons and long-serving members) and principals of the selected secondary schools. The title of my study is: **Exploring Learner Leadership in the context of rurality and multiple Deprivation at four secondary schools in Ohangwena Region, Namibia.**

The study aims to embrace what learner leaders conceptualise as their roles in the context of rurality at secondary schools in Ohangwena Region. The study will further explore the practices and experiences of the Learner Representative Councils who sit on the school board committee while carrying out their duties as mandated. This study will also investigate the perceptions of school principals, teachers and parents concerning their understanding of learner

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participation in decision-making and leadership in the researched Ohangwena Region schools. Furthermore, the study will determine the enabling and constraining factors (if any) that influence learner participation in school leadership structures. This is a qualitative case study using an emancipatory paradigm. The data will be collected through individual semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions which will take approximately 30 – 45 minutes, and the questionnaires and document review. The semi-structured interviews will be conducted with four principals, four liaison teachers, the school board chairperson, and the school's long-serving members (four parents). As mentioned above, the principals and liaison teachers will conduct the questionnaires. The focus group discussions will be conducted with four Learner Representative Councils from each school.

In addition to interviews, I also intend to audio-record both the interviews and the focus group discussions. I will also conduct a document analysis on the Namibia Education Act no. 16 of 2001, School Internal Policies, and Minutes of the School Management and Learner Representative Council's meetings. It is envisaged that my research activities will not interfere with the learners' teaching and learning activities. The study posits that findings from this study will give additional guidance to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture to develop guidelines on learner leadership in schools. The guidelines will help all the stakeholders, such as principals and teachers who work with the learner representative council, to understand the importance of their roles and the school management authorities specified in the selected researched schools in the Ohangwena Region.

All the ethical issues will be taken into consideration. For example, letters of request and consent forms will be sent to respective participants inviting them to engage in the research process. The consent documentation will contain brief information about the research project and the research expectations. Efforts will be made to ensure the data's confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity of all participants and schools. Names of participants will be substituted with pseudonyms. All participants will be accorded the right to withdraw from the research project.

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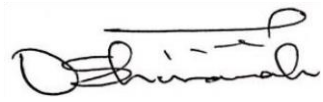
All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after the completion of the project. Participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. Their participation is voluntary. They can withdraw their permission during this project without penalty if they participate. There are no foreseeable risks in participating, and participants will not be paid for participating in this study.

Please let me know if you require any further information. If you think you might need more details about this research project and therefore would like to know more details about it, you can contact my supervisor, Prof Siphiwe E. Mthiyane on, **siphiwe.mthiyane@up.ac.za or** +27733774672. In addition, if you have queries, please get in touch with Wits Research Office info Matsie Mabeta at Matsie.Mabeta@wits.ac.za or +27733774672 or contact me at Olivia Ndalikutala Shinana at +264811484257 or oshinana@yahoo.com. Research tools are attached herewith for your perusal.

Your consideration in this study project will be very much appreciated.

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,



……..

NAME: Olivia Ndalikutala Shinana

EMAIL: oshinana@yahoo.com

TELEPHONE NUMBERS: 264811484257

APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET TO THE PRINCIPAL

22 July 2021

Dear Principal

My name is Olivia Ndalikutala Shinana, and I am a part-time PhD student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, conducting research on Learner Leadership in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations at four secondary schools in Ohangwena Region, Namibia under the supervision of Dr Siphiwe Mthiyane. The reason why I have chosen your school is that your school is one of the secondary schools that are in the context of a rural environment in which I will carry out my study. This study explores what learner leaders conceptualise as their roles, practices, and experiences while carrying out their roles in the school leadership structures.

As part of my study, I would like to invite four Learner Representative Councils, two parents (the chairperson and the long-serving school board member), one Liaison teacher who works with the Learner Representative Council and the school principal to participate voluntarily in my study, which is part of my doctoral thesis research. The face-to-face contact sessions for the focus group discussions will be held at the researched schools. Due to COVID–19, I will provide masks and sanitisers for all the participants and observe social distancing as prescribed by the health protocols. The selected participants can refuse to participate in this research at any time if they wish, and there will be no negative consequences. Their names, the school's anonymity concerning my PhD study, and any publications from this study will be protected. All the information generated through this study will be kept confidential. Only my supervisors and I can access the raw data I will collect. The information collected from the participants will be used for the researcher's study. The findings of this study will be shared with the participants through the Regional Director of Education for Ohangwena Region, where I will submit one thesis book after completion of my study, presentations at regional and national conferences and publishing programs.

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Participation in this study involves individual interviews and focus group discussions which will last for approximately 45 minutes as well as the questionnaires. The study will use the document review to access minutes of the school board, school management and Learner Representative Council meetings. I will also review the Namibia Education Act no. 16 of 2001 and the school's internal policies. The principal and liaison teachers will participate in questionnaires and semi-structured interviews; parents will participate in the semi-structured interview only, while the Learner Representative Councils will participate in the focus group discussions. The interview and focus group will be audio-recorded by obtaining permission from the participants. I will transcribe the data and store it in a safe password computer.

All research data will be destroyed after 5 years of completing this study. Participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They can withdraw their permission during this project without penalty if they participate. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study. I want to ensure that this exercise will not interrupt the learners' school activities as it will be conducted after school or on weekends at a convenient time for the participants.

Those who think they might be interested in participating in this research project and therefore would like to know more details about it can contact my supervisor, Prof Siphiwe Mthiyane, at **siphiwe.mthiyane@up.ac.za** **or** you can contact me, Olivia Ndalikutala, Shinana at **oshinana@yahoo.com** or +264811484257. Their participation in this study project will be very much appreciated. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone: +27 (0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za. Please let me know if you require any further information.

I look forward to your response as soon as it is convenient.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Yours sincerely,

…….

SIGNATURE

NAME: Olivia Ndalikutala Shinana
ADDRESS: Omungwelume, Ongenga Constituency, Ohangwena Region
EMAIL: oshinana@yahoo.com
TELEPHONE NUMBERS: +264811484257

APPENDIX 3: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR TEACHERS

22 July 2021

Dear Teacher

My name is Olivia Ndalikutala Shinana, and I am a part-time PhD student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, conducting research on Learner Leadership in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations at four secondary schools in Ohangwena Region, Namibia under the supervision of Prof Siphiwe Mthiyane. This study explores what learner leaders conceptualise as their roles, practices, and experiences while carrying out their roles in the school leadership structures.

As part of this project, I invite you to participate in a semi-structured interview and questionnaires. This activity will involve Liaison teachers working with the learner representative council for three years. The semi-structured interview will take approximately 45 minutes and will be audio taped. With your permission, I would like to record the semi-structured interview using a cellular phone. I will use vernacular language to allow all the participants to express themselves freely. Due to COVID–19, I will provide masks and hand sanitisers for all the participants and observe social distancing as prescribed by the health protocols.

The selected participants can refuse to participate in this research at any time if they wish, and there will be no negative consequences. Their names, the school's anonymity concerning my PhD study, and any publications from this study will be protected. All the information generated through this study will be kept confidential. Only my supervisors and I can access the raw data I will collect. The information collected from this study will be used for the researcher's study. The findings of this study will be shared with the participants through the Regional Director of Education for Ohangwena Region, where I will submit one thesis book after completion of my study, presentations at regional and national conferences and publishing programs.

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You will not receive any direct benefit from participating in this study, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The questionnaires will be completely confidential. During the semi-structured interview, I will not ask for your name or any identifying information; the information you will give me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. In my final research report, I will use a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation. If you experience any distress or discomfort, we will stop the interview or resume it another time. All information about you will be kept confidential in all my writing about the study. Also, all collected information will be stored safely in a password computer and destroyed after 5 years of completing my study. Also, if you decide halfway through that you prefer to stop, this is your choice and will not affect you negatively.

I look forward to working with you. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) by telephone: +27 (0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Thank you

Yours sincerely

……

SIGNATURE

Name: Olivia Ndalikutala Shinana

Address: Omungwelume, Ongenga Constituency, Ohangwena region

Email: oshinana@yahoo.com

Telephone Numbers: +264811484257

Supervisor name: Prof Siphiwe Mthiyane

Address: Wits School of Education

Email: siphiwe.mthiyane@up.ac.za

Telephone number: +27733774672

APPENDIX 4: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR LEARNERS

22 July 2021

Dear Learner

My name is Olivia Ndalikutala Shinana, and I am a part-time student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. As part of my study, I have to undertake a research project and explore Learner leadership in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations at four secondary schools in Ohangwena Region under Dr Siphiwe Mthiyane. The study explores what learner leaders understand as their roles, practices, and experiences while carrying out their duties as assigned.

As part of this project, I invite you to participate in a focus group discussion. This activity will involve learner leaders who have been carrying out leadership roles for two years and will take approximately 45 minutes. With your permission, I would like to record the focus group discussions using a cellular phone. I will use Oshikwanyama (a vernacular language) to allow all the participants to express themselves freely. The face-to-face contact sessions for the focus group discussions will be held at the researched schools. Due to COVID–19, I will provide masks and hand sanitisers for all the participants and observe social distancing as prescribed by the health protocols.

You will not receive any direct benefit from participating in this study, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. During the focus group, I will not ask for your name or any identifying information; the information you will give me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. In my final research report, I will use pseudonyms (false names) to represent your participation. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed during the focus group

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discussion process. If you experience any distress or discomfort, we will stop the interview or resume it another time.

All information about you will be kept confidential in all my writing about the study. Also, all collected information will be stored safely and destroyed after 5 years of completing my study.

When you decide halfway through that, you prefer to stop. This is completely your choice and will not affect you negatively. Your parents have also been given an information sheet and consent form in case of a minor, but at the end of the day, you decide to join us in the study. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) by telephone: +27 (0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

I look forward to working with you! Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you

Yours sincerely

……

SIGNATURE

Name: Olivia Ndalikutala Shinana

Address: Omungwelume, Ongenga Constituency, Ohangwena region

Email: oshinana@yahoo.com

Telephone Numbers: +264811484257

Supervisor name: Dr Siphiwe Mthiyane

Address: Wits School of Education

Email: siphiwe.mthiyane@wits.ac.za

Telephone number: +27117173092

APPENDIX 5: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR THE SCHOOL BOARD (PARENTS)

22 July 2021

Dear Parent

My name is Olivia Ndalikutala Shinana, and I am a part-time PhD student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, conducting research on Learner Leadership in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations at four secondary schools in Ohangwena Region, Namibia under the supervision of Prof Siphiwe Mthiyane. This study explores what learner leaders conceptualise as their roles, practices, and experiences while carrying out their roles in the school leadership structures.

As part of this project, I invite you to participate in a semi-structured interview. This activity will involve two school board members (the school board chairperson and a long-serving board member) who have served for Nine years. The semi-structured interview will take approximately 45 minutes and will be audio taped. With your permission, I would like to record the semi-structured interview using a cellular phone. I will use vernacular language to allow all the participants to express themselves freely. The face-to-face contact sessions for the focus group discussions will be held at the researched schools. Due to COVID–19, I will provide masks and hand sanitisers for all the participants and observe social distancing as prescribed by the health protocols.

The selected participants can refuse to participate in this research at any time if they wish, and there will be no negative consequences. Their names, the school's anonymity concerning my PhD study, and any publications from this study will be protected. All the information generated through this study will be kept confidential. Only my supervisors and I can access the raw data I will collect. The findings of this study will be shared with the participants through

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the Regional Director of Education for Ohangwena Region, where I will submit one thesis book after completion of my study, presentations at regional and national conferences and publishing programs.

You will not receive any direct benefit from participating in this study, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. During the semi-structured interview, I will not ask for your name or any identifying information; the information you will give me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. In my final research report, I will use a pseudonym (false names) to represent your participation. If you experience any distress or discomfort, we will stop the interview or resume it another time. All information about you will be kept confidential in all my writing about the study. Also, all collected information will be stored safely in a password computer and destroyed after 5 years of completing my study. Also, if you decide halfway through that you prefer to stop, this is your choice and will not affect you negatively. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) by telephone: +27 (0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

I look forward to working with you. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. Thank you

Yours sincerely

……

SIGNATURE

Name: Olivia Ndalikutala Shinana

Address: Omungwelume, Ongenga Constituency, Ohangwena region

Email: oshinana@yahoo.com

Telephone Numbers: +264811484257

Supervisor name: Prof Siphiwe Mthiyane

Address: Wits School of Education

Email: siphiwe.mthiyane@up.ac.za

Telephone number: +27733

APPENDIX 6: PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

22 July 2021

A Consent Form for Principals
Title of project: **Exploring Learner Leadership in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations at four secondary schools in Ohangwena Region, Namibia**

Name of researcher: Olivia Ndalikutala Shinana

I …….. agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me, and I understand what my participation will involve. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed during the data collection process. The participant has the right to withdraw from this study at any time, and there will be no negative consequences. The participant also has the right not to answer questions they may be uncomfortable with. Therefore, participants are urged to maintain confidentiality at all times. Due to COVID–19, the researcher will provide masks and hand sanitisers for all the participants and observe social distancing as prescribed by the health protocols.

The researcher requests permission for the participant to be interviewed and answers a questionnaire/review/collect documents.

Please tick one

I agree that a semi-structured interview and a questionnaire can be used for this study only

YES	NO

I agree to provide the researcher access to review documents such as Namibia Education Act, No. 16 of 2001; The participant is invited to agree or disagree to complete a questionnaire and to be interviewed; provide access to review documents such as the Namibia Education Act No. 16 of 2001, internal school policies, minutes of the school board, school management and Learner Representative Council meetings.

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YES	NO

I agree that my participation will remain confidential

YES	NO

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in her research report

YES	NO

I agree that the semi-structured interview may be audio recorded using a cellular phone

YES	NO

I agree that the information I provide may only be used anonymously for this study.

YES	NO

I agree that all the data collected during this study will be destroyed after 5 years upon the completion of this study.

YES	NO

Signature ……..

Name of participant …….

Date …….

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APPENDIX 7: TEACHER CONSENT FORM

22 July 2021

Teacher's Consent Form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to participate in the study titled: **Exploring learner leadership in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations secondary schools in Ohangwena Region, Namibia**

I, _____, give consent to the researcher for me to participate in the semi-structured interview and a questionnaire. The research has been explained to me, and I understand what my participation will involve. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed during the data collection process. The participant has the right to withdraw from this study at any time, and there will be no negative consequences. The participant also has the right not to answer questions they may be uncomfortable with. Therefore, the researcher is urging the participant to maintain confidentiality. Due to COVID–19, the researcher will provide masks and hand sanitisers for all the participants and observe social distancing as prescribed by the health protocols.

I agree and understand that the information I will provide through the semi-structured interview and answering a questionnaire will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and school name will not be revealed.

YES	NO

I agree that a semi-structured interview and a questionnaire can be used for this study only.

YES	NO

I agree that I have the right not to answer questions if I wish not to do so and can withdraw from the study at any time.

YES	NO

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I agree that my participation in a semi-structured interview can be used for this study only

YES	NO

I agree that I may be audiotaped during the semi-structured interview.

YES	NO

I agree that the audiotapes will be used for this study only

YES	NO

I agree that I can ask not to be audiotaped.

YES	NO

I agree that I can stop this permission at any time.

YES	NO

I agree that all the data collected during this study will be destroyed after 5 years upon the completion of this study.

YES	NO

Sign_____ Date_____

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APPENDIX 8: LEARNER LEADERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRES (2021)

To be filled in by School Principals only

Section A: Biographical information

Place a CROSS (X) in the appropriate box

1. Gender: Male: _____ Female: _____

2. Age:

21− 30		31−40		41−50	50+

3. School type

Secondary		Combined	

4. Years of experience (in years):

Position		**Number of years**
1.	Head of Department	
2.	Deputy Principal	
3.	School Principal	

Section B

Instructions

Place a cross (X) in the column most closely describes your opinion when implementing Learner Leadership principles in your school.

Scale: 1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Neutral, 4= Disagree, 5= Strongly Disagree

As a school principal, I believe I…		**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1.	Handle school matters fairly.					
2.	Make decisions consciously aware of the implications they may have on teachers, learners and other stakeholders in the community.					
3.	When engaging with teachers and learners, I embrace consultation, collaboration and participation in adherence to democratic principles.					
4.	Understand the legal and leadership concerns facing education in our country.					

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5.	Make decisions that are reasonable and procedurally fair.					
6.	Understand the laws governing the basic education sector and implement them to the best of my abilities.					
7.	Ensure that teachers and learners are familiar with and regularly remind them about the contents of the Namibia Education Act no. 16 of 2001.					
8.	Only the school principal, teachers and parents should make a decision.					
9.	All stakeholders should take a leadership role in the school.					
10.	That only people in positions of authority should lead.					
11.	That boys can lead better than girls					

Section C

In this section, please indicate how you do the following in your daily leadership practice (You may use an additional answer sheet if necessary):

1. Fair decision-making:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Involvement:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Learner participation:

_____

_____

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4. Democracy in schools:

5. Consultations:

6. Collaboration:

Section D

In your opinion, what are some of the obstacles you experience as a school principal in putting into practice the following:

1. Developing relationships based on participation and leadership:

2. Promoting collaboration among teachers and learners:

3. Promote consultation among all stakeholders:

4. Encourage democratic participation of learners:

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5. Manifest learner leadership development:

_____

_____

_____

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APPENDIX 9: PRINCIPALS' QUESTIONNAIRES LEARNER LEADERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRES (2021)

To be filled in by School Principals only

Section A: Biographical information

Place a CROSS (X) in the appropriate box

1. Gender: Male: _____ Female: _____

2. Age:

21− 30		31−40		41−50	50+

3. School type

Secondary		Combined	

4. Years of experience (in years):

Position		**Number of years**
1.	Head of Department	
2.	Deputy Principal	
3.	School Principal	

Section B

Instructions

Place a cross (X) in the column most closely describes your opinion when implementing Learner Leadership principles in your school.

Scale: 1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Neutral, 4= Disagree, 5= Strongly Disagree

As a school principal, I believe I…		**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1.	Handle school matters fairly.					
2.	Make decisions consciously aware of the implications they may have on teachers, learners and other stakeholders in the community.					

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3.	When engaging with teachers and learners, I embrace consultation, collaboration and participation in adherence to democratic principles.					
4.	Understand the legal and leadership concerns facing education in our country.					
5.	Make decisions that are reasonable and procedurally fair.					
6.	Understand the laws governing the basic education sector and implement them to the best of my abilities.					
7.	Ensure that teachers and learners are familiar with and regularly remind them about the contents of the Namibia Education Act no. 16 of 2001.					
8.	Only the school principal, teachers and parents should make a decision.					
9.	All stakeholders should take a leadership role in the school.					
10.	That only people in positions of authority should lead.					
11.	That boys can lead better than girls					

Section C

In this section, please indicate how you do the following in your daily leadership practice (You may use an additional answer sheet if necessary):

7. Fair decision-making:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. Involvement:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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9. Learner participation:

10. Democracy in schools:

11. Consultations:

12. Collaboration:

Section D

In your opinion, what are some of the obstacles you experience as a school principal in putting into practice the following:

6. Developing relationships based on participation and leadership:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Promoting collaboration among teachers and learners:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. Promote consultation among all stakeholders:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. Encourage democratic participation of learners:

_____

_____

_____

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APPENDIX 10: PRINCIPALS' SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Section A: Biographical information

Place a CROSS (X) in the appropriate box

1. Gender: Male: _____ Female: _____

2. Age:

21− 30		31−40		41−50	50+

3. School type

Secondary		Combined	

4. Years of experience in the SGB: _____

5. Position/s held in the SGB

Position		**Number of years**
1.	Chairperson	
2.	Deputy Chairperson	
3.	Secretary	
4.	Treasurer	
5.	Other….(name the position)	

Section B

6. In your view, what is a leader?

7. How do you understand the term "learner leadership"?

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8. What are the views regarding learner leaders in taking up roles in school leadership and management especially knowing the attitude of parents in rural areas about the place of learners in such societies?

9. How do you perceive learner leadership in decision-making in schools?

10. Share your views regarding the advantages/disadvantages of learners taking part in school leadership and decision-making.

11. Do you support/not support the notion of learner leaders in schools?

(a) If so, why, or if not, why not?

12. How does the school involve learners in leadership roles at your school?

13. How do you, as adult members of the SGB, manage the challenges of power between yourselves and the learner leaders who are considered minors, especially in the context of the rurality of the school?

14. How do you, as adult members of the SGB, support learner leaders in practising their leadership roles in the SGB?

15. What do you do to support learner leaders and promote participation in school leadership structures? Please elaborate by giving examples of things you do.

16. What do you consider to be challenges to learner leadership in rural schools, and how do you resolve them?

17. In conclusion, is there any issue related to learner leadership in rural schools that I have not asked you to share? If so, please share it with me.

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APPENDIX 11: TEACHERS' INTERVIEW

Section A: Biographical information

Place a CROSS (X) in the appropriate box 1. Gender:

Male: _____ Female: _____

2: Age:

21− 30		31−40		41−50	50+

3. School type

Secondary		Combined	

4. Years of experience in the SGB:

5. Position/s held in the SGB

Position		**Number of years**
1.	Chairperson	
2.	Deputy Chairperson	
3.	Secretary	
4.	Treasurer	
5.	Other….(name the position)	

Section B

6. In your view, what is a leader?

7. How do you understand the term learner leadership?

8. What are your views regarding learner leaders taking up roles in school leadership and management especially knowing the attitude of parents in rural areas about the place of learners in such societies?

9. How do you perceive learner leadership in decision-making in schools?
10. Share your views regarding the advantages/disadvantages of learners taking part in school leadership and decision-making. 11. Do you support/not support the notion of learner leaders in schools? (a) If so, why? If not, why not?
12. How does the school involve learners in leadership roles at your school?
13. How do you, as adult members of the SGB, manage the challenges of power between yourselves and the learner leaders who are considered minors, especially in the context of the rurality of the school?

14. How do you, as adult members of the SGB, support learner leaders in practising their leadership roles in the SGB?
15. What do you do to support learner leaders and promote participation in school leadership structures? Please elaborate by giving examples of things you do.
16. What do you consider to be challenges to learner leadership in rural schools, and how do you resolve them?
17. In conclusion, is there any issue related to learner leadership in rural schools that I have not asked you to share? If so, please share it with me.

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APPENDIX 12: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focus Group Interview schedule with learners (2021)

Section A: Biographical information

Place a CROSS (X) in the appropriate box

1. Gender: Male: _____ Female: _____

2. Age:

18 - 21		22 - 25		26+			

3. School type

Secondary		Combined	

4. Years of experience in the School Board:

5. Positions held in the School Board

Position		Number of years
1.	Chairperson	
2.	Vice Chairperson	
3.	Secretary	
4.	Treasurer	
5.	Other…… (name the position)	

Section B

Questions for discussions

1. **Learner leaders' conceptualisation to be their roles:**

1.1 What do you understand your role to be as a learner leader?

1.2 What are the challenges/ benefits to you and the school?

1.3 The Namibia Education Act no. 16 of 2001 stipulates your expected roles. Have you read them? If so, please share it with me. 1.4 Do you think you have a role to play regarding conditions of teaching and learning at school? Please elaborate.

1.5 What have you learnt from being a learner leader?

2. Election of Learner Representative Council (LRC) and participation

2.1 Please briefly explain how you were elected as a learner leader.

2.2 How many learners are members of the current LRC?

2.3 How many learners sit on the school board's management committee, school board, and finance committee?

2.4 What are your views regarding learner participation/ non-participation in certain committees, such as the teacher recruitment panel?

3. Support of learner leaders.

3.1 Have you attended any training after you were elected as a learner leader?

3.2 What are your views regarding the quality and relevance of the training you received?

3.3 As part of your leadership responsibilities, what else would you prefer to support and develop your leadership skills?

3.4 Apart from being a leader, what else would you prefer to learn from being a leader?

4. Learner leaders' experiences

4.1 What are your experiences concerning your roles as a learner leader, noting that you are in a rural school?

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4.2 Have you experienced any challenges related to your role/s as learner leaders in the school board which you believe could be a result of power relations/ conservative attitudes of adults toward you as a learner leader? Please elaborate.

4.3 How often do you attend school board meetings? How do they impact your learning? What have you experienced regarding attitudes from adults from these meetings? Do you feel that your views are valued or not valued by other members?

4.4 In your opinion, how have you experienced support from the school authorities to promote your maximum participation in the school board?

4.5 The Namibia Education Act no. 16 of 2001 prohibits learners from handling finances. Do you understand why you are prohibited? What are your views in this regard?

4.6 Is there anything we have not discussed regarding your experiences as learner leaders that you would like to share with me? Please elaborate.

5. Constraints faced by learner leaders and possible solutions:

5.1 What constraining factors influence learner participation in school leadership structures?

5.2 How did you think those constraints could be overcome?

5.3 In conclusion, what should be done to promote learner leaders' role in school leadership structures, especially in rural schools?

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APPENDIX 13: SCHOOL BOARDS' CONSENT FORM

22 July 2021

A school board consent form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to participate in the study titled: **Exploring learner leadership in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations secondary schools in Ohangwena Region, Namibia**

I, _____, the school board member (chairperson/long-serving member), give consent to the researcher for me to participate in the semi-structured interview. The research has been explained to me, and I understand what my participation will involve. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed during the data collection process. The participant has the right to withdraw from this study at any time, and there will be no negative consequences. The participant also has the right not to answer questions they may be uncomfortable with. Therefore, the researcher is urging the participant to maintain confidentiality. Due to COVID–19, the researcher will provide masks and hand sanitisers for all the participants and observe social distancing as prescribed by the health protocols.

I agree and understand that the information I will provide through the semi-structured interview will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and school name will not be revealed.

YES	NO

I agree that I have the right not to answer questions if I wish not to do so and can withdraw from the study at any time.

YES	NO

I agree that my participation in a semi-structured interview can be used for this study only.

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YES	NO

I agree that I may be audiotaped during the semi-structured interview.

YES	NO

I agree that the audiotapes will be used for this study only

YES	NO

I agree that I can ask not to be audiotaped.

YES	NO

I agree that I can stop this permission at any time.

YES	NO

I agree that all the data collected during this study will be destroyed after 5 years upon the completion of this study.

YES	NO

Sign_____ Date_____

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APPENDIX 14: SCHOOL BOARDS' SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Section A: Biographical information

Place a CROSS (X) in the appropriate box

1. Gender: Male: _____ Female: _____

2. Age:

21− 30		31−40		41−50	50+

3. School type

Secondary		Combined	

4. Years of experience in the SGB:

5. Position/s held in the SGB

Position		**Number of years**
1.	Chairperson	
2.	Deputy Chairperson	
3.	Secretary	
4.	Treasurer	
5.	Other….(name the position)	

Section B

1. In your view, what is a leader?
2. How do you understand the term "learner leadership"?
3. What are the views regarding learner leaders in taking up roles in school leadership and management especially knowing the attitude of parents in rural areas about the place of learners in such societies?
4. How do you perceive learner leadership in decision-making in schools?

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5. I was hoping you could share your views regarding the advantages/disadvantages of learners taking part in school leadership and decision-making.

6. Do you support/not support the notion of learner leaders in schools?

(a) If so, why, or if not, why not?

7. How does the school involve learners in leadership roles at your school?

8. How do you, as adult members of the SGB, manage the challenges of power between yourselves and the learner leaders who are considered minors, especially in the context of the rurality of the school?

9. How do you, as adult members of the SGB, support learner leaders in practising their leadership roles in the SGB?

10. What do you do to support learner leaders and promote participation in school leadership structures? Please elaborate by giving examples of things you do.

11. What are the challenges to learner leadership in rural schools, and how do you resolve them?

12. In conclusion, is there any issue related to learner leadership in rural schools that I have not asked you to share? If so, please share it with me.

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APPENDIX 15: LEARNERS' CONSENT FORM

22 July 2021

A consent form for the Learners

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to participate in the study titled: **Exploring learner leadership in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations secondary schools in Ohangwena Region, Namibia**

I, _____, the Learner Representative Council, give consent to participate in a focus group discussion. The research has been explained to me, and I understand what my participation will involve. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed during the data collection process. The participant has the right to withdraw from this study at any time, and there will be no negative consequences. The participant also has the right not to answer questions they may be uncomfortable with. Therefore, the researcher is urging the participant to maintain confidentiality. Due to COVID–19, the researcher will provide masks and hand sanitisers for all the participants and observe social distancing as prescribed by the health protocols.

I agree and understand that the information I will provide through focus group discussion will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and school name will not be revealed.

YES	NO

I agree that my participation in a focus group discussion can be used for this study only.

YES	NO

I agree that I may be audiotaped during the interview.

YES	NO

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I agree that the audiotapes will be used for this study only

YES	NO

I agree that I can stop this permission at any time.

YES	NO

I agree that I have the right not to answer questions if I wish not to do so and can withdraw from the study at any time.

YES	NO

I agree that I can ask not to be audiotaped.

YES	NO

I agree that all the data collected during this study will be destroyed after 5 years upon the completion of this study.

YES	NO

Sign_____ Date_____

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APPENDIX 16: PERMISSION LETTER

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
OHANGWENA REGIONAL COUNCIL
DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE

Section: Office of the Director
Tel: (+264) 65 290200
Fax: (+264) 65 290224
Enquiries: Magano Gaoses
Our Ref : 12/3/10/1

Harelbecke Street, Greenwell Complex
Private Bag, 88005
Eenhana

To: Ms. Olivia Shinana
Email: oshinana@yahoo.com
Cell: 0811481257

8 April 2020

Dear Ms. Shinana

SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT FOUR SELECTED SCHOOLS IN OHANGWENA REGION

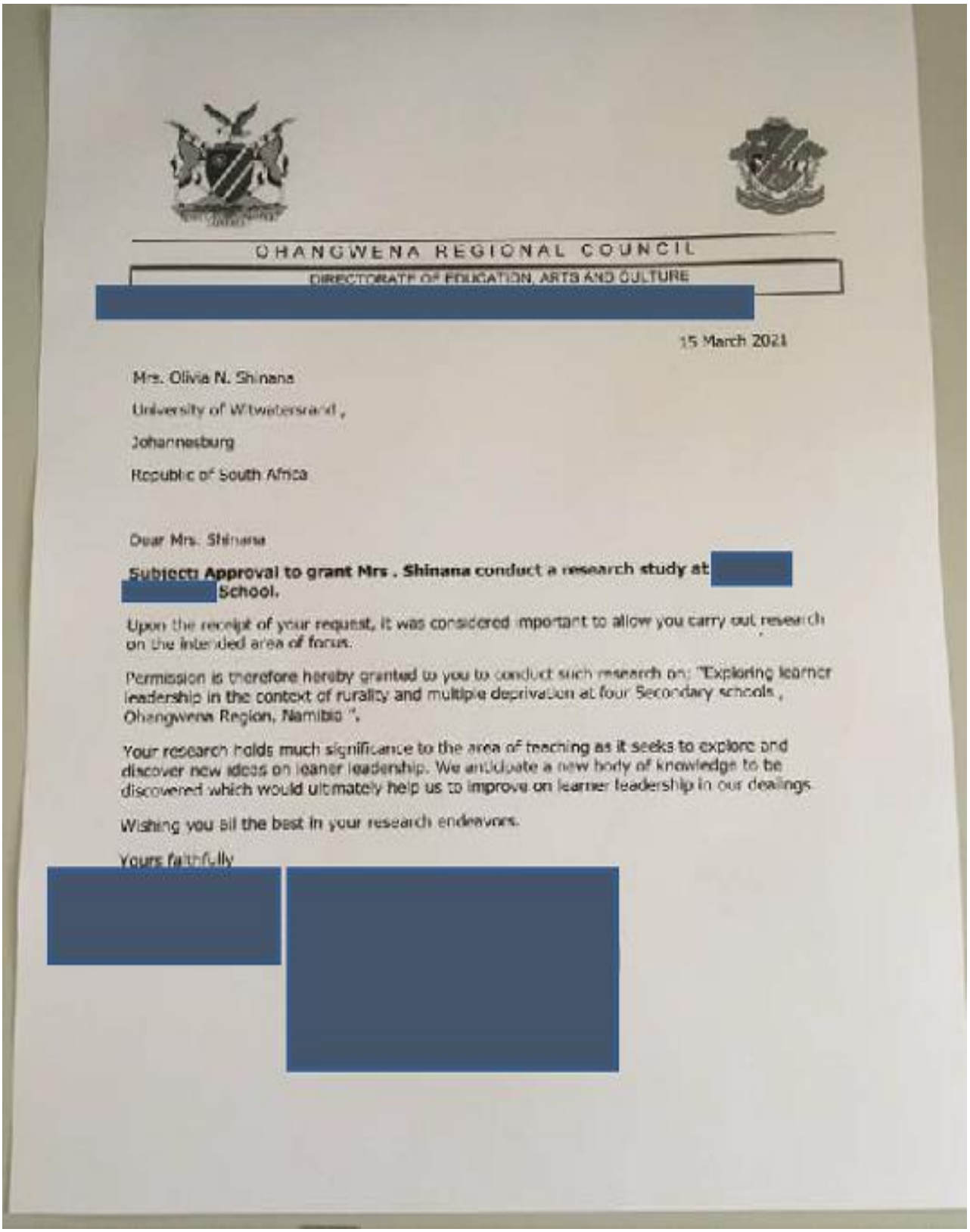
1. Receipt of your letter on the above stated subject is hereby acknowledged.
2. The request has been evaluated and found to have merit as it deals with a critical aspect of "Exploring learner leadership in the context of rurality".
3. Your research outcome, as outlined in your request, has the potential to make stakeholders such as Principals and teachers who regularly work with Learner Representative Councils understand the importance of the roles they have to play in the administration of schools.
4. Permission to conduct research is therefore given under the following conditions;
   - The information to be collected should only be used for the completion of your studies.
   - Kindly liaise with the concerned School Principals so as to make prior arrangements before the date of the data collection.
5. You may please share the final report of your study with the directorate.
6. It is trusted that you will find this arrangement in order whilst wishing you all the best with your studies.

Yours Sincerely,

Isak Hamatwi
Director
08/04/2020

Ohangwena Regional Council
Directorate of Education Arts and Culture
08 APR 2020
Fax. 065-290 224
Private Bag 88005 • Eenhana
REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

PERMISSION LETTER 2: FROM SCHOOL 1



OHANGWENA REGIONAL COUNCIL

DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE

[redacted]

15 March 2021

Mrs. Olivia N. Shinana

University of Witwatersrand ,

Johannesburg

Republic of South Africa

Dear Mrs. Shinana

Subject: Approval to grant Mrs . Shinana conduct a research study at [redacted] School.

Upon the receipt of your request, it was considered important to allow you carry out research on the intended area of focus.

Permission is therefore hereby granted to you to conduct such research on: "Exploring learner leadership in the context of rurality and multiple deprivation at four Secondary schools , Ohangwena Region, Namibia ".

Your research holds much significance to the area of teaching as it seeks to explore and discover new ideas on learner leadership. We anticipate a new body of knowledge to be discovered which would ultimately help us to improve on learner leadership in our dealings.

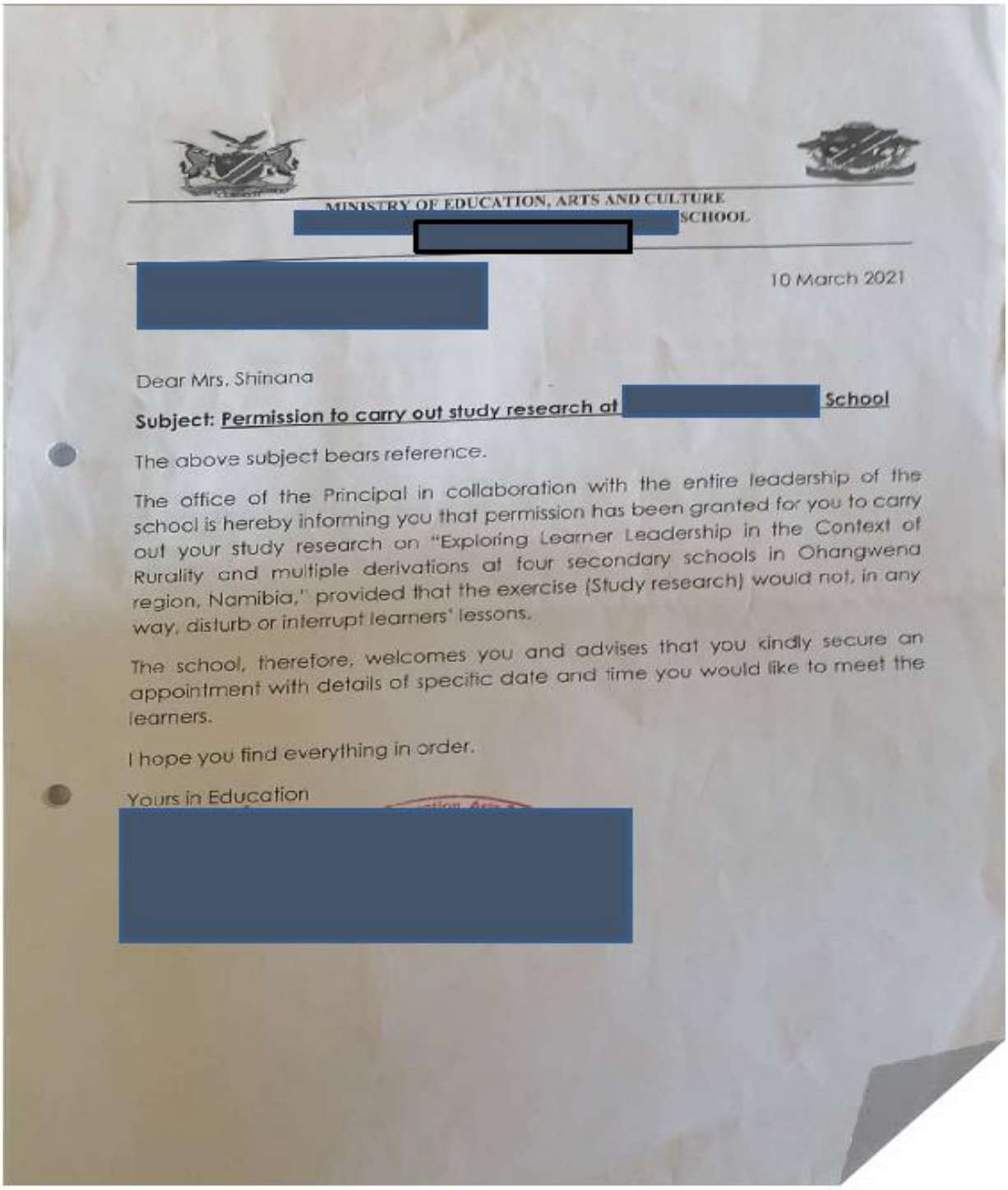
Wishing you all the best in your research endeavors.

Yours faithfully

[redacted]

[redacted]

PERMISSION LETTER 3: FROM SCHOOL 2



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE
[redacted] SCHOOL

[redacted]

10 March 2021

Dear Mrs. Shinana

Subject: Permission to carry out study research at [redacted] School

The above subject bears reference.

The office of the Principal in collaboration with the entire leadership of the school is hereby informing you that permission has been granted for you to carry out your study research on "Exploring Learner Leadership in the Context of Rurality and multiple derivations at four secondary schools in Ohangwena region, Namibia," provided that the exercise (Study research) would not, in any way, disturb or interrupt learners' lessons.

The school, therefore, welcomes you and advises that you kindly secure an appointment with details of specific date and time you would like to meet the learners.

I hope you find everything in order.

Yours in Education

[redacted]

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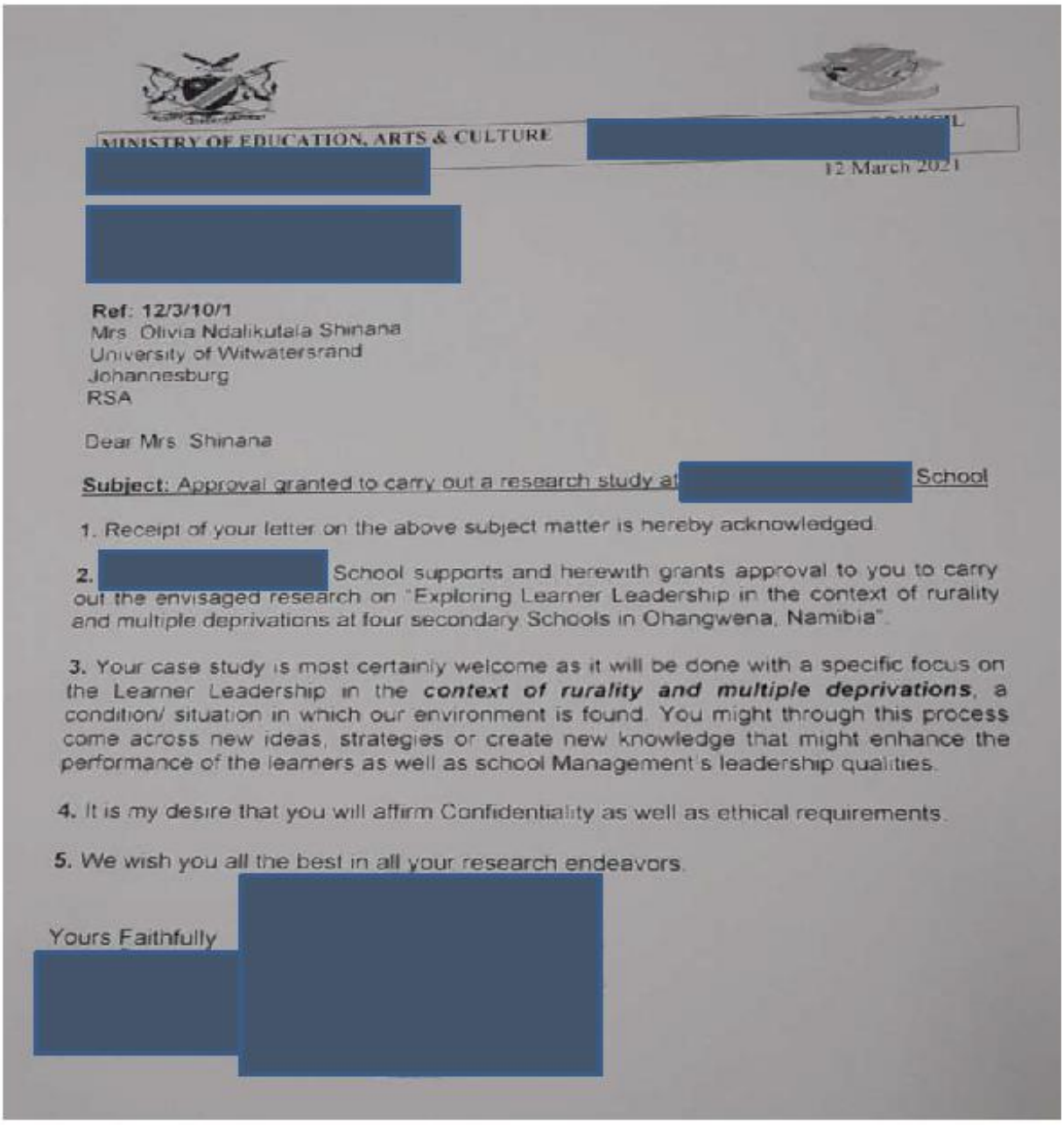
PERMISSION LETTER 4: FROM SCHOOL 3



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, ARTS & CULTURE

[redacted]

12 March 2021

[redacted]

Ref: 12/3/10/1
Mrs Olivia Ndalikutala Shinana
University of Witwatersrand
Johannesburg
RSA

Dear Mrs Shinana

Subject: Approval granted to carry out a research study at [redacted] School

1. Receipt of your letter on the above subject matter is hereby acknowledged.

2. [redacted] School supports and herewith grants approval to you to carry out the envisaged research on "Exploring Learner Leadership in the context of rurality and multiple deprivations at four secondary Schools in Ohangwena, Namibia".

3. Your case study is most certainly welcome as it will be done with a specific focus on the Learner Leadership in the ***context of rurality and multiple deprivations***, a condition/ situation in which our environment is found. You might through this process come across new ideas, strategies or create new knowledge that might enhance the performance of the learners as well as school Management's leadership qualities.

4. It is my desire that you will affirm Confidentiality as well as ethical requirements.

5. We wish you all the best in all your research endeavors.

Yours Faithfully

[redacted]

PERMISSION LETTER 5: FROM SCHOOL 4

OHANGWENA REGIONAL COUNCIL – DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION

[redacted]

11 March 2021

[redacted]

Mrs. Olivia N Shinana
Wits University
Johannesburg
RSA

Dear Mrs. Shinana

SUBJECT: APPROVAL TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH STUDY AT [redacted]

1. Receipt of your request at our school is hereby acknowledged.
2. [redacted] support and herewith authorizes you to carry out your research which focuses on the "***Exploring Learner Leadership in the context of Rurality and multiple deprivations at four Secondary Schools in Ohangwena Region, Namibia***.

We wish you all the best in your studies.

Yours faithfully

[redacted]

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