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PERCEPTIONS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS ON THE PROPOSED GRADE NINE EXIT PLAN POLICY: THE CASE OF TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN JOHANNESBURG, GAUTENG

A report on a research study presented to

The Department of Social Work
School of Human and Community Development
Faculty of Humanities
University of the Witwatersrand

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts in the field of Social Development
by

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24 June 2022

DECLARATION

I declare that this my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts in the field of Social Development in the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.



……

Adillah Abdallah Mohammed
School of Human and Community Development
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22 day of June, 2022

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Above all, to God for His grace, good health, and care all through my studies.

ABSTRACT

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) intends to introduce the General Education Certificate (GEC). The GEC would allow learners to exit the mainstream schooling system at the end of grade nine for vocational training or jobs. The GEC policy aims to reduce the high dropout rates between grades ten and eleven. This study sets out to establish the perceptions of grade nine teachers on the introduction of GEC. The critical theory framework underpinned the study, which questioned how the education system can best offer education to all learners irrespective of their socioeconomic status. This study used a qualitative research approach. The study sample comprised of fourteen participants from two public schools in Johannesburg. Seven participants from each of the two schools. Purposive sampling was utilised to select the participants. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Face-to-face interviews were conducted on an individual basis. The data was analysed utilising thematic analysis. The participants perceive the GEC to be inclusive in nature as it accommodates all leaners with different learning needs and abilities. The GEC is perceived as a path to implementing inclusive education for equitable opportunities for all learners, for a just and less discriminative society. A noted concern was that the learners may use the GEC as an exit ticket from the schooling system. Participants indicated that a mechanism to ensure that all learners leaving the schooling system get absorbed in technical colleges for further training is required. They noted that the learners are too young to decide on their career paths at grade nine. A selection criterion to guide the identification of learners permitted to exit at grade nine, further engagement with key stakeholders, expansion and opening of more skills-based colleges, training, and funding of schools and skills-based colleges were recommended.

Key words*:* General Education Certificate (GEC), Grade Nine, School Dropout, Secondary school teachers' perceptions

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LIST OF ACRONYMNS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
BE	Bantu Education
BEA	Bantu Education Act
DA	Democratic Alliance
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
GEC	General Education Certificate
NE	Native Education
NNSSF	National Norms and Standards for School Funding
NP	National Party
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation

CHAPTER 1:GENERAL ORIENTATION AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the study, the background and rationale of the study. The research question, aims, objectives and the relevance of the study to the field of social development are stated. The key concepts used in the study are defined and the organisation of the research report is outlined.

1.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Education is necessary for social inclusion and improvement of wellbeing. It is a basic human right (United Nations, 1948). Therefore, there is a need to set up institutional structures for learners to have access to quality basic education. This is because quality education improves literacy and job prospects in the society. Educated youths will become active members of a peaceful society and have a fulfilling life (Tarc, 2013). Education is, therefore, important for integrating the marginalised into the development process and a way out of poverty. However, the South African education system has had very limited success in uplifting the marginalised out of poverty (Ngozo & Mtantato, 2018). Promoting equity through a well-developed education and training system needs to be at the centre-stage of the country's development agenda.

South Africa's education system has undergone various reforms to ensure equal provision of quality education for all learners irrespective of their race and income status. Access to quality education is a global goal, and youth education is a priority. South Africa faces high dropout rates between grades nine and eleven. To address this, the government plans to introduce an exit-level exam in grade nine where learners could formally leave school and receive a General Education Certificate (GEC) (Department of Basic Education, 2019).

1.3 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The objective of the democratic government after apartheid was to remove the structures of racial discrimination and rectify inequalities. To this end, South Africa adopted and implemented many non-racial policies and reforms. The education system was one of many departments that faced several structural reforms (Jansen & Taylor, 2003).

The education system during apartheid was discriminatory in nature and characterised by inequities. The first democratic government of South Africa embarked on restructuring the education system to make it accessible to learners of all races. The end of apartheid led to the reforms in the education system in terms of provision, curriculum, and funding (Sauden & Sayed,

2004). The Department of Basic Education (DBE) was formed to oversee primary and secondary education. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) oversees tertiary level education, that included academic institutions and post-secondary technical training.

South African basic education system is divided into two phases, elementary and secondary. The elementary level begins from grade R to grade seven, and the secondary begins from grade eight to grade 12. The secondary school comprises two phases: lower and higher secondary. Lower secondary school is compulsory and ends at grade nine. The upper secondary is not mandatory and is from grade nine to grade 12.

Drop out numbers at the secondary level are high, many learners, mostly blacks, drop out without achieving a grade 12 certificate. It is estimated that about 50 percent of registered learners who start grade R drop out before completing grade 12 (Spaull, 2015). An additional 500,000 learners have dropped out of school during the COVID-19 pandemic, registering the highest dropout numbers in 20 years (Essop, Mansfield, & Duncan, 2021). As a result of the high dropout rates, the government plans to introduce the GEC, grade nine school leaving certificate. Learners could formally leave school with government-approved qualification, three years earlier than scheduled. The DBE states that these new education reforms would improve basic education outcomes by reducing the matric failure rates and the high level of matric dropouts (Department of Basic Education, 2019). This study will investigate the perceptions of secondary school teachers on the proposed grade nine exit plan.

1.4 STATEMENT AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

South Africa is faced with a problem of high dropout rates, with many learners dropping out before completing grade 12. It is estimated that 300,000 learners leave the schooling system each year (Van der Berg, et al., 2011). Most learners leave school between grade 10 and 12 without any formal qualification to show for the many years spent in school (Mbatha, 2019). Only 1% of learners who leave school without matric move on to get a formal qualification (Jobson & Duncan, Daily Maverick, 2019). Many learners who drop out do not get jobs and stay for years without employed (Spaull, 2015). Approximately half of South Africans below the age of 25 years of age are not employed in an economy that lacks skilled workers (Mbatha, 2019). Further still, the general perception of the state of the current basic education system is that it disadvantages black learners from poor households who drop out of school before completing matric.

In response to the dropout rates, the DBE has proposed to introduce the GEC at grade nine. Given its promise to serve as a significant lever of change in schools, successful implementation, and analysis of the outcome of education policies is critical. And given these high stakes, education policy implementation warrants scrutiny. To successfully implement the new grade nine exit policy, one must not overlook the views, perceptions, and needs of teachers since they are the implementers of the reforms. This study intends to explore the perceptions of teachers, one of the education stakeholders, to understand their views on the GEC to guide the constructive implementation of the GEC.

The study generates information from the perspectives of teachers that can be used to ensure the success of the implementation of the GEC. Teachers are at the center of this study because they are expected to be the implementers of the basic education reforms. The teachers might have perceptions that could influence and contribute to the implementation of the policy. Therefore, to successfully implement the new grade nine exit policy, the views, perceptions, and needs of teachers, the implementers of the education reforms should be considered and acknowledged.

Education commands a substantial share of national and provincial budgets to levels that require hard questions about the feasibility and the value-adding by the education policies. Given its promise to serve as a significant lever of change in schools, successful implementation, and analysis of the outcome of education policies is critical. And given these high stakes, the proposed GEC warrants scrutiny and a monitoring and evaluation process that includes the key stakeholders. Secondary school teachers as key people are directly involved in the implementation of the GEC policy and might determine whether the policy succeeds or fails. As reiterated by Honig (2006), successful implementation is essential to policy outcomes, and is the product of interactions between policies, people, and places. The people directly involved in the implementation of a policy, their beliefs, knowledge, and other orientations determine how implementable and successful the policy will be. The places or contexts help shape what the implementers can and will do (Honig, 2006).

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION

The overarching research question for this study was:

'***What are the perceptions of teachers at two secondary schools in Johannesburg regarding the introduction of the General Education Certificate (GEC) at grade nine?'***

1.6 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of secondary school teachers regarding the introduction of the GEC in grade nine. The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To explore secondary school teachers' perceptions about the introduction of the GEC policy in grade nine.
2. To establish secondary school teachers' perspectives about advantages and disadvantages to the implementation of the GEC policy.
3. To establish the secondary school teachers' perceptions on the training and support they might require for the successful implementation of the proposed change.
4. To explore suggestions and recommendations from secondary school teachers on the successful implementation of the GEC policy.

1.7 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

This research is undertaken, in part, as fulfilment towards a Master of Arts degree in the field of Social Development. As such, the topic was selected specifically for its relevance to the field. The concept of Social Development was first introduced by the United Nations (UN) during the independence period in the 1960s to deal with human development needs and distorted development in the Less Economically Developed Countries (Midgley, 2014). It places people at the center of the development process. Social development emphasises empowering people and taking account of structural challenges that face people in their daily lives (Midgley, 2014). Social development, therefore, emphasises investing in people as it focuses on improving the wellbeing of people. The core values of social development are equality, humanity, social justice, non-discrimination, democracy, and reconciliation (Midgley, 2014).

The introduction of GEC at grade nine will contribute positively to social development if engineered to channel learners to vocational education and training especially learners from disadvantaged backgrounds in line with the demands or needs in the labour market. The GEC promises social inclusion of learners who would have otherwise dropped out by providing an

opportunity for the creation of a skills development learning stream parallel to the academic stream. In this way, the education system ensures that the learning needs of all learners are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and training streams. This is one way of empowering the youth and ensuring that they become skilled and productive members of society who will add value to the economy. Evidence shows that skills acquired through vocational training reduce poverty and generate economic development. Taking the youth through TVET colleges would prepare them for the job market, make them employable, and reduce their vulnerability in the labour market (Hossain et al., 2012). Introducing a vocational stream at grade nine and investing in vocational skills training will be a way of bringing the unemployed youth into the formal workforce. The expansion of access to education training opportunities will create an inclusionary effect on the marginalised and disadvantaged groups and increase equity in society.

This research generated information that can be used to ensure that GEC is implemented successfully. It will contribute to the implementation of the GEC and in the monitoring and evaluation process of the policy. This research adds knowledge to the policy and practice of GEC.

1.8 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This study used a qualitative research design with the aim of exploring the perceptions of secondary school teachers on the proposed grade nine exit plan policy. The study sample comprised of fourteen participants from two public schools in Johannesburg. Seven participants from each of the two schools.

Purposive sampling was utilised to select the participants. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Face-to-face interviews were conducted on an individual basis. The data was analysed utilising thematic analysis.

1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The use of qualitative research approach for this study is influenced by the aim of the study, which is to explore views and perceptions on the subject matter. The aim of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth perspective of the participants (Creswell, 2014). The advantage of qualitative approach is that it is interpretive with a broad and complex focus (open-ended) that allows the researcher to explore views of the issue.

According to 2019 statistical report published by the DBE, there are 2071 public secondary schools in Gauteng province. There might be concerns why this study utilised a small sample size of only 14 teachers from two secondary schools, leading to only tentative results that may have limited value to decision-makers. To address this the researcher provided contextual information of the study for comparison purposes to enable transferability to similar areas and populations. The researcher provided a detailed description of the participants and the contextual information on the two schools including their geographical location and historical details. In this way, the information from the study could be used as an analogue for similar studies in comparable areas and populations.

1.10 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

The key concepts used in this research are the following:

Grade: It is defined as a stage of learning in basic education that is scheduled to run for one academic year (UNESCO, 2012). The South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) defines grade as part of an educational programme which a learner may complete in one school year. For this study, grade refers to a formal schooling program that a learner is required to complete in one school year.

Learner: The South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996, p.4) refers to a learner as "any person receiving education or obliged to receive education". The DBE defines a learner as a person who receives education or training in Early Childhood Development Centre, school, or Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Centre (Department of Basic Education, 2010). For this study, a learner refers to any person below the age of 18 attending formal secondary school education in South Africa.

School dropout: It is defined as the "proportion of pupils from a cohort enrolled in a given grade at a given school year who are no longer enrolled in the following school year" (Statistics South Africa, 2017, p.x). The DBE defines school dropout as exiting school prior to completing a grade in a school year (Wegner, *et al.*, 2008). For this study, school dropout refers to learners leaving the schooling system before completing a given grade.

Secondary School: It refers to an institution where learners acquire basic education that prepares them for higher learning (UNESCO, 2012). The DBE defines a secondary school as an institution that offers all or a selection of grades from grade 8 to grade 12 (Department of Basic Education, 2010). This study defines a secondary school as a public or an independent school that offers education from grade eight to grade 12.

Teacher: The South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) defines a teacher as an educator. It refers to any person who teaches and trains other people. The DBE refers to a teacher as a person who teaches learners in a classroom at a school (Department of Basic Education, 2010). This study adopts the definition of a teacher as a school-based educator employed to teach in a secondary school.

Technical, vocational, and occupational skills: It refers to learning of knowledge, attitudes and practical skills required to perform specific work or trade in the labour market. These skills focus on addressing economic and social demands by assisting youth acquire knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need for employment and entrepreneurship (UNESCO, 2022). These skills include plumbing, welding, culinary arts, automotive repair, fashion design, hairdressing to mention a few. This study defines technical, vocational, and occupational skills as knowledge, attitudes and practical skills acquired through training in technical colleges to perform specific work or trade.

1.11 ORGANISATION OF RESEARCH REPORT

This report comprises five chapters as described below.

Chapter One presents the background of the study, an overview of the study, research question and rationale for the study. It includes the aims and objectives of the study, the relevance of the study to the social development field and and gives a brief description of the research methodology and methods applied. The chapter includes limitations of the study, definition of key concepts and outlines the organisation of the research report.

Chapter Two contains theoretical framework and literature review of the study. The critical theory framework underpins this study. The theory is consistent with the study approach.

Chapter Three focuses on the research methodology used in the study, the research question and aims and objectives, study population and sampling procedures. The chapter outlines the research instruments, methods of data collection, methods of data analysis, trustworthiness of the study and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four deals with the presentation of research findings, the analysis and interpretation of data. The presentation of research findings is presented through five main themes.

Chapter Five provides a summary of the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Two presents a review of relevant literature and scholarly contribution underpinning this study. The focus of the study was to explore the perceptions of secondary school teachers with regards to the introduction of the GEC. The literature review includes a description of the evolution of the schooling system and education policies in South Africa from the apartheid era to date. This chapter also explores critical theory as the theoretical framework that underpins this study.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is the critical theory framework. This framework allowed the researcher to critique the society and the dominant policies that hold it together. Critical theory engages in critique, interrogate the policy, and examine policy players involved to reveal policy constructions (Diem & Young, 2015). The theory also provides opportunities for different voices that are not dominant to be heard in society. The theory is consistent with the approach of this study where the researcher explored teachers' perceptions of the GEC to reveal their perceptions and concerns on the policy. Following critical theory approach, this study provided an opportunity for teachers' voices to be heard with regards to the GEC.

The critical theory framework has an emancipatory interest in critical inquiry. It examines social conditions to uncover hidden structures that oppress various groups in society (Brookfield, 2005). In education, it questions how the education system can best offer education to all learners irrespective of their socioeconomic status (Diem & Young, 2015). This study is supported by the critical theory framework in understanding the teachers perspectives on how the GEC stands to benefit all learners irrespective of their socioeconomic conditions.

Critical theory was developed in 1923 by a group of scholars from Frankfurt School, Germany. The prominent scholars of the theory are Jurgen Habermas, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor Adorno. The theory focuses on empowering people to overcome different forms of domination, including race, class, age, and gender. It analyses beliefs, ideas, and policies that favour the privileged economic class over the lower classes. It is concerned with evaluating and changing society, in contrast to traditional theory oriented only to understanding or explaining it (Brookfield, 2005).

Critical theory argues that all knowledge, even the most scientific, is historical and broadly political in nature (Friesen, 2008). It further argues that all knowledge is shaped by human interests rather than objectivity (Friesen, 2008). Therefore, knowledge is neither neutral nor objective, but rather it is shaped by social interests. This study explored teachers' perceptions on the proposed policy. Questions were asked whether they think the GEC is made to serve social interests of all learners especially from the disadvantaged groups.

Critical theory is grounded on three core assumptions. The first assumption is that democratic societies are unequal and characterised by social inequalities and discrimination based on race, class, and gender. The second assumption is that social inequality is maintained and reproduced by spreading the dominant ideology to make the conditions seem normal. The third assumption is that critical theory helps to understand the situation as a precondition to changing it. It helps researchers to understand how the reproduction of unequal structures based on sharp economic inequality is accepted as a normal situation (Brookfield, 2005). The vision of critical theory is not only to understand society but also to transform it and emancipate people from oppression. To attain this vision, people must be aware of the dominant ideology that reproduces and maintains the status quo to seem normal (Friesen, 2008). It responds by critically engaging with the dominant ideology through ideology critique.

Ideology critique asks questions of things considered normal or common sense such as 'Why is it being made as it is and in whose interest?' (Friesen, 2008). It describes how people learn to recognise how uncritically accepted and unjust dominant ideologies are embedded in everyday situations and practices (Brookfield, 2005). It is this ideology critique that I utilised when exploring and analysing teachers' views and perceptions on the GEC policy. It is important for teachers to realise that education policies are not fixed, but rather can be questioned, critiqued and changed. Majority of education policies are implemented using a top-down manner, where policies are handed down for implementation without any room for questioning or critiquing. Critical theory encourages critical engagements towards education policies that affect our societies. In this way, critical theory becomes a theoretical framework in which the GEC policy is investigated through the secondary school teachers' lenses to reveal their views, criticisms, and suggestions on the proposed policy.

2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review includes a description of the historical background of the evolution of the schooling system in South Africa. It presents the education policies during- and post-apartheid. It describes the origins of racial inequalities and inequities in the schooling system.

2.3.1 HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.3.1.1 Native Education (Pre-Bantu-Education)

Molteno (1984) describes the evolution of schooling in South Africa during the colonialism period. He views the evolution of schooling as part and parcel of the evolution of South Africa's political economy. The school system, under the Native Education (NE), was structured for different races. The aim was to establish the supremacy of the colonisers (Molteno, 1984). Differential schooling was practiced as early as the 17th century. Indigenous people were schooled to become servants and manual labourers. They were made to feel to be of lower level in society. The main objective of the education system was to entrench a master-servant relationship. The natives were trained to be subordinates and whites were trained to be leaders (Molteno, 1984).

The separate and unequal schooling system entrenched racist divisions among learners of different races by preparing each race for their respective positions in society. This is stated in the 1936 report of the Interdepartmental Committee that "the education of the white child prepares him for life in a dominant society and the education of the black child prepares him for a subordinate society" (Molteno 1984, p. 64). This schooling system was characterised by unequal funding for the different groups. In the mid-1930s, the government spent more than 40 times more on the white population than on the African population (Molteno, 1984). The majority of black South Africans were out of school. In 1940, it is estimated that more than three quarters of black children did not get the opportunity to attend school (Molteno, 1984). The schooling system that existed before the rise of the National Party (NP) to power created the foundation for the racist Bantu Education (BE) that followed it.

2.3.1.2 Bantu Education

Bantu Education Act (BEA) was passed in 1952, segregating learners of different ethnic and racial groups. The architect of Bantu Education (BE) was Hendrik Verwoerd who was the Minister of Native Affairs at the time (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). Bantu Education was for the black communities and was inferior and of poor quality. The aim was to ensure that the black

communities were kept away from the economic sector to sustain the supply of cheap labour particularly for the agricultural, mining, and domestic sectors (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). It aimed to perpetuate white supremacy by providing good quality education to the whites at the expense of other races; Coloureds, Indians, and Blacks in order of priority. The worst education was for black people.

The language used for teaching was different for the different schools, intended to preserve the separate cultures. This is reiterated by Christie and Collins (2006, p. 60) that "Bantu education signified education for subservience and cultural domination precisely by imposing outmoded tribal customs, languages, and government on unwilling blacks." Schools for black learners were forced to use their local languages to teach, and Afrikaans and English languages were compulsory subjects (Kros, 1996). Schools were modelled in line with the NP's Bantustan policy.

Like NE, the BE also introduced different syllabuses to black schools intended to prepare blacks for subordinate positions (Kros, 1996). Subjects such as agriculture and handwork were emphasized in black schools to prepare them for their expected roles in the labour market (Christie & Collins, 1982). Molteno (1984) states that one of the main objectives of the BE was to reduce the number of black South Africans with qualifications, to limit the threat to the white working class. The aim was to reduce competition for skilled jobs and provide blacks with medium-level academic qualifications, teachers, and functionaries in the Bantustan bureaucracies. Thus, BE can be argued to have been a strategy by the government of the NP to de-skill or reduce the number of qualified blacks through the provision of very basic education. There was an expansion in the provision of schooling, but without quality (Kros, 1996).

The black schools were poorly resourced; books and classrooms were in poor conditions, teachers were poorly trained, the amount of money allocated per pupil in white schools was more than two and half times the amount allocated per black pupil in the urban township schools, and the teacher to pupil ratio was poor (Kros, 1996). The BE promoted racial identity, ethnic pride, and segregation (Fiske & Ladd, 2004).

The immediate effect of BE policy was inequality, huge differences between white and black schools. Different education departments were set up for different races. Bantu education led to an increase in the number of black students attending schools, however, more students attended lower primary, and few continued to high schools (Christie & Collins, 1982). Bantu

education also led to an increase in unqualified or untrained teachers in black schools leading to the provision of poor-quality education that characterizes basic education in South Africa today.

2.3.1.3 The Post-Apartheid Education

The legacy of apartheid persists in the current South African schooling system. Despite the adoption of non-racial education policies, black learners are still deprived of quality education. Racial inequality still exists in the education system. A person's race is still a defining factor in academic progress in South Africa today.

Sauden and Sayed (2004) explore the unintended consequences of non-racial policies that were put in place to redress racial inequalities in schooling. The authors argue that the new non-racial school policies reproduce class tensions through decentralisation processes where the school governing bodies are left to oversee school standards. Policy as a vehicle of democratisation in education recreates racial inequities in the system. Decentralisation permits the reproduction of racial inequities in new forms or disguised in other forms such as class. The authors further claim that the education policies as embodied in the South African Schools Act of 1996 contain some concealed exclusionary possibilities (Sauden & Sayed, 2004). The provisions for the governance of schools allow governing bodies to still exclude students based on race.

The policies that could be interpreted to be exclusionary in nature include the South African Schools Act (1996) and the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) Bill (1998). These laws make it difficult for the state to intervene directly to bring equity in schooling because the state relies on the provinces to do their duties. The provinces decide on the distribution of funds to sectors and schools. In this way, the class has been appropriated as a new way through which racial forms of exclusion continue to operate.

Fiske and Ladd (2004) argue that despite positive changes regarding racial desegregation of schooling, little progress has been achieved in racial integration among learners and teachers from different backgrounds. The authors reiterate that despite non-racial policies, school resources were not made equally available to students from different racial groups. They argue that the move from race-based to race-blind education policies failed to create equal schooling opportunities for most black students compared to white students. They acknowledge that the government has played a huge role in doing away with racist education structures and funding policies at a policy level but failed to achieve this in practice (Fiske & Ladd, 2004).

Most black learners continue to attend formerly black only schools with inadequate facilities while their white peers attend privileged schools with better facilities. Most black learners are locked out of the former white schools due to their high costs thus perpetuating the inequities in a schooling system (Fiske & Ladd, 2004).

Bloch (2006) refers to the state of basic education in South Africa as a 'crisis' because the schooling system has failed to meet its promise. The author, however, acknowledges that there have been significant achievements in turning around the apartheid discriminatory schooling system. The achievements include the unification of the various apartheid education systems and incorporating the Bantustans into a single national department responsible for all learners irrespective of their race.

Despite the stated achievements, Bloch (2006) highlights disparities amongst schools and notes that education is failing most black children by contributing to marginalisation and inequity rather than promoting social advancement, especially in the poor and rural societies.

A common theme that comes through is that the apartheid legacy of racial inequality in education persists in the current education system. The inequalities in the post-apartheid period are manifested in a different form as class divisions impacting the black learners negatively.

Van der Berg (2007) provides a broad overview of the economic dimensions of the schooling system in South Africa. The author argues that matric results have not improved in the historically black schools in the post-apartheid period. Therefore, the schooling system has contributed very little in supporting the upward mobility of poor children in the labour market. Racial inequalities are still persistent between predominantly former black schools where pass rates are low relative to the former white schools.

Expanding on the above arguments on the disparities in schools, Jansen and Taylor (2003) explain that inequalities between schools persist for several reasons. First, the extent of the backlogs in apartheid education requires a much greater investment than has been achieved through existing levels of budgetary allocation. A second major source of inequality between schools arises from the ability of more privileged schools to supplement government grants through school fees. Third, the management capacity of provincial education departments to deliver on allocated budgets remains a primary explanation for under-spending in schools in the poorest provinces. The authors state further that the lack of systemic thinking and implementation capacity have been major barriers to reaching the stated goals of educational

reforms in post-apartheid South Africa. They provide evidence to indicate that basic education in the country remains one of the most inefficient and ineffective in Africa, despite the disproportionate per-capita amounts spent on South African pupils (Jansen & Taylor, 2003).

Joubert (2012) further discusses the lack of systematic thinking and implementation capacity. The author argues that change of education policies needs to be accompanied by an implementation strategy which includes a programme of re-skilling and re-empowerment of teachers. If this does not happen, policies alone will not bring changes in basic education in the country. Thus, for policies to work they need to be accompanied by a human resource programme that will ensure their implementation. The key point here is that capacity building and empowerment are essential principles in ensuring the support of policies for the transformation of the basic education system to succeed (Joubert, 2012).

Spaull (2012) elaborates further on the role of teachers in basic education. He cites the role of teachers as the reason behind learner's underperformance in basic education. He states that it is ironic that, the biggest percentage of the education budget goes into the teachers' salary, yet the basic sector is the most unproductive of all sectors. He notes that the teacher's knowledge of the content they are supposed to teach is pathetic and does not justify the amount of money spent on basic education. He cites teacher absenteeism as a big problem. The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) study of 2007 indicated that "South Africa had the highest rate of teacher absenteeism of the 14 African countries that participated in the study" (Spaull, 2012, p. 18). It is estimated that teachers at least miss 20 working days in a year due to strikes and other minor reasons. The Western Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal, and Limpopo reported the highest teacher absenteeism.

Sondlo and Subotzky (2010) provide further insights into the implication of poor basic education on higher education in South Africa. The report argues that poor basic education poses a challenge to higher education in that the students who join universities are academically unprepared for higher learning. This subsequently poses a challenge to national development because of the high dropout rates at higher levels of education and the need to keep high standards for skilled labour. The unpreparedness of students entering higher education obstructs the attainment of higher education goals and continues to burden the higher education sector with costs for academic support and development of underprepared students and the associated costs of poor retention, success, and graduation rates.

In summary, the general perception of post-apartheid basic education is that the current schooling system is haunted by the apartheid legacy. Inequities in the schooling system still exist resulting in the current basic education system reproducing social inequalities. Although good policies have been adopted to address inequalities, their implementation has been very poor.

2.3.2 BASIC EDUCATION AND LABOUR MARKET

Spaull (2015) reiterates the above arguments that the current education system suffers the legacy of apartheid, highlighting inequality and poverty. Former white schools during apartheid remain functional while the former black schools are debilitated and not able to provide quality education to the learners. The author notes wide gaps in the achievement of basic education. Less than half of Black and Coloured youths (44%) completed matric relative to Indian (83%) and White (88%) youths (Spaull, 2015). Van der Berg et al. (2011) by acknowledging that great progress has been made in the enrolment of children into school at the appropriate age but there remain disparities in school grade progression by race and geographical areas, where the rural poor lag compared to their urban peers.

Low-quality education becomes a poverty trap for most black learners in South Africa (Van der Berg, et al., 2011). As black learners receive low-quality education and fall behind the curriculum compared to their peers from wealthy families, most of them drop out of high school. South Africa, therefore, is argued to have a dualistic basic education system like the apartheid era. The education system is therefore not a tool for social mobility but rather a mechanism through which an unequal society replicates itself (Van der Berg, et al., 2011).

The unequal education system leads to unequal labour market positioning. The poor children who attend dysfunctional schools and drop out, end up at the bottom end of the labour market, while their peers from wealthy households attending functional schools, perform well, and occupy the upper end of the labour market (Spaull, 2015). This affects the poor children's employment prospects in the labour market thus perpetuating the poverty cycle among blacks. The difference in educational outcomes in South Africa will only see improvements if policy focuses not only on continuing to ensure that learners remain at school but also on developing complementary strategies to change the poverty landscape of the country (Spaull, 2015).

2.3.3 THE PROPOSED GENERAL EDUCATION CERTIFICATE

The Department of Basic Education plans to introduce a grade nine school leaving certificate called the General Education Certificate (GEC). Learners could formally leave school

with government-approved qualifications, three years earlier than scheduled. Currently, South African secondary schools issue a school leaving certificate after completing grade 12. Also, there is no standardised assessment and proper mechanism to recognise the learning achievement of learners at the end of the compulsory school phase, which is grade nine (Department of Basic Education, 2019). Therefore, awarding the GEC would provide an accurate reflection of the learning achievement of learners at the end of the compulsory schooling phase (Department of Basic Education, 2019).

The GEC would allow learners who have completed grade nine to pursue alternative learning options such as technical, vocational, and occupational skills (Department of Basic Education, 2019). With a GEC, learners will be allowed to join Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. The DBE argues that the plan to introduce the GEC is in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 that aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The new basic education reforms are based on the 'three-stream model' which has the academic, technical, and vocational stream to cater for all learners with different interests and abilities (Department of Basic Education, 2019).

The DBE states that these new basic education reforms aim to address the problem of high rates of school dropouts especially at grade 10 and grade 11, where learners leaving the schooling system with no formal recognised qualification with which to navigate the labour market (Department of Basic Education, 2019)

2.3.3.1 The Purpose of the General Education Certificate

The main purpose of General Education Certificate is "to equip learners with the values, knowledge, and skills that will enable or enhance meaningful participation in society, contribute towards developing sustainable communities, provide a basis for learning in further education and training, and establish a firm foundation for skills development that will prepare learners for the workplace" (SAQA, 2001, p. 3). The GEC, therefore, is not an exit ticket for learners from an education pathway, but rather it offers alternative learning pathways that learners can access after grade nine. However, it may become an exit ticket from the schooling system if not implemented and managed effectively.

2.3.3.2 Advantages of the General Education Certificate

The strength of the GEC is that it will allow learners to select education streams based on their interests and abilities. Therefore, the GEC will assist learners in making informed career path choices based on learners' academic abilities (Mbatha, 2019). High-quality vocational education pathways could help improve graduation rates for learners who are low academic achievers and ensure their smooth transition from school to work (Field, et al., 2014). Furthermore, the GEC comes with additional standardised testing for grade nine learners which is a useful opportunity to assess the quality of the basic education system. Assessing learners in grade nine is a good move that would improve the provision of education at lower grades to prepare learners for grade nine exams (Mbatha, 2019). Currently, the only national standardised exams learners write is at grade 12.

The introduction of GEC would act as a motivation to improve the curriculum and management of TVET colleges as these institutions will be given bigger roles in the education system. With more focus on these colleges, they will be compelled to respond to job market needs (Mbatha, 2019), and hence equip youth with relevant skills needed in the job market. However, it is worth noting that the TVET colleges may not respond in the desired way due to the concerns highlighted on section 2.3.3.3 of this report.

Streaming into vocational training could have positive effects on gender equality in the labour market. Currently, South African labour markets are highly gendered segmented with women crowded at the bottom of the paying scale due to them having lower skills (Pikoli, 2020). Therefore, investments in female learners' direct access to non-traditional sectors offer opportunities to reduce gender divisions in the labour market and increasing returns to girls' education and training (Hassain, 2012). The TVET sector would need to be responsible for this. It is noted that gender stereotyping may be a hindrance to the efforts to reduce gender divisions in the labour market and increasing returns to girls' education and training.

2.3.3.3 Concerns of the General Education Certificate

The main concern with the GEC is that TVET colleges are not well managed and are under-resourced. Majority of TVET colleges are not well equipped to absorb an influx of learners who will be exiting the mainstream schooling (Mbatha, 2019). For the new policies to work, TVET colleges need to be revamped to provide up to date training. Many TVET colleges offer programmes that are customised by providers, and this has led to fragmentation and lack

of sustainability. As a result, over the years the colleges have become obsolete. The training must be tailored to the demand and opportunities in the labour market.

Another concern is that the GEC could encourage more learners to leave the schooling system (Mbatha, 2019). When the GEC is formalised, learner could use the certificate to look for jobs rather than continue with further training. This could lead to many learners entering a job market at a young age making them vulnerable to exploitation.

2.3.3.4 Implementation Plan of the General Education Certificate

According to the DBE, the first roll-out of the GEC is scheduled for 2023. The field trials for the GEC are currently taking place with 300 schools participating (South African Government News Agency, 2020). The sample size will be increased in 2023. The GEC policy will be rolled out to all schools by 2024 (BusinessTech, 2022).

The policy framework for the introduction of the GEC has been provisionally approved by quality assurer, *Umalusi*, and the department is in the process to publish it for public comments (Mofokeng, 2021). The DBE is currently working with *Umalusi*, to register the GEC as a recognised qualification on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (Department of Basic Education, 2021).

2.3.3.5 Public Perceptions on the General Education Certificate

There have been mixed reactions from the public towards the proposed school leaving certificate in grade nine. The main opposition party in South Africa, the Democratic Alliance (DA), criticises the policy stating that the move will produce unskilled young people. The DA further states that the plan is like the Bantu Education policy that prescribed that black learner receive poor quality and the most basic education to prepare them for low skilled and low paying jobs (Lindwa, 2019). The DA argues that this policy will still disadvantage the black youth in the labour market and perpetuate the poverty cycle. As an alternative, the DA advises the government to improve the current basic education syllabus to prepare skilled youth to be better players in the new digital age labour market (Lindwa, 2019). The party wants the government to explain how GEC will differ from the current education system, which is perceived to have failed the youth by not equipping them with adequate skills for employment (Lindwa, 2019).

The University of Pretoria lecturer Professor Salome Human-Vogel stated that, the TVET college sector is one of the mechanisms that the government is looking at to address the high unemployment rates by channelling the youth to technical colleges. Stellenbosch

University lecturer Dr Lize Barclay said there is nothing controversial about using grade nine as formal exit point, noting that some countries in Europe and Asia had adopted the idea many years ago (Makgatho, 2019). Prof Michael le Cordeur the Vice Dean of Stellenbosch University supports the policy and states that the GEC could offer a solution to youth unemployment in the country as it instils skillset to learners and hence make them employable (le Cordeur, 2019).

Supporters of the policy argue that the policy has the potential to boost the quality and structure of education in ways that support employment amongst youth (Mbatha, 2019). Schools will be forced to prepare learners better to pass grade nine exams the same way that schools focus on preparing learners for matric exams in grade 12. Currently the only standardised assessment of quality of basic education in the country is the National Senior Certificate (matric) exam written at grade 12. The GEC therefore presents an opportunity for an earlier standardised assessment for which the education system can be assessed (Duncan-Williams, 2022). This gives an opportunity for failing schools and students to be identified earlier on so that they could be given necessary support to ensure improvements. In the long run this could lead to improvements in the quality of the schooling system.

The proponents reiterate that the GEC will be a formal qualification that is recognised nationally and can be used to enrol learners in technical and vocational training colleges to be trained in specific skills that will enable them to look for work (Mbatha, 2019).

The public perception on the introduction of the GEC policy is still limited. There is no official statements released by other political parties apart from the DA. This could be because the policy has not been officially rolled out yet. Therefore, this study recommends further studies to be carried out so that we can get the perceptions of various stakeholders on the matter.

2.4 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER TWO

This chapter presented the theoretical framework and literature review of the study. It described the origins of racial inequalities and inequities in South African schooling system from apartheid period. It highlighted the purpose, advantages, concerns, and public perceptions of the GEC policy. The next chapter presents the research question, aims and objectives, and research design of the study.

CHAPTER 3:RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research question, aim and objectives, and research approach of the study. It highlights the research design adopted by the study. The chapter defines the population sample, sampling procedure, and the research instruments used. It describes the qualitative research methodology and justification for the selection of the methodology used. It further presents a discussion on the method of data collection and data analysis used. Lastly, it describes strategies and ethical considerations utilised to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTION, AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The research question that guided the study was:

What are the perceptions of teachers at two secondary schools in Johannesburg regarding the introduction of the General Education Certificate (GEC) at grade nine?

The primary aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of secondary school teachers regarding the introduction of the GEC in grade nine.

The specific objectives of the study were the following:

1. To explore secondary school teachers' perceptions about the introduction of the GEC policy in grade nine.
2. To establish secondary school teachers' perspectives about advantages and disadvantages to the implementation of the GEC policy.
3. To establish the secondary school teachers' perceptions on the training and support they might require for the successful implementation of the proposed change.
4. To explore suggestions and recommendations from secondary school teachers on the successful implementation of the GEC policy.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

To answer the research questions for this study, the researcher used a qualitative research approach. Polit et al. (2001, p. 469) define qualitative research as the "investigation of a phenomenon, typically in an in-depth and holistic fashion, through the collection of rich narrative materials using a flexible research design." In addition, Creswell (2005, p. 39) defines a qualitative study as "a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the view

of participants, asks broad, general questions, collects data consisting largely of words (or texts) from participants, describes and analyses these words for themes, and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner." Creswell's (2005) definition of qualitative research was adopted for this study because it relies heavily on first-hand data collected during interviews. Participants' views were analysed to understand their perceptions on the topic.

The use of qualitative research methodology for this study was influenced by the aim of the study, which is exploratory. The study sought to explore secondary school teachers' perceptions of GEC by collecting their views, and data that largely consisted of words. The methodology was useful in generating information required for the study by providing an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions on the proposed education reforms. The key advantage of using a qualitative research methodology is that it is interpretive with a broad and complex focus (open-ended) that allowed the researcher to have deeper insights and understanding of the issues.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Creswell (2007), a research design is an overall strategy that the researcher uses to address the research problem logically and unambiguously. It incorporates formulating the research questions, identifying data collection and analysis procedures, and the approach to the reporting of findings (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). This study adopted case study research design. The case study design refers to an inquiry to which a researcher collects detailed information about a particular topic from a specific group of individuals (Creswell, 2014). In this study the case that was studied is secondary school teachers' perceptions of the Grade 9 Exit Plan Policy, and the boundaries being the two secondary schools selected. The case study design investigates issues from the perspective of participants and draws meanings from their experiences and opinions attached on such issues (De Vos et al., 2005). This research approach therefore was appropriate for this study as the primary aim of this study was to gain insights into the secondary school teachers' perceptions, views, and opinions on the introduction of the GEC in grade nine.

3.5 POPULATION, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Fraenkel and Warren (2002), defines a study population as a group of people with similar attributes of interest to the researcher. The study population was all the Grade nine teachers from the two public secondary schools in Johannesburg. The sample constituted fourteen grade nine

teachers who had at least two years of classroom teaching experience in two public secondary schools in Johannesburg. Participants were selected by using purposive sampling.

Purposive sampling also known as subjective sampling is a sampling technique where participants for the study are selected based on the judgement of a researcher. The goal of purposive sampling is not to randomly select participants from a population that would act as a representative of the whole population, but rather to focus on a specific group of participants with specific characteristics of a population that are of interest which will enable the researcher to best answer the research question (De Vos et al, 2005). Purposive sampling therefore is the opposite of random sampling where each participant has an equal chance of being selected.

The sampling criteria below was used in selecting the study participants:

- Participants must be employees of the two selected government schools.
- Participants must have at least two years of classroom teaching experience.
- Participants must be teaching grade nine.
- Any teacher without any of the above requirements was excluded from the study.

The researcher recruited fourteen teachers from two selected secondary schools, seven from each school. The researcher contacted the principals of the two schools and requested them to share the participants information sheet (see Appendix A) with the grade nine teachers with at least two years' teaching experience. The researcher then contacted (telephonically) willing participants from the list provided by the two principals. Once participants were identified, consent forms for the participation in the study (see Appendix B) were handed out to them. Permission was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education in written form to conduct the research study in the two schools (see Appendix C). Ethics clearance was also obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand (see Appendix D). Once approval to conduct research was obtained, interviews were arranged at the time and location suitable to the participants. No coercion was used to recruit participants. The researcher made it clear to them that their participation was voluntary, their identities were kept anonymous, and responses treated confidentially.

3.6 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The research instrument used in this study was in-depth interview guide. An in-depth interview guide is a method for guiding an interview and ensuring that important questions are not forgotten during the interview (Creswell, 2014). The guide contained set of questions and

provided a structure that was followed by the researcher during all the interview sessions. The interview guide was flexible and allowed the researcher to probe for clarity on related issues that arose during the interview that were not part of the interview guide (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The interview guide that was used for the study is presented in Appendix E.

3.7 PRE-TESTING THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Pre-testing research instrument is one of the important steps in a research project. Its purpose is to identify potential problems with the research instrument before data collection phase (Abu Hassan, Schattner, & Mazza, 2006). The aim of this step in this study was to evaluate the clarity of the questions, assess if interview questions produce relevant information to the overall research question.

The pre-test phase involved three participants who met the criteria set for participants for this study. During the pre-test each participant was interviewed individually by going through all questions on the interview guide. The interviews were face to face. They took place in the schools they work at for their convenience. Information was provided to participants in the form of participant information sheets, consent form (see Appendix B) before the start of interviews. The collected data during pre-testing phase was not included as part of the final data analysis of this study.

The adjustments made to the pre-test questions from the feedback received from interviews are presented in **Table *3-1*** below.

Table 3-1: Pre-test and post-test questions

Pre-Test Questions	**Post-Test Questions**
What do you understand by the General Education Certificate?	I assume you are aware of and informed about the General Education Certificate? What are your views about the policy?
Which stakeholders participated in the development of the policy?	Who do you perceive to be critical stakeholders in the implementation of the GEC policy and why?
Does your school plan on rolling out/adopting the GEC model?	When do you think, your school might start to implement the new GEC policy?

3.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.8.1 Methods of Data Collection

The study adopted semi-structured interviews to collect data. Semi-structured interviews are an effective method for data collection where the study intends to explore participants' perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a topic. They provide the opportunity for direct face to face or virtual platforms interaction that are useful for clarifying concepts that might be confusing to both the participants and the researcher. This allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the questions by probing for answers and clarifying ambiguous answers. The interviews contribute to the trustworthiness of the study since the recorded data can be retrieved. The interviews offered room for the participants to respond on their terms. De Vos et al (2005) states that interviews are a useful way of getting in depth data on the topic at hand.

The semi-structured interviews involved asking open-ended questions designed to obtain an in-depth understanding of participants' views, opinions, perceptions, feelings, and knowledge on GEC. Semi-structured interviews provide a better understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires (Creswell, 2003). Interviews are, therefore, most appropriate where little is known about the topic or where detailed insights are required from the individual participants (Cropley, 2019). The goal of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth perspective of the participants. The main purpose of using semi-structured interviews for data collection was to gather information from participants who have personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs related to the subject matter.

Face to face interviews were conducted with 14 participants in their respective schools where they work. Interviews were recorded to ensure that participants' responses are accurately represented alongside note taking. The interviews were scheduled for online interaction by Zoom meetings due to the COVID19 pandemic. However, this was changed to face-to-face interview sessions because the teachers were hesitant and uncomfortable with online interviews.

Under the COVID circumstances, it was difficult to access the schools or secure an appointment with the schools to collect data. This resulted in a six-month delay in data collection. The permission to conduct interviews in the schools was granted telephonically upon intervention by the research supervisor through the Gauteng Department of Education and other contacts made in the first school.

COVID19 protocols were followed during the interviews. The researcher and participants sanitised their hands, wore masks, and maintained at least a one-meter distance during the interviews.

3.8.2 Methods of Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected data. Thematic analysis is an approach for analysing qualitative data that uses raw data to derive key themes and concepts through interpretations of collected data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Key themes were developed by reviewing the interview transcripts. The researcher discussed the themes in depth and concluded them. The collected data was analysed using six steps as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2013). These steps are as follows:

Step 1. *Acquainting with the data*

The researcher acquainted with the collected data by transcribing the audio recordings and reading the transcriptions. The process of transcription is seen as an excellent way for a researcher to familiarise with the collected data (Riessman, 1993). The researcher read and re-read the transcripts of the interviews to familiarise with the information and identify key themes (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

Step 2. *Generating initial codes*

This phase involves generating initial codes from the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The researcher organises the data into meaningful categories and generated codes to represent each category to make the analysis of the data and its interpretation more efficient (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This step was achieved by thorough reading of interview transcripts and organise collected data into categories and generate appropriate labels for them.

Step 3. *Searching for themes*

This phase involved sorting the codes into potential themes. Themes are broader than codes (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The researcher identified common recurring patterns that come across different codes and group codes into potential themes that tell meaningful story about the study. This phase was achieved by combining different codes into broader themes that accurately depicts the different data sets (Creswell, 2014).

Step 4. *Reviewing themes*

This phase requires refinement of identified themes. The researcher must ensure that identified themes adequately capture the contours of the coded data (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

Therefore, identified themes were compared to generate codes and data to ensure they are the accurate representation of the collected data. This was done by re-reading the data and comparing the information with generated themes to ensure all relevant information is included accurately and adequately.

Step 5. *Defining and naming themes*

During this phase, the identified themes were named and defined. The researcher will describe each theme, stating the story each theme tells and how these stories fit within the broader picture of the research (Clarke & Braun, 2013). In other words, the researcher wrote a detailed analysis for each individual theme and stated how these themes helped answer the research question.

Step 6. *Producing the report*

This phase involves the final analysis and write up of the report. The final analysis and write up should demonstrate evidence of the themes within data sets (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The final writeup should be a logical story the data tells within and across themes about the research question (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The researcher wrote an analytical report while using extracts from collected data as evidence in making argument about the research question.

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

In qualitative research, it is crucial to include strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of the study (Nobel & Smith, 2015). This study used credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to enhance its trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004).

3.9.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the study measures what it sets out to measure. Credibility deals with the question of 'how consistent the findings are with reality?' (Shenton, 2004). To ensure credibility participants were given a chance to decide to take part in the study by themselves to ensure that they are genuinely providing free information. This was done by informing them that participation is voluntary, and one is free to withdraw from participating at any point without explanation (Shenton, 2004). The researcher used triangulation to further ensure credibility of this study. Triangulation in this case involved the use of informants from two schools to get a rich picture of perceptions of the teachers towards the GEC. In this way participants viewpoints and experiences can be verified against others and hence gaining rich picture of views, perceptions, and attitudes of those under scrutiny (Shenton, 2004).

3.9.2 Transferability

Transferability involves the extent to which the findings of one study can be transferred or applied to a wider population (Shenton, 2004). The researcher provides the contextual information of the study for comparison purposes to enable transferability to similar areas and populations. This study provided a detailed description and background information on the study area and population to allow the readers to have a good understanding and to conceptualise the study setting (Shenton, 2004). The study provides a detailed description of the participants and the contextual information on the two schools including their geographical location and historical details. In this way information from the study could be used as an analogue for similar studies in comparable areas and populations.

3.9.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent to which the study can be repeated using the same methods in the same context to reveal the same results (Shenton, 2004). This study documents the procedure followed from the information reviewed, detailed description of the study area and population, research design, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and reporting.

3.9.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the study findings can be confirmed to be neutral and objective, free of the researcher's bias (Shenton, 2004). To ensure confirmability the researcher transcribed the interviews and used enough direct quotations so that readers get a picture of participants responses. The reporting included the interview guide and transcriptions as appendices for verification and confirmation.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The application of proper ethical principles and protection of human participants is crucial in all research study (Creswell, 2014). The University of the Witwatersrand has rules and regulations to guide researchers during their studies which involve human participants. This study abided by the existing ethical guidelines for undertaking qualitative research. The researcher took into consideration ethical principles set out below during the study.

3.10.1 Ethics Approval

According to Creswell (2014), a researcher is required to submit the research proposal for the proposed study to get ethical clearance before conducting a study. The researcher

obtained an ethics clearance certificate from the Departmental Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) to conduct this study (see Appendix D). The study followed the Wits University guidelines on studies that involve human participation.

3.10.2 Permission from Schools and Participants

Permission was sought from the Gauteng Department of Education, and the two participating schools. The researcher sent via email participant information sheets to the participants prior to the interviews. The researcher completed the application form to request permission to conduct the study from the Gauteng Department of Education (see Appendix C). The letter requesting for permission was given to the principal of each of the two schools to allow the research to be conducted in their schools.

3.10.3 Voluntary Participation

Voluntary participation means that participation in this study requires potential participants to be well informed about the research and have freedom to decide whether to participate or to decline (Shenton, 2004). It also means that the participants can freely withdraw from the study at any time. The recruits were not coerced to take part in the study by any means. Participants were provided with participant information sheet (see Appendix A) because it has information that they might need should they be uncomfortable about how the study has been conducted.

Participants were given an opportunity to decide if they want to participate in the study or not. The researcher made it clear to all participants that participation was voluntary, and that one could withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions. Participation in this research was voluntary with no favours given or threats made.

3.10.4 Informed Consent

Informed consent is an essential element of any research study. Participants were given consent forms (see Appendix B) and were requested to sign them prior to interview sessions. The researcher verbally explained the principle of informed consent to the participants, emphasising that they could at any time withdraw from taking part in the study. The researcher explained the aim of the research and provided clarifications to participants who had questions about the research. By adhering to the above ethical requirements, the researcher ensured that the participants feel and are safe to trust the process for trustworthy results (Briggs & Coleman, 2012).

3.10.5 Confidentiality

Confidentiality refers to not disclosing any private information about participants without their permission (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). According to Maree (2011), confidentiality of the findings of the study and the protection of the participants' identities are an important ethical aspect of any study. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher informed participants that their participation would remain confidential, and their personal details would not be disclosed in anyway in the final research report. The researcher did not reveal the names and the identity of the participants.

3.10.6 Anonymity

Anonymity is stricter than confidentiality as it requires the identity of participants to remain unknown to the research team (Creswell, 2014). The participant identities were known to the researcher due to face-to-face interviews, therefore anonymity in this case could not be assured. The researcher kept the identities of the participants private. Their names were not mentioned in the interview transcripts and this report. Instead, pseudonyms were assigned in the form of codes to refer to the participants.

3.10.7 Data Protection and Management

According to Creswell (2014), analysed data need to be stored for a particular period before it is discarded. The author recommends that data should be kept for five years, consistent with APA's recommendations. The data was digitally stored in a password-protected computer throughout the data collection phase. Copies of the interview transcripts without any identifying information are digitally stored securely in a password-protected computer for future use if need be.

3.11 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER THREE

This chapter presented an overview of the research methodology and research design. The research question, aim and objectives were highlighted. The research approach, research design, sample and sampling procedure were discussed as well as research instrument and pretesting phase. Methods of data analysis were also described together with the ethical considerations employed by this study. The next chapter focuses on the presentation and discussion of findings from the study.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the analysis, interpretation, and discussion of research findings. Data analysis is referred to as the process of systematically going through and sorting the interview transcripts, observation notes or other information that the researcher gathers to widen the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The purpose of data analysis is to create meaning and make sense of the collected data and establish how the collected data answer the research question creating new knowledge in the process (Yin, 2003).

The data analysis and interpretation in this study is guided by the study objective; to explore the perceptions of secondary school teachers on the proposed grade nine exit policy. The purpose of the study is to generate information that can be used to improve the implementation of the GEC and in the monitoring and evaluation process of the policy. Thematic analysis is employed in this study to identify and describe patterns across the collected dataset.

All participants were asked similar interview questions. The interview approach was semi-structured. The participants were interviewed individually. This was done by face-to-face interaction except one case where a written response was provided by the interviewer due to a busy schedule. The interviews were conducted in the schools where the participants work.

Fourteen secondary school teachers, seven from each of the two schools, were interviewed. Their teaching experiences ranged from two to forty-two years. For anonymity and confidentiality, the schools are referred to as A and B and the participants allocated codes as follows:

School A: Participants A1; A2; A3; A4; A5; A6; and A7.

School B: Participants B8; B9; B10; B11; B13; B14; and B15.

4.1.1 Profile of Participants

The participants were from public schools in Johannesburg. A summary of their profile is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Profile of the participants

Participant	Gender	School	Experience
A1	Female	A	2 years
A2	Female	A	21 years
A3	Male	A	19 years
A4	Female	A	6 years
A5	Male	A	10 years
A6	Male	A	30 years
A7	Female	A	34 years
B8	Female	B	5 years
B9	Male	B	5 years
B10	Male	B	20 years
B11	Female	B	42 years
B12	Male	B	30 years
B13	Male	B	16 years
B14	Male	B	6 years

The racial profile of the participants was 12 black and 2 white. The gender profile of the participants was eight male and six female. Their work experience ranged from two to forty-two years. All the participants were grade nine teachers at the time of the interview. Participants profiles were further categorised as follows:

- 2-10 years of teaching experience: 6 participants, 3 females and three females; 5 blacks, 1 white.
- 11-20 years of teaching experience: 3 participants, all black males.
- 20-30 years of teaching experience: 3 participants, 1 female, 2 males, all blacks.
- 30-42 years of teaching experience: 1 female, 1 male; 1 black, 1 white.

4.1.2 Profile of the Schools

The two schools are situated in the suburban neighbourhoods of Johannesburg. The two schools were within a kilometre of each other in a straight line. One was a girl only school and

the other was a boy only school. Although the schools are in a high-income area, the learners were mainly of middle to low-income status.

4.2 THEMES AND FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

Thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It seeks to find what is common to the way a particular topic is perceived to make sense of the commonalities (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme 'captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). A theme is therefore a sentence that captures a pattern across the data set that is important and relevant in answering the research question. The recorded interviews were transcribed, and responses grouped into the themes and sub-themes presented in Table 4.2

Table 4.2: Themes and sub-themes from the collected data

Themes	Sub-Themes
GEC viewed as an inclusive policy that aims to accommodate learners with different needs and diverse learning abilities.	Diversity
	Inclusivity
	Access to TVETs
GEC presents opportunity to improve learning outcomes for learners.	It opens technical training opportunities to learners failing in the mainstream system.
	It presents academic certification at the end of compulsory schooling.
	Reduce school dropouts.
The role and the level of teachers' participation in the formulation of education policies is critical.	Teachers are the implementers of education policies.
	Teachers have direct contact with schools and learners.
	Teachers understand the realities of what is on the ground that policy makers lack.
Success of the GEC policy depends on joint stakeholder involvement, collaboration, and consultation.	Parents
	Teachers
	TVETs
	Private sector/employers

Themes	Sub-Themes
Training and workshops needed before the GEC is officially rolled out.	Training
	Workshops
Suggestions and recommendations for successful implementation	Engagement with teachers and parents
	Open more technical colleges
	Selection criteria

Theme 1: The GEC policy is viewed as inclusive in nature to accommodate learners with different needs and diverse learning abilities.

To establish participants' views on the GEC policy, the participants were asked to state their thoughts about the government's plan to introduce the GEC in grade nine. The data collected from the interviews conducted with participants indicate that most participants (12 participants out of 14) perceive the GEC policy to be inclusive in nature as it accommodates all learners with different learning abilities. Participants regard the GEC policy as a positive education reform to a schooling system that only caters for learners who are academically strong. They believe the policy accommodates the diverse needs of learners. When participants were asked to share their opinions on the GEC policy, this is what they said:

Participant A1:

Yes, I have heard about the GEC, and to a certain extent I agree with the initiative. Remember we have a lot of differences in society particularly in terms of learners, there is a lot of diversity, so to accommodate the learners who are not more classroom orientated. This policy can give them an opportunity to explore the other avenues, in terms of may be, things like boiler making and electrical engineering cause that's what I have heard of most technical colleges offer to learners who have a certificate in grade nine.

Participant A2:

The GEC aims to provide a well-balanced general education which will benefit learners at the end of compulsory schooling. It is aimed at better positioning learners to take advantage of competencies across the subjects and introducing new subjects.

Participant A7:

I think it is a good idea, because there are many learners who are not academically capable of continuing into the FET phase. And certainly, as a teacher, we can see the learners who are struggling at grade 10 level, and often end up failing grade 10, which discourages them. Failure seems to lead to bad behavior. And problems with doing the academic work, they lose confidence.

Participant B13:

It is going to be catering for the dropouts. I think it will help those who want to leave the system and they are not going to be coping with the system beyond grade nine.

Participant B9:

For me, we've heard about GEC, but we've never seen the policy directly in the media. But I've always been saying to the young boys that you know, for me, it's something that I'm proud of, in terms of our government, because I know in America, they have something similar like a grade nine school Leaving Certificate. And I say, you know, unfortunately, a lot of our kids are dropping out. And if you look at grade nine, that's our basic education. And a lot of people just need basic education. But unfortunately, we are facing hostile views in the community when you say, you know, it's okay for a child to leave in grade nine certificate, it's as if you are shutting them out of the economy, the formal economy. So, in essence, it's a very tricky, sensitive topic. Because on one hand, we are saying yes, it's helpful because some kids, they don't want to continue to grade 12.

Participant B10:

I think the policy is good at taking into cognizance that our learners, they start from primary level up to secondary level without having an exit exam. So, they only sit for the national exam when they're approaching grade 12, which is not a novel idea.

Participant B15:

In theory, the policy is a really good idea, but my issue is how it's implemented. So, the thing is that they exit this basic education with a certificate. Now, as far as I see it, majority of students that I see are not so inclined for academic work. They're much more inclined for hands on technical stream type tasks, which the normal matric certificate doesn't cater for. So, the big thing is that the general education certificate, if paired with colleges and institutions that will

train these learners in the technical tasks and skills, they need to work in life, then I'm all for it. But without those institutions in place for the learners to go and access it's not going to work. And as it currently stands, we don't have enough space and those types of colleges.

Participants A6 and B14 expressed similar positive sentiments about the GEC policy stating that the policy is meant to benefit learners who are talented in other fields rather than those that require above matric qualifications. These participants' views are consistent with the rights-based approach to inclusive education. Inclusive education advocates for change in education systems and calls for commitment to create education systems and schools which respond to the needs of individual learners, rather than enforcing children with different learning needs to comply with a rigid education system (UNICEF, 2014). Inclusive education promotes the schooling system that enables learners to be successful at school and to be included in society by meeting their diverse learning needs (OECD, 2008). In other words, inclusive education advocates for social justice in education system. It seeks to challenge exclusionary policies and practices in the schooling system. This is also consistent with the SDG4's commitment to providing quality education to all. Inclusion is about ensuring all learners especially from disadvantaged and poverty-stricken communities have access to quality learning.

The GEC is therefore perceived by these participants as a path to implementing inclusive education to all learners to provide equitable opportunities for all learners, thus making society more just and less discriminatory. Inclusive education focuses on the delivery of education (UNICEF, 2014). Therefore, the GEC is perceived as generally a positive education reform policy aimed to cater for learners with different needs and abilities.

All the participants stated that the policy stands to benefit learners who struggle academically, who drop out of the schooling system before completing grade 12. Therefore, the GEC policy would improve access to technical colleges and offer new career pathways. They however stated that for the GEC to be successful, it needs to be paired with technical colleges that will absorb such learners and train them in technical skills. They advise that the society should be educated on the policy to limit hostility towards it.

On the other hand, less than half of all participants criticised the GEC policy stating that it could encourage learners to leave school. They also stated that at grade nine learners are too

young to decide on their future career paths. The learners need to remain in the schooling system to acquire basic literacy skills beyond grade nine as stated by the following participants:

Participant A4:

I feel, like the grade nines are probably about 13 or 14 years old. So, I don't think they're ready to go out there. They're still figuring out what do they like, what do they don't like. So, keeping them in the school system will be advised. I think rather, they should maybe change the curriculum to fit the needs of the diversity of the abilities of the learners. But in terms of them getting out of the school system and going out there competing with individuals who are adults. I don't think it's a fair environment for them.

Participant A5:

.... I think grade nine level, it's early because most of the students are very young. And they really don't know what they would like to do in future, in terms of career option. They are still at that phase where they are not so sure, on what they want to become in the future. So at least if it was just extended, maybe to grade 10, an additional year would have given them a more solid foundation for them to be in a better position to make a well-informed decision after having selected the different subjects which they would like to pursue to fulfill their career paths.

Participant B8:

... I don't think it's appropriate because now it takes away an opportunity from everybody to push a lot harder. You know, if a child knows that I can exit at grade nine, then why push even further. But as a teacher who has been on the ground, I think it makes things better, because I just don't think that, that mainstream education is for every learner. You know, and I think that, creating an opportunity for them to exit with something in the hand, it's better than walking away with nothing. So, from that positionality, I think, to some degree, it does make sense.

Participant B11:

In fact, in the present-day situation, it's not going to be feasible to have the GEC certificate. Learners are not ready to go out, into the world seeking a job because they are still immature, okay. And the transition from primary school to grade eight, they don't overcome it in grade eight, sometimes you are working with them in grade nine, to bridge the gap between

primary and high school. And the problem is the support, we don't get full support from parents, you know, to bridge this gap. So sometimes we are working on our own, and we also don't get the support from the children. Besides being immature, academically they are not performing that well, even in grade nine level for them to get the certificate and be confident that they can go out into the world and make a name for themselves. The problem also is the learners' attitude, attitude towards work, time management, accountability is the major problem.

Four other participants were skeptical of the GEC policy. They were not against the policy per se but expressed their reservations about it because of the unintended consequences such as joining the labour market at a very young age with no adequate skills and hence be prone to exploitation. They indicated that the policy could be a platform for the lazy but capable learners to exit the school system. They also stated that the learners are too young at grade nine to decide on their career paths.

In summary, the teachers' perspective on the GEC policy is positive, but with four dissenting voices. They view the policy as an opportunity to implement inclusive education for all learners. The GEC will provide equitable opportunities for all learners, lessen discrimination, and improve social justice in the education system through challenging exclusionary policies and practices. The GEC is perceived as generally a positive education reform policy aimed to cater for learners with diverse needs and abilities.

Theme 2: GEC presents opportunity to improve learning outcomes for learners

When asked about the potential advantages of the GEC policy, all participants stated that the GEC policy stands to help learners who are not strong academically and could drop out before completing grade 12. All the participants noted that many learners struggle to pass when they get to grade nine and grade ten. The GEC therefore presents an opportunity for such learners to choose different pathways to success, rather than dropping out of school without any form of academic certification. In this way learners get another opportunity to pursue alternative learning options such as joining technical colleges who otherwise would have been on the streets without any skills or academic certificate, hence improving their life chances. The formal academic certification at the end of grade nine recognises the nine years of schooling. Something that the current system doesn't do.

The participants' responses were as presented below:

Participant A1:

The advantages are that the learners get a certificate in grade nine, and that the policy can accommodate learners who are not class orientated, and hence accommodate the diversity we have in our learners. Like I said most learners prefer, to be hands on, where some of them are more classroom based, they like more to study books and all that. I feel like the GEC program wants to give all learners the opportunity to be successful human beings.

Participant A7:

The first advantage that I think would be that learners who are not academic won't be forced to stay on at school for a further three years. If alternative qualifications could be given, such as in the technical field, I really think this would benefit learners who really dislike having to sit at a desk and learn everything out of book.

Participant A2:

The GEC aims to provide a well-balanced general education which will benefit learners at the end of compulsory schooling. It is aimed at better positioning learners to take advantage of competencies across the subjects and introducing new subjects. The GEC also aims to balance the mismatch between the available skills and competencies against the expectations and requirements of the labour market. Its major primary purpose should be to equip learners with the values, knowledge and skills that will enable or enhance meaningful participation, contributes towards developing sustainable communities, provide a basis for learning in further education and training, and establish a firm foundation for the assumption of a productive and responsible role in the workplace.

Participant A3:

In my view, the advantages are going to be that the confusion, which we have been seeing when learners progress from grade nine to 10, where in the learners didn't really know, they end up changing subjects later when they get to grade 11. And in that, the new system is going to iron out that confusion, because it makes learners to be aligned to their career paths earlier in the curriculum.

Participant A6:

Definitely, a certificate will allow them of course, if they decide to continue with further studies. We know most of our students, they struggle quite a lot. But if they can do at least some mathematics up to that level and exit the system that could help their life after school.

Participant A4:

The advantage is, it will benefit some of the learners especially those probably who failed a lot, or have gotten themselves into maybe teenage pregnancy, and then they can, they now fit in the society, by going out there to the TVET colleges and stuff like that.

Participant B13:

I believe there are some learners that really need to be advised to take this route. One, there are other learners that repeated in primary school maybe once, they come to grade eight and nine they also repeat. Those learners are now too old for the FET and there is high likelihood that they will repeat again in FET. So, if it is in this policy, a certificate that can be given at grade nine, it might open their mind that they should take this other route.

Participant B8:

Advantages for me with it, at least we've got a lot of learners who walk away with something in hand, you know, because I do know that there's a lot of them who drop out at grade 10, and they would have nothing to show that they've been through schooling. So now with this alternative form of certification, regardless of how weak minded someone is, at least, if they can push to grade nine, then they get to walk away with some sort of a paper.

Participant B9:

So, the advantages of implementing the GEC policy number one, learners who don't want to go further, in further education and training will have a qualification. Because the problem now is that once you are done with grade 10, you drop out, there's nothing in your record to say you have something to show that you completed schooling. So, when you leave grade nine with the GEC, you have a qualification.

Participant B14:

The advantages will be that most learners who would be scared to come to school, because of fear of failing and repeating class and then not making it to matric, whereas now it will just change the perception of school. That is not only about excelling in class, if you just make it to grade nine you can always be promoted to the next phase in life. Another advantage is that those learners who are not gifted academically but have the talent can always earn a living through their talent.

The view of all the participants is that the GEC will benefit the learners especially those who are not coping in the mainstream schooling. The policy offers alternative training for learners without the ability to proceed to grade 12. The provision of a formal academic certification at grade nine will be evidence that the learners have been at school for nine years. The learners can proceed to technical training colleges to acquire skills to improve their life chances.

There are, however, few participants who expressed concerns over the GEC policy. According to them, letting learners opt out of the schooling system at grade nine may encourage learners to leave schools prematurely. They stated that at grade nine learners are too young to know what career paths they want to focus on. The participants were not against the GEC policy per se, but the unintended consequences it may have on learners. They expressed reservations with the GEC policy but supported it.

Participant A5:

... we will have a situation where more students will feel like they are encouraged to drop out of school earlier. So instead of going the extra mile to achieve their career paths, they'll just feel like as long as I have that certificate, that means I'm fine. I'm okay, I can still get a job. So, it's like we'll be setting the standard a bit low for those who are not disciplined enough or need that guidance, that push to attain their goals.

Participant B8:

I don't think it's appropriate because now it takes away an opportunity from everybody to push a lot harder. You know, if a child knows that I can exit at grade nine, then why push even further. In terms of motivation, knowing the kind of kids we teach, who would opt for

anything, which looks easier. I think when they're on it, it might open a door for laziness, you know, we might lose skills, we might lose great minds into this.

Participant B11 expressed pessimism on the GEC:

The advantages will be very slim, okay. We don't have enough skill-based schools, we don't have enough skill-based subjects. Even if the schools are there, they are not fully equipped to get these learners who are good. They have the skills in them to go out, for instance, plumbing, electrical, you know, the food industry, to go out at the end of grade nine and pursue a career in that. So, in terms of skills of the learners, I think those who are more skilled, to be able to go out, and say I'm going to try and find a job or see how I can get back to make this career for myself.

The participants recommended that the government needs to fund technical colleges so that learners who take that path receive proper technical training. They noted that many technical colleges in the country are under resourced and therefore the government need to revamp them.

Theme 3: The role and the level of teachers' participation in the formulation and design of the GEC policy is critical.

The study results indicate that the teacher's role in the implementation of GEC is important and requires emphasis. Teachers are regarded as change agents, and the successful implementation of education reforms is determined by their acceptance of the policy, their involvement in its formulation, and the degree of their ownership of the reforms (Carless, 2001). This is because they have first-hand and direct access to schools and learners, and therefore can provide valuable insights with regards to education reform policies.

When participants were asked who they perceive to be critical stakeholders in the implementation of the GEC policy, half of the participants mentioned secondary school teachers:

Participant B9:

The people that I see as critical stakeholders in this policy are first and foremost, its teachers. Because I believe that teachers are the backbone of the education system, and they need to be informed, they need to be aware of the implications of this policy. So, for me I'd say teachers are important.

Participant B11:

I believe it's the teachers, we should be the ones you know, as the main stakeholders, because we are working with the learners. We know the caliber of learners, we know the quality in each school, and the strengths, the weaknesses of the learners. So, we should be consulted, because personally, I feel the teachers are the ones that are working on the ground. They are spending most of the time at school, and some of them don't even see their parents after school.

Participant B8:

... I think you want your learners and your teachers because these are the people on the ground. They know exactly what's happening. And so, for me, the most important stakeholder in education is the teacher and the learner, then the rest can support what the two agree one.

Participant A5:

I believe the stakeholders here, most importantly, we should have the teachers and the parents themselves because these are the guardians for the students. The teachers have a thorough understanding of the students' academic achievements or potential from the time they enter the system from grade eight. So, the main stakeholders should be the parents and the teachers themselves.

Participants A3, A5 and A6 expressed similar views stating that secondary school teachers are important stakeholders because they are the ones who understand the realities and dynamics of schooling system. Ignoring teachers' perspective and input can lead to resistance towards a policy, hence hindering the effective implementation of the education reforms (Romanowski & Ellili-Cherif, 2013).

Participants' responses point to the crucial role teachers play in the implementation of the GEC policy. Participants stated that their views need to be taken into consideration because they are the ones on the ground and understand the realities of schools and learners. Therefore, there is a need for greater involvement of teachers in formulating the GEC policy. When the teachers are not involved in the design of education reforms, they are unlikely to support their implementation (Schleicher, 2018). Therefore, policy makers and the government at large need to foster greater involvement of teachers in formulating the GEC policy. Teachers play a critical role that is recognised as a prerequisite to effective implementation of education reform policies

(Yun, 2007). Teachers are viewed as the number one stakeholder in the education sector as they are the curriculum policy implementing agents in the classrooms (Maluleke, 2015).

The rest of the participants mentioned the other key stakeholders that need to be involved in GEC policy as parents, learners, schools, employers, and the DBE. The responses indicate that the mentioned stakeholders must be involved for the policy to be a success.

Theme 4: The success of the GEC policy depends on joint stakeholder involvement, collaboration, and consultation.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews is the importance of involving, engaging, and consulting with all key stakeholders for the GEC policy to be a success. Most of the participants noted that the process of stakeholder collaboration and consultation is rather limited and poorly done. They noted that the government uses top-down approach to the GEC policy. Participants said they heard about the policy for the first time in the media and were not involved or consulted in the formulation of the policy. Participants pointed the need to collaborate with all key education stakeholders who they identified as teachers, parents, TVETs and employers in order to make the GEC policy a success.

Participant A5:

…the department needs to involve all stakeholders, the parents, the teachers, and sit down with them and consult and have more of questionnaire which can be done where they get to understand how the stakeholders feel about the new policy which can be potentially introduced. Then first have the buy-in of all stakeholders so that by the time they implement it, it can be able to run smoothly without any hiccups. Because failure to do that would result in resistance, and the policy not being implemented successfully. So, having the buy in of all stakeholders involved is very important.

Participant B14:

…. there must be some kind of consultation, the government must be the one who consults with the private sector. Because for this to be a success, the private sector is the one that has to play the most role. Because they are the ones who employ the most. So, without consultation, it won't succeed.

Participant B11:

Unfortunately, the education department does things in isolation. You know, we at grassroots level were not consulted, they could have done a survey, with teachers and just do a pilot survey. Every school, we all need to be involved, you need to get the majority viewpoints. So, it's just been a top-down transition.

Participant B8:

The level of consultation I have noted so far is that they do engage teachers, but at a level of unions, remember, these are your representatives as teachers. So, it is not every teacher goes there, it is those who are selected to represent us through unions. So, my understanding is that they did engage with the unions, as is to what degree that I cannot tell.

Participant B9:

There needs to be a proper engagement across all structures. So that these structures form partnerships. And now when they form partnerships, it's not a top-down approach. It's a sort of like a coordinated process where we garner support because at the end of the day, we're talking about learners' lives. And now if we are talking about people's lives, it's going to compromise the lives of leaners, because they are going to get this grade nine certificate, but how is it going to assist them if other stakeholders are not part of it.

Participant B15:

The thing is, the consultations are often done, but those consultations are never actually considered. Like look at the CAPS policy as well. The CAPS policy had all levels of consultation of teachers done across board, but none of the consultation was listened to.

Participants A1, A4, B10 and B13 stated that there was no direct engagement and consultation made with key education stakeholders. These responses indicate that there was limited involvement and consultations made with key education stakeholders. Participants stated that the DBE only had limited consultations with unions that represent teachers. They also noted that parents were not engaged at all. Participants noted that parents are important stakeholders as it is their children that are going to be affected in one way or another by the GEC policy. Participants pointed the need to have clear communication about the benefits of GEC so that it can be understood and accepted by parents. They stated that parents prefer their

children to continue to grade12 even though they do not perform well in class. Involving parents is therefore crucial for the GEC policy to be accepted. This reiterates the Critical theory's stand that different voices that are not dominant must be heard in society. Critical theory encourages critical engagements towards education policies that affect our societies (Diem & Young, 2015).

Participant A7:

I think the number one challenge is going to be parents' reluctance to let the children leave school at the end of grade nine. Some may feel that this is too young. And many parents have hopes that their children will get to matric level and achieve a matric certificate. So, I think it's going to be the parents' reluctance in this case to take their children out of school following grade nine.

Participant A5:

I think the challenge the main challenges coming will be come from the stakeholders, especially the parents. Because there's a certain perception, which parents do have that the child should go all the way to university level, and if we are creating an early exit from the schooling system, it's going to be very difficult to get the cooperation for most parents. Because they would like their child, any parent would like their child to attain a matric certificate. That is the minimum expectation which they would like their child to have, regardless of the child passing or not. So, it's a cooperation from the parents.

Participant B13:

The challenge might be on the parents' side. Because some parents might still be on the view that my child needs to try the FET and go up to grade 12. Just like any another normal child. Because my view is, if this is implemented well, a learner qualifies according to this policy to go to TVET college, then they must try that route because there won't be any real prospects of this learner passing in the normal system. So, I think the parents might be difficult to convince them that okay, my child qualifies to be part of this new policy.

According to the teachers' responses, getting the buy-in of all key education stakeholders is of paramount importance for the GEC policy to be successful. Involving all stakeholders is key to successful implementation of any policy because it improves communication and brings in various perspectives (Schleicher, 2018). Insufficient collaboration, involvement and

consultation of key stakeholders could hamper the success of the GEC policy. The top-down approach in the implementation of education policies can be a hindrance to successfulness of policies (Maluleke, 2015). It can therefore be concluded from participants' responses that the GEC policy is being developed within a framework of limited stakeholder consultation.

Surprisingly, two participants (B13 and A1) said that they had no idea that such a policy was in the making and heard about it for the first time from the researcher.

Theme 5: Training and capacity building is needed before the implementation phase.

When asked what kind of support they need to successfully implement the GEC policy, majority of participants pointed to the need of training and workshops to align themselves with the proposed reforms.

Participant A2:

Workshops provided by well-trained facilitators to make sure that teachers are equipped with relevant information to successfully implement the policy.

Participant A5:

.. we would need workshop training based on career orientation, so that the students are not disadvantaged in any way. I believe all the teachers involved need to be taught so that we are well informed and better able to advise the students on their options in the future.

Participant A7:

I think the guidance that we will need as teachers will be that we must know what work in each of our subjects will be covered in the exit examination and how best we can prepare learners for the future ahead.

Participant B13:

I think maybe before being implemented; all schools must be retrained. Look at all challenges, advantages, and disadvantages, all the stakeholders come into play and look at all the pros and cons about the new policy. And then we can now have the training on trying to iron out those loopholes. I think the kind of training needed will be one, understanding the policy, how is it going to help the school system, and how is it going to help the learners.

Participant B14:

…all we need to be sent to some sort of workshop and spend at least minimum a month of training in the next three years, while wait to implement it in the next five years. So that when we start it we know what to do. I think funding and equipment are needed for implementing such policy, because as it stands really, we only have chalks and paper. So, with this, we must get everything that is needed.

Participant B9:

Resources are going to be needed. Training is going to be needed whether its virtual or physical. Workshops are going to be needed. And then, policy guidelines need to be there so that we know what we are saying to the learners, we cannot find ourselves wanting, saying one thing, but you are contradicting official policy statement.

Participants A1, A3, A4, A6 B8 and B11 expressed the need to train the teachers before the implementation phase begins. What comes from the above responses is that teachers require training to fully understand the proposed changes. Training and capacity building for secondary school teachers who are the implementers of the GEC policy is imperative. Poor implementation of education reform policies is associated with poor capacity among teachers (Hesbon, Bomett, & Catherine, 2014). Therefore, training and capacity building would equip them with needed tools and skills to translate the policy into practice.

Participants also mentioned funding and provision of necessary resources as a pre-requisite to the effective implementation of the GEC policy. They stated that the DBE should provide schools with adequate funding and resources. Financing is an important element of education reforms. Inadequate funding can prevent the progress and effective implementation of education reform policies and hence prevent the achievement of reform objectives (Africa Development Bank, 2014). Therefore, the DBE needs to provide adequate finance and resource for the funding of the GEC policy.

Theme 6: Teacher's suggestions and recommendations to improve GEC

When asked to state suggestions and recommendations in implementing the proposed GEC policy, this is what the participants said:

Participant A1 suggested that:

I think they should have the criteria that helps them to choose the best candidates for the program, because if they just take any type of learner, may be all learners will just take the option to leave school. So, I think there should be criteria that department uses to choose participants, may be let's say, mark allocation for certain subjects, so that when learners are selected need to have obtained a certain mark. For instance, if a learner wants to do electrical engineering, they should have a pass mark for relevant subjects, so at least, we can see that they have some sort of basic understanding of that topic, for them to study that type of field.

Participant A2:

I will personally ask them to select committees amongst the Grade nine teachers who will facilitate the process effectively.

Participant A3:

I would say to them that there is need for greater attention to be paid to teachers, who are going to be the essence of implementing this new system. So, teachers have got to be involved, and the assessment methods got to be monitored. And once the assessments are monitored, and the teachers are visited, and the data is collected, then the districts must collect all that and then map the way forward from there.

Participant A6:

Right number one, train a few teachers who will then train others. That would be my suggestion number one. And then of course, the logistics as well is one of the areas that I would want them to focus on the logistics of running such a program of that magnitude and that scale in the country.

Participant A7:

I would like to recommend that the educators and the executive of the school management are insistent that if a child is advised to leave following the certificate being awarded to them, that they must not then request to come back in grade 10.

Participant B8:

For me, it would be advising them to create alternative options for the kids who will be exiting schools at grade nine, something like opening more school centers and making them more accessible to this kind of learners. And then adapting a curriculum for where these kids are going to go.

Participant B10:

One suggestion is that teachers and learners must be given time to prepare for the examinations for it to be effective. More resources should be provided, like textbooks, and other teaching materials. Since we are using technology, we are moving to the fourth industrial revolution.

Participant B11:

Firstly, I will do a survey. I have my questionnaires and give it out to schools. Maybe one afternoon, I can do a team's meeting with principals, and tell them this is what they need to do for it to be effective. Go through the questionnaire with them and work on that. So, if I'm a consultant, I'll do that, I'll do a team's meeting, do a questionnaire and maybe from each school or each district. And maybe meet the parents and teachers and discuss their views on it.

Participant B13:

The advice would be given it out to the teachers, the schools, the unions to consult about it. So, more consultation, more discussions about the advantages and the disadvantages to be openly discussed.

Participant B14:

... the main point would be to advise them to invite experts from other countries that have successfully implemented similar policy, and to be the ones who are driving the training and the direction of the policy and how to remain successful.

The participants recommended the following to be considered in the implementation of GEC policy:

- The development of a selection criterion to guide the identification of learners permitted to exit secondary school at grade nine.

- Further engagement with teachers and parents as the key stakeholders for education and training on GEC.
- The expansion and opening of more skills-based colleges to cater for learners who leave school at grade nine.
- The use of a quality-control-quality assurance such as Umalusi to give grade nine exit a grade just like matric for the learners to write a formal exit exam so that it is recognised formally.
- More funding from the government to support the implementation of the policy in schools.
- The invitation of experts from countries that have successfully implemented similar policies to train and advise teachers on GEC.

The findings resonate with the critical theory theoretical framework that emphasizes the need to provide opportunities for different voices that are not dominant to be heard in society. There is clearly a need to further engage with parents and teachers as stakeholders to provide an opportunity for their voices to be heard with regards to the GEC. This will allow for further criticism, interrogation, and examination of the policy for wider acceptance and better implementation.

4.3 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

As stated in Chapter One the aim of this study was to explore perceptions of secondary school teachers on the proposed grade nine exit policy. The general perception of the teachers on the GEC policy is positive. There is a consensus by all the participants that the GEC will benefit the learners who are struggling academically and may drop out before completing grade 12 through having access to other training avenues such as TVETs. Participants' responses revealed that teachers are willing to welcome and accept the GEC policy. Participants also called for training and workshops to prepare teachers before the policy is rolled out.

The chapter presented and analysed responses obtained from interviews conducted with grade nine secondary school teachers. The six themes and their subthemes identified from the study were the following:

- The GEC was viewed as an inclusive policy that accommodates learners with different needs and diverse learning abilities. The sub themes under this theme were diversity, inclusivity, and accessibility to other training opportunities such as TVETs.

- The GEC presents an opportunity to improve learning outcomes for learners. The sub themes under this theme included the following:
    - It opens technical training opportunities to learners failing in the mainstream system.
    - It presents academic certification at the end of compulsory schooling in grade nine.
    - It presents opportunity to reduce school dropouts.
- The role and the level of teachers' participation in the formulation of education policies is critical. The sub themes included:
    - Teachers are the implementers of education policies.
    - Teachers have direct contact with schools and learners.
    - Teachers understand the realities on the ground that policy makers lack.
- The success of the GEC policy depends on joint stakeholder involvement, collaboration, and consultation. The stakeholders included: parents, teachers, technical colleges, and the private sector.
- Training and workshops are needed before the GEC is officially rolled out. The sub themes included training and workshops.
- Suggestions and recommendations for successful GEC policy implementation. The sub themes included:
    - Policy makers engagement with teachers and parents.
    - Opening more technical colleges.
    - Developing a selection criterion to technical colleges.

The themes and subthemes were identified and explained supported by direct quotations, literature, and the theoretical framework. The following chapter consolidates the main findings, conclusions, and present recommendations to improve the implementation of GEC.

CHAPTER 5:MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarizes the main findings of the study and presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study. The findings are assessed against the aims and objectives of the study. The primary aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of secondary school teachers on the introduction of the GEC in grade nine. The study had four main objectives. The main findings and conclusions in relation to the different objectives are addressed in Section 5.2 below.

5.2 MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Objective 1: To explore secondary school teachers' perceptions about the introduction of the GEC policy in grade nine.

This objective was achieved by reviewing the relevant literature (see literature review in Chapter Two), interviewing secondary school teachers as the method of data collection described in Chapter Three, and analyzing empirical data in Chapter Four. The main findings and conclusions are presented in **Table 5.1**.

Table 5.1: Secondary school teachers' perceptions on the introduction of the GEC policy

Secondary school teachers' perceptions on the GEC policy		
	Finding	**Conclusion**
1	Participants perceive the GEC policy as a positive education reform to a schooling system that only caters for learners who are academically strong. Participants believe the GEC policy accommodates the diverse needs of learners.	The perceptions of the teachers on the introduction of the GEC policy in grade nine were positive. Participants perceive the GEC to be inclusive in nature as it accommodates all leaners with different learning needs and abilities. The GEC is therefore perceived by participants as a path to implementing inclusive education to provide equitable opportunities for all learners, thus making the society just and less discriminatory.
2	Some participants were sceptical of the GEC policy stating that if not effectively implemented, it could encourage learners to leave schools prematurely. Participants noted that grade nine learners are too young to decide career paths for their future and hence need to remain in the mainstream schooling system to learn the basic literacy skills that majority lack in grade nine.	Participants were not necessarily against the GEC policy per se, but rather worry about the unintended consequences that could result from the policy such as acting as a platform to exit the schooling system even when learners can work harder to get to grade 12. The participants' skepticisms emanate from the fact that grade nine learners are too young to decide on their career path.

Objective 2: To establish secondary school teachers' perspectives about the advantages and disadvantages to the implementation of the GEC policy.

This objective was achieved through the review and analysis of the media reports from various stakeholders on the proposed GEC (see literature review in Chapter Two), interviewing grade nine teachers from two schools as described in Chapter Three, and analyzing empirical data from the interviews in Chapter Four. The main findings and conclusions are presented in **Table *5-1***.

Table 5-1: Advantages and disadvantages of the GEC policy

Advantages of the GEC policy		
	Findings	**Conclusion**
3	Research participants stated that the GEC policy stands to help learners who are not strong academically and on the verge of dropping out before completing grade 12. Participants noted that many learners struggle to pass exams when they get to grade nine and grade ten. The GEC therefore presents an opportunity for such learners to choose different career pathways to success, rather than dropping out of school without any form of academic certification. The following advantages were stated by the participants: • GEC will open technical training opportunities to learners failing in the mainstream system. • GEC provides an academic certification at the end of compulsory schooling. • GEC will reduce school dropouts.	There is a consensus by all participants that GEC stand to benefit the learners especially those who are not coping in the mainstream schooling. Participants' responses point to several advantages of the GEC policy that revolve around the theme of improvement of educational outcomes and the education system, that in turn, benefits the society and country.
Disadvantages of the GEC policy		
	Findings	**Conclusion**

4	A few research participants noted that GEC could encourage learners to drop out of school prematurely in search of jobs if not implemented effectively. The participants were not against the GEC policy per se but were concerned about the unintended consequences it may have on learners. They expressed reservations but still supported the policy.	The noted concern was that the learners may decide to use the GEC as the exit ticket from the schooling system to enter the job market. Participants suggested that the government needs to come up with mechanisms to ensure that all learners leaving the schooling system get absorbed in technical colleges for further training.

Objective 3: To establish the secondary school teachers' perceptions on the training and support they might require for the successful implementation of the proposed change.

This objective was achieved through the review of literature on education reform (see literature review in Chapter Two), the interviews with teachers as described in Chapter Three, and the analysis and interpretation of empirical data presented in Chapter Four. The main findings and conclusions are presented in **Table *5-2***.

Table 5-2: Secondary school teachers' perceptions on the training and support needed to implement GEC

Secondary school teachers' perceptions on the training and support needed to implement GEC		
	Findings	**Conclusion**
5	Participants expressed the need for the following: • Training and workshops before implementation to align themselves with the proposed reforms. • Continuous guidance by the DBE to make sure that teachers understand and know what content needs to be completed in each subject before exit. • The teachers need to be well informed about the policy guidelines to be able to advise learners on the best academic path to take.	Training and capacity building for secondary school teachers who are the implementers of the GEC policy is imperative. The training would provide them with necessary skills to perform duties for the effective implementation of the policy. The training is required before the official rollout of the GEC.
6	Participants emphasised the importance of financing the GEC policy for successful implementation. They stated that the DBE should provide schools with adequate funding and necessary resources to implement the change.	Adequate funding is key to achieving GEC policy goals. The DBE needs to put concerted efforts to provide adequate finance and resource for the effective implementation of the GEC policy.

Objective 4: To explore suggestions and recommendations from secondary school teachers on the implementation of the GEC policy.

This objective was informed by the critical theory as discussed under the theoretical framework underpinning the study in Chapter Two. The critical theory encourages critical engagements towards education policies that affect our societies. The researcher explored the perceptions of teachers on the GEC to reveal their suggestions and recommendations on the policy.

This objective was achieved mainly through semi-structured interviews to collect data that involved asking open-ended questions designed to obtain an in-depth understanding of grade nine teachers' views, opinions, perceptions, feelings, and knowledge on GEC as described in Chapter Three. Interviews were recorded to ensure that participants' responses were accurately represented alongside note taking. The data collected from the interviews were analysed and interpreted as presented in Chapter Four. The main findings and conclusions are presented in **Table *5-3***.

Table 5-3: Secondary school teachers' suggestions and recommendations for successful implemental of GEC

Secondary school teachers' suggestions and recommendations to ensure successful GEC implementation		
	Findings	**Conclusion**
7	Participants suggested to set up admission criteria that would be used to select learners to join technical training stream	There should be a standard selection criterion for learners seeking admission into vocational and training colleges
8	Participants noted the importance of training of teachers before the implementation phase	Teachers' training and capacity building is important for effective implementation of the GEC.
9	Participants noted the importance of consultation and engagement with teachers, parents, and trade unions before the implementation GEC. They recommended that the DBE should stop using a top-down approach of imposing new policies without adequate consultations with the key stake holders. They recommended that the policy makers should build rapport with stakeholders on GEC and involve them in formulating and implementing education policies.	Consultation and engagement with key stakeholders are key for the GEC policy to succeed.

Secondary school teachers' suggestions and recommendations to ensure successful GEC implementation		
	Findings	**Conclusion**
10	The government should invite experts from countries that have successfully implemented similar policy to share best practices and provide expert advice.	Experts' inputs and guidance are required from countries with similar systems to effectively implemented the GEC policy
11	There is a negative perception of TVETs in the society especially by parents. Participants noted the need to invest and put more funding on TVETs to revive them and make them more marketable.	There is a need to rejuvenate TVETs through increased funding to improve the institutions to change the negative perception by the society.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY FINDINGS TO GEC POLICY

The study findings raised important issues on the introduction and the implementation of the GEC policy. First, the findings show the positive attitude of secondary school teachers towards the introduction of GEC. The participants regarded the GEC as a positive education reform to a schooling system that only caters for learners who are academically strong. Teachers perceived the GEC policy to be inclusive in nature as it accommodates all leaners with different learning abilities.

There was consensus by all the participants that GEC stands to benefit the learners especially those who are not coping in the mainstream schooling. Participants' responses point to several advantages of the GEC that include the opening of technical training opportunities to learners who cannot continue in the mainstream system, provision of an academic certification at the end of compulsory schooling to enable learners to pursue other interests, and reduction of school dropouts without certification to show that they attended school. It is believed that this will improve the education outcomes and in turn benefit the society at large.

Secondly, the study findings raised other concerns that require reflection. First, the research participants did not have enough information on the GEC policy, yet they constitute key stakeholders. This implies that teachers have not been sufficiently informed or prepared for the reform and that the stakeholder engagement process has not reached the intended people. The participants indicated that there has been no direct engagement or communication with the DBE on the policy. They noted the need to collaborate with and educate all key stakeholders on the policy. The teachers called for more involvement in the formulation and design of education

policies. Related to this is the need for teacher training and capacity building, not only in the secondary schools but also in the TVET sector to handle the changes in the system.

Second, the participants noted the poor state of the TVET colleges in the country. This is consistent with what was discussed in the literature review about the concerns of the GEC. Majority of TVETs are not well equipped to absorb the potential influx of learners who will be exiting the mainstream schooling (Mbatha, 2019). For the GEC policy to be a success, TVET colleges need to be revamped to provide up to date training. The training must also be tailored to meet the demands based on the opportunities that exist in the labour market.

Lastly, there is a concern that the GEC policy could have unintended consequences of encouraging learners to exit the schooling system and use the certificate to enter the labour market to look for jobs rather than continue with further training. This is consistent with what was noted in the literature review section, that the GEC could encourage learners to leave the schooling system and join the labour market (Mbatha, 2019). When the GEC is formalised, learners could use the certificate to look for jobs rather than continue with further training. Mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that all learners who exit the schooling system get opportunities to join technical colleges to gain appropriate and relevant skills to be absorbed into the labour market.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations transpired from the study. The recommendations are directed mainly to the DBE as the developers of the policy. Further research is also recommended to prepare the TVET sector for GEC.

5.4.1 Department of Basic Education

There is need for further consultation and education of key stakeholders on the GEC policy. The key stakeholders include the teachers, parents, learners, schools, employers, and the DBE. The respondents indicated that the key stakeholders must be involved for the policy to succeed. The study results indicate that the teacher's role in the implementation of GEC is important and requires emphasis. Teachers are regarded as change agents, and the successful implementation of education reforms is dependent on their acceptance of the policy, their involvement in its formulation, and the degree of their ownership of the policy.

The main concern with the GEC is that TVET colleges are not well managed and are under-resourced. Majority of TVET colleges are not well equipped to absorb an influx of

learners who will be exiting the mainstream schooling (Mbatha, 2019). For the GEC policy to work, TVET colleges need to be revamped to provide up to date training. Many TVET colleges offer programmes that are customised by providers, and this has led to fragmentation and lack of sustainability. As a result, over the years the colleges have become obsolete. The training must be tailored to the demand and opportunities in the labour market.

The DBE needs to guard against the unintended consequences that could result from the GEC policy such as providing an exit platform for learners when they can continue to grade 12. Grade nine learners are too young to decide on their future careers. There should be a standard and clear selection criterion for learners seeking admission into vocational and training colleges at grade nine. Secondary school teachers and DBE officials should play a crucial role in guiding learners and their parents/guardians to make suitable decisions.

The DBE needs to come up with mechanisms to ensure that all learners leaving the schooling system at grade nine get absorbed in technical colleges for further training before getting into the labour market.

Training and capacity building for secondary school teachers who are the implementers of the GEC policy is imperative. The training would provide them with the necessary skills to perform their duties for the effective implementation of the policy. The training should be undertaken before the official rollout of the GEC.

Adequate funding is key to achieving GEC policy goals. The DBE needs to put concerted efforts to provide adequate funds and resources for the effective implementation of the policy, not only in the secondary schools but also in the technical training institutions.

5.4.2 Further Research

A national study of this nature is recommended to cover all provinces in South Africa to find out teachers' perceptions of the GEC policy, as the results and conclusions cannot be fully generalized for the whole country. Furthermore, further studies can be carried out to explore perceptions of the education stakeholders towards the GEC. As the topic is still new, there is not much literature on it.

The unpreparedness of TVETs for the introduction of GEC has been highlighted both in the reviewed literature and by the participants in the study. The TVET are noted to be in a poor state and a key concern of the GEC because they are not well equipped to absorb the potential influx of learners who will exit the mainstream school at grade nine. As reiterated by Mbatha

(2019), TVETs need to be revamped and tailored to provide up to date training to meet the demands of the future labour market.

More research therefore needs to focus on improving the TVET for GEC to succeed. The potential research focus areas to support this would include the following:

- What institutional forms, systems and cultures are required to make TVETs prepared to absorb the potential influx of learners who will exit the mainstream school at grade nine under the GEC policy?
- What are the employers' perceptions of the future labour market demands and what should TVETs be doing to support developments in those directions in readiness for GEC?
- What are the challenges of sustainable futures that TVETs need to address to be relevant to the future labour market demands in the wake of the proposed GEC policy?
- Will there be jobs in the market for learners who leave the school system at the end of grade nine for TVET training?

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Appendix A: Participants Information Sheet

Title of project: Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers on the Proposed Grade Nine Exit Plan Policy: The Case of Two Secondary Schools in Johannesburg, Gauteng

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Adillah Abdallah, and I am a master's student in Social Development at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I must undertake a research project, and I am investigating 'the perceptions of the secondary school teachers on the proposed grade nine exit plan policy' under the supervision of Prof Edmarie Pretorius. The aim of this research project is to find out the views, opinions, and perceptions of secondary school teachers with regards to the introduction of the General Education Certificate (GEC) in grade nine.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an online interview. Due to Covid19 pandemic the interview session will be done using online Zoom meeting. This activity will involve answering questions on the research topic and will take around 30 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview *session*.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project, you will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be confidential and anonymous as I will not use your actual names or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. The data collected from this

research project will be stored in a password protected computer and kept for five years. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Researcher: Adillah Abdallah

Email: 569325@students.wits.ac.za

Cell No: 0795349549

Supervisor: Prof Edmarie Pretorius

Email: Edmarie.Pretorius@wits.ac.za

Tel No: +27 11 717 4476

Appendix B: Consent Form for the Participants in the Study

Title of project: Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers on the Proposed Grade Nine Exit Plan Policy: The Case of Two Secondary Schools in Johannesburg, Gauteng

Name of researcher: Adillah Abdallah

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below).

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous.	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in her research report.	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	YES	NO

…… (signature)

…… (name of participant)

…… (date)

…… (signature)

…… (name of person seeking consent)

…… (date)

Appendix C: Gauteng Department of Education Approval Letter



GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	**01 March 2021**
Validity of Research Approval:	**08 February 2021– 30 September 2021** **2021/51**
Name of Researcher:	**Ochieng A A**
Address of Researcher:	**27 Melrose Place**
	51 Athol Oaklands Road
	Melrose North
Telephone Number:	**0795349549**
Email address:	**569325@students.wits.ac.za**
Research Topic:	**Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers on the Proposed Grade Nine Exit Plan Policy: The Case of Two Secondary Schools in Johannesburg, Gauteng**
Type of qualification	**Master's Degree by Coursework and Research Report in the field of Social Development**
Number and type of schools:	**2 Secondary Schools**
District/s/HO	**Johannesburg East**

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

02/03/2021

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1. *Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

2. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.*
3. ***Because of COVID 19 pandemic researchers can ONLY collect data online, telephonically or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate. The approval letter will then indicate the type of arrangements that have been made with the school.***
4. ***The Researchers are advised to make arrangements with the schools via Fax, email or telephonically with the Principal.***
5. *A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
6. *A letter / document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.*
7. *The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.*
8. *Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*
9. *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.*
10. *Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*
11. *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.*
12. *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.*
13. *The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.*
14. *On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.*
15. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*
16. *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.*

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

02/03/2021

Mr Gumani Mukatuni
Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 02/03/2021

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

Appendix D: Ethics Clearance Letter

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

CHAPTER 1: DEPARTMENTAL HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SOCIAL WORK)CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Protocol number: SW21/02/02

Project title: Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers on the Proposed GradeNine Exit Plan Policy: The Case of Two Secondary Schools in Johannesburg, Gauteng

Researcher/s: A A Mohammed, student number: 569325

School/department: SHCD Social Work

Date considered: 05 March 2021

Decision of the committee: Approved (Minimal risk)

Date ratified: 16 April 2021

Expiry date: 30 April 2024

Date: 22 April 2021

Chairperson: Prof E. Pretorius

Cc: Supervisor: Prof E Pretorius

CHAPTER 6: Declaration of researcher(s)

To be completed in **DUPLICATE** and **ONE COPY** returned to the Administrative Assistant, Room 8, Department of Social Work, Umthombo Building Basement or e-mailed to Fezile.Ndebele@wits.ac.za

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorised to carry outthe abovementioned research and I/we 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.

For Mastersand PhD an annual progress report is required.

\-   ______/______/____

SIGNATURE   DATE

CHATER 7: PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

School of Human and Community Development: Social Work
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050, South Africa
T +27 11 717 4472 **| E** socialwork.SHCD@wits.a.c.za **|** www.wits.ac.za/shcd/social-work/social-work-as-a-profession/
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Appendix E: Interview Guide

Title of project: Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers on the Proposed Grade Nine Exit Plan Policy: The Case of Two Secondary Schools in Johannesburg, Gauteng

Participant 1:

School A:

Gender:

The number of years of teaching experience:

1. I assume you are aware of and informed about the General Education Certificate? What are your views about the GEC policy?
2. Who do you perceive to be critical stakeholders in the implementation of the GEC policy and why? In your view, what might be the advantages of implementing the GEC policy and why?
3. Share with me the challenges, if any, you as a teacher is foreseeing in implementing this GEC policy and why?
4. Tell me by when do you think the school, you're teaching at might start implementing the new policy on GEC?
5. What kind of training, guidance and/or support do you as a teacher need to successfully implement of the GEC policy?
6. Imagine you are a consultant to the DoE on the implementation of the GEC policy. What suggestions and recommendations would you make to them on implementing the GEC policy?