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Leading and Navigating Inclusion in South African Muslim Schools: A Pedagogical Responsiveness and Complexity Theory Perspective

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Leading and Navigating Inclusion in South African Muslim Schools: A Pedagogical Responsiveness and Complexity Theory Perspective

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In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how leadership and management in South African Muslim schools respond to the challenges of fostering inclusive education within complex and diverse environments. Drawing on complexity theory and pedagogical responsiveness, it examines how school leaders navigate the intersection of Islamic ethos, socio-economic diversity, and contemporary educational demands, including the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews with 15 educators and school leaders from urban Muslim schools in Johannesburg. Six key themes emerged: inclusive leadership and collaborative decision-making; strategic curriculum integration; socio-cultural sensitivity and adaptive student support; strengthened parental and community partnerships; teacher well-being and professional development; and balanced technological integration.

Findings reveal that contextually responsive leadership, attuned to both religious values and evolving educational challenges, is critical for advancing inclusion and excellence. The study recommends that the Association of Muslim Schools (AMS) support schools in adopting adaptive leadership strategies grounded in pedagogical responsiveness and complexity thinking.

KEY WORDS: Pedagogical responsiveness; Muslim schools; Inclusive Education; Complexity theory; context

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This serves to confirm that I, Uwais Kathrada declare that this research study and report has been written up by me and is my own original work. I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the University's policy in this regard.

I further declare that this work has not been previously submitted to any institution for a degree nor has it been submitted as part requirement(s) for a degree.

I have not used work(s) previously developed by others to hand in as my own work. Any assistance that I have received in conducting the study and in the drafting this research report, has been acknowledged.



Signature of researcher

21/02/2025

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

I begin in the name of Allah (S.W.T), the Most Kind and the Most Merciful.

"*And my success is only by Allah. In Him I trust and to Him I turn*"

{Surah Hud 11:88}

All praises and thanks are due to my *creator*, my lord, the Most Merciful and the Most Gracious Allah (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى) for granting me the strength and ability to complete this research report. My Lord has indeed shown me the importance of maintaining '*sabr*' (patience) in every difficulty I have faced. Praise is due to my beloved Prophet Muhammed ﷺ whose teachings have guided me toward completing this research report.

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GLOSSARY AND TERMINOLOGY ASSOCIATED WITH THIS RESEARCH REPORT

- **Adaptive Leadership:** A leadership approach that emphasises flexibility, responsiveness, and the ability to navigate complex and changing environments by adjusting strategies to emerging challenges (Dunn, 2020).

- **Blended Learning:** An educational approach that combines traditional face-to-face instruction with digital and online learning methods to create a more flexible and personalised learning experience (Dziuban et al., 2004; Watson, 2008).

- **Cartesian Plane of Pedagogical Responsiveness vs Complexity:** A theoretical model proposed by Walton & Osman (2022) that is used to categorise school leadership and management approaches based on their ability to navigate complexity and apply pedagogical responsiveness in this research.
  The four quadrants of this model include:
  1. Transformational: (High Pedagogical Responsiveness, High Complexity)
  2. Conservative: (Low Pedagogical Responsiveness, High Complexity)
  3. Efficacy: (High Pedagogical Responsiveness, Low Complexity)
  4. Inertia: (Low Pedagogical Responsiveness, Low Complexity)

- **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:** An educational approach that recognises and values students' diverse cultural backgrounds, integrating culturally relevant teaching strategies to create inclusive and effective learning environments (Gay, 2002).

- **Curriculum Adaptation:** The process of modifying and adjusting curriculum content, teaching methods, and assessments to accommodate diverse student needs and contextual realities within a school setting.

- **Distributed Leadership:** A leadership model that decentralises decision-making by involving multiple stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, and administrators, in shaping school policies and practices (Harris, 2009; Spillane, 2005).

- **Dual-Curriculum Model**: An educational framework used in Islamic schools that integrates both secular academic subjects and Islamic studies, aiming to provide students

with a balanced education that meets national educational requirements while also reinforcing religious teachings.

- **Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR):** A technological shift characterised by artificial intelligence (AI), automation, robotics, and digital innovation, significantly transforming education, employment, and social interactions (Moloi & Mhlanga, 2021; Schwab, 2016).

- **Holistic Education:** An approach to teaching and learning that emphasises the development of the whole child- intellectually, emotionally, socially, physically, and spiritually, rather than focusing solely on academic achievement.

- **Inclusive Education:** A philosophy and practice that ensures all students, regardless of ability, background, or socioeconomic status, have equitable access to quality education and opportunities for meaningful participation in learning (Engelbrecht, 2006, 2020).

- **Islamisation of Knowledge:** A concept in Islamic education that involves integrating Islamic values, epistemology, and ethics into various academic disciplines to create an Islamically grounded knowledge system.

- **Leadership for Learning:** A leadership model that emphasises the role of school leaders in shaping teaching and learning environments to improve student outcomes (Hallinger, 2011).

- **Mashurah (Consultative Leadership):** An Islamic principle that promotes collective decision-making through consultation, ensuring that the perspectives of all stakeholders are considered.

- **Parental Engagement:** The active involvement of parents in their children's education, including participation in school governance, academic support, and decision-making processes that impact student learning.

- **Pedagogical Responsiveness:** An approach that emphasises the need for educators, school leaders, and managers to adapt their teaching and management strategies based on students' diverse needs and learning contexts (Walton & Osman, 2022).

- **School-Based Support Team (SBST):** A structured intervention team within a school responsible for identifying, assessing, and providing support to learners with academic, behavioural, or socio-emotional challenges.

- **Socio-Cultural Sensitivity:** An awareness and consideration of the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds of learners, ensuring that teaching practices and school policies accommodate diverse student needs.

- **Strategic Curriculum Integration:** The deliberate and structured process of incorporating religious, ethical, and contextual elements into the broader school curriculum to create a cohesive and meaningful educational experience.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

DBE	Department of Basic Education
HOD	Head of Department
AMS	Association of Muslim Schools
WP6	White Paper 6
SIAS	Screening, Identification, and Support Policy
CAS	Complex Adaptive Systems
SBST	School Based Support Team
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH STUDY

"The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work" (Leithwood et al., 2020, p. 5)

1.1 The Historical Context That Frames This Study

Leading and managing schools in the 21st century, and foregrounding inclusive teaching practices has become a challenging task considering the complexities and evolving dynamics of the institutions that they find themselves in and "necessitating schools to actively adapt and reshape their practices to equip students for successful life paths" (Sliwka et al., 2024). This complexity is particularly pronounced in the South African context where schools must contend not only with general educational challenges but also with the persistent effects of historical inequalities and contextual disparities (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2024).

Globally, schools face unique contextual constraints that influence leadership and management practices, and South Africa is no exception. However, the South African educational landscape is further complicated by the legacy of apartheid, which continues to shape the dynamics of teaching and learning in many schools (Naicker, 2007). Additionally, South Africa is classified as a developing country within the global South, and it has one of the highest levels of wealth disparity in the world. Additionally, South Africa is a developing country in the global South and it has one of the largest wealth disparities in the world (Andrews et al., 2021). These socio-economic and historical factors contribute to varied school contexts, which, in turn, shape the challenges faced by educational leaders and managers across different types of schools.

Historically, before 1994, education in South Africa was characterised by systemic segregation based on race and perceived ability. Limited educational opportunities for non-white South Africans were deliberately maintained to enforce socio-economic subjugation, perpetuating inequalities that remain evident in present-day South Africa (Christie & Collins, 1982; Giliomee, 2009; Thobejane, 2013; Tomlin, 2016). Consequently, the notion of inclusive education was absent due to apartheid policies being dominated by the medical model of disability, resulting in many students who faced learning barriers to being excluded

from mainstream education or being placed in special schools without adequate resources or support (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, et al., 2015; Engelbrecht, 2020; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; S. Naicker, 2007). This approach not only marginalised students with disabilities but also entrenched broader educational inequalities.

The transition to democracy in 1994 saw the new government attempting redress past inequalities and promote inclusive education. Enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa, the government recognised education as a fundamental human right. Additionally, the South African Schools, Act 84 of 1996 marked a pivotal shift towards creating a more equitable educational landscape, emphasising the right to education for all learners, irrespective of their backgrounds and context (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Furthermore, it allowed for the decentralisation of the governance of schools (Soudien & Sayed, 2005), allowing for greater autonomy while emphasising inclusive education.

More specifically, the implementation of the White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System in 2001 (Department of Basic Education, 2001) marked a significant step towards inclusive education. This national policy advocated for the integration of students with special educational needs into mainstream schools and highlighted the importance of removing barriers to learning (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, et al., 2015). Moreover, the implementation of the Screening, Identification, and Support (SIAS) policy of 2014 was developed to improve access to quality education for learners who face barriers to learning. This policy emphasises the early identification and support of students with learning difficulties, promoting a more inclusive education system (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

On an international level, policies such as the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education of 1994, which called for inclusive education systems worldwide, influenced South Africa’s educational reforms, emphasising the need to accommodate all learners, including those with disabilities, within mainstream schools (UNESCO, 1994). Additionally, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) seeks to ensure that inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all is achieved seeks to ensure that inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all is achieved (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). These international frameworks have provided a foundation for South Africa's inclusive education policies and practices.

Despite the advocacy for inclusionary practices and the progressive policies available, traction has been slow as suggested by the literature (Andrews et al., 2021; Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Engelbrecht, 2006b; Engelbrecht, Nel, Norma, et al., 2015; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, et al., 2015; Makoelle, 2012; Naicker, 2007; Walton, 2011). Central to the effectiveness of inclusive education in schools is the role of school leaders. School leaders are crucial in adapting educational strategies to meet the evolving needs of their students (Gous et al., 2014; Lambrecht et al., 2022; Mbuna, 2023; Rose & Shevlin, 2017; Walton, 2011). Their ability to navigate the complexities of the educational landscape and become pedagogically responsive to create and sustain inclusionary schools becomes crucial.

Like many democratic countries, schools in South Africa are decentralized from central control. The South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (hereafter SASA) (Republic of South Africa, 1996) makes provision for and extends significant decision-making powers to school governing bodies allowing for independent schools not only to exist within the framework of the constitution but also determine their internal constitutions their polices, language of teaching and learning, religious orientation, discipline, management of finances and staff appointments (Davids, 2022). These democratic rights to self-determination, although aligned with the South African Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996) add a further layer of complexity to school leadership and management in South Africa given the internal constitutional and governance differences across the range of schooling options available in South Africa. The constitutional right for schools in South Africa to govern their affairs and determine their ethos and identity, most notably in the private sector, coupled with issues of economic and historical inequality (Christie, 2020), creates a constellation of challenges for leadership and management in vastly different school contexts.

1.2 The Problem Statement

Existing literature on inclusive education in South Africa has predominantly focused on analysing current inclusive policies and implementation challenges (Andrews et al., 2021; Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Engelbrecht, 2006b; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, et al., 2015; Engelbrecht, 2020; Makoelle, 2012; S. Naicker, 2007; Walton, 2011). In combining aspects of leadership and inclusive education, other studies (Lambrecht et al., 2022; Mbuna, 2023) has centred on understanding the leadership styles necessary for enacting inclusive practices successfully in schools. However, schools are complex learning organisations (Lambrecht et al., 2022; Mbuna, 2023) in which each school faces its unique challenges that hinder

inclusivity and therefore require leadership strategies tailored to its specific needs. Schools need to be managed as complex adaptative systems (Fidan & Balcı, 2017) where successful leadership is demonstrated by responsiveness to, rather than being dictated by, the contexts in which they operate (Leithwood et al., 2020). This responsiveness is crucial for fostering inclusive education practices that are adaptive and contextually relevant.

While some studies (Engelbrecht, Nel, Norma, et al., 2015; Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna, 2019) have examined the notion of inclusive education about the complexity of school environments, there remains a gap in understanding how school leaders' conceptualisations of inclusive education are influenced by and responsive to their specific school contexts. The research presented by Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna (2019) investigated how school leadership in a South African rural school manages its complex context to establish and shape inclusive practices, highlighting the intricate interplay between leadership and context. However, their research does not explicitly address how school leaders' understanding of pedagogical responsiveness impacts the implementation of inclusive education practices within the school's complex context. The nuances of how leaders can adapt pedagogical strategies to be responsive to the unique needs of their student population remain unexplored. The application of the pedagogical responsiveness framework by Walton & Osman (2022), is crucial for opening new learning pathways to understanding the responsiveness of school leaders in their complex and unique educational environments.

Muslim schools in South Africa present a particularly intricate case for studying inclusive education within complex contexts. These schools operate under the dual mandate of providing both religious and secular education, aiming to prepare students for participation in a diverse and democratic society (Davids & Waghid, 2021). The transnational and cosmopolitan influences on Muslim education Hassim (2020) add another layer of complexity, necessitating a leadership approach that is not only inclusive but also culturally and religiously sensitive.

Davids & Waghid (2021) argue that there is a pressing need for educational reform within Muslim schooling in South Africa, particularly regarding inclusive practices. One of the critical crisis points identified is the ability of Muslim school leaders to navigate this complexity while striving to implement inclusive and equitable educational practices. This research aims to fill the gap by exploring how Muslim school leaders understand and respond to the complexities of their school contexts in fostering inclusive education.

In alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which prioritizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all, this study critically examines how school leaders and managers in Muslim schools in South Africa navigate the contextual complexities of developing and sustaining inclusive school environments. Given the diverse socio-economic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds of learners in these schools, leaders and managers must balance the integration of Islamic educational values with the demands of national education policies while addressing systemic barriers to inclusion. This research highlights the intricate interplay between leadership and management practices, contextual constraints, and the evolving imperatives of inclusive education, offering valuable insights into how Muslim school leaders and managers respond to these challenges. By doing so, this study contributes to the broader discourse on educational equity, advocating for leadership and management approaches that are both contextually responsive and strategically adaptive in ensuring sustainable inclusivity in complex schooling environments.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

This study contributes to the discourse on educational leadership and inclusive education by investigating how school leaders and managers in South African Muslim schools navigate the complexities inherent in their unique contexts. These schools operate at the intersection of socio-cultural diversity, religious values, and national education policy, creating a distinct set of challenges for leadership. Framed within complexity theory and the pedagogical responsiveness framework of Walton & Osman (2022), the study aims to explore how leadership and management practices respond to such multifaceted environments.

This study contributes to the discourse on educational leadership, management and inclusive education by investigating how school leaders and managers in South African Muslim schools navigate the complexities inherent in their unique contexts. These schools operate at the intersection of socio-cultural diversity, religious values, and national education policy, creating a distinct set of challenges for leadership. Framed within complexity theory and the pedagogical responsiveness framework of Walton & Osman (2022), the study aims to explore how leadership and management practices respond to such multifaceted environments.

The primary objective is to examine how school leaders and managers understand and respond to specific contextual complexities- such as religious-secular tensions, socio-economic disparities, and curriculum integration challenges that influence inclusive education. In doing so, the study interrogates how Muslim school leaders and managers

interpret their dynamic environments and adapt their practices accordingly. This aligns with the first research question.

A second objective is to explore the perceptions of school leaders and managers regarding pedagogical responsiveness, particularly as a tool to support inclusive education. This includes examining how leaders and managers interpret, value, and apply responsiveness in their decision-making and instructional strategies, directly addressing the second research question.

Thirdly, the study aims to investigate how understandings of pedagogical responsiveness and contextual complexity shape the everyday leadership and management practices within these schools. It considers how leadership approaches- whether collaborative, hierarchical, or transformational are influenced by the leader's conceptual stance and practical understanding of their operating environment.

The fourth objective focuses on identifying the specific challenges Muslim school leaders and managers encounter in developing and sustaining inclusive education. These may include institutional constraints, conflicting policy expectations, resource shortages, and community pressures. The study seeks to uncover how leaders navigate these challenges, and what adaptive strategies are employed in response.

Finally, by situating school leaders and managers within Walton & Osman (2022) Cartesian plane, which maps leadership responses according to levels of complexity and pedagogical responsiveness- the study aims to provide a critical analytical framework for understanding the positioning of Muslim school leaders and managers within broader inclusion discourses. This enables a deeper understanding of how leadership identities and practices either advance or inhibit inclusive education goals.

To address these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do school leaders and managers in Muslim schools understand and respond to specific contextual complexities, such as religious-secular tensions, socio-economic disparities, and curriculum integration challenges?
2. What are the perceptions of school leadership and management regarding pedagogical responsiveness as a tool for fostering inclusive education in their unique school contexts?

3. How does the understanding of pedagogical responsiveness and contextual complexity shape leadership and management practices in Muslim schools?
4. What challenges do Muslim school leaders and managers encounter in developing and sustaining inclusive education within their specific school contexts?

This research provides a nuanced understanding of leadership in faith-based schools, emphasising the importance of responsive and adaptive practices in navigating the complex interplay of religious, socio-cultural, and educational factors. By situating school leaders and managers in Muslim schools within Walton & Osman's (2022) framework, the study offers a novel perspective on how leadership and management practices can be evaluated and enhanced to promote inclusivity and responsiveness.

Through its findings, this study aims to contribute to the development of practical recommendations for school leaders, policymakers, and educational practitioners. These recommendations will highlight strategies for fostering inclusive and responsive leadership, particularly in minority faith-based schools, where leaders and managers must navigate the dual challenges of preserving religious identity and meeting contemporary educational standards. By bridging gaps in the existing literature, this research not only advances theoretical understandings of complexity and responsiveness but also provides actionable insights for improving leadership and management practices in Muslim schools.

1.4 The Significance of the Research

This study holds considerable significance for advancing the discourse on educational leadership and inclusive education, particularly within the context of faith-based schools. By focusing on the challenges and opportunities presented within the unique contexts of Muslim schools in South Africa, the research addresses a gap in the literature regarding leadership and management practices in minority educational institutions. Muslim schools operate within a complex environment that combines the need to adhere to national educational standards with the requirement to preserve their religious and cultural ethos. This unique duality underscores the importance of understanding how leadership and management in these schools responds to the complexities of their contexts, making the findings of this study both relevant and timely.

1.5 Positionality of The Researcher

As a researcher, my positionality is a critical factor that has shaped the design, implementation, and interpretation of this study. Positionality refers to the way in which my own background, experiences, values, and beliefs intersect with the research process, influencing my interactions with participants and my understanding of the data (Maggie & Howell, 2013). Acknowledging this positionality is essential for maintaining transparency and ensuring the rigor of the research.

As both a member of the Muslim community and an educational researcher, I bring an insider perspective that allows for cultural sensitivity and a nuanced understanding of the complexities within Muslim schools in South Africa. This dual role enables me to bridge theory and practice, critically analysing leadership challenges while remaining attuned to the socio-cultural dynamics that shape these institutions.

While my insider status facilitates trust and rapport with participants, it also requires reflexivity to mitigate potential biases. To ensure the credibility of my findings, I employed strategies such as peer debriefing and member checking. Additionally, I was mindful of power dynamics when engaging with school leaders and managers, striving to create a collaborative research environment where participants felt free to express their views without hesitation.

My positionality is both an asset and a challenge. It allows me to interpret data with cultural and contextual depth, yet it necessitates vigilance against overgeneralisation or assumptions of shared understanding. To balance this, I adopted a critical, outsider lens during data analysis, ensuring alignment with established theoretical frameworks. This interplay between insider and outsider perspectives enhances the study's depth and rigor.

Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the authentic representation of participants' voices, were central to my approach. Rather than limiting the study, my positionality strengthens its relevance, providing insights that are both academically rigorous and practically meaningful for the leadership and management of Muslim schools.

1.6 Outline of The Chapters of This Research Project

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the study, including its background, problem statement, research aims and objectives, and research questions. It also outlines the significance of the study, the theoretical frameworks guiding the research, and the methodology employed. Additionally, it presents a brief discussion on the scope and limitations of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

This chapter explores existing literature on school leadership and management, with a specific focus on Islamic schools in South Africa. It reviews key concepts such as inclusive leadership, complexity in educational settings, pedagogical responsiveness, and the challenges of balancing secular and religious education. The literature review critically evaluates studies on curriculum integration, socio-cultural sensitivity, parental engagement, and teacher development within faith-based schools. In addition, this chapter introduces and explains the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study: complexity theory and pedagogical responsiveness. It discusses how these frameworks provide a lens for understanding the dynamic and evolving nature of leadership and management in Muslim schools. The chapter also incorporates Walton & Osman's (2022) Cartesian plane of pedagogical responsiveness and complexity, which categorises school leadership and management approaches based on their adaptability and contextual responsiveness.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This chapter details the research design and methodology employed in the study. It explains the research paradigm, data collection methods, sampling techniques, and data analysis procedures. The chapter also discusses ethical considerations and the strategies implemented to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

Chapter Four: Research Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the key findings of the research, structured according to the major themes that emerged from the data. The findings are discussed in relation to existing literature and the theoretical frameworks of complexity theory and pedagogical responsiveness. The chapter explores the role of leadership in curriculum integration, socio-cultural sensitivity, adaptive student support, parental engagement, teacher well-being, and technology integration in Muslim schools.

Chapter Five: Conclusion, Recommendations and Learning Journey

The final chapter synthesises the study's key findings and discusses their implications for leadership and management in Muslim schools. It highlights the study's contributions to the field, provides recommendations for future research, and offers a reflection on the researcher's experience undertaking this research project. The chapter concludes by emphasising the importance of adaptive, contextually responsive leadership in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of Muslim schools in South Africa.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This literature review explores the critical role of leadership in the implementation and success of inclusive education within diverse contexts. It examines the strategies employed by effective school principals and leaders, emphasising their commitment to inclusive values, transformational and instructional leadership practices, and responsive approaches to managing complex educational environments. The review also highlights the unique challenges and approaches in multicultural and religious educational settings, particularly in Muslim schools, providing a comprehensive understanding of how inclusive education can be fostered across varied educational landscapes.

To refine the search results, inclusion criteria were established to filter out articles that were not directly relevant to the study. Priority was given to recent literature, as well as seminal works that have shaped discourse on inclusive education and educational leadership. This approach aligns with Grant & Booth (2009) typology of systematic reviews, which emphasises the importance of clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure a rigorous and focused review process. In this study, articles were excluded if they did not specifically address educational leadership, inclusive education, or the complexities of school management in diverse contexts.

The selected literature was then thematically analysed, with key studies grouped under historical policy developments, educational exclusion, implementation of inclusive education, and leadership challenges in fostering inclusivity. Thematic analysis was guided by systematic review principles, as outlined by (Gough et al., 2017), which stress the need for an iterative and structured approach to synthesising research findings.

This structured approach ensured that the literature review not only provided a historical and conceptual foundation for the study but also critically engaged with existing debates, gaps, and emerging trends. By synthesising insights from both global and South African perspectives, this review positions the research within the broader discourse on educational leadership and inclusion, while highlighting the context-specific challenges faced by school leaders in Muslim schools.

2.2 Muslim Schools in South Africa

Muslim education in South Africa has undergone significant transformations from its early informal roots to the establishment of formal institutions that blend religious teachings with secular education. Initially, Muslim education was primarily conducted in mosques and homes, addressing the community's needs in the absence of formal structures (Davids & Waghid, 2021; Tayob, 2011). The establishment of formal Muslim schools in the early 20th century marked a pivotal response to the educational needs of the Muslim community, which were not adequately addressed by secular state schools (Davids & Waghid, 2021; Tayob, 2011, 2015).

Under apartheid, Muslim schools operated within a racially segregated and unequal educational system. They provided an essential service by offering an alternative to the biased state education system, aiming to preserve Islamic identity and ensure educational quality amidst an oppressive regime (Davids, 2019; Davids & Waghid, 2021; Fataar, 2003; Tayob, 2011). During this period, the growth of private Muslim schools was significant, driven by the need to counteract the educational inequities enforced by apartheid policies.

In the democratic era, the primary aim of Muslim schools in South Africa has been to integrate Islamic teachings with the national curriculum (Davids, 2014, 2019; Davids & Waghid, 2021; Pilo et al., 2024; Tayob, 2011, 2015). These schools strive to create environments that nurture Islamic values, ethics, and identity while maintaining academic excellence. They aim to produce well-rounded individuals who can contribute positively to both the Muslim community and the broader South African (Davids, 2019; Tayob, 2015).

Most Muslim schools in South Africa are governed by the Association of Muslim Schools (AMS) (Pilo et al., 2024; Tayob, 2015). Leadership and management structures vary, but many schools are overseen by boards comprising community leaders, religious scholars, and professionals. These boards set strategic directions, ensure adherence to Islamic principles, and oversee financial and operational management (Pilo et al., 2024). The role of school principals in Muslim schools is crucial; they must navigate the complex landscape of integrating Islamic values with educational leadership and management, balancing the expectations of parents, the community, and educational authorities while fostering an environment conducive to learning and spiritual growth (Pilo et al., 2024).

Muslim schools in South Africa face several challenges. One primary issue is the tension between religious education and national curriculum requirements, often leading to debates

about the extent to which Islamic teachings should be integrated into the school syllabus (Davids & Waghid, 2021). Financial sustainability is another significant challenge. Many Muslim schools rely on fees paid by parents, which can be a barrier for low-income families and limit access to quality education, exacerbating educational inequalities within the community (Fataar, 2005). The ongoing tension between maintaining Islamic values and meeting modern educational demands remains another persistent challenge (Davids & Waghid, 2021). Muslim schools endeavour to balance religious education with the requirements of the national education framework, fostering individuals who are both devout Muslims and active, democratic citizens (Davids, 2019; Waghid, 2022).

Teacher training and professional development also pose challenges. Ensuring that teachers are both qualified in their subjects and knowledgeable about Islamic teachings is complex. The dual demands on teachers can lead to difficulties in maintaining high educational standards while providing comprehensive Islamic education (Waghid, 2022). Additionally, social integration remains a concern. Tayob (2015) discusses the balance between maintaining a distinct Islamic identity and fostering integration within the broader South African society. Muslim schools often grapple with preparing students to be active citizens in a diverse and democratic society while preserving their religious and cultural heritage.

Despite these challenges, Muslim schools have made significant contributions to the educational landscape in South Africa. They offer a model of education that combines religious values with academic rigor, helping to cultivate students who are not only academically competent but also morally grounded and socially responsible (Davids, 2019). Muslim schools also play a crucial role in community cohesion, serving as centres of community life that provide not only education but also social and cultural support, fostering a sense of belonging and identity among Muslim students and their families (Fataar, 2003).

Muslim education faces unique challenges and opportunities in a transnational world. Hassim (2020) argues that understanding Muslim cosmopolitanism is crucial for developing educational frameworks that cater to the diverse and transnational experiences of Muslim students. This perspective encourages the incorporation of global Islamic values and practices into the curriculum, thereby enriching the educational experience and fostering a more inclusive environment.

2.3 Evolution of Inclusive Education in South Africa

The development of inclusive education in South Africa is deeply rooted in the country's history of apartheid, which systematically excluded learners from marginalised racial and socio-economic backgrounds from accessing quality education. The transition to democracy in 1994 ushered in significant educational reforms, culminating in policies aimed at transforming a previously exclusionary system into one that promotes inclusivity, equity, and redress (Engelbrecht, 2006b; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). The introduction of White Paper 6: Special Needs Education- Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Basic Education, 2001) was a landmark policy initiative aimed at restructuring the education system to accommodate learners with disabilities and other barriers to learning. This policy outlined a framework for the gradual implementation of inclusive education, emphasising the need for systemic transformation in curriculum delivery, teacher training, and school support structures (Naicker, 2005).

However, the historical trajectory of policy development in South Africa has been marked by competing ideologies regarding educational inclusion and exclusion. As Sayed et al. (2003) argue, post-apartheid education policies have sought to balance the demands of equity and redress with the realities of limited resources and infrastructural disparities. This has resulted in fragmented implementation, with many schools struggling to translate policy objectives into effective practice. Furthermore, Jansen (1998) critically assesses the impact of curriculum reform in the post-apartheid era, arguing that while inclusive education policies have been ambitious, they have often failed to consider the structural and systemic inequalities that persist within the education system. This historical context underscores the complexities involved in developing and sustaining an inclusive education system in South Africa.

Despite progressive policies aimed at fostering inclusive education, South Africa's schooling system remains characterised by high levels of exclusion, particularly for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Exclusion operates along multiple dimensions, including race, socio-economic status, disability, and geographic location (Soudien et al., 2004). The historical legacy of apartheid education continues to manifest in stark inequalities between former Model C schools, which remain well-resourced, and township and rural schools, which often lack basic infrastructure and qualified teachers (Spaull, 2004).

Educational exclusion is further exacerbated by systemic inefficiencies such as high dropout rates, inadequate learning support, and the failure to accommodate learners with diverse

learning needs (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, et al., 2015). Walton et al. (2009) highlight that while independent schools in South Africa have made strides towards inclusion, government schools continue to face significant structural barriers, including large class sizes, insufficient teacher training, and inadequate learner support services. Donohue & Bornman (2014) argue that exclusion in education is not only a result of resource constraints but also of entrenched attitudes that perceive learners with disabilities or learning difficulties as burdens rather than as individuals with the right to equitable education.

Additionally, Sayed et al. (2007) examine the broader socio-political dimensions of educational exclusion, noting that many policies, while well-intended, fail to address the lived realities of learners who experience marginalisation due to poverty, language barriers, and systemic discrimination. This highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of educational exclusion, one that takes into account the intersectionality of social, economic, and political factors in shaping learners' access to education.

The implementation of inclusive education in South Africa has been fraught with challenges, ranging from inadequate teacher preparation to insufficient resources and weak policy enforcement mechanisms. Scholars (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Engelbrecht, 2006a; Murungi, 2015) have emphasises that while White Paper 6 provided a framework for inclusion, its execution has been uneven, with significant disparities between policy intentions and classroom realities. Many schools, particularly those in underprivileged communities, lack the necessary support structures, trained personnel, and adaptive teaching methodologies to accommodate learners with diverse educational needs (N. M. Nel et al., 2016).

Oswald (2010) highlights the role of teacher learning in the implementation of inclusive education, noting that many educators enter the profession with limited exposure to inclusive pedagogies. This gap in teacher training results in a reliance on traditional, exclusionary teaching methods that fail to cater to learners with disabilities or other learning barriers. Moosa & Bekker (2021) further reinforce this by noting that many initial teacher education students conceptualise inclusion in limited terms, often equating it solely with the presence of learners with disabilities rather than embracing a broader understanding of diverse learning needs.

Moreover, the lack of adequate support structures within schools has hindered the successful implementation of inclusive education. Scholars (Engelbrecht et al., 2016; N. M. Nel et al.,

2016) found that teachers frequently feel overwhelmed by the demands of inclusive classrooms due to inadequate professional development and a lack of specialised support personnel, such as therapists and remedial educators. Walton (2011) suggests that getting inclusion right in South Africa requires not only policy adjustments but also a shift in the professional development framework for teachers, ensuring that they are equipped with the skills and resources necessary to create inclusive learning environments.

One of the key barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive education in South Africa is the presence of conflicting ideas regarding what inclusion entails and how it should be practised. There exists a tension between the global push for inclusive education, as outlined by international frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1994), and the realities of the South African educational landscape, which is still grappling with issues of inequality, resource shortages, and systemic fragmentation (Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna, 2019)

Meltz et al. (2014) explore how competing beliefs about inclusion impact its implementation in South African schools. They found that while some educators view inclusion as an opportunity to foster diversity and equity, others perceive it as an additional burden, particularly in schools that lack adequate support systems. Similarly, de Jager (2013) highlights the practical difficulties in implementing differentiated learning activities in secondary schools, noting that many educators struggle to balance the diverse learning needs of their students with the pressures of an overloaded curriculum.

Scholars (Carrim, 2003; Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht, 2018; Pather & Nxumalo, 2013; Soudien & Sayed, 2004) further examine the ideological contestations surrounding inclusion, arguing that policies aimed at fostering inclusion often operate within broader socio-political contexts that resist change. In many cases, inclusion is treated as an aspirational goal rather than a tangible reality, with educators, policymakers, and communities holding divergent views on what inclusion should look like in practice. This lack of consensus leads to inconsistent implementation, with some schools making significant progress in fostering inclusive environments while others remain exclusionary due to entrenched institutional practices and resistance to change.

Moreover, Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, et al. (2015) note that classroom practices often do not align with the principles of inclusion, with many teachers continuing to adopt deficit-based

approaches that position learners with disabilities as needing ‘special’ education rather than seeing inclusion as a systemic transformation of the education system. This perspective is reinforced by Makoelle (2012) who argues that inclusive pedagogy in South Africa remains underdeveloped, with many educators struggling to move beyond traditional teaching methods towards more flexible and adaptive approaches.

2.4 An Islamic Perspective on Inclusive Education

Islamic education plays a crucial role in preserving religious and cultural identities while providing students with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in contemporary society. Hussain (2004) argues that Islamic education is essential for nurturing moral and ethical values, promoting social cohesion, and preparing students to contribute positively to their communities. The importance of Islamic education extends beyond religious instruction to include the development of critical thinking, civic responsibility, and intercultural understanding. By integrating Islamic principles with modern educational practices, Muslim schools can offer a holistic education that prepares students for both personal and professional success.

In the same way, the conceptualisation of inclusive education within the perspectives and teachings of Islam in this review of literature is essential to providing a unique lens for understanding the religious and cultural beliefs of school leaders and managers in Muslim schools which shape their leadership and management practices. It allows for a nuanced approach to inclusive education that respects and integrates local beliefs and values.

In Islam, the concept of inclusive education is viewed through the lens of equity, justice, and compassion, as outlined in several scholarly works (Maghfiroh et al., 2022; Risnawati, 2019; Sulasmi, 2022). Risnawati (2019) argues that inclusive education aligns with Islamic teachings by emphasising the equal value and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their differences. This perspective is rooted in the Quranic principle of universal access to knowledge and learning (Maghfiroh et al., 2022), which underpins the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) teachings about the importance of education for all members of society.

Sulasmi (2022) expands on this perspective by highlighting how Islamic education promotes inclusivity through its emphasis on moral and ethical teachings. Central to this view is the concept of "tarbiyah" (upbringing), which encompasses nurturing individuals to realise their full potential within a supportive and inclusive educational environment (Maghfiroh et al.,

2022). This approach not only fosters intellectual development but also encourages empathy, respect, and social cohesion among diverse groups within society.

The first ten verses of Surah Abasa (Chapter: He Frowned) of the Quran, states:

"*He frowned and turned his attention away simply because the blind man came to him, interrupting. You never know O Prophet, perhaps he may be purified, or he may be mindful, benefitting from the remainder. As for the indifferent one, you gave him your undivided attention, even though you are not to blame if he would not be purified. But as for the one who came to you, eager to learn, being in awe of Allah, you were inattentive to him*".

This verse according to Maghfiroh et al. (2022) relates to the concept of inclusive education. These verses were revealed to following an incident with the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) in which he invited some leaders of the Quraish tribe to engage in discussions. Suddenly, a blind man approached the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) and asked him if he could teach him to read some verses of the Quran. However, the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) turned his face away and frowned and continue his conversation with the leaders of the Quraish tribe. Allah (God) had thus revealed these verses to the Prophet (PBUH). This narrative underscores Islam's commitment to removing barriers to education and ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their physical abilities or social status, have access to knowledge and learning opportunities.

From an academic perspective, these insights into Islamic perspectives on inclusive education offer a robust framework for understanding and implementing inclusive practices within educational systems. By integrating these principles into pedagogical approaches, educators can promote a more inclusive environment that respects and accommodates diverse learning needs.

The Quranic perspective presented by Maghfiroh et al. (2022) serves as a foundational text for shaping inclusive educational policies and practices. It emphasises the ethical imperative of inclusivity and the moral duty to provide equitable access to education for all individuals. This aligns with global efforts to foster inclusive education systems that address diversity and promote social justice.

Furthermore, Sulasmi (2022) emphasises the role of Islamic ethics in guiding educational practices, highlighting how principles such as compassion, justice, and respect contribute to creating inclusive learning environments. This ethical framework not only supports the

academic development of students but also nurtures their moral and social growth, preparing them to contribute positively to society.

2.5 Inclusive Education and Leadership

Inclusive education, which aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, necessitates robust and visionary leadership to address its inherent challenges. Effective leadership in inclusive education is marked by a commitment to fostering environments where all students, regardless of their abilities, can thrive. Principals and school leaders play a pivotal role in shaping and implementing inclusive practices that support diverse learners. Their leadership extends beyond administrative responsibilities to fostering a culture of inclusivity, equity, and shared responsibility (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010).

Leadership in inclusive education is grounded in a deep understanding of inclusive values and a firm commitment to ensuring that all learners receive the support they need to succeed. Gous et al. (2014) emphasise that principals of independent schools perceive inclusive education as both an ethical and moral obligation, highlighting the importance of a leadership philosophy that prioritises inclusivity. Similarly, Mbuna (2023) asserts that successful principals are those who set high expectations for all learners, advocate for inclusive policies, and foster an inclusive school culture that embraces diversity.

Transformational and instructional leadership practices are particularly critical in effectively implementing inclusive education. Transformational leadership involves inspiring and motivating staff to embrace inclusive education through a shared vision and collaborative efforts (Lambrecht et al., 2022). These leaders champion inclusivity by cultivating a school culture that actively promotes equitable access to education for all learners. Instructional leadership, on the other hand, focuses on the practical aspects of curriculum delivery, ensuring that teaching strategies and learning materials are adapted to meet the needs of diverse learners (DeMattews et al., 2020). Research suggests that principals who effectively combine both leadership styles are better equipped to lead inclusive schools, as they foster an inclusive ethos while ensuring high-quality instruction tailored to all learners' needs (Ryan, 2006).

Inclusive leadership and collaborative decision-making are essential for fostering equitable and effective school management, particularly within diverse and complex educational environments. Inclusive leadership involves creating an organisational culture that values

diversity, equity, and shared responsibility in decision-making processes (Ryan, 2006). Such leadership is characterised by participatory governance, where multiple stakeholders-including teachers, parents, and learners, are actively involved in shaping school policies and practices. By embedding inclusivity into leadership structures, school leaders enhance transparency, encourage stakeholder engagement, and cultivate a sense of shared ownership in the decision-making process (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010).

Collaborative decision-making further complements inclusive leadership by promoting shared accountability and ensuring that diverse perspectives inform school governance. Johnson (2022) notes that schools implementing collaborative leadership structures experience higher levels of teacher satisfaction, improved student outcomes, and more effective governance. In the context of inclusive education, such collaborative practices are essential for developing policies and strategies that are responsive to the needs of diverse learners (Tejeiro, 2024). By fostering a culture of consultation and joint decision-making, school leaders can ensure that educational policies reflect the lived realities of both educators and learners. By engaging various stakeholders in decision-making processes, school leaders and managers can develop contextually relevant solutions that align with the institution's ethos (Murwanto, 2024).

Furthermore, inclusive leadership necessitates transparent communication, a commitment to professional dialogue, and a willingness to share authority with staff and parents. Schools that cultivate strong, inclusive leadership and collaborative decision-making structures are more resilient in the face of challenges and more effective in implementing inclusive education policies (Verheijen-Tiemstra et al., 2024).

2.6 Constraints and Challenges to the Implementation of Inclusive Education

South African school leaders and managers face a myriad of constraints and challenges in implementing inclusive education, rooted in the country's socio-political history and current socio-economic conditions. The legacy of apartheid has entrenched deep-seated inequalities in the education system, resulting in significant disparities in resources, infrastructure, and educational outcomes between urban and rural schools (Engelbrecht, 2006a; Thobejane, 2013). These historical inequities continue to shape the landscape of education, presenting unique challenges for school leaders and managers.

One of the primary challenges faced by school leaders is the lack of resources. Despite the progressive framework of White Paper 6 on inclusive education, many schools struggle to provide adequate support for learners with disabilities. Financial constraints and a lack of trained personnel are significant barriers (Engelbrecht, 2020; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, et al., 2015). For instance, schools often lack the necessary materials and equipment to accommodate diverse learning needs, and there is a chronic shortage of specialised staff such as educational psychologists and special education teachers (Engelbrecht et al., 2016; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, et al., 2015)

Another critical challenge is the inadequate training and professional development for teachers and school leaders. Effective implementation of inclusive education requires that educators are well-equipped with the knowledge and skills to address the diverse needs of all learners. However, studies indicate that many teachers feel ill-prepared to implement inclusive practices due to insufficient training (Moosa & Bekker, 2021; Walton, 2011). Professional development opportunities are often limited, and when available, they are not always tailored to the specific contexts and challenges faced by schools (Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna, 2019).

School leadership and management must also navigate the complexities of socioeconomic and cultural barriers that affect the implementation of inclusive education. In many communities, poverty and social instability are pervasive, complicating efforts to create supportive and inclusive educational environments (Maistry, 2014). Additionally, cultural attitudes towards disability and inclusion can hinder the acceptance and support for inclusive education practices. Andrews et al. (2021) highlight that cultural-historical activity theory can provide insights into how these socio-cultural factors impact the implementation of inclusive education.

The pressure to improve academic performance in a highly competitive environment further complicates the role of school leaders. The neoliberal emphasis on standardised testing and measurable outcomes often undermines efforts to foster inclusive practices (Maistry, 2014). Moreover, there is often a disconnect between policy and practice or the political symbolism (Jansen, 2002), with inclusive education policies not being fully integrated into the school curriculum and daily practices. Engelbrecht (2020) points out that policy implementation is frequently hampered by systemic issues, including bureaucratic inefficiencies and a lack of coherent support structures at various levels of the education system.

Leadership itself poses a significant challenge in the implementation of inclusive education. Effective inclusive education requires strong, adaptive leadership capable of driving change and fostering a supportive school culture. However, many school leaders find it challenging to balance the demands of managing diverse student populations, improving academic outcomes, and engaging with communities in contexts of poverty and social instability (Engelbrecht et al., 2016). These challenges necessitate leadership that is not only visionary but also pragmatic and responsive to the specific needs of their schools.

Engaging with parents and the wider community is another area where school leaders face significant hurdles. Parental involvement is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive education, yet many parents lack understanding or support for inclusive practices. This can be due to a lack of awareness or cultural beliefs about disability and education (N. M. Nel et al., 2016). Building strong partnerships with parents and the community requires sustained effort and effective communication strategies, which are often lacking due to resource and capacity constraints.

The implementation of inclusive education in South Africa is fraught with numerous challenges, deeply rooted in the historical and socio-economic context of the country. School leaders must navigate resource limitations, inadequate training, socio-economic and cultural barriers, policy and systemic issues, leadership challenges, and the complexities of community engagement. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including targeted investment in resources and training, policy coherence, and the development of strong, context-sensitive leadership. By understanding and addressing these constraints, South Africa can move closer to realising the goal of inclusive education for all learners.

2.7 Leadership in Multicultural and Faith-Based Contexts

Leadership in multicultural contexts, such as in Muslim schools, requires sensitivity to the unique cultural and religious needs of the student population. Saleemad et al. (2022) discuss the importance of leadership characteristics tailored to Muslim schools in Thailand, highlighting the need for leaders to integrate cultural values with inclusive educational practices. Brooks & Mutohar (2018) extend this discussion by proposing a conceptual framework for Islamic school leadership, which emphasises the integration of Islamic principles with contemporary educational leadership strategies.

Hammad & Shah (2019) highlight the challenges faced by head teachers of Muslim schools in the United Kingdom, where balancing faith-based education with secular educational standards can create tensions. This context underscores the necessity for school leaders and managers to navigate societal prejudices and policy constraints while maintaining the religious ethos of their institutions. Similarly, Shah (2012) discusses how Muslim schools in secular societies either persist in their religious mission or resist assimilation pressures, highlighting the nuanced responses of these schools to secular norms.

Culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies are essential for supporting Muslim students in diverse educational settings. Alameddine (2021) underscores the importance of incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into teaching practices to enhance their academic engagement and success. This involves recognising and valuing students' religious identities and integrating Islamic perspectives into the curriculum in meaningful ways.

Effective pedagogical strategies for Muslim students include the use of culturally relevant materials, the incorporation of Islamic values into lesson plans, and the creation of a supportive and inclusive classroom environment. These strategies help bridge the gap between students' home and school experiences, fostering a sense of belonging, and promoting academic achievement. Strategies used by school principals at successful inclusionary schools implementing inclusive education require dynamic and effective leadership. Principals are at the forefront of this challenge, utilising various strategies to foster inclusive environments. This section explores how successful principals focus on networking and collaboration, instructional practices, maintaining a social justice mindset, and being sensitive to complexity.

Principals who lead inclusive schools recognise the importance of networking and collaboration. Successful principals build and sustain robust networks with stakeholders such as teachers, parents, community members, and external agencies. DeMattews et al. (2020) emphasise that these networks are crucial for obtaining the support and resources needed to address diverse student needs. Additionally, Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) illustrate through a case study how a principal’s active engagement in collaborative practices fosters a culture of teamwork and shared responsibility, essential for consistent implementation of inclusive practices. Similarly, Lambrecht et al. (2022) highlight the positive impact of transformational

leadership practices on promoting inclusive education through collaboration and open communication.

Instructional leadership is a cornerstone of effective inclusive education. Principals who prioritise improving instructional practices ensure they are inclusive and responsive to all students. Lambrecht et al. (2022) find that transformational and instructional leadership practices significantly influence individualised education planning, addressing the unique needs of each student. Moreover, DeMattews et al. (2020) argue that professional development is key, as it equips teachers with the necessary skills for inclusive teaching. Principals who value inclusive education, as noted by Gous et al. (2014) are more likely to implement instructional practices that foster equity and access for all students.

A social justice mindset is essential for principals striving to lead inclusive schools. Principals committed to social justice actively work to address inequalities and promote equity within their schools. Mbuna (2023) discusses how principals with a social justice orientation strive to remove barriers to inclusion and advocate for marginalised students. Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna (2019) provide a South African case study showing how a principal's commitment to social justice can tailor inclusive practices to the local context, promoting a sense of belonging among all students. Poon-McBrayer (2017) also underscores the importance of addressing systemic issues and fostering a school culture that values diversity and inclusion.

Navigating the complexities of inclusive education requires principals to be sensitive to their specific contexts. Effective principals adopt inclusive practices to fit the unique needs of their schools. DeMattews et al. (2020) highlight that successful principals navigate the multifaceted challenges of inclusion, from resource allocation to stakeholder engagement. Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna (2019) emphasise that understanding the local context is critical for implementing effective inclusive education. They argue that principals who are attuned to the specific needs and challenges of their schools can develop effective, context-specific strategies. Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) illustrate a principal's strategic decision-making that balances the demands of inclusive education with the school's overall goals.

Principals play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of inclusive education by leveraging strategies such as networking and collaboration, focusing on instructional practices, maintaining a social justice mindset, and being sensitive to complexity. By fostering a collaborative culture, prioritising inclusive instructional practices, advocating for

equity, and adapting to unique challenges, these principals create environments that support the diverse needs of all students. The insights from the literature underscore the multifaceted role of principals in promoting inclusive education and highlight the importance of effective leadership in achieving educational equity.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks serve as the foundation for scholarly research, guiding the study's design, analysis, and interpretation (Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Ngulube et al., 2015). This literature review focuses on examining the theoretical frameworks of complexity theory and pedagogical responsiveness, both of which provide critical lenses for understanding the intricate dynamics of educational leadership within the unique context of South African Muslim schools. These frameworks are particularly relevant to the study's aim of exploring how school leadership and management navigate the complexities of teaching and learning in South African Muslim schools.

Complexity theory emphasises the interconnectedness and adaptive nature of systems, positioning schools as complex adaptive systems where multiple components interact non-linearly (Cockran-Smith et al., 2014; Mason, 2008). This perspective underscores the importance of contextual sensitivity and adaptive leadership in managing the challenges inherent in dynamic and diverse educational settings. Pedagogical responsiveness complements this framework by highlighting the need for inclusive, relational, and contextually sensitive approaches to teaching and leadership. Rooted in principles of equity, social justice, and collaboration, pedagogical responsiveness aligns with the broader goals of fostering inclusive education in complex contexts (Walton & Osman, 2022).

This chapter critically examines the existing literature on these frameworks, identifying key concepts, relationships, and applications that inform the study. By situating complexity theory and pedagogical responsiveness within the context of South African Muslim schools, this review provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding the interplay between leadership, management, context, and inclusivity in complex educational environments. The review also highlights gaps in the literature, demonstrating how these frameworks contribute to addressing the unique challenges faced by school leaders in navigating inclusive education.

2.8.1 Complexity Theory

Complexity theory provides a comprehensive lens for examining the dynamic and multifaceted nature of school leadership within diverse and evolving educational systems. Originating in the natural sciences, complexity theory has been increasingly applied to social sciences and education to understand how systems operate, adapt, and evolve in response to changing internal and external stimuli (Byrne, 2002; Manson, 2001; Mason, 2008). This framework is particularly relevant to the study of Muslim schools in South Africa, where leaders face the dual challenge of meeting inclusive educational mandates while maintaining the cultural and religious ethos of their institutions. This section elaborates on the principles of complexity theory, its key concepts, and its application to the research focus on leadership and pedagogical responsiveness.

At the heart of complexity theory is the concept of complex adaptive systems (CAS), which views organisations, including schools, as dynamic systems composed of interconnected and interdependent components (Manson, 2001). These components- such as students, teachers, school leaders, policies, and community stakeholders- interact in non-linear ways, meaning that small changes in one part of the system can produce disproportionately large or unpredictable effects elsewhere (Trombly, 2014).

In the context of Muslim schools, the CAS perspective highlights the intricate interplay between governance, pedagogical practices, and community expectations. For example, school leaders and managers must navigate overlapping priorities, such as fulfilling national curriculum standards, integrating Islamic teachings, and addressing socio-economic disparities among learners. Complexity theory emphasises that these systems are not static but continuously adapt and evolve, requiring leaders to be flexible and responsive (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

One of the defining principles of complexity theory is emergence, which refers to the spontaneous and often unpredictable patterns that arise from the interactions within a system (Walby, 2007). In education, emergence manifests in the development of innovative teaching strategies, adaptive leadership practices, and collaborative problem-solving approaches that are not pre-determined but arise organically from the system's needs and constraints.

For Muslim school leaders and managers, the principle of emergence underscores the importance of fostering environments where innovative practices can thrive. For instance, teachers and staff working collaboratively to integrate Islamic values into secular subjects can

create new pedagogical approaches that align with both religious and educational goals. Leaders and managers who embrace complexity theory are more likely to recognise and harness these emergent opportunities, thereby promoting adaptive and inclusive educational practices.

Non-linearity, another core concept of complexity theory, highlights the unpredictability of cause-and-effect relationships within systems (Byrne, 2002). In educational leadership, non-linearity is evident in the varied outcomes of policy implementation across different school contexts. For instance, while inclusive education policies aim to promote equity and access, their effectiveness depends on how these policies interact with the unique socio-economic, cultural, and institutional characteristics of individual schools (Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna, 2019).

In South African Muslim schools, leaders and managers often find that implementing inclusive education policies requires significant adaptation to align with the cultural and religious ethos of their communities. This adaptation process reflects the non-linear nature of policy impact, where a standardised approach may yield unintended consequences or fail to address the specific needs of the school.

Complexity theory also emphasises the interconnectedness of system components, where changes in one area invariably affect others (Anderson, 1999). For Muslim schools, this interconnectedness is evident in the relationship between governance, community expectations, and classroom practices. For example, decisions made at the leadership level about resource allocation or curriculum design can have far-reaching implications for teacher effectiveness and student engagement.

Recognising these interconnections allows school leaders to adopt a holistic approach to decision-making. Complexity theory suggests that effective leadership in such contexts requires a deep understanding of how various factors- such as socio-economic conditions, parental involvement, and teacher professional development, interact and influence one another (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Contextual sensitivity is a cornerstone of complexity theory, emphasising the importance of understanding and responding to the specific characteristics of each system (Mason, 2008). In the case of Muslim schools, this involves acknowledging the unique challenges posed by

their dual mandates of providing religious and secular education while fostering inclusivity and equity.

For example, leaders and managers must navigate the socio-political dynamics of operating within a predominantly secular education system while addressing the cultural and religious needs of their communities. Complexity theory underscores that leadership strategies must be adaptive and contextually grounded, enabling leaders to respond effectively to the diverse and often competing demands of their schools (Walby, 2007).

The principles of complexity theory align closely with the concept of pedagogical responsiveness, which emphasises the need for teaching practices to be inclusive, contextually relevant, and adaptive to the needs of diverse learners (Walton & Osman, 2022). By viewing schools as complex systems, this research examines how Muslim school leaders and managers implement pedagogical strategies that address the unique challenges of their contexts while promoting equity and inclusion.

Pedagogical responsiveness, as enabled by complexity theory, involves collaboration, dialogue, and the integration of community perspectives into educational practices. It also requires leaders to be attuned to the systemic barriers that hinder inclusivity and to develop innovative solutions that reflect the interconnected and adaptive nature of their schools (Trombly, 2014).

Complexity theory provides a robust framework for analysing the dynamic and multifaceted nature of educational leadership in South African Muslim schools. By defining and exploring its key concepts- complex adaptive systems, emergence, non-linearity, interconnectedness, and contextual sensitivity, this framework offers valuable insights into how leaders navigate the complexities of their environments. The application of complexity theory to this study underscores the importance of adaptive leadership and pedagogical responsiveness in fostering inclusive and equitable education within complex schooling systems. This theoretical lens not only informs the research design and analysis but also contributes to a broader understanding of leadership practices in faith-based educational contexts.

2.8.2 Pedagogical Responsiveness

Pedagogical responsiveness is a theoretical framework that emphasises the need for educational systems and stakeholders to dynamically adapt to the multifaceted and evolving contexts in which they operate. Rooted in principles of inclusivity, relationality, and

epistemic engagement, pedagogical responsiveness provides an essential lens for understanding the interactions between educators, learners, and their environments, particularly in complex educational settings such as South African Muslim schools. As outlined by Walton & Osman (2022), this framework challenges conventional approaches to pedagogy by advocating for context-sensitive, inclusive, and equitable practices that respond to the unique needs of diverse learning communities. This section explores the key concepts, characteristics, and enabling factors of pedagogical responsiveness and its relevance to the study.

Pedagogical responsiveness is defined as an active, empathetic, and contextually sensitive orientation to teaching that prioritises inclusivity and equity. It moves beyond a passive adaptation to external stimuli by encouraging educators to consider the socio-political, cultural, and systemic factors that shape educational experiences (Walton & Osman, 2022). At its core, pedagogical responsiveness is characterised by five interrelated dimensions. The first is inclusivity and student focus, which emphasises removing barriers to learning and creating environments where all students can thrive. This focus is especially relevant in South African Muslim schools, where leaders and managers must balance the dual mandate of religious and secular education while fostering inclusive practices.

The second dimension, knowledge work, refers to the intellectual labour required to navigate the tensions between abstract and contextualised knowledge. Responsive teaching demands a careful balance between cumulative learning and addressing the immediate needs of diverse learners (Walton & Rusznyak, 2019). The third dimension, dialogue, and relationality, underscores the importance of building meaningful connections between educators and learners. This relational approach aligns with the ethic of care, fostering trust and mutual respect within the learning environment.

The fourth characteristic is community orientation, which highlights the interconnectedness of schools with their local and global contexts. This orientation advocates for education that reflects the socio-economic and cultural realities of the communities it serves. Finally, social justice and equity form the foundation of pedagogical responsiveness, emphasising the need to address systemic inequalities and create opportunities for marginalised learners. This is particularly critical in South Africa, where the legacies of apartheid continue to influence educational access and outcomes.

The implementation of pedagogical responsiveness is facilitated by several enabling factors, which provide a framework for schools to adapt effectively to their unique challenges. Collaboration and relational agency are essential for fostering a culture of responsiveness (Walton & Osman, 2022) as they enable educators, administrators, and stakeholders to work together while maintaining individual autonomy. This collaborative approach is particularly valuable in Muslim schools, where collective decision-making and shared responsibilities are often integral to the organisational culture.

Epistemic engagement is another critical enabler, requiring educators to critically engage with the knowledge they teach. This includes challenging dominant epistemologies and embracing alternative ways of knowing that reflect the diverse realities of their learners (Maringe & Chiramba, 2021). In addition, contextual sensitivity is paramount, as it allows educators to tailor their approaches to the unique socio-cultural and institutional dynamics of their schools. For South African Muslim schools, this involves navigating the interplay between Islamic values, cultural traditions, and national educational mandates.

The integration of technology and the development of institutional capacity further support the implementation of pedagogical responsiveness (Walton & Osman, 2022). These factors provide the infrastructure and resources needed to adapt to changing contexts effectively. For example, digital tools can facilitate innovative teaching practices, while strong institutional support ensures that educators have access to professional development and other resources necessary for fostering inclusivity.

Walton & Osman (2022) position pedagogical responsiveness within the broader framework of complexity theory, emphasising its importance in navigating the dynamic and interconnected systems that define contemporary education. This alignment underscores the relevance of pedagogical responsiveness in understanding how Muslim school leaders in South Africa address the complexities of their educational environments. By fostering an adaptive and inclusive approach to teaching and leadership, pedagogical responsiveness enables leaders to respond to the unique challenges and opportunities presented by their contexts.

The intersection of pedagogical responsiveness and complexity is illustrated by Walton & Osman (2022) through a Cartesian plane with pedagogical responsiveness on the y-axis and complexity on the x-axis. This framework can be useful for analysing and categorising different leadership approaches within educational settings, including Muslim schools. The

pedagogical responsiveness (y-axis), measures how effectively school leaders respond to the diverse needs of their students. High responsiveness indicates a proactive approach to addressing and adapting to students' varied educational needs. Low responsiveness indicates a more rigid, one-size-fits-all approach. Complexity (x-axis), measures the level of complexity in the school environment, including social, cultural, and economic factors. High complexity suggests a dynamic, multifaceted environment with numerous interacting elements. Low complexity suggests a more stable, predictable environment with fewer interacting elements.

The intersection of these axes creates four quadrants (Walton & Osman, 2022) that describe different leadership approaches based on varying levels of pedagogical responsiveness and environmental complexity. These quadrants are labelled by Walton & Osman (2022) as efficacy, conservatism, inertia and transformational as illustrated in *Figure 1*.

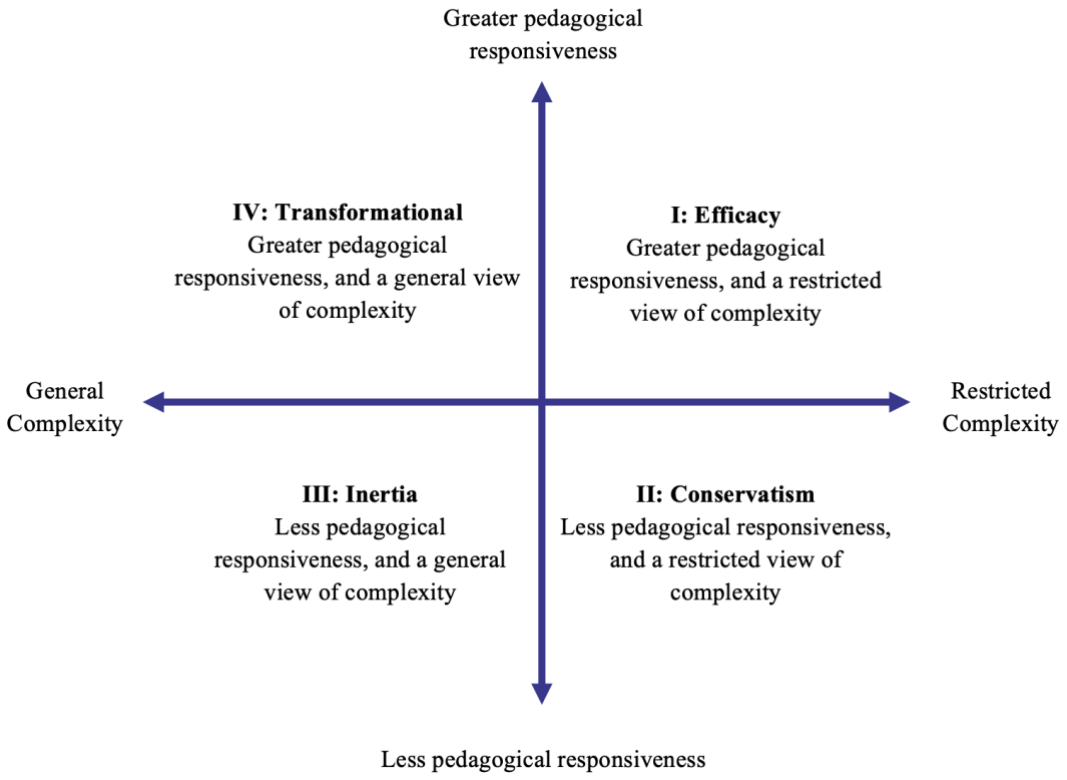


Figure 1: Cartesian Plane of Pedagogical Responsiveness vs Complexity as proposed by Walton & Osman (2022)

Quadrant one (efficacy), would describe school leaders and managers who are highly responsive to students' needs and operate with a restricted view of complexity (Walton & Osman, 2022). In a Muslim school setting, leaders and managers operating in this quadrant would excel in environments where socio-cultural factors are less volatile. They might find it

easier to implement inclusive education practices due to fewer external challenges, focusing on optimising teaching methods and resources. Leaders and managers in the transformational quadrant demonstrate high responsiveness despite operating in highly complex environments. They are capable of navigating and managing the complexities of their environment while fostering inclusive and responsive educational practices (Walton & Osman, 2022). Muslim school leaders and managers in this quadrant demonstrate exceptional ability to handle socio-cultural, economic, and educational challenges. They implement innovative strategies and transformational leadership practices to promote inclusion and equity, despite the complexities they face.

Quadrant two (conservatism) views leaders and managers in a less responsive nature and have a restricted view of the complex nature of their schools (Walton & Osman, 2022). They tend to maintain traditional approaches and resist changes or innovations in educational practices (Walton & Osman, 2022). In a Muslim school context, leaders and managers in this quadrant might adhere to traditional educational practices and face fewer challenges that require adaptive strategies. This conservative approach may limit the implementation of inclusive practices, potentially neglecting the diverse needs of students.

Quadrant three (inertia) views school leaders and managers as being less responsive to students' needs and do not have a good understanding of the complexities of their schools (Walton & Osman, 2022). They struggle to adapt to the complexities of their environment, leading to stagnation and ineffective educational practices. Muslim school leaders and managers in this quadrant may find it challenging to address the diverse needs of their students due to the overwhelming complexity of their environment (Walton & Osman, 2022). Their inability to adapt and innovate may result in ineffective leadership and management and limited progress in implementing inclusive education practices.

Quadrant four (transformational) represents the ideal intersection of high pedagogical responsiveness and high complexity awareness, where school leaders and managers effectively adapt to dynamic educational challenges while maintaining inclusive and contextually relevant teaching practices (Walton & Osman, 2022). Schools within this quadrant embrace innovation and flexibility, ensuring that curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and school management practices evolve in response to both student needs and broader systemic complexities. Leaders and managers operating in this quadrant acknowledge unpredictability but navigate it effectively by fostering inclusive decision-

making, continuous professional development, and a commitment to holistic learner development. These schools recognise that educational challenges are nonlinear and emergent and respond by integrating context-sensitive pedagogical strategies that promote student agency, critical thinking, and long-term adaptability. Ultimately, the transformational quadrant represents an optimal model of leadership and management in complex educational settings, ensuring sustainable, equitable, and forward-thinking approaches to teaching and learning (Walton & Osman, 2022).

Muslim school leaders and managers face unique challenges due to the socio-cultural, economic, and educational complexities specific to their context. The Cartesian plane of pedagogical responsiveness vs. complexity provides a valuable framework for understanding and improving their leadership approaches. By aiming to move towards the transformational quadrant, Muslim school leaders and managers can better navigate these complexities and enhance their pedagogical responsiveness, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

This framework underscores the importance of adaptability and innovation in leadership, particularly in environments marked by high complexity. For Muslim school leaders and managers, this means not only responding effectively to the diverse needs of their students but also developing strategies to manage and leverage the complexities of their socio-cultural context to promote educational success and inclusivity.

In the context of this study, pedagogical responsiveness provides a theoretical foundation for examining how Muslim school leaders and managers navigate the dual mandates of secular and religious education. It highlights the critical role of leadership in creating environments that support inclusivity, equity, and community engagement. This framework also emphasises the need for leaders and managers to be sensitive to the socio-political and cultural factors that shape their schools, enabling them to develop strategies that are both contextually relevant and socially just.

Pedagogical responsiveness offers a comprehensive lens for understanding and addressing the challenges of inclusive education in complex contexts. Its emphasis on inclusivity, relationality, and contextual sensitivity aligns closely with the aims of this research, providing a framework for exploring how Muslim school leaders and managers in South Africa navigate the multifaceted demands of their roles. By integrating this framework with complexity theory, this study contributes to the broader discourse on educational equity and

responsiveness in diverse and dynamic settings. Through this theoretical lens, the research seeks to provide valuable insights into the adaptive strategies employed by leaders and managers to foster inclusive and equitable education within their unique schooling environments.

2.9 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has presented a comprehensive review of the literature and theoretical frameworks that underpin this study, critically engaging with both empirical and conceptual perspectives on inclusive education, leadership in faith-based contexts, and the complexities faced by Muslim schools in South Africa. The discussion highlighted the evolving nature of Islamic education, tracing its development from informal learning spaces to formal institutions that now strive to integrate Islamic values with national education policies.

The review of inclusive education in South Africa illustrated both notable progress and persistent challenges- particularly the tension between policy aspirations and the practical realities of implementation. Issues such as resource constraints, inadequate teacher training, and socio-cultural barriers underscored the need for leadership that is both contextually grounded and adaptively responsive. An exploration of Islamic perspectives on inclusion further revealed how religious principles of equity and justice align with global inclusive education frameworks, offering a faith-based rationale for fostering meaningful inclusion in Muslim schools.

In examining leadership in multicultural and faith-based environments, the chapter emphasised the importance of inclusive leadership practices, collaborative decision-making, and culturally responsive pedagogy. These practices are essential in navigating the competing demands of religious identity, academic excellence, and socio-cultural diversity, and in creating sustainable inclusive learning environments.

To support the analysis of leadership practices in Muslim schools, this chapter also introduced the guiding theoretical frameworks for the study: complexity theory and pedagogical responsiveness, as conceptualised by Walton & Osman's (2022) Cartesian plane. Complexity theory frames schools as dynamic systems shaped by multiple interacting factors, while the pedagogical responsiveness framework provides a structured lens to assess the degree to which leaders are both responsive and contextually aware. Together, these frameworks offer a robust analytical foundation for interpreting the findings and

understanding how Muslim school leaders conceptualise and implement inclusive education in the face of contextual complexity.

By synthesising both global and South African literature with theoretical insights, this chapter lays the foundation for the research analysis that follows. It positions Muslim school leadership within broader scholarly debates and provides a framework through which the study will examine how inclusive education is shaped by complexity, responsiveness, and culturally anchored leadership.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this study, including the research design, paradigm, and data analysis approach. It explains the rationale for adopting a qualitative research approach and a case study design to explore school leadership in Muslim schools. The interpretivist paradigm is discussed as the guiding philosophical framework, allowing for an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives. The chapter also details the data collection process, emphasising the use of semi-structured interviews, and the thematic analysis used to interpret the findings. Finally, measures taken to ensure credibility, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are highlighted.

3.2 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design, which is well-suited for exploring the nuanced and complex phenomena of leadership, inclusivity, and educational management in Muslim schools. A qualitative approach enables the researcher to gather rich, descriptive data, providing a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, perspectives, and actions (Creswell & Potch, 2016). This design aligns with the study's aim to investigate subjective and context-specific understandings of leadership practices within Muslim schools.

Qualitative research prioritises the exploration of meaning and lived experiences over generalisation (Fossey et al., 2002). By employing semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the study captured the complexities of leadership dynamics and the challenges of fostering inclusivity in diverse and resource-constrained school environments. The choice of qualitative design was also informed by the complexity theory framework, as it allows for the analysis of interconnected variables within dynamic educational settings (Morrison, 2008).

The research design further utilised a case study approach, which enabled an in-depth examination of leadership practices within specific Muslim school contexts. Case studies are valuable for exploring phenomena within their real-life context, particularly when boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2011). The case study approach allowed the researcher to analyse the practices, challenges, and opportunities faced by school leaders in depth while accounting for the unique cultural, social, and organisational characteristics of Muslim schools.

3.3 Research Paradigm

This study was situated within the interpretive paradigm, which emphasises the construction of knowledge through the interpretation of participants' lived experiences and social realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Interpretivism is grounded in the belief that reality is subjective and socially constructed, making it appropriate for investigating the multifaceted and context-dependent nature of leadership and inclusivity in Muslim schools.

The interpretive paradigm aligns with the study's use of complexity theory, which recognises that educational environments are dynamic systems influenced by various interacting factors. By adopting this paradigm, the researcher aimed to understand how school leaders perceive and navigate the complexities of their roles in fostering inclusive practices. This approach also allowed for the integration of participants' cultural and religious contexts, as interpretivism values the influence of social and cultural factors on individual experiences (Creswell & Potch, 2016).

The research also drew on phenomenology as a philosophical underpinning, focusing on the lived experiences of school leaders and their interactions with complex systems. Phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of participants' experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019), making it a suitable framework for exploring how school leaders understand and implement inclusive practices within the specific context of Muslim schools.

3.4 Description of Research Sites

This research was conducted across three urban Muslim schools in South Africa, each representing diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts within the broader Johannesburg metropolitan area. All three schools are independent schools that are affiliated with the Association of Muslim Schools (AMS). To maintain anonymity, the schools are referred to as *School A*, *School B*, and *School C* (see *Table 2*).

School A operates in a more affluent part of Johannesburg, providing an enriched educational experience that integrates modern pedagogical approaches with Islamic teachings. This institution prides itself on small class sizes, innovative teaching methodologies, and the incorporation of technology, fostering a balanced environment that addresses both spiritual and academic development.

School B serves a multicultural student body and operates within a densely populated urban environment. It offers a blend of Islamic and secular education, reflecting the cosmopolitan

character of the area. The school is well-established, with a focus on academic excellence, community engagement, and fostering leadership qualities in its students.

School C caters to a predominantly Muslim population and is deeply rooted in the local community. The school is known for its commitment to preserving Islamic traditions alongside a robust national curriculum, the school faces challenges associated with socio-economic disparities, reflecting the diverse backgrounds of its learners.

These three schools collectively offer valuable insights into the complexities faced by Muslim educational institutions in South Africa. Their distinct yet overlapping challenges contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how school leaders navigate pedagogical responsiveness and inclusive education within the unique context of Muslim schooling.

School Number	1	2	3
Name of School	Muslim School A	Muslim School B	Muslim School C
Location	Urban	Urban	Urban
Type	Semi-private	Semi-private	Semi-private
Student Population	+/- 1200	+/- 1000	+/- 980
Number of staff	+/- 64	+/- 80	+/- 50
Year Established	2020	1990	1988

Table 1: Research Site Information

3.5 Data Collection

Researching the pedagogical responsiveness of school leadership and management amidst the complex contexts in which South African Muslim schools operate and function, required a holistic approach that captured the dynamic ways in which principals, deputy principals, HOD's and teachers pedagogically respond to the complexities of the context in which they lead and manage teaching and learning.

Three different Muslim schools in South Africa were purposefully sampled to investigate the pedagogical responsiveness of school leadership and management toward the complexity of their school context. The following criteria were used to purposefully sample these three schools: they were geographically located in the greater Johannesburg region, they were located within urban settings, they represented a mixture of newly formed Muslim schools and older Muslim schools, they were all independent Muslim Schools affiliated with the

Association of Muslim Schools (AMS). At each school, I approached the respective principal to gain permission to conduct one-on-one interviews with different members of staff on one scheduled day. This study employed a combination of maximum variation, expert sampling, and criterion sampling (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). Maximum variation sampling captured a wide range of viewpoints, expert sampling included participants with specialised knowledge in the field, and criterion sampling targeted individuals with specific experience in demonstrating pedagogical responsiveness towards complexities in Muslim Schools (Cresswell, 2013). A total of 15 participants across three different Muslim Schools were willing to be interviewed. These participants included: principals, deputy principals, HOD and primary and high school teachers with at least 3 years of teaching experience in Muslim schools (refer to *Table 1*). This method is particularly effective in capturing the complexities of pedagogical responsiveness and leadership strategies in diverse educational contexts.

Participant	Role in respective school
1	Principal 1
2	Head of Department 1
3	Head of Department 2
4	Head of Department 3
5	Educator 1
6	Head of Department 4
7	Principal 2
8	Deputy Principal 1
9	Head of Department 5
10	Head of Department 6
11	Head of Department 7
12	Principal 3
13	Deputy Principal 2
14	Educator 2
15	Educator 3

Table 2: Participants and their roles in their respective schools

3.6 Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data, a widely used method that allows for the identification, organisation, and interpretation of patterns or themes within qualitative data. This approach was particularly appropriate for examining the complexities and context-dependent nature of leadership and inclusivity in Muslim schools. The thematic analysis provided the flexibility to explore rich, detailed accounts of participants' experiences while maintaining a structured framework for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012)

The process began with the researcher immersing themselves in the data to develop a comprehensive understanding of the information gathered. Transcriptions of interviews and field notes were carefully reviewed to identify key ideas and recurring patterns that reflected participants' perspectives on leadership, communication, and inclusivity. This phase of familiarisation was critical for uncovering the underlying themes that informed the research findings.

After familiarisation, data coding was conducted to systematically organise the information into meaningful segments. Codes were developed inductively, grounded in the data, and aligned with the research questions and theoretical framework (Cohen et al., 2007). The process involved tagging specific excerpts that captured important concepts, such as "inclusive leadership," "collaborative decision-making," and "complexity in leadership roles." These codes served as the foundation for identifying broader themes.

Once initial codes were established, related codes were grouped to form preliminary themes. The themes reflected recurring ideas that emerged across multiple participants, highlighting the shared experiences and challenges faced by school leaders and managers. For example, codes related to communication barriers, structured collaboration, and trust-building were consolidated under the theme of "inclusive leadership practices." This process ensured that themes were both comprehensive and aligned with the study's objectives.

Themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and alignment with the research questions. This stage involved evaluating the consistency of the data within each theme and ensuring that the themes were distinct from one another. For instance, the theme of "role ambiguity in leadership" was separated from "collaborative decision-making" to ensure clarity and focus. Refinement also included the integration of theoretical perspectives, such as complexity theory, to contextualise the findings within the broader literature.

Once the themes were finalised, they were defined and named to capture their essence and relevance to the study. Each theme was given a clear description that articulated its significance to the research and its connection to the theoretical framework. For example, the theme “inclusive leadership practices” was defined as the strategies employed by leaders and managers to foster a culture of trust, collaboration, and inclusivity in the school environment.

The final step involved interpreting the themes and integrating them into the research findings. This phase involved synthesising the data with theoretical insights, particularly complexity theory and the Cartesian plane framework (Walton & Osman, 2022). Direct quotations from participants were used to support and enrich the findings, ensuring that their voices were authentically represented. For example, participants’ reflections on structured communication channels and their impact on trust-building provided concrete evidence of the themes identified.

To enhance the credibility of the data analysis, the study employed multiple validation strategies. Triangulation was used by incorporating multiple data sources, including interviews and field notes, to cross-verify the findings (Carter, 2014; Vivek et al., 2023). Member checking was also conducted, allowing participants to review the transcriptions and interpretations to ensure accuracy and authenticity. Additionally, peer debriefing was employed to provide critical feedback on the coding and thematic development, further strengthening the reliability of the analysis.

Thematic analysis, with its structured yet flexible approach, enabled the researcher to uncover rich insights into the leadership and management dynamics of Muslim schools. By grounding the analysis in participants’ experiences and aligning it with complexity theory, the study provided a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities in fostering inclusivity and responsiveness in educational leadership.

3.7 Credibility and Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of this qualitative research study, several strategies were employed to establish credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, as outlined by (Gunawan, 2015; Shenton, 2004; Stahl & King, 2020). Trustworthiness is essential in qualitative research because it ensures that the findings are reliable, valid, and reflective of the participants' true experiences and perspectives. By maintaining a high level

of trustworthiness, this research can withstand scrutiny and be deemed credible and valuable by the academic community and other stakeholders.

Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with participants, which is crucial for gaining a deep understanding of their experiences and perspectives. This involved spending significant time in the field, building rapport with participants, and observing their interactions and contexts. Such engagement allowed for the collection of rich, detailed data that captures the complexity of the phenomena under study. Additionally, triangulation of data sources was employed to corroborate findings from multiple perspectives, enhancing the validity of the results (Cohen et al., 2007; Shenton, 2004). Through conducting interviews with multiple stakeholders in three different Muslim school, the study provides a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research questions.

Dependability was ensured through meticulous and transparent documentation of the research process. This included detailed descriptions of the data collection and analysis procedures, which allowed other researchers to follow the same process and potentially replicate the study. Member checking, a key strategy for enhancing dependability, involved sharing the preliminary findings with participants to verify the accuracy of their contributions and interpretations (Gunawan, 2015; Motulsky, 2021; Shenton, 2004). This feedback loop not only validated the data but also engages participants in the research process, fostering a sense of ownership and co-construction of knowledge.

Confirmability was maintained through the practice of reflexivity, where the researcher continually examined their own biases, assumptions, and preconceptions. Reflexive journaling was a critical tool in this process, enabling the researcher to document subjective experiences, thoughts, and reflections throughout the study (Gunawan, 2015; Shenton, 2004). This ongoing self-awareness helped to mitigate the influence of personal biases on the research findings and ensured that the data and interpretations are grounded in the participants' realities rather than my own perspectives.

Transferability was addressed by providing a thorough and detailed description of the research context, participants, and data collection procedures. This level of detail allows readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other similar contexts or populations (Shenton, 2004). By offering a rich contextual backdrop, the study enables others to determine whether the insights and conclusions can be meaningfully applied to their own settings or circumstances.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Ethics in qualitative research involve considerations of autonomy, beneficence, and justice (Orb et al., 2001). These principles have guided the conduct of this study to ensure the protection of participants' rights and well-being.

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was sought from the University of the Witwatersrand's Ethics Committee in accordance with their institutional guidelines and procedures. This step ensured that the research adheres to established ethical standards and protects the interests of all stakeholders involved (Orb et al., 2001). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, clarifying the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without repercussions. This ensured respect towards the autonomy of the participants (Orb et al., 2001). Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and measures were in place to securely store and handle all data. Personal identifiers were removed and coded to protect the identity of participants. Data is and will remain securely stored and handled, with access limited to the research team. These measures align with the ethical requirement to protect participant confidentiality and data integrity (Orb et al., 2001).

Throughout the research process, efforts were made to minimise any potential harm or discomfort to participants. Sensitive topics were approached with care, and participants were provided with appropriate support when they experience distress. This commitment to minimising harm reflects the principle of beneficence, which requires researchers to maximise benefits and minimise risks to participants (Orb et al., 2001).

The research also upheld principles of respect, fairness, and integrity in all interactions with participants and stakeholders. Respect for persons involves recognising the dignity and autonomy of participants. Fairness in the research process ensured equitable treatment of all participants, and integrity involves maintaining honesty and transparency throughout the research (Orb et al., 2001).

Any conflicts of interest were transparently disclosed, and efforts were made to mitigate their impact on the research process. By adhering to these ethical considerations and seeking approval from the University Ethics Committee, I believe that this research upheld the highest standards of ethical conduct and ensure the integrity and validity of the research findings.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the research methodology adopted in this study, including the qualitative research approach, case study design, and interpretivist paradigm, which align with the study's objectives. The methods of data collection and analysis, particularly the use of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, were discussed to demonstrate the rigor of the research process. Additionally, measures taken to ensure credibility, trustworthiness, and ethical integrity were highlighted, ensuring that the study maintains academic rigor. The methodological choices made in this chapter provide a strong foundation for analysing the data and drawing meaningful conclusions about school leadership and management in Muslim schools.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings derived from an in-depth thematic analysis of interviews conducted with school principals, deputy principals, Heads of Departments, and teachers withing South African Muslim schools. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of complexity theory and pedagogical responsiveness, the findings critically examine how school leadership and management navigate the intricate challenges of their contexts. The analysis seeks to uncover the nuanced interplay between leadership and management practices, contextual influences, and the operational realities of Muslim schools functioning within South Africa's complex educational landscape.

The findings are structured thematically to address the study's central research questions, offering an academically rigorous and contextually sensitive understanding of the leadership and management strategies employed to lead and manage the complexities faced by Muslim schools in South Africa. This chapter not only highlights the key contextual and operational challenges faced by these school leaders and managers but also illuminates the ways in which they respond to their unique complexities inherent in their environments.

4.2 Research Findings

This findings section presents six key themes (see *Table 3*) that emerged from the analysis of participant interviews, shedding light on the leadership, management, and pedagogical practices within Muslim schools in South Africa. These themes underscore the challenges and opportunities faced by school leaders and managers as they navigate the complexities of fostering inclusive and effective educational environments that align with both Islamic values and contemporary educational standards.

	Emergent Themes
4.2.1	Inclusive leadership and Collaborative decision-making
4.2.2	Strategic curriculum integration
4.2.3	Socio-cultural sensitivity and Adaptive student support
4.2.4	Strengthening parental and community involvement
4.5.5	Teacher well-being and professional development
4.5.6	Balanced technology integration

Table 1: Emergent Themes of this study

4.2.1 Inclusive leadership and Collaborative decision-making

Inclusive leadership and collaborative decision-making play a crucial role in fostering equitable and effective school management, particularly within Muslim schools in South Africa. Given the socio-cultural diversity of learners, the intersection of religious values with secular educational policies, and the dynamic challenges of school governance, leadership within these institutions requires a contextually responsive and adaptive approach. Complexity theory provides a useful framework for understanding how school leaders and managers operate in non-linear and interconnected systems, where diverse elements interact dynamically to shape institutional outcomes (Morrison, 2008). Effective leadership within this context necessitates the adoption of inclusive strategies that prioritise meaningful collaboration, open communication, and shared decision-making. Research on inclusive leadership suggests that school leaders who engage in consultative and distributed leadership practices foster environments that are more resilient, responsive, and supportive of all stakeholders (Leithwood et al., 2020; Romanuck Murphy, 2018)

This section explores the findings related to inclusive leadership and collaborative decision-making in Muslim schools, highlighting the ways in which school leaders foster stakeholder engagement and manage complexity. The discussion draws on Walton & Osman (2022) Cartesian Plane of Pedagogical Responsiveness and Complexity to assess the extent to which school leaders effectively navigate challenges through adaptive leadership and structured collaboration. By examining the role of communication, shared decision-making, and role clarity in school governance, this section underscores the significance of inclusive leadership practices in ensuring the sustainability and success of Muslim schools.

Participants emphasised the importance of fostering open communication, engaging in meaningful consultation, and creating collaborative environments that empower all

stakeholders. Principal 1 identified communication as a previous weakness in her school and described their efforts to improve it through structured channels such as regular meetings and surveys. Principal 1 explained:

"*One of the weaknesses was communication... We have more regular meetings now. There's briefings held twice a week, a full staff meeting once a month, and communication with parents is more regular through surveys."*

The initiative to enhance communication through structured channels, such as regular meetings and surveys, illustrates a practical application of complexity theory by addressing a systemic weakness that undermined cohesion. Complexity theory posits that school systems are dynamic, interconnected environments where small changes can lead to significant transformations in overall functionality (Manson, 2001). By implementing structured communication strategies, school leaders in Muslim schools are engaging in adaptive management, responding to emergent challenges rather than relying on static leadership approaches. As highlighted by Romanuck Murphy (2018), effective school leadership in inclusive education settings necessitates strong communication frameworks to ensure all stakeholders are aligned in their goals. Romanuck Murphy (2018) argues that inclusive school leaders must proactively cultivate communication pathways to mitigate misunderstandings and promote shared decision-making. This perspective aligns with the findings in this study, where improved communication channels contributed to increased trust and collaboration between school leaders, educators, and parents. Furthermore, complexity theory suggests that systems evolve through interactions between their various components (Byrne, 2002). In the case of Muslim schools, fostering open dialogue between school leadership, management and parents creates a feedback loop that strengthens institutional practices, making them more responsive to the diverse needs of learners.

Similarly, HOD 2 emphasised the critical role of communication in effective leadership, noting that:

"*Communication is key... If you don't communicate effectively within time, and if you don't commit... your department also tends to give off the same effect.*"

These insights underscore the importance of timely and clear communication in aligning objectives and fostering inclusivity. This aligns with the complexity theory principle that emphasises the importance of shared information in maintaining organisational equilibrium.

Leithwood et al. (2020) argue that clear communication pathways facilitate better decision-making and enable leaders to align individual contributions with collective objectives. This highlights the critical role of communication in managing the dynamic interplay of relationships within schools.

The findings also highlight the value of collaborative decision-making as a strategy for navigating complexity. Nel et al. (2014) emphasise that collaboration is a fundamental component of inclusive education, particularly in contexts where teachers, school leaders, and stakeholders must work together to address diverse learner needs. Their study on South African teachers' perspectives on collaboration within an inclusive education system found that collaborative decision-making enhances the effectiveness of inclusive practices by fostering shared ownership, distributed leadership, and collective problem-solving. This aligns with complexity theory, which posits that educational environments are non-linear and emergent, requiring school leaders to engage in adaptive, context-sensitive decision-making rather than relying on rigid hierarchical structures (Byrne, 2002).

In Muslim schools, where school leaders and managers must balance religious, cultural, and educational expectations, collaborative decision-making allows for more contextually relevant and inclusive solutions to challenges. Nel et al. (2014) argue that when teachers school leaders and managers engage in joint decision-making, they develop a sense of shared responsibility that leads to more sustainable and effective implementation of inclusive education policies. This perspective is evident in the findings of this study, where participants highlighted the need for greater consultation and dialogue among all stakeholders to ensure inclusivity is meaningfully embedded within school practices. The concept of pedagogical responsiveness, a cornerstone of complexity theory, suggests that leadership should be attuned to the diverse needs of stakeholders and adapt practices to create inclusive environments.

Educator 3 emphasised the need for two-way consultation, arguing that it should not be limited to hierarchical leadership and noted:

"*It works both ways. A teacher obviously cannot decide without consulting those above him, and the same should apply to leadership when making decisions that impact teaching."*

This reflects the need for a leadership style that values collective input and distributes decision-making authority and emphasises the Islamic principle of "*Mashurah*" (Arabic term

for ‘consultation’), which encourages collective decision-making and values diverse perspectives. This aligns with distributed leadership model, which argues that collaborative leadership enhances organisational capacity by leveraging the strengths and perspectives of all stakeholders (Harris et al., 2007; Spillane, 2005).

However, as highlighted by Educator 1 and Educator 3, hierarchical leadership structures that exclude teachers from decision-making processes can undermine morale and limit the organisation’s ability to respond effectively to challenges. Educator 1 stated:

“*Don’t limit leadership to a certain group of people. Distribute it. There are teachers in your school that have strengths that sometimes outweigh people in management.”*

Similarly, Educator 3 stated:

“*It doesn’t create a very happy or enjoyable environment... It doesn’t provide you with a feeling to get you out of bed or something to look forward to.”*

This dissatisfaction underscores the importance of involving teachers in discussions that directly affect their work, fostering a sense of ownership and motivation among staff. This perspective further highlights the need to recognise and utilise the expertise of teachers, ensuring that leadership practices are inclusive and supportive of all staff members.

Walton & Osman’s (2022) Cartesian plane framework provides a lens to understand these dynamics, categorising leadership and management approaches based on their responsiveness and engagement with complexity. Leaders and managers who actively involve teachers in decision-making are more likely to position themselves within the transformational or efficacy quadrants, characterised by adaptability and inclusivity. Conversely, leaders who centralise decision-making and resist consultation risk falling into the conservatism or inertia quadrants, where responsiveness is limited, and innovation is stifled

The ambiguity of leadership roles, as identified in the findings, presents a significant challenge within Muslim schools. Fleish & Christie (2004) argue that structural changes in education, particularly in post-apartheid South Africa, have contributed to role confusion among school leadership and management, affecting school effectiveness and improvement. Their study highlights how leadership and management in South African schools are often caught between bureaucratic expectations, policy reforms, and the practical demands of managing diverse educational environments. This aligns with complexity theory, which suggests that educational systems function as dynamic and interdependent networks where

leadership roles must be continuously negotiated and adapted to emerging challenges (Byrne, 2002; Mason, 2008).

Complexity theory underscores that unclear roles can disrupt the flow of information and decision-making, leading to inefficiencies and conflicts. Deputy Principal 1 highlighted the initial confusion caused by overlapping roles and unclear responsibilities within the leadership structure:

"*It took a whole year for people to understand my role. There was a difficulty differentiating who to turn to, especially with someone else still being the principal."*

This ambiguity often resulted in inefficiencies and misunderstandings, particularly regarding decision-making authority and accountability. Fleish & Christie (2004) emphasise that unclear leadership roles can lead to inefficiencies, conflicts, and a lack of accountability, ultimately undermining school improvement efforts. This is evident in the findings, where participants described difficulties in differentiating responsibilities, particularly with the introduction of new leadership positions such as operational managers. Without clear role demarcation, decision-making authority becomes fragmented, confusing who is responsible for key aspects of school governance and management. To address these challenges, leaders like Principal 2 emphasised the importance of clearly defining roles and responsibilities within the management team. Principal 2 explained:

"*If we distinguish roles and responsibilities, we don't have issues. It's important to set boundaries, especially for the operational manager and deputy principal roles."*

These insights underscore the need for structured and well-communicated leadership and management frameworks to prevent role overlaps and ensure cohesive functioning within the leadership and management teams. This aligns with the Cartesian Plane of Pedagogical Responsiveness and Complexity (Walton & Osman, 2022) , which highlights that schools with ambiguous leadership structures are more likely to fall into the 'Inertia' quadrant, where both responsiveness and engagement with complexity are low. Conversely, schools that clarify and distribute leadership responsibilities are positioned within the 'transformational' quadrant, where leaders effectively navigate complexity through adaptive and responsive strategies. The findings suggest that structured leadership is essential for fostering inclusive and responsive school environments.

Deputy Principal 2 added another layer to this discussion by critiquing the role of school boards in complicating leadership and management structures in Muslim schools. The participant noted that board members, often lacking educational expertise, tend to impose business-oriented approaches on schools, thereby undermining the authority and expertise of educational leaders. Deputy Principal 2 explained:

"*You get these businessmen on the school board, and they think they can run the school like a grocery shop. They undermine the experience and expertise of principals and teachers.*"

This governance model not only creates tension but also limits the ability of school leadership and management to implement inclusive and pedagogically responsive strategies effectively. Addressing this misalignment requires a shared understanding of the school's mission among all stakeholders, including the operational manager, principal, and board members, to streamline roles and avoid conflicts. Fleisch & Christie (2004) advocate for leadership strategies that emphasise clarity, collaboration and distributed leadership to improve school effectiveness. By clearly defining roles and responsibilities within Muslim schools, leaders can enhance efficiency, accountability, and inclusivity, ensuring that schools function as cohesive systems rather than fragmented entities struggling with structural inconsistencies.

The challenges posed by hierarchical leadership structures were evident in several accounts, where a lack of inclusivity and consultation led to internal tensions and reduced morale. HOD 5 described such dynamics, stating:

"*We do have our issues and differences between management and the senior leadership team... I would like us to function as a cohesive unit where we all have a shared goal."*

The findings highlight that without clear leadership frameworks, schools risk internal dissonance, leading to lower staff morale and ineffective management. This reinforces the importance of leadership models that prioritise inclusivity and shared decision-making, which complexity theory suggests is necessary for schools to function as adaptive, self-organizing systems capable of responding to emerging challenges.

Additionally, HOD 7 noted a disconnect between school leaders and classroom realities, observing that leaders often spend more time on administrative tasks than engaging directly with learners and educators. HOD 7 explained:

"*Our Islamic school leaders are not spending enough time in the classroom... They are so inundated with admin, responsibilities, meetings, and work, that they are not getting to know our children enough."*

This detachment underscores the need for balanced leadership practices that prioritise both administrative efficiency and direct involvement in teaching and learning processes.

Structured collaboration was identified as a key strategy for fostering inclusivity and addressing challenges. HOD 4 highlighted the role of regular departmental meetings in facilitating collaborative problem-solving, stating:

"*The meetings are structured but are centred around how we better achieve our objectives... It's a time where we can share best practices and look at how to solve certain problems.*"

Such platforms enable staff to engage in open dialogue, share responsibilities, and collectively work toward school improvement. Principal 1 also emphasised the value of collaboration within her senior management team (SMT), describing it as both a support system and a sounding board for decision-making. Principal 1 explained:

"*I have an amazing team... my SMT is excellent. Sometimes it's just my sounding board, where I throw things out there just to get feedback.*"

These examples illustrate how inclusive leadership practices create opportunities for shared responsibility and collective accountability, ultimately strengthening school culture and improving educational outcomes in Muslim schools

4.2.2 Strategic Curriculum Integration

The integration of Islamic values with a secular curriculum in Muslim schools presents a complex, multifaceted challenge that requires adaptive and contextually responsive leadership and management. Complexity theory provides a useful lens through which to examine this challenge, as it highlights how school environments are dynamic, nonlinear systems influenced by multiple interacting factors (Mason, 2008). Leaders and managers in Muslim schools must navigate the tension between government regulations and the preservation of Islamic identity, as well as the diverse backgrounds of learners. Pedagogical responsiveness, which emphasises contextually relevant and adaptive teaching practices (Walton & Osman, 2022), further informs the discussion by underscoring the need for flexible, inclusive approaches to curriculum design.

The Cartesian plane of pedagogical responsiveness and complexity (Walton & Osman, 2022) provides a framework to assess the extent to which school leaders and managers are effectively responding to these challenges. Schools that exhibit high pedagogical responsiveness and a sophisticated understanding of complexity fall into the transformational quadrant, where leaders proactively adapt their curricular and instructional strategies to integrate Islamic values meaningfully while maintaining compliance with secular regulations. Conversely, schools that demonstrate low responsiveness and a rigid view of complexity fall into the conservatism quadrant, where efforts to integrate Islamic values are often superficial and dictated by static regulatory frameworks. This plane helps situate Muslim schools within a broader spectrum of leadership adaptability, guiding the discussion on curriculum integration.

Engelbrecht et al. (2016) highlight the disconnect between the idealism of education policies and the realities of their implementation, particularly in contexts where schools must navigate conflicting mandates. Similarly, the findings revealed that the tension between secular education regulations and the desire to maintain an Islamic ethos reflects broader challenges in policy implementation, where schools struggle to balance compliance with state requirements while preserving their religious identity. Complexity theory posits that educational institutions operate within regulatory environments that impose constraints but also create opportunities for adaptive leadership (Baltaci & Balcı, 2017; Fidan & Balcı, 2017; Kershner & McQuillan, 2016). In this study, Principal 1 articulated this challenge, stating:

"*Government policy, regulations from the education department, expectations... prevent us from actually running the school and implementing things the way we would like to."*

This highlights the structural limitations that Muslim school leaders and managers must contend with, particularly in balancing compliance with secular education standards and the desire to maintain an Islamic educational philosophy. Engelbrecht et al. (2016) highlight how inclusive education policies, while designed to create equitable access to education, often fail to accommodate the unique needs of faith-based schools. The implementation of inclusive education in South Africa has been characterised by an overemphasis on compliance with national frameworks, leaving little space for faith-based schools to fully integrate their religious and cultural ethos into mainstream education. Muslim schools must, therefore, engage in strategic adaptation, often negotiating between governmental requirements and community expectations to maintain their religious identity. This regulatory

rigidity results in a fragmented approach, where Islamic teachings are often incorporated in a superficial or tokenistic manner rather than being deeply embedded in curriculum structures.

Adaptive leadership in complex environments requires strategic decision-making, negotiation, and innovation (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). School leaders and managers in this study employed varied strategies to maintain Islamic values while aligning with government mandates, such as embedding Islamic perspectives across all subjects rather than limiting them to Islamic Studies. This aligns with previous research indicating that context-sensitive curricular adaptation is crucial in faith-based schools that operate within secular educational systems (Fataar, 2003, 2005).

According to the Cartesian plane, schools that successfully integrate Islamic values across multiple subjects without facing significant regulatory friction exhibit characteristics of efficacy, where leaders and managers maintain a high level of responsiveness but within constrained complexity. Conversely, schools that struggle to balance these competing demands may find themselves in the inertia quadrant, where leaders recognise the challenges but fail to implement meaningful curriculum adaptations. These distinctions help in analysing why some Muslim schools are more effective in curriculum integration than others.

The findings also highlight the diversity of learner backgrounds as a major challenge in curriculum integration. Complexity theory emphasises the unpredictable and emergent nature of school systems (Mason, 2008; Morrison, 2006; Morrison, 2008), meaning that a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to succeed in diverse classrooms. This was evident in the experiences shared by HOD 2, who stated:

"*There are learners who come from very strong Islamic backgrounds, and they challenge you within the classroom... whereas others may not have the same exposure to Islam."*

Pedagogical responsiveness becomes particularly relevant in such contexts, as it calls for differentiated instruction that accommodates diverse learner needs (Walton, 2018).

One approach employed by educators in this study involved contextualising secular content within Islamic teachings. For example, HOD 7 described integrating Islamic references into English literature lessons:

"*If I am teaching a poem... I'm sure to bring in the Quran, I'm sure to bring in the ideas behind what our religion says about it.*"

This practice aligns with the literature on integrated curriculum design, which advocates for embedding cultural and religious perspectives into subject areas to create more meaningful and holistic learning experiences (Marshall, 2024; Sidqurrahman, 2024). Such integration fosters both academic and moral development, supporting a dual-identity approach where students engage with both secular knowledge and religious values.

From the perspective of Walton & Osman's (2022) framework, schools that successfully balance inclusivity and curriculum adaptation demonstrate transformational leadership. In contrast, schools that maintain rigid, standardised curricula, failing to accommodate student diversity, risk falling into the conservatism quadrant. Leaders and managers in the latter category often struggle to reconcile traditional Islamic education methods with modern pedagogical demands, limiting their ability to create a truly integrated curriculum.

However, pedagogical responsiveness also requires careful balance, particularly when addressing sensitive or contentious topics. Educator 1's account of teaching Islamic history underscores this tension:

"*When you teach a topic like Karbala, you have to be careful not to favour any side and just teach the facts*."

This highlights the need for neutrality and sensitivity, ensuring that diverse perspectives within the Muslim community are acknowledged while maintaining an inclusive classroom environment. Research suggests that faith-based schools must navigate internal theological differences carefully to ensure an educational experience that is inclusive rather than divisive.

Despite efforts to integrate Islamic principles into secular subjects, the findings suggest that the dual-curriculum model remains limited in fostering holistic learner development. Deputy Principal 1 acknowledged this shortcoming, emphasising that:

"*Our focus has been on academics and Islamiyaat, but we need to look at the bigger picture. Our learners need opportunities to develop their social skills, leadership abilities, and character outside of the classroom."*

It is thus evident that Muslim schools often succeed in embedding religious values within academic subjects, but fail in providing extracurricular programs focusing on social, emotional, and ethical development are equally vital. Engelbrecht et al. (2016) further argue that the rigidity of policy frameworks limits the ability of faith-based schools to provide holistic education, as compliance pressures often force schools to prioritise academics over

broader developmental objectives. The challenges of maintaining both regulatory adherence and faith-based curriculum design contribute to inconsistencies in the quality of education, particularly in balancing spiritual, social, and academic competencies.

Schools that actively incorporate leadership and character-building activities into their curriculum demonstrate high pedagogical responsiveness and fall within the efficacy or transformational quadrants of Walton & Osman's (2022) framework. Conversely, schools that emphasise rote learning and memorisation of Islamic teachings, without providing practical applications, are more likely to fall into the inertia or conservatism quadrants, where responsiveness to real-world educational needs is minimal.

Holistic education in Muslim schools should include leadership training, community service, and interfaith engagement, providing students with opportunities to apply Islamic teachings in real-world contexts. This aligns with the pedagogical goal of developing well-rounded learners who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible and ethically grounded. Several participants in this study expressed a desire for more structured initiatives that nurture leadership skills and character development, highlighting the need for a more expansive, multi-dimensional approach to Islamic education.

Another key finding is that Islamisation efforts in curriculum design are often superficial, lacking the depth and intentionality needed to truly integrate Islamic values into all aspects of learning. Deputy Principal 2 criticised this approach, stating:

"*In many cases, it's like putting a sticker on a secular curriculum, calling it Islamic, but not truly changing the essence of how the subjects are taught*."

Complexity theory suggests that curriculum design should not be viewed as a static structure but as an evolving, adaptive process (Osberg & Biesta, 2010). It is thus evident that for an effective curriculum integration to take in Muslim schools, a research-informed approach is necessary, one that incorporates Islamic epistemology while ensuring alignment with contemporary educational best practices.

The need for intentional, systematic Islamisation is particularly evident in the case of schools where integration occurs in an ad hoc manner, as noted by HOD 6:

"*A lot is side by side. But there is merging as well... we have these few opportunities... certain questions were phrased to bring in line the Islamic perspective.*"

This lack of consistency points to a broader issue of fragmented curriculum planning, which complexity theory suggests can be mitigated through more structured, iterative models of curriculum adaptation.

The findings highlight the challenges and opportunities of integrating Islamic values with a secular curriculum, underscoring the need for strategic, contextually responsive leadership. Complexity theory suggests that curriculum integration should not be seen as a rigid framework but as an evolving, adaptive process that responds to the needs of learners, regulatory constraints, and shifting socio-cultural contexts. Pedagogical responsiveness further reinforces the need for differentiated instruction and inclusive curriculum strategies that account for learner diversity while maintaining educational integrity.

To move beyond superficial Islamisation, Islamic schools must adopt a systematic, research-driven approach to curriculum design, one that seamlessly integrates Islamic values across all subject areas while maintaining academic rigor. The goal is to shift more schools into the transformational quadrant, where leaders and managers effectively navigate complexity while maintaining high responsiveness to student needs. This shift requires ongoing professional development, curriculum innovation, and strategic leadership committed to both Islamic values and modern educational best practices. Additionally, the expansion of extracurricular and leadership development initiatives is essential to fostering holistic student development. By applying complexity-informed and responsive leadership strategies, Islamic schools can create a dynamic and inclusive educational experience that equips students with both academic excellence and a strong moral compass, preparing them for meaningful contributions to both their faith communities and broader society.

4.2.3 Socio-cultural Sensitivity and Adaptive Student Support

The socio-cultural and economic diversity within Muslim schools in South Africa presents both challenges and opportunities for leadership, teaching, and learning. Participants highlighted the complexities introduced by learners' diverse backgrounds and the strategies employed to create inclusive and supportive environments. This aligns with Walton & Engelbrecht (2024) argument that inclusive education in South Africa must be understood within a historical and socio-political context, where structural inequalities continue to shape educational access and quality. The findings thus underscore the importance of adaptive leadership and culturally responsive pedagogical practices in addressing disparities and fostering equity in Muslim schools.

A significant challenge in Muslim schools is the wide socio-economic range of learners, which directly influences teaching strategies, resource allocation, and learner engagement. Principal 1 described this disparity vividly.

"*Some of our learners haven't been to Sandton City. The background of learners affects the kind of examples we use in our teaching, it affects the kind of resources we use.*"

This disparity impacts learners' access to educational resources, such as laptops and internet connectivity, creating inequitable learning opportunities. Engelbrecht et al. (2016) note that despite the idealism of inclusive education policies, economic inequalities remain a primary barrier to access, reinforcing systemic exclusion in resource-constrained schools. Teachers in Muslim schools must therefore adapt their instructional methods to accommodate this diversity, ensuring that all learners, regardless of their socio-economic background, are included in the learning process.

HOD 1 expanded on the financial challenges facing schools, noting an increase in non-paying families:

"*The last 10 years... if you look at the increase in our non-paying school fees, it's greater than it's ever been.*"

This trend not only strains school resources but also highlights the need for innovative leadership strategies to sustain educational quality while addressing learners' socio-economic realities. Naicker & Ncokwana (2016) argue that school principals in both fee-paying and no-fee schools face increasing difficulties in securing financial sustainability, requiring them to engage in strategic planning and stakeholder collaboration to maintain school operations. Muslim schools must therefore balance resource allocation with equity, ensuring that all learners have access to necessary support and tools for academic success.

The linguistic diversity of learners adds another layer of complexity to inclusive education. Engelbrecht (2020) highlights that multilingual classrooms require pedagogical adaptation, where teachers must employ flexible language policies and instructional techniques to accommodate learners who are not proficient in the language of instruction. HOD 1 explained the disconnect between curriculum expectations and learners' home languages:

"*In a class we teach English as a home language... But in my class, there are almost 80 percent of the children. English is not a home language.*"

This disparity necessitates differentiated instruction to bridge language gaps and support learners in mastering academic content in Muslim schools. Teachers are often required to scaffold lessons and use simplified language to ensure comprehension as a pedagogical response.

HOD 2 highlighted the cultural diversity within schools, noting its influence on both learners and staff:

"*The school is an Islamic school, it's a Muslim school. However, it's a very diverse school... For example, the educators within the school are not of the same religion, but they are made to feel comfortable within the school.*"

This diversity enriches the school environment but also requires culturally sensitive policies that respect individual differences while promoting unity (Engelbrecht et al., 2016). Educator 3 elaborated on the challenges posed by cultural disconnects between teachers and learners:

"*You look at the staff, the majority would be from an Indian background. Whereas the student base is mainly foreign, meaning Somali or Ethiopian. It causes difficulty in understanding why children act a certain way or do certain things a certain way.*"

Mahaye & Ajani (2023) highlight that cultural insensitivity within schools exacerbates social exclusion, particularly when there is a disconnect between educators and learners from different backgrounds. To address these challenges, it was suggested by Educator 3 that teachers either learn about the cultural heritage of their students or the school employs staff familiar with these contexts. This approach promotes a more inclusive environment where learners feel understood and supported.

Participants emphasised the importance of structured support systems to address the diverse needs of learners. HOD 3 described the role of the School-Based Support Team (SBST) in identifying and addressing barriers to learning:

"*We have educators that are trained in picking up learning difficulties... The support we try to give them is that extra care in teaching to make sure they understand.*"

This structured approach ensures that learners with specific needs receive tailored interventions. However, resource constraints often limit the effectiveness of these systems. Engelbrecht et al. (2016) argue that while South African policies advocate for inclusive education support services, inadequate funding and a shortage of trained personnel hinder

effective implementation in many schools. This sentiment is echoed in some Muslim schools as HOD 1 noted:

"*We do the testing... But obviously because we don't have in-house therapists, we have to tell the parents to bring the evidence. Now, that's where we face a challenge.*"

This reliance on external service providers underscores the need for greater investment in internal support structures, such as full-time therapists and specialised educators.

Several participants highlighted initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity and character development. Some schools, for example, offer scholarships and bursaries to support learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Principal 2 explained:

"*We cater to learners from all backgrounds. We have on-site psychologists to assist students with social issues, ensuring that their challenges don't hinder their academic progress.*"

In addition to academic support, schools emphasised the importance of nurturing learners' social and moral development. HOD 5 articulated this dual focus:

"*As a Muslim school... I feel like we are failing... We have challenges. It's technology, it's TV and children have their cell phones... I would like to see our children's character... akhlaq (character)... that for me is very crucial.*"

This emphasis on character development reflects the schools' mission to produce well-rounded individuals who excel academically and embody Islamic values. Initiatives such as Social Responsibility Clubs, described by Principal 2, aim to instil empathy and civic responsibility among learners. This aligns with Walton & Engelbrecht (2024) findings that inclusive education extends beyond academics to include social and emotional learning, which is particularly vital in diverse schooling contexts.

Schools often face external challenges that impact their ability to provide a conducive learning environment. HOD 5 described the difficulties posed by the school's location:

"*We are based in an area that's not the best of localities... we had to shut down school for the day because of... service delivery protests*."

Such disruptions highlight the need for leadership strategies that prioritise safety while maintaining educational continuity. Mahaye & Ajani (2023) argue that school instability in South Africa is exacerbated by socio-political factors such as service delivery protests, crime,

and economic hardships. Their systematic review highlights how these external disruptions not only impact school management but also create psychological distress for learners and educators, ultimately affecting academic performance and overall school effectiveness. As such, adaptive leadership is necessary to implement contingency plans that prioritise student safety and learning continuity in volatile environments. For Muslim schools, building resilient school systems that can adapt to external pressures is crucial for sustaining learning in challenging contexts.

The findings highlight the intricate interplay between socio-economic, linguistic, and cultural factors in shaping the educational experiences of learners in Muslim schools. Adaptive leadership and culturally responsive pedagogy are essential for addressing these complexities and ensuring inclusivity. By investing in robust support systems, fostering cultural understanding, and prioritising character development, Muslim schools can create environments that reflect their dual mission of academic excellence and Islamic ethos. These strategies not only enhance learner outcomes but also prepare students to navigate diverse and dynamic societal contexts with confidence and empathy.

4.2.4 Strengthening Parental and Community Partnerships

Parental engagement is widely acknowledged as a crucial determinant of student success and school improvement. However, within Muslim schools in South Africa, parental engagement presents unique complexities that require contextually responsive leadership and management strategies. The findings reveal diverse perspectives and experiences regarding the role of parents in the teaching and learning process. Aspects such as parental reluctance to acknowledge learning barriers, socio-cultural dynamics, fluctuating levels of involvement, and the absence of formal engagement structures emerged as significant factors affecting the school-parent partnership. This aligns with the work of Engelbrecht et al. (2005),who argue that the successful implementation of inclusive education depends on fostering positive relationships between parents and schools. However, many parents experience challenges in asserting their rights or engaging meaningfully in their children's education due to systemic and contextual barriers. As highlighted De Boer et al. (2010), parents' attitudes toward inclusive education are significantly influenced by their perceptions of disability, academic achievement, and their cultural beliefs regarding education. Schools that fail to address these sensitivities through structured engagement risk alienating parents, making collaboration more difficult.

The findings reveal that parental engagement in Muslim schools is far from uniform, with parents exhibiting varying levels of involvement, expectations, and willingness to collaborate with educators. The complexity of these interactions aligns with Complexity Theory's assertion that educational institutions function as co-evolving multilayer networks where elements interact dynamically. One of the most pressing issues highlighted by participants was the reluctance of some parents to acknowledge or address their children's learning challenges. HOD 1 explained:

"*Even if it's just an intervention, it's parents who don't want to be told there's something wrong with their child... Very few parents are open to that*."

This reluctance creates a significant barrier to implementing effective support strategies, as parents may perceive interventions as criticisms rather than opportunities to assist their children. Similarly, Educator 2 noted the sensitivities surrounding parental acknowledgment of academic difficulties:

"*Parents are very strict, and they push their children to a very deep degree in terms of being successful. But then when there are problems and we're picking up on the reading, they are very scared to admit that there is an issue.*"

This reluctance to accept academic challenges complicates school-based interventions and requires a pedagogically responsive approach that is empathetic and trust-building rather than merely directive. According to Walton & Osman (2022), schools that acknowledge complexity but fail to be pedagogically responsive may experience inertia, where interventions stagnate due to parental resistance. In contrast, school leaders and managers who combine pedagogical responsiveness with a general view of complexity can move towards transformational engagement, fostering open dialogue and shared responsibility (Walton & Osman, 2022). In this way, schools can ensure that parents view their involvement as integral to their children's success

Cultural dynamics further complicate parental engagement, particularly in schools serving diverse communities. HOD 2 observed how differing ideologies and socio-cultural contexts influence parental expectations:

"*Their ideology of education is very limited... It's not one that fits well when we want parent involvement for the betterment of the educational experience within a school.*"

This drift in expectations requires school leaders and managers to navigate cultural sensitivities carefully while promoting a unified vision for education. Educator 3 added that cultural mismatches between staff and families can hinder effective communication:

"*The majority [of staff] would be from an Indian background, whereas the student base is mainly foreign, meaning Somali or Ethiopian. It causes difficulty in understanding why children act a certain way or do certain things a certain way*."

To address these cultural gaps, Educator 3 suggested either training staff to better understand the cultural backgrounds of their students or employing staff from similar communities. Such measures would enhance empathy and communication between the school and families. Paseka & Schwab (2020) similarly argue that culturally responsive teaching practices and parent-school collaboration are crucial in fostering inclusive environments. They emphasise that teachers must engage in meaningful dialogue with parents to create educational strategies that reflect the cultural diversity of the school community.

To address this challenge, a pedagogically responsive approach requires culturally aware leadership that fosters reciprocal learning between schools and parents. As suggested by Sleeter (2011), culturally responsive engagement is not just about accommodating differences but actively incorporating parental perspectives into educational decision-making. Schools that do not adjust their strategies based on cultural and socio-economic realities risk falling into the conservatism quadrant of Walton & Osman's (2022) cartesian plane model, where traditional models of engagement are maintained despite their ineffectiveness.

The findings also highlighted the inconsistent levels of parental involvement at different stages of learners' academic journeys. HOD 6 described these fluctuations:

"*You get two extremes... at grade 1, 2, 3, parents are like helicopters... by grade 6, they're giving you hell... then they hit high school. They've forgotten about the child*."

This shift suggests that initial enthusiasm gives way to disengagement as students' progress through school, requiring a reimagined model of parental engagement. De Boer et al. (2010) note that parental involvement tends to decline as children grow older, particularly in contexts where parents feel less equipped to support their children's academic development. This pattern aligns with Harris et al. (2017) conceptualisation of schools as networks of interactions and micropolitics, where parental involvement is influenced by broader social and institutional forces.

HOD 6 also noted that some parents view Islamic schools as a "one-stop shop," expecting the school to manage both secular and Islamic aspects of their children's education and development:

"*They want a one-stop shop... I drop my child off and my child gets picked up. I don't have to worry about making arrangements for lunch, for Madrasa. Because once you come here, you do your school, your Madrasa, and you're done."*

This convenience-based perception underscores the need for schools to actively involve parents in meaningful ways that extend beyond logistical arrangements, fostering a shared responsibility for learners' growth.

Participants frequently highlighted the lack of formal structures, such as Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), as a significant barrier to parental engagement. Educator 3 stated:

"*Very seldom. What I feel that the school is lacking is a Parent Teacher Association. Where parents play an active role in an institute.*"

Educator 3 advocated for establishing a PTA to provide parents with a platform for meaningful involvement in school decision-making processes:

"*A PTA would assist teachers and the institute in keeping parents updated about what's happening and get them involved in decisions that affect the learners*."

The absence of structured forums means that parental concerns are addressed on an ad hoc basis rather than through sustained dialogue, leading to fragmented and reactive rather than proactive engagement. Paseka & Schwab (2020) emphasise that parent-school collaboration should be structured and systematic rather than based on informal interactions, ensuring that all parents have equitable access to engagement opportunities. Research by Weaver-Hightower (2008) on policy ecologies suggests that parental engagement should be embedded in the broader governance structure of the school. Without institutionalised mechanisms, leadership decisions remain top-down, limiting genuine parental influence.

The shifting dynamics of parent-child relationships emerged as another critical finding, with some parents deferring authority to their children. HOD 5 remarked:

"*It seems to me that the children actually are making the decisions at home... So how difficult is it for us as an educational institution to have control over the same learners where the parents cannot control them?*"

This erosion of parental authority creates challenges in maintaining discipline and consistency between home and school. Additionally, some parents were described as prioritising complaints over constructive engagement. HOD 5 explained:

"*We have a parent population that are very quick to pick up the phone and complain... They're not supporting us in this partnership.*"

This breakdown in trust leads to transactional rather than relational engagement, where parents interact with the school only in moments of crisis. These dynamics underscore the need for leadership and management strategies that rebuild trust and reinforce the collaborative nature of the school-parent relationship.

Despite the challenges, schools have implemented various initiatives to strengthen parental engagement. Workshops and meetings were cited as common strategies, though participation levels remain low. Deputy principal 1 noted:

"*We've tried to have workshops for parents, but the attendance is low. There's only so much we can do if the parents are not involved.*"

Similarly, HOD 7 emphasised the importance of incorporating parental feedback into school policies:

"*If parents come through with a suggestion, an idea, a complaint that is valid... we are of the opinion of welcoming that complaint and adapting ideas.*"

This inclusive approach reflects an effort to create a collaborative school culture, though it requires ongoing refinement to achieve greater participation and impact. Engelbrecht et al. (2005) argue that building strong parent-school relationships requires leadership that actively seeks out parental concerns and incorporates them into school policies rather than assuming that parents will engage without structured initiatives. Strengthening parental engagement is both a challenge and a necessity for Islamic schools striving to foster cohesive educational environments.

The findings reveal that parental engagement in Muslim schools is shaped by complex socio-cultural, economic, and structural factors, requiring leadership and management strategies

that move beyond surface-level interactions (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2024). Applying Complexity Theory illustrates how multiple, interdependent factors shape engagement, while Pedagogical Responsiveness offers a framework for adapting leadership strategies to foster trust, inclusivity, and sustained involvement.

According to Walton & Osman's (2022) Cartesian plane, schools that embrace complexity but remain pedagogically unresponsive risk inertia, while those that apply restricted complexity fall into conservatism. True transformation occurs when school leadership engages parents through structured mechanisms, cultural sensitivity, and trust-building efforts, ensuring that parents move from passive participants to active co-creators in the educational journey.

4.2.5 Teacher Well-being and Professional Development

Teacher well-being and professional development emerged as critical components in the findings, highlighting the interplay between recruitment challenges, staff retention, mentoring, and capacity building. Participants emphasised that fostering a supportive and development-oriented work environment is essential for ensuring the quality and sustainability of education in Islamic schools. This section explores these issues, with particular attention to the challenges of teacher recruitment, the implications of staff turnover, and the importance of mentoring and professional growth.

Recruiting qualified teachers, particularly in critical subject areas such as Mathematics and Science, remains a persistent challenge for Islamic schools. HOD 1 described the difficulties in finding suitable candidates and the pressures this creates:

"*We found it very difficult initially to find maths teachers, physics teachers... you need a teacher in a classroom, that's the most important thing. Especially in a private school, if you don't have a teacher in the classroom, then the parents complain*."

This reactive approach to staffing often necessitates hiring less-than-ideal candidates to meet immediate needs, potentially impacting long-term educational quality. Additionally, high staff turnover exacerbates these challenges, disrupting continuity and consistency in teaching practices. HOD 1 observed:

"*Staff turnover... affects Islamic schools, because we change teachers so often... Islamic schools, I'm not saying we have to become like government schools... but there has to be some incentives in a school to keep teachers*."

This aligns with literature on teacher attrition, which suggests that inadequate financial incentives and limited career development opportunities contribute to high turnover rates in private and faith-based schools (Toropova et al., 2021). Complexity theory further suggests that turnover disrupts the stability of school systems, leading to emergent challenges that require adaptive responses from school leaders (Morrison, 2008). This sentiment underscores the need for structured incentives and retention strategies to mitigate the instability caused by frequent teacher turnover. Providing a stable teaching workforce is vital for maintaining effective teaching strategies and fostering positive learning outcomes for students.

The disparity in teaching readiness between experienced educators and new hires was another key concern. HOD 5 noted:

"*The teachers that have retired... the new ones that are coming in don't seem to be... well prepared to teach... all the teachers that we've been interviewing lately... are poles apart from teachers that started teaching years ago.*"

This reflects a broader issue in teacher education, where pre-service training often fails to adequately prepare educators for the complexities of diverse school environments (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Pedagogical responsiveness emphasises that teachers must be equipped to adapt their teaching approaches to diverse student needs (Walton & Osman, 2022), requiring targeted professional development and ongoing mentorship.

Principal 2 highlighted the importance of mentoring, even for experienced teachers, to ensure alignment with the school's culture and expectations:

"*Even if a teacher comes in with 20 years of experience, mentoring is essential to avoid potential pitfalls and ensure they fit into the culture of the school.*"

Mentoring not only supports the integration of new teachers but also fosters a sense of belonging and shared purpose, which are critical for both individual well-being and institutional success. Research indicates that structured mentoring programs significantly improve teacher retention and instructional quality, particularly in faith-based schools where cultural and religious alignment is essential (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Regular collaboration and communication among staff emerged as an effective strategy for fostering professional growth and addressing challenges collectively. HOD 5 described how structured meetings facilitated open dialogue and shared problem-solving:

"*The SMT, which is the HODs... have meetings in their departments... as a staff, we have a full staff meeting... If there's any issues that management needs to raise with the educators we raise them.*"

These meetings provide a platform for discussing challenges, sharing best practices, and aligning teaching strategies across departments. This collaborative approach promotes a sense of shared responsibility and collective effort, which are essential for sustaining teacher morale and engagement.

From a complexity theory perspective, such collaborative engagements create feedback loops that can lead to systemic improvement, reinforcing the adaptability of leadership and teaching practices (Heck & Hallinger, 2010). Schools that implement structured professional learning communities often report higher teacher satisfaction and improved instructional practices (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Teacher well-being is closely linked to the availability of professional development opportunities and a supportive work environment. The challenges of recruitment, turnover, and readiness gaps place additional stress on teachers, particularly in resource-constrained environments like Muslim schools. Without sufficient support, teachers are at risk of burnout, which can further exacerbate turnover rates and negatively impact learner outcomes.

Burnout among teachers is well-documented in the literature, with excessive workloads, limited autonomy, and a lack of institutional support contributing to emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Pedagogical responsiveness emphasises that professional development must be context-sensitive (Walton & Osman, 2022), ensuring that teachers receive training that directly addresses the unique challenges they face in Muslim school environments.

The Cartesian plane of pedagogical responsiveness vs. complexity by Walton & Osman (2022) provides a useful framework for analysing teacher professional development in Muslim schools. Schools that invest in professional development while effectively managing systemic complexity fall within the transformational quadrant, where responsive teaching practices lead to long-term improvement. However, schools that fail to adapt their teacher

training strategies may find themselves in the inertia' quadrant, where low responsiveness and ineffective adaptation result in stagnation and declining instructional quality.

The findings highlight the need for Muslim schools to adopt comprehensive strategies that prioritise teacher well-being and professional development. Addressing recruitment challenges, reducing staff turnover through incentives, and bridging readiness gaps through mentoring and training are critical steps toward building a resilient teaching workforce. Furthermore, fostering collaboration and open communication within teaching staff promotes a sense of community and shared purpose. These strategies are essential for ensuring that Muslim schools can continue to deliver high-quality education while supporting the well-being of their educators.

4.2.6 Balanced Technology Integration

The integration of technology into Muslim schools in South Africa presents a complex dynamic requiring a balanced approach that aligns with the principles of pedagogical responsiveness and complexity theory. This section examines how technology is utilised to foster inclusive education, enhance learner engagement, and address diverse educational needs, while simultaneously navigating challenges associated with over-reliance and under-preparation.

A recurring concern among participants was the impact of technology on foundational skills, particularly reading comprehension and motor skills. Principal 1 stated:

"*Research says that we need to go back to books... the drop in reading comprehension in grade fours is because of the devices.*"

This observation aligns with concerns that excessive screen time may undermine traditional literacy development, a foundational element for academic success. Similarly, HOD 3 remarked:

"*Learners using iPads and notebooks lose their cross-motor skills or the ability to write. ICT is important, but too much of ICT can be harmful.*"

These reflections emphasise the need for a pedagogically responsive approach to technology integration, which balances digital tools with traditional methods to ensure holistic learner development. This approach is supported by research indicating that while technology can

enhance learning, it must be carefully integrated to avoid negative impacts on essential skills (George et al., 2024)

This challenge can be mapped onto Walton & Osman's (2022) Cartesian plane of pedagogical responsiveness vs complexity. Schools that struggle to balance traditional literacy with digital engagement may find themselves in the quadrant of inertia, where complexity overwhelms their ability to be pedagogically responsive. Conversely, schools that successfully integrate technology while maintaining literacy skills align more closely with the efficacy quadrant, demonstrating both responsiveness and a nuanced understanding of complexity.

From the perspective of complexity theory, the unintended consequences of technology use, such as diminished motor skills, highlight the non-linear interactions within school environments. Complexity theory posits that educational systems are dynamic and interconnected, where changes in one aspect can lead to unforeseen effects in another (Morrison, 2006). These findings suggest that effective leadership in Muslim schools must account for the emergent properties of technology integration, continually adapting practices to address such complexities.

Principal 1 advocacy for a bottom-up approach to technology integration reflects a strategic effort to inculcate responsible usage from an early age. Principal 1 explained:

"*If you start bottom up... where the child is accustomed to having the devices and the exposure to technology from a young age, you're not going to experience the behavioural problems.*"

Introducing technology during early developmental stages aligns with pedagogical responsiveness, as it considers learners' developmental trajectories and aims to cultivate disciplined, adaptive users of digital tools. This strategy is consistent with the concept of scaffolding in education, where support is provided early to build foundational skills for future learning (Lajoie, 2005; Pea, 2018; Puntambekar & Husbscher, 2005).

This approach contrasts with top-down implementations, where technology is introduced later, often resulting in misuse and a lack of digital literacy. By embedding technology in foundational education, school leaders and managers can ensure that learners develop the necessary skills and attitudes to navigate complex digital environments effectively. Such proactive integration aligns with the principles of complexity theory, emphasising the

importance of early interventions in complex adaptive systems to influence positive outcomes.

In Walton & Osman's (2022) framework, this approach reflects a movement towards the transformational quadrant, where leaders implement proactive, structured pedagogical changes while responding effectively to complexity. Schools that delay technology integration without sufficient scaffolding risk falling into the conservatism quadrant, where traditional approaches are maintained but responsiveness to new learning tools remains limited.

The effectiveness of technology integration hinges on teacher preparedness, as highlighted by Principal 1:

"*Most teachers went in and used it either as a screen to write or to show videos... No one really took the interest to see the unique features of the smartboard.*"

This observation underscores a significant gap in professional development, with many educators lacking the training to utilise advanced features of digital tools for interactive and inclusive pedagogy. Research indicates that without adequate training, teachers may underutilise technology, limiting its potential benefits in the classroom (Hennessy et al., 2015; Hixon & Buckenmeyer, 2009).

HOD 7 illustrated the benefits of addressing this gap, stating:

"*All the teachers at our school are Apple certified... we've done courses to become Apple certified teachers and be able to use the iPads for technology.*"

This proactive investment in teacher training reflects an adaptive leadership strategy that aligns with complexity theory by equipping educators to navigate the dynamic interactions between technology, pedagogy, and learner needs. Such initiatives ensure that technological tools are not merely supplementary but are integral to enhancing teaching and learning.

The integration of AI in education emerged as a polarising theme, with participants emphasising both its potential and its pitfalls. HOD 3 noted:

"*AI can be beneficial to learners if used responsibly... It's good if it's used to stimulate your thought process, but if it's thinking for you, then you're not learning anything by it*."

This aligns with the principle of pedagogical responsiveness, which emphasises the use of tools to support critical thinking and learner engagement rather than replacing active cognitive processes. Studies have shown that while AI can enhance learning, it should be used to augment, not replace, human cognition to maintain educational effectiveness (Chen et al., 2020; Lampou, 2023)

HOD 5 echoed these concerns, stating:

"*AI... is impacting our learners' writing skills... They don't even bother now to sit and try and attempt to write an essay from scratch.*"

These insights highlight the need for contextual sensitivity in integrating AI, ensuring that its use enhances rather than detracts from essential learning outcomes. For Muslim schools, this requires balancing the innovative potential of AI with a commitment to foundational skill development and Islamic educational principles. This balance is crucial to prevent over-reliance on technology, which can impede the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills (George et al., 2024; Zhai et al., 2024).

Walton & Osman's (2022) Cartesian plane provides a useful lens to evaluate AI integration in Muslim schools. Schools that effectively incorporate AI without diminishing traditional writing and cognitive skills may align with the efficacy quadrant, demonstrating strong pedagogical responsiveness and an understanding of technological complexity. However, schools that adopt AI without proper regulation risk falling into the inertia quadrant, where complexity increases without a structured, adaptive response.

Several participants highlighted the role of technology in fostering inclusive and engaging learning environments. Educator 1 described how multimedia tools enhanced learner engagement:

"*Having access to projectors and the ability to take students outside for outdoor learning has been very beneficial. I used a video presentation while teaching Islamic History, and it made a difference for the learners.*"

This reflects the ability of digital tools to cater to diverse learning preferences, particularly for visual and kinaesthetic learners. Research supports that multimedia tools can enhance engagement and accommodate various learning styles, contributing to a more inclusive classroom (Sankey et al., 2011)

Principal 2 emphasised the proactive integration of robotics and IT to prepare learners for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR):

"*Our robotics program has seen great success, with students even winning awards in competitions.*"

These examples demonstrate how technology can be leveraged to equip students with critical skills for future success, aligning with the goals of pedagogical responsiveness to address diverse learner needs (Walton & Osman, 2022). Preparing students for future technological advancements is essential for their success in a rapidly evolving world (Tiwari & Fahrudin, 2024)

The flexibility afforded by technology, particularly in online learning, was praised for its inclusivity. Principal 3 noted:

"*The flexibility in online learning means learners aren't constrained to set times... they can watch pre-recorded videos, engage with beautiful content, and interact at their own pace.*"

However, this flexibility must be balanced with efforts to prevent over-dependence. As Principal 2 remarked:

"*AI can provide a written essay, but when students need to articulate their ideas, debate, or communicate in real-life situations, they might struggle."*

These insights highlight the need for leadership strategies that promote critical engagement with technology, ensuring that learners develop both digital competencies and interpersonal skills. This balance is crucial to prevent the erosion of essential communication skills in the digital age (George et al., 2024; Zhai et al., 2024).

The findings underscore the need for a nuanced, contextually responsive approach to technology integration in Muslim schools. By applying Walton & Osman's (2022) framework, schools can evaluate whether their technological strategies foster pedagogical efficacy or contribute to inertia. Schools that successfully navigate this balance will be best positioned to provide high-quality, responsive, and future-oriented Islamic education. By leveraging pedagogical responsiveness and complexity theory, school leaders and managers can navigate the dynamic interplay of technological, cultural, and pedagogical factors.

4.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide an in-depth understanding of the leadership and management practices within Muslim schools in South Africa, revealing both their complexities and opportunities. At the heart of these schools lies a commitment to fostering inclusivity, academic excellence, and moral development, while navigating the challenges posed by diverse learner needs, socio-cultural dynamics, and resource constraints. Key strategies include leveraging inclusive leadership to build cohesive school communities, employing culturally responsive and adaptive pedagogical practices, and integrating technology in a balanced manner to enhance learning outcomes. Moreover, the importance of strengthening parental engagement, supporting teacher well-being, and innovating curriculum design reflects the broader need for contextually responsive approaches that align with both Islamic values and modern educational standards.

These findings underscore the significance of adaptive leadership and the application of frameworks such as pedagogical responsiveness and complexity theory in addressing the dynamic needs of Muslim schools. By embracing collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity, these schools can continue to serve as transformative spaces that equip learners with the skills and values necessary to navigate a rapidly changing world while upholding their Islamic identity.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LEARNING JOURNEY

5.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesises the key findings of this study and demonstrates how they address the research questions. It evaluates the impact of the research by outlining the study's contributions to the understanding of leadership and management in Muslim schools within the theoretical frameworks of complexity theory and pedagogical responsiveness. Additionally, it presents recommendations for future research based on the study's limitations and findings. This chapter also includes a reflective account of the researcher's experience in conducting the study, highlighting the challenges, learning outcomes, and methodological considerations encountered. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the study's contributions and broader implications for educational leadership in Muslim schools

5.2 Key conclusions from the study

This study has provided a comprehensive examination of the leadership and management practices in Muslim schools in South Africa, focusing on how school leaders and managers conceptualise and implement pedagogical responsiveness and navigate the complexities of their educational environments. By applying complexity theory and pedagogical responsiveness, this research has illuminated the dynamic and non-linear challenges faced by school leaders and managers in faith-based educational institutions. The study underscores that effective school leadership and management requires adaptive, inclusive, and contextually responsive approaches that balance regulatory compliance, Islamic educational philosophy, and diverse stakeholder expectations.

The four central research questions that guided this study were:

1. To what extent does school leadership and management in Muslim schools understand and respond to the complexities that exist within their school context?
2. What does it mean to be pedagogically responsive according to the perceptions of school leadership and management in Muslim schools?
3. In what way do school leadership and management in Muslim schools' understandings of pedagogical responsiveness and school environment complexity influence their leadership practices in fostering and leading quality education within their schools?

4. What potential challenges do Muslim school leaders and managers face in implementing and maintaining inclusive practices within the unique contexts of their schools?

Through the findings, it is evident that school leadership and management in Muslim schools exist on a spectrum of pedagogical responsiveness and complexity, as represented in the Cartesian Plane of Pedagogical Responsiveness vs. Complexity proposed by Walton & Osman (2022).

The Cartesian plane of complexity and pedagogical responsiveness (Walton & Osman, 2022) provides a framework for situating school leaders based on their ability to adapt to complexity and their level of pedagogical responsiveness. The four quadrants- efficacy, conservatism, inertia, and transformational, help contextualise the different leadership and management styles observed in this study:

a) Efficacy: High Complexity, Low Pedagogical Responsiveness

Some school leaders and managers in the study were found to be highly aware of the complexities of their schools but lacked pedagogical responsiveness. They struggled to implement inclusive teaching strategies despite recognising socio-economic disparities, linguistic diversity, and governance challenges. This was evident in schools where regulatory constraints and resource shortages inhibited leadership and management from making pedagogical innovations, limiting their ability to effectively respond to student needs.

b) Conservatism: Low Complexity, Low Pedagogical Responsiveness

A smaller subset of school leaders and managers exhibited a lack of engagement with both complexity and pedagogical responsiveness, opting to maintain traditional teaching methods without critically addressing learner diversity or external challenges. This was particularly observed in hierarchical leadership structures where decision-making was centralised, with a limited teacher or community involvement. The findings indicate that such approaches contribute to rigidity in school governance and limit the ability of schools to evolve in response to changing educational demands.

c) Inertia: Low Complexity, High Pedagogical Responsiveness

Some school leaders and managers demonstrated strong pedagogical responsiveness but lacked an understanding of school complexity. These leaders and managers were dedicated to inclusive teaching and curriculum integration but were less attuned to external pressures such as financial constraints, parental expectations, and governance conflicts. While their teaching

strategies supported differentiated instruction and student engagement, they struggled to navigate the larger systemic issues affecting school functionality. This misalignment highlights the need for leadership and management development programs that integrate both pedagogical innovation and strategic management skills.

d) Transformational Leadership: High Complexity, High Pedagogical Responsiveness

The most effective school leaders and managers fell into the transformational quadrant, demonstrating both a deep understanding of complexity and a strong commitment to pedagogical responsiveness. These leaders and managers actively engaged with teachers, parents, and governing bodies, implemented inclusive and adaptive teaching practices and navigated socio-cultural and economic challenges with innovative strategies. They leveraged partnerships, fostered collaborative decision-making, and utilised technology integration to enhance student learning experiences. This quadrant represents the ideal leadership approach for Muslim schools, where leaders and managers actively balance tradition with innovation, regulatory requirements with faith-based identity, and community expectations with student-centered learning.

This research has made several key contributions to the discourse on leadership and management in faith-based education, particularly in the South African context. Firstly, leadership and management in Muslim schools are deeply influenced by the socio-political and economic realities of the broader South African education system. The study found that school leaders and managers must operate within a dual framework- complying with national education regulations while preserving Islamic values. This balancing act requires adaptive leadership, strategic planning, and a nuanced understanding of governance.

Secondly, parental and community engagement remains a major challenge for many schools. The findings revealed that many parents disengage from active school participation, either due to financial pressures, cultural differences, or a lack of structured parental involvement programs. School leaders and managers who were highly responsive to parental needs were more successful in fostering a supportive learning environment, demonstrating the importance of cohesive school-community relationships in Islamic education.

Thirdly, teacher well-being and professional development are critical for sustainable school leadership and management. The findings indicated that high teacher turnover, lack of

training opportunities, and limited incentives negatively impact pedagogical responsiveness. Schools that invested in teacher training and mentorship programs were better able to maintain instructional consistency, student engagement, and curriculum innovation.

Lastly, the integration of technology in Islamic education presents both opportunities and challenges. While technology enhances learner engagement and expands access to digital resources, concerns were raised about over-reliance on AI tools, reduced literacy development, and the digital divide among learners. Effective school leaders and managers recognised these challenges and implemented structured approaches to technology integration that balanced traditional learning with digital literacy.

The study affirms that Muslim school leadership and management is inherently complex, requiring an intricate balance between tradition and modernity, faith-based pedagogy and secular curriculum mandates, and community expectations with institutional realities. The Cartesian Plane of Complexity against Pedagogical Responsiveness provides a valuable tool for analysing and improving leadership and management effectiveness, guiding school leaders and managers toward transformational approaches that ensure both educational excellence and Islamic ethos.

To move beyond traditional hierarchical leadership models, school leaders and managers must embrace participatory governance, pedagogically responsive teaching methods, and complexity-aware management strategies. By fostering pedagogical innovation, inclusive leadership, and strategic adaptability, Muslim schools in South Africa can continue to serve as exemplary institutions that produce well-rounded, socially responsible, and spiritually grounded learners, prepared to navigate both the contemporary world and their faith-based identities.

5.3 Recommendations for future research

While this study has provided valuable insights into the leadership and management of Muslim schools, several areas warrant further investigation. Future research should explore longitudinal studies on leadership effectiveness in faith-based schools, examining how leadership and management strategies evolve over time in response to shifting educational policies and societal changes.

Another area for future research is the impact of teacher professional development on pedagogical responsiveness in Muslim schools. Given the findings that many teachers lack

structured professional training opportunities, future studies could investigate how targeted training programs influence instructional practices, student outcomes, and teacher retention rates.

Additionally, further research is needed on the role of school governing bodies and parental engagement in shaping leadership effectiveness. This study has identified governance structures as a major challenge, particularly when board members prioritise financial management over pedagogical needs. Future research should examine best practices for governance in faith-based schools, identifying models that promote collaborative decision-making and educationally sound leadership practices.

The role of technology integration and digital literacy in Islamic education also presents a critical avenue for exploration. Future research could focus on how digital tools can be leveraged to enhance student engagement while preserving the core values of Islamic education, as well as investigating the implications of artificial intelligence (AI) on teaching and assessment in faith-based contexts.

Finally, comparative research between Muslim schools in different countries would provide valuable insights into how Islamic education is managed in diverse socio-political contexts. By examining best practices across international settings, researchers can contribute to the development of globally relevant frameworks for leadership, governance, and curriculum integration in faith-based schools.

5.4 My experience undertaking this research project

Conducting this research has been a deeply enriching and intellectually stimulating journey, offering both challenges and rewards. Engaging with school leaders, managers, educators, and stakeholders in Muslim schools provided first-hand insights into the realities of leadership and management in complex educational environments, highlighting both the successes and struggles faced by faith-based schools.

One of the key lessons I have learned is that educational leadership and management are inherently complex, requiring adaptability, resilience, and a deep understanding of socio-cultural dynamics. Throughout this research, I encountered contrasting leadership approaches, some that emphasised transformational change and innovation, while others were constrained by institutional inertia. These variations reaffirmed the importance of applying

complexity theory to educational research, as schools function as dynamic, evolving systems influenced by multiple interacting factors.

Another significant aspect of this research experience was the methodological challenges involved in qualitative research. Conducting semi-structured interviews, analysing participant narratives, and synthesising findings into a coherent framework required careful consideration of bias, subjectivity, and ethical concerns. I developed a greater appreciation for the value of reflexivity in research, ensuring that my interpretations remained grounded in participants' lived experiences and empirical data.

Engaging with theoretical frameworks such as pedagogical responsiveness and complexity theory also enhanced my understanding of how educational institutions adapt to external pressures and internal challenges. This study reinforced the idea that schools are not static entities but evolving ecosystems where leadership decisions have ripple effects across the educational community.

Finally, this research has deepened my commitment to educational transformation, particularly in the context of Muslim schools striving for excellence in both faith-based and secular education. The insights gained from this study will inform my future work in academia, educational leadership, and policy advocacy, ensuring that research translates into meaningful, evidence-based improvements in school leadership and pedagogy.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has provided critical insights into the leadership and management of Muslim schools, revealing the complex challenges and opportunities that shape their functioning. The research has demonstrated that effective school leadership requires a balance of flexibility, contextual responsiveness, and strategic decision-making, particularly in faith-based educational settings. By applying complexity theory and pedagogical responsiveness, this study has contributed to the growing body of literature on educational leadership and management in diverse and dynamic school contexts.

The findings emphasise the need for ongoing collaboration between school leaders, educators, parents, and policymakers to create inclusive, high-quality learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of students. As Muslim schools continue to evolve, they must remain open to innovation, reflective practice, and adaptive leadership and management strategies to navigate the ever-changing landscape of education.

This research represents a small but significant step in advancing the discourse on Islamic educational leadership and management, offering both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for fostering effective, inclusive, and sustainable school management.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following semi-structured interview questions were used to conduct interviews with all participants in this study to explore how they understand and respond to complexity within their schooling context.

A- Introductory Questions

- Personal and professional journey as a school leader- motivation and perspectives?
- How long have you been serving at this school?
- Describe the situational context of your school community which you serve?
- What are the primary goals and values that guide your leadership at this school?

B- School Context and Environment

- How would you describe the overall culture and ethos of your school? How do these shape your approach to leadership?
- What are some of the key challenges you face in your role as a leader within this school's context?
- In what ways do you feel the school's geographical, social, or cultural context influences its operations and your leadership practices?
- In what ways do you find the growing complexity of the school system challenging, and how do you address these challenges?

C- Pedagogical Responsiveness

- How do you define pedagogical responsiveness in the context of your school, and what does it mean to you as a leader?
- What specific actions or initiatives have you taken to ensure that teaching and learning in your school are inclusive and focused on the needs of all students?
- How do you foster a culture of dialogue, relationality, and community orientation among your staff and students?
- In what ways do you integrate social justice and equity into your school's pedagogical practices?

D- Enabling Pedagogical Responsiveness

- How do you encourage collaboration and relational agency among your staff to support pedagogical responsiveness?
- What role does epistemic engagement (engagement with different forms of knowledge) play in your approach to inclusive education?
- How do you ensure that your leadership is contextually sensitive and responsive to the unique needs of your school community?
- Can you discuss how technology and institutional capacity have been leveraged to enhance pedagogical responsiveness and inclusivity in your school?

E- Reflection and Future Directions

- How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your leadership in promoting pedagogical responsiveness and inclusivity?
- What are your goals for further advancing inclusive education and pedagogical responsiveness in the future?
- What advice would you give to other school leaders who are facing similar complexities in their educational environments?

APPENDIX TWO: ETHICS CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG | WSoE Wits School of Education

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE **PROTOCOL NUMBER:** 2024ECE051M

PROJECT TITLE

Muslim School Leaders in South Africa Navigating an Inclusive Education Agenda: A Complexity and Pedagogical Responsiveness Perspective.

INVESTIGATOR	Uwais Kathrada.
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	Wits School of Education.
DATE CONSIDERED	25 July 2024.
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally.
RISK LEVEL	No Risk.
EXPIRY DATE	Date of submission of the Research Report.
ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE	25 July 2024.

CHAIRPERSON

Dr. Lawan Abdulhamid

cc: Dr. Douglas Andrews.

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Kathrada
Signature

22 / 08 / 24
Date

APPENDIX THREE: REQUEST LETTERS

Dear: _____

Re: Permission to conduct research at [insert organisation name]

My name is Uwais Kathrada, and I am a Master of Education student at the University of the Witwatersrand, School of Education. I am conducting research titled *"Muslim School Leaders in South Africa Navigating an Inclusive Education Agenda: A Complexity and Pedagogical Responsiveness Perspective."* This study aims to explore how Muslim school leaders perceive the complexities within the school system and how these perceptions influence their ability to create and maintain inclusive teaching environments. By examining contextual constraints, leadership strategies, and the role of pedagogical responsiveness, this research seeks to provide insights into the unique challenges and opportunities Muslim school leaders face in fostering inclusive teaching practices.

This research will involve collecting data from principals, deputy principals, heads of departments (HODs), and experienced educators (with at least three years of teaching experience in Muslim schools). Additionally, it will include an analysis of the school's vision and mission statements, policies on inclusion, diversity, learner support, and other relevant documents.

I kindly request permission to conduct interviews with the following stakeholders within your organisation: the school principal, deputy principal/organisational manager, one Islamic Studies HOD, one secular subject HOD, one experienced primary school educator, and one experienced high school educator (including one Islamic Studies educator and one secular subject educator). I also request access to the necessary documentation and policies as outlined above.

Selected individuals from your organisation will be invited to participate in this study. If they consent, they will be asked to complete a Google Form providing their names, email

addresses, roles in the school, and preferences regarding the timing and location of data collection (i.e., whether it should occur on the premises and/or during work hours). During these interviews, participants' responses will be audio-recorded.

Participants will be asked to provide written or verbal consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and both their identities and the name of the organisation will remain anonymous unless explicitly stated otherwise. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

Please note that research participants will neither be advantaged nor disadvantaged in any way. They will be assured that they may withdraw their participation at any time without penalty. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study, and participants will not receive any monetary compensation. All research data will be stored on a password-protected laptop for five years, after which it will be securely destroyed.
The results of the study will be communicated upon the completion and submission of the research report in March 2025.

I respectfully request written permission to conduct my research at your organisation. The permission letter should be on your organisation's official letterhead, signed, and dated, and should specifically refer to me by name and the title of my study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information. I look forward to your response at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,
Uwais Kathrada

Researcher Details:
Uwais Kathrada
Email: 1838443@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor Details:
Dr Douglas Andrews
Email: douglas.andrews@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX FOUR: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

Title of research: Muslim School Leaders in South Africa Navigating an Inclusive Education Agenda: A Complexity and Pedagogical Responsiveness Perspective

Name of researcher: Uwais Kathrada

I, _____ (*name and surname*), agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

1.	The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
2.	I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study.	YES	NO
3.	I agree to conducting an interview with the researcher.	YES	NO
4.	I agree to the interview being audio recorded.	YES	NO
5.	I agree that direct quotations from my interview activity may be used by the researcher in the research report.	YES	NO

6.	I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report).	YES	NO
7.	I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on	YES	NO

_____

Name of participant

_____

Signature of participant

_____

Date

_____

Name of researcher

_____

Signature of researcher

_____

Date

APPENDIX FIVE: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Participant,

My name is Uwais Kathrada, and I am a Master of Education student at the University of the Witwatersrand, School of Education. I am conducting research titled "*Muslim School Leaders in South Africa Navigating an Inclusive Education Agenda: A Complexity and Pedagogical Responsiveness Perspective*." This study aims to explore how school leadership in Muslim schools perceive the complexities within the school system and how these perceptions influence their ability to create and maintain inclusive teaching environments. By examining contextual constraints, leadership strategies, and the role of pedagogical responsiveness, this research seeks to provide insights into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Muslim school leaders in fostering inclusive teaching practices.

This research will involve collecting data from principals, deputy principals, heads of departments (HODs), and experienced educators (with at least three years of teaching experience in Muslim schools). Additionally, it will include an analysis of the school's vision and mission statements, policies on inclusion, diversity, learner support, and other relevant documents.

I would like to invite you, as the principal, to participate in this study by taking part in an interview. The interview will take place in a private room within your school campus [during/after] school hours on [insert date] at [insert time]. Alternatively, an online interview can be conducted should a face-to-face interview not be possible. The interview is expected to last no longer than one hour and will consist of 10 questions.

The interview will be confidential and anonymous. Your name or any other identifying information will not be disclosed in the final research report. With your permission, other

researchers may use the data collected from this study, but your name and any personal information will not be shared or passed on. All personal data will be pseudonymised during the analysis and reporting stages, and any transcripts made from the recordings will be handled by a secure transcription service. Files will be uploaded and stored using a secure, password-protected process, and all transcriptions will be stored on an encrypted, password-protected laptop at the researcher's home or in a secure, lockable office at the university.

If you choose to participate in this research study, it should be entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and you may choose not to answer any interview questions if you prefer. You will not receive any direct benefits for participating in this study, nor will you lose any services, benefits, or rights if you decide not to participate. There is no financial cost to you for taking part in this research, and the risk involved is minimal.

If you have any questions during or after the study, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor using the contact details provided below. Should you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) on 011 717 1408 or via email at hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Uwais Kathrada

Researcher Details:
Uwais Kathrada
Email: 1838443@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor Details:
Dr Douglas Andrews
Email: douglas.andrews@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX SIX: EXAMPLE OF A CODING TABLE

Extract from interview	Code
P1: *If we look at the diversity that we have at our school. It does impact how we deliver curriculum. Not every child comes from the same background. For one child, eating out at a restaurant might be a common, normal thing. They understand it. But the next child, they have never been to a shopping mall. Some of our learners haven't been to Sandton City so the background of learners affects how we get set the kind of examples we can use in our teaching, it affects the kind of resources we use. So I'm expecting, for example, I have a child who comes from a background where there are five people living in one room without even a kitchen or a bathroom. I can't expect him to have resources to do research, to do things that I can expect from other learners who come from extremely affluent backgrounds. Laptops and everything is not even a question. So all of those factors affect the context of the school. So we're dealing with a very diverse group. Coming back to your research topic of inclusion, as much as we would like to do it in a holistic way, it's difficult because of the different types of learners. I know that's part of the inclusion, but taking into account the very different challenges that our learners have, it's difficult.*	Learner diversity Student demographics Socio economic disparities in learning Barriers to inclusivity