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School Heads' Experiences and Perspectives on Critical Leadership Competencies in Zimbabwe: A Phenomenological Study



School of Education

by

Tapfuma Ronald Jongwe

A thesis submitted in the fulfilment of the academic requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the Faculty of Humanities: School of Education

at the

University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Supervisor: Dr Pinkie E. Mthembu

Date Submitted: July 2024

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Tapfuma Ronald Jongwe, under the supervision of Dr Pinkie E. Mthembu, hereby declare that this research, *School Heads' Experiences and Perspectives on Critical Leadership Competencies in Zimbabwe: A Phenomenological Study* is my unaided work and that:

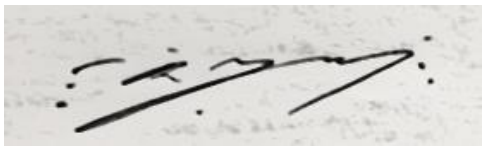
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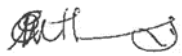
Tapfuma Ronald Jongwe

Date: July 2024

STATEMENT BY THE SUPERVISOR

I Dr. Pinkie E. Mthembu,

As the candidate's supervisor, agree to the submission of this thesis and confirm that the thesis has been submitted with my approval.



Supervisor: Dr P. Mthembu **Date: July 2024**

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Thank you all, because of you, like Julius Caesar, I came, I saw, I conquered – *Veni, vidi, vici*!

DEDICATION

To my loving wife Zvikomborero, thank you for inspiring me and believing in me since day one. I would not have reached this milestone without your unwavering support.

To my children, Aanshe, Jayden, Tyler, Idaiishe and Liam – You are the source of my strength and everything that I do is for you. May you make me proud and achieve even more than I have.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine the lived experiences of Zimbabwean school heads and, from these experiences, draw their resultant perspectives on the critical competencies required for effectively leading schools within the Zimbabwean context. School leadership has evolved into an inevitable pillar in education research and practice, with governments worldwide investing in school leadership development as part of broader strategies to enhance their education systems and improve learning outcomes. As a result, many school leadership models and competencies have been developed and identified, with some being adopted by and adapted to African contexts. Yet, a look at most of these models and competencies shows that they are primarily derived from the global North and not rooted in African experiences. Zimbabwe has not been immune to this challenge, as reviewed literature pointed to a need for more scholarly work on school leadership in general and school leadership competencies in particular. This gap in the literature on school leadership competencies thus motivated this research. The research sought to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by identifying school leadership competencies drawn from and informed by the lived experiences of Zimbabwean school heads.

The study employed a qualitative research method informed by a phenomenological research design, particularly hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology allowed me to interpret my data and make meaning of the research participants' lived experiences through a *fusion of horizons* that enabled me to interface these experiences with my prior knowledge of school leadership in Zimbabwe. My data generation involved in-depth face-to-face phenomenological interviews with six school leaders drawn from three provinces. The participants were a balanced mixture of primary and secondary heads, two of whom were female. Additional data was generated from participant diaries that were provided to the research participants to document their contemporaneous leadership experiences over a six-month period.

The research applied a generic approach to variables like school levels, geographical locations and gender as the primary variable of interest was school leadership competencies regardless of the mentioned contexts. This presents an opportunity for further studies that may want to build on the research findings by applying a contextualised lens that factors in other variables that this research did not consider.

The findings of this research show that Zimbabwean school heads viewed the critical competencies essential to their role as grounded in both transformational and instructional leadership, which were the two theories that underpinned this research. The research showed that some competencies straddled both theories, emphasising the importance of integrating these leadership theories to foster effective school leadership, a case that the research made in combining the two theories as the theoretical framework of this research. In total, the research identified twelve competencies that were of an instructional, transformational and blended (cross-cutting) nature.[1] Furthermore, the research revealed that leadership competencies alone were insufficient in building effective school leadership and contributing to improved learning outcomes. There is a need for education authorities in Zimbabwe to create an enabling environment that allows school leaders to utilise their competencies effectively. The research thus identified five enabling factors that Zimbabwean school heads singled out as key support pillars in creating an enabling environment that allows competent school leaders to thrive.

The research concludes by identifying a set of lessons learned from the study and recommendations that Zimbabwe could consider in enriching its school leadership journey.

[1] The experiences of school heads are reported in the past tense as there were only six participants. Insights drawn from the research for the training of school heads specifically in Zimbabwe are outlined in the present tense since they are universally true.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE STUDY

ACE	Advanced Certificate in Education School Management and Leadership
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BSPZ	Better Schools Programme Zimbabwe
CIET	Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
DSI	District Schools Inspector
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EDF	Education Development Fund
EdTech	Education Technology
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HSTP	Heads' Support Training Programme
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MoPSE	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
NAPH	National Association of Primary Heads
NASH	National Association of Secondary Heads
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
NCTL	National College for Teaching and Leadership
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
PLC	Professional Learning Circle

RDC	Rural District Council
SDC	School Development Committee
SMIT	School Management and Induction Training
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TPS	Teacher Professional Standards
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

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CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction and Background

Over the years, the environment in which school leaders the world over operate has become increasingly complex, more demanding and multi-dimensional (Carrington et al., 2022; Day et al., 2020; Duze, 2012; Pont et al., 2008). In effect, the context of school leadership has significantly changed in the past three decades and this is particularly signified by a plethora of past and current educational reforms and school restructuring efforts. Such efforts are mostly seen in some Western countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and also in the Asia-Pacific region – particularly in countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Australia and Mainland China (Cheng & Townsend, 2000; Day et al., 2020). Reynolds et al. (2014) argue that the role of school leaders has become more critical than ever in the face of constantly changing educational contexts. Over the past few decades, the responsibilities of school leaders have evolved significantly. Today's school leaders are responsible for administrative tasks while, at the same time, they are expected to engage with educational policies and practices, demonstrating their impact not only on overall school improvement but also on teaching, learning, and learning outcomes. This evolution highlights the multifaceted nature of contemporary school leadership, emphasising its pivotal role in navigating the complexities of modern educational landscapes.

Ideally, this means that the modern-day school leader, be it in a developed country context like the examples noted above, or in a developing country set up such as Zimbabwe, will find themselves confronted with many responsibilities. Such responsibilities may range from enhancing teaching and learning, managing day to day operations within the school, managing school resources, liaison with the community and navigating the school culture while rallying all stakeholders towards a shared vision, among other roles. This multifaceted nature of school leadership bears paramount importance in any education system as various scholars (Day et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020a; Leithwood et al., 2020b; Pang & Pisapia, 2012) concur that school leadership is an important variable in learner achievement and school improvement; hence, in some cases it has been rated as being second only to classroom teaching as an influence on learning (Leithwood et al., 2008). The notion of these scholars places a high value on leadership and posits that it acts as

a fulcrum upon which improved systems are built, thereby arguing that without good leadership, effective schools that are characterised by high learning outcomes will be very difficult to exist.

Furthermore, school leaders play a pivotal role in building relations between the school and other stakeholders as they are also responsible for the interface of the school with stakeholders such as parents, the corporate world and institutions of higher learning, among others (Maak, 2007; Mendels, 2012; MoPSE, 2021a). This key and emerging role of school leaders is best underscored by Shields (2006, p. 76) who argues that "relationships are not merely the beginning, but indeed the foundation of the educative endeavour". The author argues that the teaching profession and its day-to-day practices should be rooted in "relationships of respect and absolute regard". School leadership should, therefore, be pivoted on the same principle of encouraging and cultivating positive relationships within the school environment.

Scholars, policymakers, educationists, and development partners, among other interested stakeholders, all concur that in the past three decades, school leadership has emerged as an inevitable domain in education discourse (Leithwood et al., 2020a). This is primarily because education has been evolving at a fast pace as schools and curricula increasingly cover a wide range of issues to respond to a constantly changing 21st century. As such, the situation and mandate of teachers and school leaders today differ from those of a decade ago. For example, there are now more teachers in the national education systems, and learner populations have increased and become more diverse. Furthermore, the global economic, social and cultural contexts have also changed; hence, schools need to be dynamic to remain relevant (Pont, 2014; Creemers & Kyriakides, 2015).

The impact of technology on education has also rapidly increased as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been integrated into teaching and learning, with scholars (Hawkins & Whyley-Naace, 2023; Robinson et al., 2015; UK Department of Education, 2021; The National University, 2021) noting that the need for school leaders to have ICT literacy has become more urgent than ever. Recent school leadership literature (Fullan et al., 2023; Harris, 2020) has even explored the role of school leaders in modern-day settings where education has been affected by emerging issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Artificial Intelligence (AI). These scholars argue that school leaders must be dynamic and consistently attuned to the changing

educational landscape. Consequently, they must possess high adaptability and undergo continuous training, personal-driven learning, and professional development to align with the evolving contexts in which they operate (Faizuddin et al. 2023; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). This highlights the profound changes occurring in education, where the role of school leaders is becoming increasingly demanding as they strive to navigate the ever-shifting dynamics of the educational environment.

School leaders also play a pivotal role in improving education quality and contributing to effective schools that are characterised by high learning outcomes. This is because research findings by various scholars (Bush, 2020; Bush & Moorosi, 2019; Leithwood et al. 2020b) point out that school leaders are indeed one of the most influential single determinants of schools' overall quality and effectiveness. This is against the backdrop and realisation that school leadership plays a defining role in "improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate and environment" (Pont et al., 2008, p. 9).

In further elaborating on the paramount role and contribution of school leadership to education and particularly to learner achievement, Leithwood et al. (2020a) note the following:

> School leadership has a significant effect on features of the school organisation, which positively influences the quality of teaching and learning. While moderate in size, this leadership effect is vital to the success of most school improvement efforts. (Leithwood et al., 2020a, p. 2)

It is imperative to note that Leithwood et al. (2020a) revised earlier literature submissions by Leithwood et al. (2008) on school leadership being second only to classroom teaching, as the authors now acknowledge other contributing factors to learner achievement. However, they still locate school leadership as still occupying a pivotal role in creating "… organisational conditions that foster high quality teaching and generate improvements in learner outcomes" (Leithwood et al., 2020a, p. 3). By and large, it can be noted that school leadership remains a key variable in education discourse, with its contribution to learner achievement, teacher professional development and overall school well-being remaining significantly important. Perhaps the key point to note from this is the interdependent link between school leadership and outstanding schools that the quoted scholars highlight. Of importance is the conclusion that in building

effective, outstanding schools, the need to develop a new cadre of school leaders with the requisite competencies becomes necessary.

Although there are various literature and sources on school leadership theories, models and practices, a look at most of this literature shows that the scholarship is largely from the global North and is not rooted in African experiences (Eacott & Asuga, 2014). The authors argue that "… context matters and models cannot merely be adopted from other nations and effectively mobilised in Africa" (Eacott & Asuga, 2014, p. 3). In this vein it can be noted that most African governments have not invested in this domain (UNESCO, 2016). As a result, school leadership as a practice is still marred by various challenges in Africa, and this may ultimately be one of the contributing factors to low learning outcomes on the continent (World Bank, 2019).

Zimbabwe has not been immune to this challenge, as the appointment of school leaders (school heads as they are called in the country) has not been based on competency-related factors (Majoni, 2015) but rather on historical attributes such as years of service, one's performance as a teacher and a minimum qualification of a bachelor's degree (Majoni, 2015). Writing about the appointment of school leaders in Zimbabwe, Majoni (2015, p. 1) notes that "most of the school administrators are promoted from the classroom to become deputy headmasters and eventually headmasters … yet no formal orientation training is offered to the newly appointed administrators". This means that those being elevated to the position of school head in Zimbabwe are classroom practitioners with no prior school management or leadership experience. No formal orientation and/or training is offered to newly appointed school heads to help them meet the demands of their new position (MoPSE, 2020). Within the same vein, Chiome and Paul (2011) also lament this status quo in Zimbabwe when they argue that as a country in educational transition, Zimbabwe needs school leaders who have the requisite skills, knowledge and capacity to manage educational reform; yet the current crop of school leaders are those that have assumed their positions based on non-competency related factors such as years of service, political affiliation and at times, positive performance as a class teacher.

This prevailing practice has resulted in a lack of a clearly defined competency framework guiding the selection of school heads, their performance standards, and the professional development of those already in school headship. The absence of a structured competency framework/identified

set of competencies raises concerns about the effectiveness of school leadership in Zimbabwe (Mudzingwa, 2021; UNICEF, 2019; MoPSE, 2020). As such, the current selection process, rooted in non-competency criteria, may lead to heads lacking essential competencies vital for effective leadership. Additionally, the diverse academic pathways to headship, where the minimum entry qualification for headship is a bachelor's degree from any field, provided the candidate has pedagogical training, contribute to a lack of standardised entry-level knowledge for novice heads. These variances in the entry-level competency standards mean that school heads in Zimbabwe operate at very different competency levels, and this further complicates their professional development landscape and leads to diverse approaches in leading schools.

Recent studies contend that Zimbabwean schools are largely manned by school leaders who may not have the requisite competencies due to a lack of adequate preparation. For example, Mthiyane and Chiororo (2019), Mudzingwa (2021), Muresherwa et al. (2014), MoPSE (2020) and MoPSE (2021a) concur on the lack of effective school leadership in Zimbabwean schools and how this has resulted in underperformance and school decline in some schools in the country. As such, this research sought to expand the understanding of school leadership in Zimbabwe by exploring school heads' lived experiences. The research delved into their perspectives on the essential competencies needed for effective school leadership within the Zimbabwean context – based on their lived experiences.

1.2 Personal Motivation for the Study

In 2008, as a young, newly qualified teacher, I was deployed to go and teach at a rural school in Chiredzi District in Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe. Since I had a Bachelor of Education degree, the district office appointed me to be the school head for the school to which I was being deployed, albeit in an acting capacity. With just a visit to the district office to sort out my deployment issues, my life had been changed in a matter of a few minutes. I found myself confronted by the challenges of being a novice teacher and at the same time having to lead a school with more than three hundred learners and eight teachers. This was at the peak of Zimbabwe's economic crisis and only 40 percent of teachers and about 30 percent of learners were attending schools (UNICEF, 2008). As the school head, I found myself confronted with numerous challenges, such as teacher and learner

absenteeism, low staff morale, hunger among the learners, and lack of adequate infrastructure to support effective teaching and learning, among others. With all these being buoyed by a hyperinflationary environment and an economic crisis, my training as a teacher had not prepared me for any of these or other responsibilities. I served in this capacity for about two months, after which I also left the teaching service due to the continued economic deterioration. However, this experience ignited my interest in school leadership, particularly the experiences of school leaders in discerning their roles and the preparation and training of school leaders, or lack thereof, against their demanding role.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

While school leadership has taken centre stage in educational discourse, especially in the developed world, it should be noted that the concept has not gained as much attention in the developing world, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This view is postulated by UNESCO (2016, p. 113) that declares that "Effective school leaders are central to school performance ... however … most Sub-Saharan African countries have no adequate policies to ensure that school principals become effective leaders". It is UNESCO's contention that in many Sub-Saharan African countries, the appointment to the position of school leader has not been primarily on the basis of competency but rather on "promotion by seniority, rewarding political allegiance, corruption, nepotism and favouritism" (UNESCO, 2016, p. 113). Furthermore, scholars such as Biamba (2012) and Bush and Moorosi (2019) all concur that despite the changing context in the role of the school leader as well as the increased expectations now associated with the post, most SSA countries seem to be offering very minimal structured formal preparation for the job to would-be school leaders. Resultantly, this has led to the role and position of school leaders in Africa being occupied by people with no prior training, skills, competencies or attitudes to drive effective schools (Chiome & Paul, 2011; Eacott & Asuga, 2014; Majoni, 2015; Bush & Moorosi, 2019; Mudzingwa, 2021).

While Zimbabwe has built a strong education system, the country's investment in school leadership, like most of its African peers, has been found wanting (MoPSE, 2020; Mthiyane & Chiororo, 2019; Muresherwa et al., 2014;). Furthermore, not much research has been conducted

on bringing insight into school leadership practices in Zimbabwe, particularly from the perspectives of serving school leaders. What is of interest to this study is to contribute to this less explored area of school heads' competencies that could improve schools in Zimbabwe. As discussed in the previous section, there seems to be a lack of a clearly articulated competency-based framework on the training, selection, appointment and continuous professional development of school heads in Zimbabwe (Majoni, 2015; MoPSE, 2020; Mthiyane & Chiororo, 2019; Mudzingwa, 2021; Muresherwa et al., 2014) – hence the need for research to explore leadership competencies that are essential for Zimbabwean school heads to run effective schools and improve practice. This study thus sought to explore this essence. Understanding and articulating these critical competencies as perceived by experienced school heads is fundamental for informing a more merit-based and competency-driven approach to the selection and professional development of school leaders in Zimbabwe. As such, this research hopes to contribute valuable insights that have the potential to inform policy and practices related to school leadership in the country.

Moreover, the existing body of literature (Chiome & Paul, 2011; Majoni, 2015; Mudzingwa, 2021) underscores a scarcity of research focused on enhancing school leadership in Zimbabwe. Consequently, the importance of this research cannot be overstated, as it promises to introduce novel perspectives on school leadership – particularly those informed by the daily experiences of school heads themselves.

Against this background, this research aimed to delve more deeply into school leadership practice in Zimbabwe by engaging with serving school heads in the country. By exploring their lived experiences in leadership roles, the study sought to identify critical competencies that these school heads considered pivotal for effective school leadership. The assumption was that the accumulated experiences of these leaders, encompassing both their experiential successes and failures, positioned them as key informants in identifying the competencies essential for effective school leadership in the Zimbabwean context.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

Against this backdrop and the realisation that school leadership plays a pivotal role in any country’s education system, this study aimed to investigate and establish a set of essential

competencies crucial for effective school leadership practices in Zimbabwean public schools. The identification and comprehension of these pivotal competencies as perceived and experienced by practising school heads are imperative for providing insight and knowledge on a more meritocratic and competency-driven approach to the selection, practice and professional growth of school headship in Zimbabwe.

1.5 Key Research Questions and Objectives

The research sought to answer the following critical research questions:

1. How do Zimbabwean school heads describe their lived experiences that have influenced their competencies in leading schools?
2. What leadership competencies do Zimbabwean school heads perceive as crucial for leading schools, and how do they believe these competencies contribute to effective leadership and professional success?
3. What lessons can be learnt from the lived leadership experiences of school heads regarding leadership competencies in Zimbabwean public schools?

Guided by the listed research questions, the research had the following objectives:

1. To describe the essence of the lived leadership experiences of Zimbabwean school heads that influence the core competencies that they view as critical in leading and managing their schools.
2. To explore the leadership competencies that Zimbabwean school heads perceive as crucial for effectively leading schools, and how these competencies contribute to professional success.
3. To draw lessons on competencies for successful and effective school leadership in Zimbabwe based on lived leadership experiences of serving school heads.

1.6 Significance of the Study

In 1998 the President of Zimbabwe set up a Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (CIET) under the chairmanship of Prof. Nziramasanga of the University of Zimbabwe. Several recommendations and findings were brought out by the commission but of interest to the school leadership domain was the following recommendation:

> It makes good sense that all officials should be adequately prepared for any new duties that they are to take up … there should be special courses designed for those who are to be heads of schools … it cannot be presumed that those who are good classroom practitioners will do equally well in administration and management posts (Nziramasanga, 1999, p. 464).

While the CIET report has been in existence for more than 20 years, it remains a magnum opus in Zimbabwe's education research and literature. This is because the report has informed many reform processes in Zimbabwe's education sector, including recent ones, such as the national curriculum reviews of 2015 to 2016 and 2022 to 2023 and the subsequent introduction of a new national curriculum in 2017 and in 2024. Perhaps the most critical input for this discourse was, first, the acknowledgement by the CIET that the appointment process to the position of school head in Zimbabwe is based on classroom performance as a teacher and not on leadership competency. Secondly, the recommendation that there is a need for tailor-made training to develop the capacity of new and aspiring school heads to ensure that they effectively discharge their mandate. This research thus becomes significantly relevant as it sought to leverage the lived experiences of school heads to identify key competencies pertinent to their role within the Zimbabwean context.

This study was thus motivated by the desire to engage with incumbent school heads, exploring their experiences since assuming their roles and understanding the challenges and successes they encountered in adapting to their demanding responsibilities. The literature review (Poloncic, 2016) emphasised that while much has been explored in school leadership, rarely has this research emanated directly from the perspectives of practising school heads. As such, this study aimed to fill this academic void by grounding itself in the lived experiences of current school heads, utilising their insights to shape future school leadership practices and contribute to policy formulation in the country. Additionally, the research findings hold the potential to assist both current and future

leaders in enhancing their leadership practices, identifying essential competencies for effective school leadership, and charting precise pathways for their professional development based on identified needs.

Moreover, the Zimbabwe Education Sector Strategic Plan (2021-2025), formulated by the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) to guide the direction of basic education in the country, focuses on five priority areas: Improved Schools' Infrastructure; Enhanced Curriculum and Assessment; Adequate Safeguarding and Learner Support; Enhanced Teacher Capacity, and Enhanced Leadership Capacity (MoPSE, 2022a). Notably, the fifth priority, *Enhanced Leadership Capacity* primarily addresses administrative leadership and management within the structures of the Ministry, omitting coverage of school leadership. Consequently, the current strategic plan for education in Zimbabwe lacks comprehensive attention to school leadership. This underscores the significance of this research, as its findings can serve as a valuable source of expertise and reference point to inform the development of school leadership policies and practices in Zimbabwe.

From the discussion above it is evident from current practices related to the appointment and professional development of school heads in Zimbabwe, that there is still a lack of grounded understanding of school leadership competencies, especially one that is shaped by the first-hand experiences of school leaders themselves. This then prompted the inquiry on exploring the essential skills and abilities (competencies) necessary for effective school leadership within the Zimbabwean context. This study underscores the importance of identifying and comprehending the critical competencies that active school leaders deem vital in their practice, drawing insights from their real-life leadership experiences, successes and challenges in the role.

It is envisaged that the academic knowledge that was drawn from this research will, among other contributions, provide insight into school leadership as told by serving school leaders themselves. Additionally, the study is expected to enhance the academic knowledge surrounding school leadership in Zimbabwe, a relatively neglected area within the Zimbabwean education arena. Lastly, the research findings and recommendations are intended to serve as a foundation for future academic endeavours focusing on school leadership in Zimbabwe, particularly those informed by the perspectives of actively serving school heads.

1.7 Discussion of Key Concepts

For the purpose of this research, the terms and concepts below are defined in relation to how they were used during the research process:

1.7.1 School Leadership

Several scholars (Bush, 2016; Day et al., 2020; Hallinger & Huber, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2020a) have defined school leadership as being leadership that aims at improving the school both in terms of curriculum matters (instruction) and organisational matters, that is, the running of schools as an organisation. For the purposes of this research, Bush and Glover's (2003) definition of school leadership was seen as the most ideal as it captures the diverse and complex role of school leaders in the 21st century. While acknowledging the various definitions of leadership and ultimately, the many definitions of school leadership, the authors define ideal school leadership as leadership that is a "process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. Successful school leaders develop a vision for their schools based on their personal and professional values. They articulate this vision at every opportunity and influence their staff and other stakeholders to share the vision…" (Bush & Glover, 2003, p. 8). Based on this definition and other reviewed literature, this research thus views and locates the school leader as the nucleus of all school operations as they are responsible for stakeholder engagement within and outside the school, team coordination, vision setting and improved instruction and learner experiences. Effective school leaders are, therefore, those who can balance the core instructional role of the school and provide guidance to the provision of instruction while at the same time being able to influence, guide and organise all stakeholders for the school's success. While the term 'school leadership' is sometimes used to describe the group of individuals within a school who hold leadership roles, this research specifically used 'school leadership' as referring exclusively to the school heads.

1.7.2 School Head

In the Zimbabwean education system, school leaders are referred to as school heads, a recently introduced gender-neutral title as opposed to the colonial title of headmaster, which implied that only males could lead schools. School heads are thus school principals, and in the Zimbabwean system, they are categorised into two groups, namely primary school heads who oversee primary

schools from Early Childhood Development (ECD) education to Grade 7, which is the last year of primary school, and secondary school heads who oversee secondary education that covers Form 1 to Form 6. For the purposes of this research, the term *school head* is used interchangeably with *school leader* as they refer to the same person. My research participants were drawn from both primary and secondary school heads.

1.7.3 Effective School Leadership

Over the last two decades, various scholars (Bush, 2020; Day et al., 2020; Fullan, 2001; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2006; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2009) have concurred on effective school leadership as the ability of school leaders to inspire, guide and facilitate positive change within a school setting, ultimately leading to improved learning outcomes and positive school culture. As such, it can be argued that at the centre of effective school leadership are positive results within all aspects of the school, with learner achievement being the nucleus of all school activities. Reviewed literature pointed out that effective school leadership is anchored in various leadership practices and approaches; hence, it encompasses aspects of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, building a positive school culture, and the overall impact of leadership on learner success (Bush, 2020; Day et al., 2020; Fullan, 2001; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2020b; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2009). For the purposes of this research, effective school leadership was thus viewed as such.

1.7.4 Leadership Competencies

The Hay Group as cited in Yusof et al. (2009, p. 3) defines a competency as "a measurable characteristic of a person that is related to effective performance in a specific job, organization or culture". Competencies are thus the integrated skills, knowledge, traits, attributes, practices and judgement that people need to perform a job effectively. They are observable behaviours that can be evaluated and/or measured and are thus instrumental in staff development as well as in staff recruitment and the defining of jobs' terms of reference. Thus, it is crucial that organisations identify competencies and benchmarks that the leader can apply and utilise in the discharge of their role to attain the organisation's vision (Chen & Naquin, 2005). This research thus sought to

enrich and inform school leadership theory and practice in Zimbabwe by leveraging school heads' lived experiences to identify critical competencies for effective school leadership in the country. For the purposes of this research the terms *competencies, competency approach* and *competency-based leadership* are used interchangeably in some cases.

1.7.5 Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is defined as any effort towards encouraging and supporting parties involved in the teaching and learning process to achieve school goals and develop a strong school social system (Drake & Roe, 2003). In the same vein, Bush (2018) describes instructional leadership as a chain of actions that are taken by school leaders aimed at enhancing both learning outcomes and the conditions in which this takes place. It can thus be noted that instructional leadership is concerned with ensuring clear and strong educational goals in schools, understanding of and planning for the curriculum and leading teachers and teaching in schools. In a nutshell, instructional leadership thus emphasises the role of school leaders as primarily focused on promoting improved outcomes for learners, emphasising the importance of teaching and learning while enhancing their (teaching and learning's) quality (Robinson et al., 2009). Instructional leadership is thus considered a key competency for school leaders, as instruction and learning are the crux of any school system.

1.7.6 Transformational School Leadership

Numerous scholars and authors, including Day and Sammons (2014), Day et al., (2020), Gumus et al. (2018), Marks and Printy (2003) and Zammit et al. (2007) have extensively researched and acknowledged the efficacy of transformational leadership theory in the context of school leadership. These scholars mutually emphasise that transformational school leadership involves establishing the school's vision and direction, restructuring and realigning staff, and enhancing educational outcomes (Day & Sammons, 2014). Therefore, the focal point of transformational school leadership lies in effectively managing 21st century schools, where school leaders play a crucial role in team building, creating, and promoting a school vision, collaboration and individual staff development. Transformational leaders are distinguished by their capacity to inspire and involve teachers, learners and other stakeholders in a collective pursuit of academic excellence and

organisational enhancement (Bush, 2007). It is important to acknowledge that various scholars (Day et al., 2020; Kwan, 2020; Shatzer et al., 2014) identify transformational leadership as a key leadership theory and strategy that can be combined with other leadership models/approaches to realise effective school leadership.

1.8 Delimitations of the Study

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019) note that delimitations are concerned with the boundaries and limits that the researcher sets so that the study's aims and objectives are not impossible to achieve. It can thus be argued that delimitations of my study were those aspects of the research approach that were within my control as a researcher. The first delimitation of my study was that by design, the research focused on school heads only but still hoped to uncover new knowledge that would add value to education discourse in Zimbabwe.

I limited the selection of the research participants to school heads because I believed that employing the phenomenological approach to explore their first-hand experiences in carrying out their responsibilities would provide essential insights. These insights were deemed crucial for shaping vital competencies required by both current and prospective school heads in Zimbabwe. The decision to focus on serving school heads was motivated by the notion that valuable information could be extracted from individuals already immersed in the phenomenon. I also decided to limit the study to school heads as this group has barely been researched in Zimbabwe (Chiome, 2014).

Another delimitation of this study was that it focused on only six research participants due to the nature of a phenomenological study that limits the number of participants to allow for in-depth exploration of lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). Despite the small sample, the researcher anticipated that the number of the research participants was sufficient to reach saturation, thereby drawing meaningful conclusions.

Because of the limited number of research participants, geographical coverage was not national; yet it was hoped that the research findings would identify critical competencies for effective school leadership that could inform school leadership policy and practice in Zimbabwe. This is because the researcher hoped that by extensively exploring the lived experiences of selected school leaders,

the research would be able to extrapolate such life experiences to the generality of school leaders in Zimbabwe. Ultimately, this should foreground the competencies deemed critical for effective schools in Zimbabwe that are informed by school leaders' lived experiences.

1.9 Structure of the Thesis

The research is divided into nine chapters whose sequence and content are outlined below.

Chapter 1: Context of the Study

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter to my study, highlighting the focus of this qualitative phenomenological study, which explored lived experiences of serving Zimbabwean school heads and leveraged these experiences to identify critical competencies for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe. The chapter provides an overview of the background to this research, the motivation behind the research, its significance, the study's objectives and the research questions that guided my research. The chapter also discusses the problem statement, highlighting the key challenge that my research sought to address and why it was important to conduct the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 reviews and contextualises existing literature within the confines of this research. The review explores different sub-topics pertinent to the broader understanding of the key research questions. The importance of school leadership in education discourse, current and past pathways to school headship in Zimbabwe, global experiences on school leadership and the competency-based approach to leadership are the key topics that I reviewed in this section to inform the research process.

Chapter 3: Framing the Study within Instructional Leadership and Transformational Leadership Theories

Chapter 3 discusses the transformational and instructional leadership theories that are the theories that underpinned my research. Drawing from reviewed literature, the research argued that effective school leaders are able to integrate both instructional and transformational leadership theories into their leadership practices and approaches. I combined these theories because their merger is considered to be a potent combination in creating balanced leaders who are able to lead

instructional and teaching issues in the school while leading the school as an effective organisation (Day et al., 2020). The chapter offers a detailed discussion of these two leadership theories, emphasising their relevance to school leadership and highlighting why I chose them as the theoretical frameworks for my study.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 4 outlines the research design and methodology that I employed during the research process. Furthermore, it underscores why a qualitative research methodology, particularly a phenomenological design, was deemed most pertinent for investigating school leaders' lived experiences. The chapter also discusses the evolution of phenomenology as a research design and the rationale behind opting for the interpretive research paradigm. Other crucial aspects of the research process, such as the research population, methods for data generation and data analysis are also discussed. The chapter concludes by addressing considerations of trustworthiness and ethical concerns that guided the research.

Chapter 5: Narratives about School Headship as a Lived Experience

Chapter 5 is the first chapter of my data analysis. It centres on descriptive analysis of the school heads' lived experiences, elaborating on how these experiences shaped their perspectives of effective school leadership within a Zimbabwean context. The chapter recounts the lived leadership experiences, perspectives and narratives of the participants, presented in their own words. By offering a descriptive analysis of the first-hand accounts provided by the research participants, the chapter aims to offer insight into the unique experiences of each participant, allowing for a comprehensive understanding from their individual perspectives on school leadership as a lived experience in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 6: School Heads' Perspectives on and Experiences of Critical Competencies for Effective School Leadership

Chapter 6 is a continuation of the descriptive data analysis and focuses on emerging competencies that the research participants identified as essential for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe. It takes one through first-hand narratives and life encounters of the participants, elaborating on

how these encounters led them into viewing the emerging competencies as being critical to effective school leadership.

Chapter 7: Discussion of Findings: Contextualising School Leadership Competencies within the Research's Theoretical framework

Chapter 7 revisits the competencies identified in Chapter 6 and discusses these school leadership competencies within the context of the research's theoretical framework and draws upon themes identified in Chapters 5 and 6 based on the participants' first-hand leadership experiences, reflections and recommendations. In discussing the identified competencies, the chapter also refers to existing literature providing an interface between the research's findings and existing scholarly work.

Chapter 8: Reflective Study Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations, Contribution to Knowledge and Implications for Further Research

Chapter 8 provides a summary and the presentation of my reflections on my study. It discusses the study's main findings, lessons learnt, recommendations and conclusions. The chapter also discusses what I consider the value of my research (contribution to knowledge) to the existing academic and scholarly work on school leadership in Zimbabwe, particularly from the perspectives of serving school heads. It also discusses identified opportunities for further research.

1.10 Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the background of the research problem under study. It elaborated on how school leadership has gained attention in the developed world, yet little emphasis has been received in African countries, including Zimbabwe. Available evidence suggests limited competencies among Zimbabwean school heads, inhibiting their ability to lead their schools effectively. As such, this study sought to identify critical competencies that Zimbabwean school heads perceive as pivotal in their day-to-day practice based on their lived experiences. Against this research focus, I highlighted the statement of the problem, the research objectives, and the research questions that informed this research. I also shared the motivation behind this study and the delimitations that bound this research. The chapter also elaborated on

some key terms that were recurrently referred to in this research report and provided a justification for how such terms were used within the research's context. The chapter concludes with a summary of this research report, giving a brief overview of what each chapter contains. The next chapter focuses on my literature review where I reviewed and discussed relevant local, regional and international literature pertinent to my study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Introduction

Building research "… on and relating it to existing knowledge is the building block of all academic research activities, regardless of discipline" (Snyder, 2019, p. 333). This means that any research has to be grounded on past academic work for it to be informed and enriched by previous scholarly thinking in the phenomenon under study. As such, this section aims to review existing literature and contextualise it within the confines of this research. The literature review identified four categories deemed essential to this research's overall discourse. The ensuing sub-headings of this chapter are thus built on four identified categories: (i) School Leadership: An Inevitable Education Pillar; (ii) Drawing from Global Experiences: School Leadership Lessons for Zimbabwe; (iii) Competency-Based Leadership, and (iv) Current and Past Pathways to School Headship in Zimbabwe.

2.2 School Leadership: An Inevitable Education Pillar

Scholars, policymakers, educationists and development partners, among other interested stakeholders (Day & Sammons, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2020a; Bush & Moorosi, 2019; UNESCO, 2015) all seem to concur that in recent years, school leadership has emerged as an inevitable domain in education discourse. This shift is due to the rapid evolution of education, with schools and curricula addressing a broader range of issues to adapt to the changing 21st century. Consequently, the roles of teachers and school heads have also transformed in response to the evolving education sector. Amid these changes, recent scholarship suggests that the world is also going through a learning crisis, where learners are in school, but they are not learning (Beehary, 2021; World Bank, 2018; Pritchett, 2013), with this phenomenon being largely prevalent in the SSA region. Consequently, school leaders are increasingly viewed as part of the pivotal players in addressing and reversing the challenges associated with this learning crisis. In summary, it can thus be noted that the many changes and challenges that education is going through have resulted in the increased roles and responsibilities of the school leader, although more than often these

increased expectations are not complemented by appropriate training (Bush & Glover, 2016; Harris & Jones, 2015).

As a result, school leadership has, over the past decades, become a priority in international education discourse. This is against the backdrop and realisation that school leaders "can make a difference in school and student performance if they are granted autonomy to make important decisions while having support" (Pont, 2014, p. 11). In essence, school leadership has been located as the bedrock upon which a symbiotic nexus between effective leadership and enhanced school performance could be established (Leithwood et al., 2020b). This is because educational and school leadership scholars such as Jones (2010), Ahmad and Ghavifekr (2017) and Day et al., (2020) argue that successful schools epitomised by high learner achievement are difficult to come by in the absence of effective school leadership – a view also shared by the prominent leadership scholar Bass (2008), who avers that "In industrial, educational, and military settings … leadership plays a critical, if not the most critical, role, and is therefore an important subject for study and research" (p. 25). The essence of Bass's (2008) point of view is that the author identifies three fields of practice in which leadership plays a *critical role,* one of which is education. The inclusion and the importance of leadership in education is thus a confirmation that educational leadership and, subsequently, school leadership have become an inevitable and essential variable in both education practice and research as well as in leadership studies in general.

Furthermore, research and literature at hand (Khalifa et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020a) overwhelmingly concur that in the past three decades school leadership has taken centre stage in education discourse as its paramount importance has been widely recognised as the second most crucial factor for achieving positive learning outcomes. This acknowledgement has gained prominence as educational research and practice affirm that school leaders exert an indirect yet potent influence on learner achievement through their interactions with teachers and their ability to shape the school culture. Consequently, the school leadership domain has garnered increasing attention from educators, teachers, policymakers, teacher trainers and other relevant stakeholders.

Moreover, the realisation that education significantly contributes to the socio-economic development of any society has underscored the indispensable role of school leadership in educational discourse. This is primarily due to school leaders' impact in creating an environment

conducive to effective instruction and learner achievement, ultimately contributing to long-term positive economic prospects for nations and a favourable return on investment for households (World Bank, 2018). There is also a growing view that quality education largely depends on school leaders' capacity to tactically manage schools and ensure that schools are the cradles upon which the socio-economic development aspirations of any nation are built (Tingle et al., 2019). As such, the significance of schools in spearheading nations' socio-economic development agendas has made it necessary to reconsider the role of school leaders. This is because a 21st century school leader now goes beyond general school management and grapples with ensuring schools offer effective instruction that directly contributes to the nation's development aspirations.

Based on the evidence given thus far, one inescapable fact is that school leadership is an essential component of any country's education system. This is because, among other roles and responsibilities, school leaders are overall responsible for ensuring that schools offer quality education through "… setting vision and direction, supporting the development of staff, and ensuring effective management systems and processes … to the success of their school" (Barber et al., 2010, p. 7). As such, policymakers need to develop and adapt school leadership policies in their respective countries that seek to address the new educational challenges that have arisen in the past two to three decades.

The importance and significance of school leaders in improving education quality at the school level can thus not be underestimated. This is because research findings in education leadership discourse point out that school heads are indeed one of the most influential single determinants of schools' overall quality and effectiveness (Bush 2020; Day et al., 2020). In further elaborating on the paramount role and contribution of school leadership to education and particularly to learner achievement, the UK's Department for Education, as cited in Day et al., 2020, posits the following:

> Head teachers occupy an influential position in society and shape the teaching profession. They are lead professionals and significant role models within the communities they serve. The values and ambitions of school leaders determine the achievements of schools. They are accountable for the education of current and future generations of children. Their leadership has a decisive impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements in the nation's classrooms (Day et al., 2020, p. 11).

The crux of the above excerpt lies in its recognition of school leadership as a pivotal foundation in education. It underscores the role of school heads in overseeing various facets of the school, including teacher well-being and performance, learning outcomes, and the school's interaction with essential stakeholders. This positioning thus establishes school leadership and its interaction with stakeholders as one of the pivotal drivers of success for any school. In line with this perspective, it becomes evident that school leadership holds a crucial position in the educational policy agenda. This is due to its direct and indirect impact on shaping the school environment, particularly its influence on the instructional and learning processes occurring within the school and on learner achievement and overall learning outcomes. Furthermore, a study by the World Bank (2019) discovered that effective school leaders have the ability to generate an additional three months' worth of learning per school year compared to their less effective peers. In light of this line of thought, it becomes clear that school leadership indeed occupies an indispensable position in the educational policy agenda as it has a direct and indirect bearing on improving efficiency and effectiveness within the school system and, most importantly, on improving teaching and learning and ultimately learner achievement.

The paramount role of school leadership in the 21st century education discourse is further emphasised by Mestry (2017) when the scholar points out the following:

> Principals experience great difficulty in coping with numerous changes, partly because they are inadequately prepared for their leadership position or simply lack the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes to lead and manage schools effectively and efficiently. Fundamentally, principals should be empowered to effectively deal with challenges facing them in the 21st century. (Mestry, 2017, p.1)

Perhaps the most crucial input from this argument is that education is changing; the schools and learners of twenty years ago were completely different from those of today. The 21st century has come with significant changes demanding that all education actors redefine their roles. School leaders are now required to play a pivotal role not only in the management of day-to-day school operations but also in directing instruction and learning so that it responds to the dictates of the 21st century (Kwan, 2020). Ideally, as expectations of what school leaders should achieve have heightened, their competencies, incentives, training levels and continuous professional development support must also change to meet the new demands of their roles and responsibilities.

In further elaborating on the invaluable role of school leadership in education discourse, Tucker (2016) identified the 9 Building Blocks for a World-Class Education System. Of relevance to this research is the assertion that investment in school leadership is one of the 9 Building Blocks upon which the world's leading education systems have been built. Tucker (2016) underscores the fact that some of the world's best-performing education systems that have significantly performed in learner achievement, efficiency and equity have:

> Created a leadership development system that develops leaders at all levels to manage such systems effectively … successful systems seek out to develop school leaders with a combination of strategic skills, self-knowledge, patience, drive, management skill, ethical roots, moral qualities and a strong command of what is known world-wide about managing professional for high performance (Tucker, 2016, p. 12).

The pith of Tucker's contribution is that the author identifies school leadership's role in successful education systems from a dual perspective. First is that investment in school leadership results in strong education systems characterised by high learner achievement and efficiency. Secondly, school leadership as a domain is so important that it is one of the nine key blocks that Tucker (2016) identifies as being pivotal in building world-class education systems.

In an effort to elaborate on the changing role of the school leader and the increased expectations, Wise (2015) avers the following:

> The role of the school leader is changing even more rapidly than the changes in schools themselves … In order to be successful, the principal in today's public schools must not only cope with the administration of a complex human organization in the rapidly evolving dynamics of schools and society, but also must be an effective leader in a wide variety of areas with an increasing emphasis on the achievement of all students (Wise, 2015, p. 104).

The school leader should thus have the technical knowledge to direct and guide instruction and learning within the school and, at the same time, should have the requisite leadership skills to run the school as an effective organisation. This means that a modern-day school leader is one who should significantly influence learning and other aspects of school performance (Day et al., 2016). These notions are best summed up by Sidhu and Fook (2009) when they note the following:

> The evolving nature of school environments has placed high demands on educational leaders. Where knowledge of school management, finance, legal issues, and state mandates

> was once the primary focus for the preparation of school leaders, education reform has created an urgent need for a strong emphasis on development of instructional leadership skills to promote effective teaching and high-level learning (Sidhu & Fook, 2009, p. 106).

In essence, the scholars propose that the role of the school leader in the 21st century should now endeavour to strike a balance between day-to-day school operations, organisational development issues and instructional and learning issues.

Allensworth and Hart (2018) elaborate on the vital and comprehensive role of school leaders in the 21st century by highlighting the correlation between school leadership, school improvement and the overall school climate. They assert that school leaders have a notable impact on teachers' attitudes, learner attitudes, and opportunities for learning. This perspective is also echoed by Setlhodi (2022) who contends that successful schools are associated with competent and effective school leadership, while underperforming schools often exhibit declining leadership. In summary, there is a consensus among scholars and authors that contemporary school leadership has transcended its traditional role of mere school management, where school heads primarily focused on administrative matters. Instead, it has evolved into a more demanding role that involves overseeing instruction and learning, addressing relational and staff motivation issues, spearheading school improvement, and contributing to organisational development within the entire school system.

Documented experience (Fernandez & Rainey, 2017) indicates that effective individual leaders who are appointed to turn around failing organisations in various sectors, including education, can result in rapid, dramatic improvement. Leaders are needed, especially in times of rapid change, and considering that education is changing globally, the need for effective leaders cannot be underestimated. As this section has highlighted, these changes have necessitated the need for strong educational leaders who can chart a strategic trajectory for those they lead and supervise, make sense of an often-capricious operational environment, and provide a vision for how to embrace change to improve the quality of education (Stronge & Xu, 2021; Stein, 2016). According to the Wallace Foundation (2012), research evidence shows that principals are perceived to be the main source of leadership by key school staff. This means that the school leader’s educational values, leadership style and reflective strategies are responsible for shaping intra-organisational processes and pedagogies that result in improved learning outcomes.

In addition to the highlighted areas, school leaders have overall been identified to have an impact on many other dimensions of the school, such as stakeholder engagement (Mendels, 2012; MoPSE 2021a, Maak, 2007), promotion of accountability within the school and to stakeholders (DeMatthew & Serafini, 2021; Shava et al., 2021), teacher supervision (Kwan, 2020; Warman et al., 2021; Brandon et al., 2018), policy interpretation and implementation (Rambe et al. 2023), setting up systems for their schools' efficacy (Shaked & Schechter, 2017), fiducial financial management (Bush & Heystek, 2006; Mafugu et al., 2022; Myende et al., 2018, Rangongo et al., 2016), enforcing and upholding discipline and order within the school (Sibanda & Mathwasa, 2020; Van Wyk & Pelser, 2014), teacher motivation (Bardach & Klassen, 2021; Muranda et al., 2015) and promoting teachers' continuous professional development (Admiraal et al., 2021; Stoll & Kools, 2017).

Although school leadership has gained prominence worldwide and become a crucial element in education research, policy, and practice, as highlighted in this section, Zimbabwe has made very little progress and limited investments in this area (MoPSE, 2020; Mudzingwa, 2021). Available literature has identified capacity gaps and competency challenges among Zimbabwean school heads in different areas. These include deficiencies in supporting curriculum implementation, particularly the country's new curriculum (Gasva et al., 2019; Mupa, 2020; Gory et al., 2021), unfamiliarity with instituting positive discipline (Makwanya, et al., 2012; MoPSE, 2021a; Shumba et al., 2010) and lack of basic ICT/EdTech skills (MoPSE, 2021a) among others. Zimbabwean schools handle large sums of money as school fees are paid directly to the school and are utilised at school level, with parents reportedly contributing as much as government in education financing (MoPSE & World Bank, 2017; World Bank, 2021). Against this backdrop, poor financial management has also been identified as a key challenge in Zimbabwean schools with school heads cited as being central players in financial malpractices within the schools (Chene, 2015; Ernst & Young, 2019; MoPSE, 2021b).

This evidence suggests that the current crop of school leaders in Zimbabwe lack the requisite competencies to run effective schools as, among other reasons, the country's colleges and universities do not offer adequate programmes to prepare school leaders (Mudzingwa, 2021). At the same time, professional development opportunities for school heads have been reported to be

unstructured with minimal government coordination (MoPSE, 2020; Muresherwa et al., 2014). This lack of key functional competencies among Zimbabwean school heads calls for an urgent need for education authorities to design interventions that can bridge the said gaps to propagate the performance competencies of Zimbabwean school heads.

In concluding this section, perhaps it is noteworthy to acknowledge that there are many other factors that contribute to school success besides school leadership. For example, Lockheed and Levin (2012) identified factors such as the government's philosophy, overall school strategy, community involvement, principals' empowerment, active learning, setting high teacher expectations, and funding and resources as some of the major contributors to effective and successful schools. This research however focuses only on school leadership, locating the competencies that school leaders identify as pivotal in the successful execution of their roles and responsibilities, overall school improvement and improved learning outcomes.

In summary, this section reviewed literature on the increasing importance of school leadership in 21st century education. It emphasised the various contributions and strengths of effective school leadership in improving educational practices and overall student achievement. While school leadership is a well-established field globally, the section noted that the field has not gained as much traction in Zimbabwe. The limited literature on school leadership in Zimbabwe indicates that many current school heads lack the necessary competencies to lead schools effectively. The next section draws on global experiences from South Africa and England, arguing that Zimbabwe's school leadership trajectory could benefit from the experiences of these two countries.

2.3 Drawing from Global Experiences: School Leadership Lessons for Zimbabwe

One fundamental point that seems to be at the centre of all reviewed literature (Leithwood et al., 2020a; Day et al., 2020; Hallinger et al., 2020) is the view that school leadership has been drawing the attention of policymakers over the past two decades. As such, many countries, particularly those in the developed world, have taken significant strides in the development of school leadership, as they have come up with frameworks, competencies and standards that inform school

leadership theory and practice. This section thus examines some global experiences that the Zimbabwean system could borrow from, focusing on the frameworks and systems developed to enhance school leadership in their respective countries.

Barber et al. (2010) conducted research on how the world's top school systems had been built through developing leadership capacity for the future. The scholars picked a sample of eight countries and states, namely New York, New Zealand, Ontario, Singapore, England, the Netherlands and Victoria (Australia). Their sample was based on the notion that "The education systems in these countries/states all perform strongly on international tests, or their performance in this respect is improving, and they demonstrate good practices in school leadership" (Barber et al., 2010, p. 4). Building on this precedence, this section thus reviews the experiences of one of these countries, that is, England. This is against the backdrop that the Zimbabwean education system is largely built on the British education system, given that Zimbabwe is a former British colony. The section also discusses the South African school leadership context, as the researcher felt that Zimbabwe and other African countries could borrow some best practices and lessons from South Africa – especially given the countries' geographical, historical, political and socio-economic ties, and most importantly, South Africa's strides in enriching school leadership practice and integrating it into the country's overall education system. These two countries are discussed below.

2.3.1 The England Experience

Ingham (2014) posits that the year 1988 was the turning point for school leadership in England through the Education Reform Act of 1988. The author points out the following:

> The transformation wrought by the 1988 Reform Act possibly had its most powerful effect on head teachers themselves: from functionaries to entrepreneurs almost in a flick of the legislative pen. The culture experienced a fundamental shift. Prior to 1988, the title of the school leader, 'head teacher', certainly did indicate that the person in charge was a teacher first and foremost. There was chalk-dust on the clothing and the priorities were children, teachers and parents. In the 1990s, the situation began to change (Ingham, 2014, p. 61).

The most important point to note from Ingham's view is that prior to the reforms of 1988, the role of the school leader was that of a teacher, meaning that the greater chunk of their work was linked

to teaching. The reforms, however, brought about more autonomy and decentralisation and, in the process, allowed the head teacher to evolve from being just a head teacher to becoming a manager and eventually a leader. Commenting on this change, Hargreaves (2010, p.3) posit that the 1988 education reforms resulted in "… a balance being struck between centralisation and decentralisation, with a clear reduction in centralised action, at both national and local levels, and a matching increase in the powers and responsibilities of schools". Perhaps the key point to note for this discourse is that the England Education Reform Act of 1988, decentralised education authority from education bureaucrats (Fisher, 2008) and granted more autonomy to the head teachers thereby empowering them to make more school-based decisions and to have more localised authority in the running of their schools. This decentralised authority thus became the initial steps towards school leadership reforms and strengthening in England and Wales (Hargreaves, 2010; Ingham, 2014).

It is imperative to note that this historical context is relevant to this discourse as it gives a brief history of the journey the English system traversed to get to where they are today. At the same time, it also serves as a point of reference for Zimbabwe and other African countries that no matter where one starts from, it is still possible to develop systems that strengthen school leaders' practices, thereby ultimately contributing to improved education outcomes.

While the said reforms triggered changes in the role and mandate of school leaders, Ingham (2014, p. 65) notes that "It is arguable that no greater affirmation of the central importance of leadership in the life of schools could have been made than the creation in 2000 of a dedicated national college". This is in specific reference to the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) that was originally established as the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in 2000. The NCSL was established as a non-departmental public body with the responsibility to train and build the capacity of head teachers for the purposes of leading and improving teaching in their schools, leading effective schools and successful headship (Bush, 2011). In elaborating on the role of the NCSL, Schleicher (2012) acknowledges that the National College changed the face of school leadership in England. Schleicher (2012, p. 20) points out that the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) training that the NCSL offered produced whole school leaders as it aimed at developing and enhancing the following competencies in trainee school leaders:

- Shaping the future (strategically)
- Leading teaching and learning
- Developing self and others
- Managing the school
- Securing accountability
- Strengthening community

A look at the above competencies that England expected from its school leaders indeed bears testimony to the emphasis that the country placed on the evolving role of the school leader. A school leader in their context was someone who should be able to provide instructional leadership for teaching and learning, hence the emphasis on competencies such as *leading teaching and learning*. At the same time, their framework acknowledges the role of the school leader as a transformational leader; hence the emphasis on competencies such as *managing the school*, *developing self and others* and *shaping the future* among others. Perhaps the most paramount point to note in this discourse is the emphasis that school leadership should not just focus on teaching and learning but also on other non-teaching aspects, such as school improvement, teacher motivation and active parental-community involvement.

Commenting on the positive changes that were brought about by the National College and particularly on the training that the college was offering, Hargreaves (2010) posits the following:

> The calibre of school leadership has improved, in many places to a dramatic degree, reflecting the National College's central task of ensuring the provision of leaders with relevant capabilities… The College's work on the provision of school leaders has thus evolved from centralised provision to the point where the goal is making leadership development a largely self-generating enterprise, grounded in networks of schools (Hargreaves, 2010, pp. 3-4).

Hargreaves (2010) points out that the face and functions of school leadership evolved for the better through the tailor-made programmes offered by the National College. School leaders were now able to manage schools at a local level with more autonomy in decision-making and resource management. It is within this vein that Bush (2011) best summarises the complete evolution that school leadership underwent in England as a result of the National College noting that the

introduction of the National College was arguably the most significant influence on school leadership, management and administration in England.

While the National College's NQPH changed the way school leaders carried out their work, there was also a very significant improvement in learner achievement as it was noted that learners from schools whose heads had gone through the National College training programmes had significantly improved. This notion is lucidly captured by Schleicher (2012):

> In England, research on the impact of leadership-development programmes shows that schools whose leader participated in the National College for School Leadership's development programmes improved more quickly than others. Assessment outcomes of 16-year-old students in schools that had engaged in the programme improved by 8.1% between 2005 and 2009, compared with a 5.8% improvement in schools that had not engaged. Similarly, 43% of schools with a leader who had been certified with a National Professional Qualification for Headship showed an improvement in their overall performance rating between 2005 and 2008, compared with only 37% of non-NPQH-led schools (Schleicher, 2012, p. 24).

Perhaps the essential point to note is that through the National College's programmes, there was adequate evidence to prove that an investment in school leadership is an investment in learner achievement. This is because the statistics above are telling as far as establishing the link between school leadership and learner achievement is concerned. This observation is echoed by various scholars, such as Leithwood et al. (2020b), Ahmad and Ghavifekr (2017) and Day et al. (2020), among others, who all concur on the invaluable role of school leadership in education discourse with its influence on learner achievement being regarded by some scholars (Day et al., 2020; Day & Sammons, 2014; Kwan, 2020; Leithwood et al. 2008; Shatzer et al., 2014; Urick & Bowers, 2014;) as the second most important contributing factor, after teaching and learning.

Writing about the impact of the National College on the English education system, Toner (2015, p. 6) argues that the institution strengthened school leadership in England by "creating a framework for the three levels of school leadership that spelt out the knowledge and skills required at each level – effectively producing national standards". The author also notes that the National College developed a rich and diverse curriculum that focused on instructional, organisational and strategic leadership. The emphasis on instructional and transformational leadership competencies

boded well for the crux of this research that focused on a phenomenological exploration of school heads' lived experiences and the resultant influence of these experiences on the heads' perspectives on critical competencies required for effective school leadership. This is because the reviewed literature and the research participants' responses highlighted the merging of instructional and transformational leadership competencies as a key ingredient in effective school leadership.

While the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) was closed in 2018, the government of the United Kingdom noted that what was being closed were the physical structures of the college and not the programme and the capacity development offered to teachers per se. A Department for Education (DfE) spokesperson noted that "this potential change of building does not affect the role of the NCTL or its staff, nor do we anticipate any impact on other parts of the department ..." (Linford, 2015, n.p.). Bush (2018, p. 70), however, laments the closure of the NCTL when the scholar notes that with the closure of the NCTL there was now fragmentation and uncertainty about the future of school leadership in England as "… the closure of the National College for School Leadership, and the abandonment of a mandatory headship qualification, mean that leadership preparation and induction are likely to be highly variable". Perhaps the critical point to note is that while the NCTL was closed and its roles and functions distributed between the DfE and the Teaching Regulation Agency (Linford, 2015), there were still many lessons learnt and best practices from the England experience that Zimbabwe and other African countries can borrow from. Particularly the establishment and utilisation of a national training institution to develop the capacity of school leaders on matters related to running effective and efficient schools through structured and tailor-made training, research, peer learning, professional communities of practice and partnerships with institutions of higher learning. The research participants echoed the same sentiments as they lamented the lack of training and adequate preparation through orientation training as some of the key challenges to effective school leadership in Zimbabwe.

2.3.2 The South African Experience

Giving a background to the South African Education system, UNESCO (2015) noted that since South Africa gained political independence in 1994, many changes have occurred within the sector, with education being enshrined as a justifiable basic right that is compulsory for all learners

between the ages of seven and fifteen. While such milestones have been made, UNESCO (2015, p. 8) argues that "there is still much to be done, however, on account of the economic, social, and political rifts inherited from *apartheid.* The shortage of qualified teachers and principals is one of the major problems". While the shortage of principals, as submitted by UNESCO (2015), is a cause of concern, perhaps it is imperative to acknowledge South Africa's strides in strengthening school leadership, particularly in comparison to other African countries. Commenting on the progress that South Africa has made in the domain of school leadership, UNESCO (2016) avers the following:

> South Africa established a National Professional Qualification for Principals. School leaders attend a practice-based, two-year part-time professional development programme. It is the first national qualification of its type in Africa. Other countries in the region were found to offer no training for school leaders (UNESCO, 2016, p. 206).

What is telling from the above submission is the acknowledgement that the South African initiative is the first of its type in Africa; hence it creates room for other countries to borrow and adapt the South African approach to school leadership in their respective country contexts. This became relevant to this research given the geographical and historical ties that Zimbabwe and South Africa have. Some research participants also singled out the South African principals' support system as something worth emulating and that Zimbabwe could consider learning from through a structured government-to-government exchange.

Commenting on the South African government's commitment to improving school leadership, Msila (2013) posits that The Advanced Certificate in Education School Management and Leadership (ACE), which began as a six province pilot experiment in 2007-2009, is now a nationwide institutionalised programme that is coordinated by the South African Ministry of Basic Education. In the same vein, UNESCO (2016) notes that the goal of the ACE programme is the following:

> To provide structured learning opportunities that promote quality education in South African schools by training a corps of education leaders to apply critical understanding, values, knowledge and skills to school leadership and management consistent with the vision of democratic change (UNESCO, 2016, p. 9).

The ACE is, therefore, meant to ensure that South African schools are manned by highly qualified school leaders whose work focuses on the creation of opportunities for the optimum development and learning of all learners.

The South African Department of Education (2008, p. 7), in the foreword of one of the ACE modules, identified the following areas as the key competencies that a school leader who has gone through the ACE programme should have:

- Providing leadership and management to enable the school to give every learner quality education.
- Providing professional leadership and management of the curriculum and, therefore, ensuring that the schools provide quality teaching, learning and resources for improved standards of achievement for all learners.
- Strengthening the professional role of principalship through the competency level of SMT members.
- Developing future principals who are able critically to engage and be self-reflective practitioners.
- Enabling aspiring principals to manage their departments and schools as learning organisations and instilling values supporting transformation in the South African context.

These five aims clearly indicate that the authors of the ACE programme had an articulate vision of the type of school leader they wanted the programme to produce. They envisioned a school leader who is an all-rounder, a leader who can manage the complex school environment through critical engagement and self-reflection. They also envisaged a leader who is able to offer strategic leadership to teaching and learning matters and "therefore ensures that schools provide quality teaching, learning and resources for improved standards of achievement for all learners" (South African Department of Education 2008, p. 7). As underscored earlier, school leadership scholars (Kwan, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020a; Bush & Moorosi, 2019) seem to coalesce regarding the notion that effective school leaders have a focus on both instructional and transformative practices and organisational development aspects, such as the school culture and change management. Perhaps it is imperative at this point to note that these attributes of what makes an effective school

leader are all met by the aims and key competencies set by the South African Department of Education when they developed the ACE programme (Bush et al., 2011). Thus, the programme envisages moulding a principal with both transformational and instructional strengths, thereby aiming to make principals who go through the programme effective leaders and managers. A focus on both instructional and transformational leadership attributes was pivotal to this research based on reviewed literature (Day & Sammons, 2014; Day et al., 2020; Kwan, 2020; Shatzer et al., 2014; Urick & Bowers, 2014) that applauded merging these two, a sentiment further strengthened by the research findings that also identified transformational and instructional competencies as being at the core of effective school leadership.

Another strength of the ACE programme, as noted by various scholars (Bush et al., 2011; Kirori & Dickinson, 2020), is the integration of mentorship into the capacity development of school leaders. Mentorship is, according to Bush et al. (2011), a distinctive and central feature of the ACE programme, which is designed to "facilitate the transfer of learning to candidates' and school practice … (and) provides strong potential for deep learning" (Bush et al., 2011, p. 36). The key outcome of the emphasis on mentorship under the ACE programme is the uniqueness of the South African model in pairing trainee school leaders with mentors, a practice that was seen to be uncommon in other jurisdictions reviewed in this study. This resonated with some of the sentiments that the research participants shared as they lamented the lack of structured mentorship opportunities or professional learning circles in which school heads could learn from one another and exchange ideas (Consult 7.6.4).

Scholars have also identified mentorship as potent and effective in leadership training and development (Crisp & Alvarado-Young, 2018; Dziczkowski, 2013). In the context of school leadership, Pocklington and Wendling, as cited in Bush (2018), actually emphasise that "mentoring offers a way of speeding up the process of transition to headship" (Bush, 2018, p. 69), meaning that through mentorship, mentees easily and quickly grasp the key competencies required for the school leadership role that they will be assuming in the near future. Smith (2013, p. 16) summarises the merits of mentorship in school leadership training and development when the author argues that the positive results of mentorship to aspiring leaders are that it brings a sense of "… career stabilization through encouragement, acclimation to organisational environments and

responsibilities, and a general sense that one is in control of their career". In essence, it can be concluded that mentorship acts as a crucial catalyst for the gradual and effective development of leadership skills, ensuring a sense of control and stability in one's career.

Regardless of the strengths of mentorship and its subsequent integration into the ACE programme, Bush et al. (2011) offer a critique of the way mentorship is currently structured under the ACE:

> The overall picture suggests the need for a review of mentoring practice within provinces, HEIs and the national Department of Basic Education. A well-functioning mentoring programme would be a major asset for this programme and could contribute in a powerful way to developing school leaders and their schools. However, it is clear that there are two major constraints on effective practice: the cost of providing one-on-one mentoring, and the limited availability of well-trained and motivated professionals (Bush et al., 2011, p. 36).

Bush et al.'s (2011) critique underscores the need to address cost constraints that inhibit the full and effective implementation of the mentorship programme. It also advocates the need to ensure a sufficient pool of qualified mentors, as this will optimise the potential benefits of mentorship in the ACE programme.

Barring these highlighted weaknesses, it must be noted that mentorship is indeed a good component of the ACE programme that brings uniqueness to the programme and is likely to contribute to its further success, especially if the weaknesses are addressed. Overall, it is imperative to acknowledge that the ACE has resulted in improved school leadership practice in South Africa through the capacity development of serving and aspiring school principals. The programme has also been credited for improving learning outcomes through new leadership learning by the trainees, who, in turn, improved instructional leadership practices in their respective schools through structured teacher monitoring, classroom observations and constructive feedback (Bush & Glover, 2012).

Commenting on the need for and importance of tailor-made training as a strategy for grooming effective school leaders, Pont (2014) argued as follows:

> To be able to respond to their widened roles and responsibilities, including the need for practising pedagogical leadership, school leaders need specific training. Professionalising school leadership can be partly be attained by developing and strengthening leadership

> skills related to improving school outcomes through initial and continuing training and mentoring (Pont, 2014, p. 21).

The scholar emphasises the fact that school leaders must undergo specific training to handle increased responsibilities and discharge their duties effectively. As such, the strengthening and professionalisation of school leadership should involve enhancing leadership skills through both initial and continuous training, coupled with mentoring, ultimately to improve school outcomes.

Grobler et al. (2012) studied South African teachers' perceptions of the competency of their principals before and after a holistic leadership intervention/training. The research concluded, "Principals who were exposed to the intervention programme were perceived by their teachers to be more competent than their counterparts who were not exposed to the programme" (Grobler et al., 2012, p. 40). Considering that the competency-based approach to leadership relies on training among other interventions to mould competent leaders, the findings of Grobler et al. (2012) elaborate on the importance of leadership training to strengthen leadership and organisational effectiveness. This is because the findings of Grobler et al. (2012) point to better perception of principals who had gone through the holistic leadership programme in comparison to those who had not attended the programme. Furthermore, this phenomenological research propagated the tenets of the competency-based leadership approach as it sought "to leverage the experience, lessons learned, and knowledge of seasoned leaders for the benefit of others and the organization" (Hollenbeck et al., 2006). This was the essence of my study that sought to leverage the lived experiences, lessons learnt and acquired knowledge of serving Zimbabwean school heads to identify a set of critical competencies deemed pivotal in effective school leadership in Zimbabwe.

Given the presented context and the provided evidence, it becomes apparent that both the South African ACE programme and the former NPQH programme in England share a foundational emphasis on training. While no singular model can be credited as the best in developing effective school leaders, it is essential to recognise the existence of common competencies and standards that traverse the school leadership domain. These shared elements serve as the basis upon which effective school leaders can be developed. The fundamental assumption underlying the South African and English experiences is that school leaders are not inherently born but are made through

tailor-made training. This training is designed to equip them with the essential competencies and soft skills required to fulfil their roles effectively.

The crux of the argument in the foregoing discussion is that effective school leaders can be developed through training, resulting in improved education systems and better learning outcomes. It is Pont's (2014) belief that through tailor-made training like the South African ACE and the British NPQH, a new cadre of school leaders that are well-suited to respond to the changing needs of their respective education systems can be groomed. By and large, it can be noted that as Zimbabwe seeks to improve its school leadership practices for the better, one way of doing it, as precedence has shown particularly in the shared experiences, is to do it through well-planned government-driven training initiatives. These initiatives should be tailor-made to develop relevant skills and competencies of Zimbabwean school heads to produce whole school leaders that can provide leadership for instructional purposes and leadership for organisational development (transformational). These observations align with the research participants' perspectives, as they all identified pre-headship training and in-service continuous professional development training as key drivers in building effective school leaders (Consult 5.9.1; 7.6.1; 7.6.3).

2.4 The Competency-Based Approach to Leadership

In their research on current and emerging leadership theories, practices and trends in the new millennium, Dinh et al. (2014) identified the competency-based leadership approach as "… one of the twenty-six emerging leadership theories of the 21st century" (p. 81). Wooi et al. (2017) concur with Dinh et al. (2014) as they also note that the competency-based leadership approach is an emerging leadership practice that is coming into leadership studies, perhaps to address gaps that other leadership approaches have failed to address. Furthermore, various reviewed literature and scholarship views (Adero & Odiyo, 2020; Black, 2015; Boyatzis, 2009; De Beeck & Hondeghem, 2009; Dinh et al., 2014; Tucker & Au, 2016) all concur that the competency-based leadership theory has grown from just being a scholarly perspective of past scholars such as Katz (1974) to a leadership aproach that has informed human resource practice in the 21st century. What is also obvious from the contributions of these leadership scholars is their concurrence that the competency-based leadership concept is fast becoming the bedrock for effective 21st century

organisations. This is because it locates skills, knowledge, behaviours, and attitudes that are pertinent to specific organisations' effectiveness and development and "… forms the basis for effective individual and organisational performance" (Wooi et al., 2017, p. 151). The following sections of this report discuss the concept of the competency-based approach to leadership, highlighting its origin and evolution in leadership studies.

2.4.1 Unpacking the Competency-Based Leadership Concept

As defined by Sayed and Edgar (2019), leadership competencies refer to the combination of skills that enable leaders to perform their jobs effectively. These competencies encompass a range of abilities and behaviours that contribute to leaders' success in their role. A competent leader is thus someone who consistently demonstrates high levels of performance in their leadership responsibilities (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Burnett and Dutsch (2006, p. 141) aver that the term *competency* has a dual meaning in that it can refer to the "output of competent performers or … underlying characteristic that enables an individual to achieve outstanding performance". Burnett and Dutsch's (2006) observation is of particular relevance to this discourse as it confirms some of my findings that are discussed in later chapters in which the research participants echoed the authors' sentiments that competent leaders should be able to "achieve outstanding performance" while also being "competent performers" (p. 141) themselves. Competencies thus serve as the language that defines performance. They can express both the anticipated outcomes of a leader's endeavours and the approach taken to carry out these activities.

For the purposes of this research, *competencies*, *competency-based leadership* and *competency frameworks* are used interchangeably. This is because, on the one hand, competencies encompass the abilities, proficiencies and expertise required from a leader of an organisation or its members at all levels. On the other hand, competency-based leadership or a competency-based framework involves leveraging the concept of competencies to enhance processes related to staff performance management, recruitment, staff development and training, and staff incentives (Kapur, 2020) by identifying a set of competencies deemed crucial in a specific organisational role.

Scholars such as Adero and Odiyo (2020), Allio (2005), and Tucker and Au (2016) foreground the significance of the competency-based leadership concept in both individual and organisational

development, particularly from the standpoint that the use of competencies focuses on both the leader and the institution, thus improving effectiveness while building the capacity of the leader. It can thus be noted that the competency-based leadership approach seeks to define performance excellence within an organisation by identifying competencies, which the leader can apply and utilise in the discharge of their role to attain the organisation's vision (Chen & Naquin, 2006; Sanyal et al., 2018). The competency-based approach to leadership thus posits that by setting up a competency framework or by identifying key competencies required within the organisation, the organisation sets benchmarks for what is viewed as success within the institution.

A combination of behavioural and technical competencies has also been identified as the best fusion in creating effective and able leadership (Abd Samad et al., 2018; Chakravarty & Sharma, 2016). This is because behavioural competencies relate to relational and inter-personal issues associated with leadership, such as people management, emotional intelligence and teamwork. However, technical competencies relate to technical expertise and abilities in a specific field, such as administration or financial management. Against this backdrop, Sarna (2020) argues that by adopting the competency-based leadership approach as the basis for its human resource management, the organisation will communicate "which behaviours are required, valued, recognized and rewarded with respect to specific occupational roles" (n.p.), hence creating a balance between the behavioural and technical competencies.

The competency-based approach thus ensures that the leader has a grounded understanding of the organisation's mission and targeted results. As such, it can be argued that the significance of competencies lies in their impact on performance. This is because identifying critical competencies that the organisation requires and investing in developing these competencies among the leaders and members of the organisation can enhance job performance and maximise results (Adero & Odiyo, 2020). Overall, it can be noted that competency-based leadership offers numerous advantages, including alignment of leaders' skills with job requirements, targeted staff development opportunities, structured performance evaluation, strategic alignment with the organisation's vision, and informed selection and professional development decisions, among others (Adero & Odioyo, 2020; Benayoune, 2017; Northouse, 2016; Tucker & Au, 2016). In summary, it can be noted that the competency approach ensures that leaders possess the necessary

competencies for success, foster organisational effectiveness and contribute to the organisation's overall objectives and vision.

Overall, it can be stated that the competency-based leadership approach raises the idea that leadership skills can be acquired and honed through the development of identified competencies (Dinh et al., 2014). A crucial point emphasised is that while leaders may possess skills acquired either innately or through hands-on experiences, the competency approach suggests that there is always room for acquiring new competencies (Mulder, 2019). This perspective implies that employees can enhance their performance by mastering and applying additional competencies, thereby contributing to the organisation's overall success. The competency approach, therefore, revolves around cultivating and utilising employee competencies in line with the organisation's strategy and mission, thereby fostering mutual growth for both the organisation and its employees (Mulder, 2019; Tucker & Au, 2017). The foundational assumption of the competency approach is that organisations can achieve optimal, effective and efficient performance if they clearly define the competencies required of their employees and ensure that their employees possess these essential competencies.

2.4.2 Defining Leadership and Locating the Competency Concept

To explain competencies in leadership or the competency-based leadership approach, it is important to discuss the concept of leadership briefly and highlight how competency-based leadership relates to the broader leadership domain. Leadership has been defined in many ways by many scholars, and as scholars of leadership have tried to unpack the concept, various leadership theories and approaches have been postulated. Regardless of these varied views on leadership, there is coalescence among leadership scholars on what leadership entails. McKinsey and Company (2022) posit that all leaders, to some extent, engage in similar actions. Whether referring to a business executive or school head, leadership involves directing and influencing results and facilitating collaborative efforts among individuals to achieve goals that may be challenging when pursued individually (McKinsey & Company, 2022). In their view, leadership is thus "A set of behaviours used to help people align their collective direction, to execute strategic plans, and to continually renew an organisation" (McKinsey & Company, 2022, p. 1). On the other hand,

Northouse (2010, p. 3) states that leadership is "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal". These definitions provide a comprehensive view of leadership as a dynamic and relational process involving collaboration, influence and goal-oriented activities within the group context.

Leadership scholars such as Arnold and Wade (2015), Allen (2018), Bass (2008), Benayoune (2017) and Northouse (2010), among others, collectively emphasise that leadership primarily involves guidance in situations where no predefined circumstances exist. The scholars posit that effective leadership requires leaders to operate in unpredictable conditions and still deliver the required results. As such, effective leaders are deemed as those who are able to chat the way and guide their teams in navigating the organisational and operational environment terrain to produce the best-required results and outcomes for the organisation. This demands substantial skills, attributes and knowledge. Consequently, Hollenbeck et al. (2006), along with Day (2004), caution against conflating leadership with management, noting that managers merely *manage* specified tasks, thereby highlighting the complex nature of leadership and its distinctiveness from straightforward task management.

It is imperative to note that all referenced scholars view or define leadership as a process. Characterising leadership as a process implies that it is not an inherent trait exclusive to a select few individuals from birth. Rather, it is a phenomenon that can be mastered through structured and ad hoc processes and lived experiences where one acquires the critical skills, behaviours, attributes and attitudes required for effective leadership. Adero and Odiyo (2020, p. 22) best summarise this point of view when they argue that "… the adage that leaders are born is no longer applicable as effective leadership inheres in the behaviour, knowledge, ability and skills of the leader". At the centre of this argument is the notion that leaders are not born but are rather made through identifying competencies that allow them to excel – hence the competency-based approach to leadership.

2.4.3 The Competency-Based Leadership Approach and the Research Study

According to Dinh et al. (2014) and Bennett and Lemoine (2014), the dynamic nature and complexity of organisational environments, including schools, necessitate constant adaptation; as

such, there is a demand for 21st century leaders to be equipped with new and emerging leadership competencies and a combination of skills that allow them to navigate the leadership terrain in an increasingly demanding environment (Wooi et al., 2017). Against this backdrop, leadership scholars such as Dinh et al. (2014) assert that competency-based leadership stands out as a highly viable option in contemporary leadership discussions. Recognising the complexity of school leadership as acknowledged by various education leadership scholars (Bush, 2018; Day et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020a; Leithwood et al., 2020b; Bush & Moorosi, 2019; Pont et al., 2008) along with the increasing demands of the 21st century, I conducted this research on school leadership in Zimbabwe from a competency perspective.

The competency-based leadership approach has proved to be particularly effective in situations where organisations seek improved performance, aim to enhance competitiveness, undergo cultural and paradigm shifts, improve staff development approaches and analyse skills while identifying current and projected deficiencies (She et al., 2017; Tripathi & Agrawal, 2014). All these variables are relevant to school leadership practices and can thus inform or form the core competencies that effective school leaders may require. Additionally, a growing body of evidence indicates that competency-based leadership supports organisations, including schools, in achieving optimal, effective, and efficient performance by providing clarity on the required competencies of their leaders and employees (Mulder, 2019; Welch & Hodge, 2017). Therefore, one could contend that leadership based on competencies enhances performance expectations and establishes a distinct connection between organisational goals and the leader's performance. This is particularly crucial in school leadership, where a proven link between the school head's abilities and overall school performance has been established (Bush, 2024; Leithwood et al., 2020b).

Emiliani (2003) posits that organisations' key competencies in engaging and developing effective leadership are normally linked to the following broad competencies: leadership, analytical thinking, communication, decision-making, building relationships, strategic planning and emotional intelligence. All these competencies are critical in school leadership as they are key in both instructional leadership and transformational leadership, which are the theoretical frameworks that underpinned this research as their combination is applauded as a balanced recipe for effective school leadership (Day et al., 2020; Grissom & Loeb; 2011). In further elaboration

on the importance of competencies in school leadership, Grobler and Conley (2013, p. 220), in their studies of the relationship between emotional competency and learner achievement, conclude that "… principals should utilise their intrapersonal emotional competency as a means to influence their interpersonal leadership skills". While Grobler and Conley's research zeroed in on emotional competency alone, the key message to note from their work is that once competencies have been identified and scientifically tested, they have a symbiotic link to the leadership process itself.

In their paper that discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the competency-based leadership approach, Hollenbeck et al. (2006) underscore the benefits of utilising the competency-based approach to leadership, arguing that the concept allows for the following:

> Summarising the experience and insight of seasoned leaders, specifying a range of useful leader behaviours, providing a tool that individuals can use for their self-development, and outlining a leadership framework that can be used to help select, develop, and understand leadership effectiveness" (Hollenbeck et al., 2006, p. 402).

This observation was of great relevance to the scope of my study, which was a phenomenological exploration of Zimbabwean school heads' lived leadership experiences and how these experiences have shaped their perspectives on critical competencies required for effective school leadership. This is because the research allowed me to explore the *insights of seasoned leaders*, extract *useful leader behaviours* and extrapolate meaning from these experiences to come up with a set of critical competencies that Zimbabwean school leaders deem directly and indirectly pivotal to school improvement and effective school leadership in the country.

Wills (2015) emphasises the importance of a competency-based approach in selecting and developing school principals in South Africa. Wills' research highlights a lack of correlation between traditional indicators like years of service or academic qualifications of school heads and factors such as learner achievement and school improvement. Consequently, Wills (2015) suggests the development of a *contextually appropriate and practically viable* competency-based framework for South African school leaders. Janse van Vuuren and Van der Bank (2023) acknowledge the significance of using competency frameworks to foster effective school leadership, aligning with Wills' (2015) call for a more tailored approach to meet the specific context of South African principals, a context also relevant to Zimbabwe.

The adoption of competencies as a framework for effective school leadership is a prevalent practice worldwide, with numerous school leadership competency models and frameworks being developed by countries and educational authorities globally. Ramos et al. (2021) provide a succinct well captured overview of the benefits of utilising competency-based approaches in school leadership:

> Creating a leadership competency framework that is aligned with the organization's identity, purpose and values should be viewed as a priority agenda. It outlines what makes effective leaders, and how their roles relate to the goals and success of their organisation. A competency framework is an effective way to monitor the knowledge, skills, and attributes of the leaders. This information will be vital in the efficient planning of leadership development initiatives. Having a framework enables the organisation to measure the current competency levels of the leaders to ensure that they have the expertise to run the organisation. The ultimate goal is to set the standards for exemplary performance through a leadership competency framework. (Ramos et al., 2021, p. 80)

Competency-based frameworks thus play a crucial role in leadership studies and practice, including school leadership. As highlighted by Ramos et al. (2021), such frameworks serve multiple purposes by offering an overview of the essential competencies organisations expect from their leaders. Additionally, competency frameworks provide organisations with a solid structure to guide leader selection and professional development, linking the leaders' competencies and capabilities to the organisation's vision and overall success. The crucial advantage is that when applied to school leadership, competency-based frameworks have been proven to increase efficacy and contribute to overall school improvement (Janse van Vuuren & Van der Bank, 2023; Kin & Kareem, 2019). As such, it can be argued that leadership grounded in competencies, facilitated by a tailored and relevant competency-based framework, fosters a clearer understanding of performance expectations and establishes a direct link between organisational objectives and the leader's performance. This is especially crucial in school leadership, where a demonstrated correlation between a school head's competencies and overall school performance has been established (Bush, 2024; Ramos et al., 2021).

The important role of using competency-based approaches in aiming for effective school leadership is also underscored by Kin and Kareem (2019, p. 221) when the authors argue that the use of competencies "… would contribute to school improvement and overall effectiveness of

schools across nation (s) whereby effective school leadership relies on the performance of school leaders that basically links significantly with their professional competencies". The key point to note from this statement is that the scholars establish a symbiotic link between effective school leadership, school improvement and the school heads' competency. In their view, the performance of school leaders is directly linked to their professional competencies; as such, it can be argued that in the absence of professional competencies, a head may not be effective.

2.5 Current and Past Pathways to School Headship in Zimbabwe

Muresherwa et al. (2014, p. 55) lament the fact that "the topic (school leadership) has not been adequately researched on especially in Zimbabwe…". To confirm this point of view, the literature review noted that there is generally a dearth of literature on school leadership in Zimbabwe, and this could be a result of the limited investment in the school leadership domain by the government of Zimbabwe. While the reviewed literature (Bush & Moorosi, 2019; Day & Sammons, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2020a; UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2019) has shown the paramount role of school leadership in building successful school systems, the research noted that in Zimbabwe school leadership has not been given much prominence particularly by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE), which is in charge of selecting, appointing and organising continuous professional development for public school heads. UNICEF (2019) best summarises the limited investment in school leadership in Zimbabwe as follows:

> … many school heads who are in leadership positions in schools have neither been capacitated nor inducted in school leadership and management positions. This has resulted in schools facing challenges such as poor learning outcomes, failure of school authorities to comply with set policies and procedures, embezzlement of school funds and failure of schools through their (School Development Committees) SDCs to develop resource mobilisation and communication strategies (UNICEF, 2019, p. 34).

What is clear in this observation is first the acknowledgement that most school heads lack the capacity to run schools. Secondly, it is the acknowledgement that this lack of capacity has created a plethora of problems in the schools. The challenges that are linked to the lack of leadership in Zimbabwean schools have also been noted by different scholars (Chiome, 2014; Moyo, 2002;

Mthiyane & Chiororo, 2019; Muresherwa et al., 2014; Ndoziya, 2014; Nziramasanga, 1999) who all concur on school decline in Zimbabwe as a result of incapacitated and ill-prepared leadership.

In their study, which explored the emerging challenges around the school leadership discourse and practice in Zimbabwe, Muresherwa et al. (2014) discovered that school leaders faced many challenges in Zimbabwe. Some of the highlighted management and leadership-related challenges that school heads in Zimbabwe reported were lack of pre-service and in-service training, inadequate knowledge and skills, lack of understanding/conflict between leadership and management, lack of reward for effort, lack of performance-based management systems, and policy inconsistencies (Muresherwa et al., 2014). This underscores the fact that school leadership in its current practice in Zimbabwe is dodged by many challenges that have demotivated school heads and have also resulted in school decline and an overall lack of efficiency and effectiveness in the running of schools (MoPSE, 2020).

Elaborating on the challenges of school leadership practice in Zimbabwe, the MoPSE (2020) states the following:

> MoPSE and the public at large have been concerned about the calibre of some school leaders who were not effective and efficient in the execution of their duties … Cases of deteriorating educational standards, misappropriation of school funds, improper association with learners, teacher and learner indiscipline, and poor leadership at some schools were on the increase ... (MoPSE, 2020, p. 207).

These observations by the MoPSE (2020) and Muresherwa et al. (2014) resonate with this research's findings as the school heads who took part in this research process also lamented declining standards in their schools and the Zimbabwe education sector in general, attributing this decline to inadequately prepared leaders, lack of a support structure for serving heads and chronic underfunding of schools from the government. Detailed discussions on these findings can be found in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

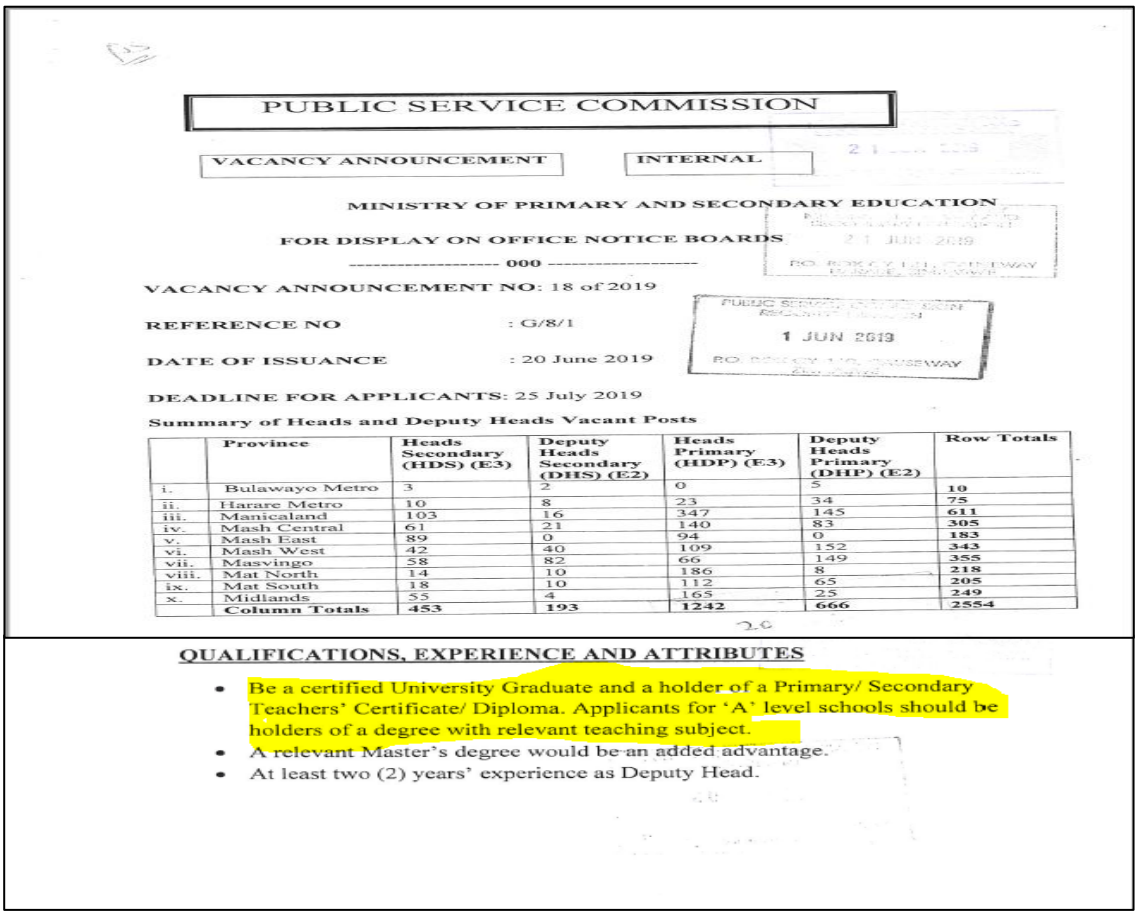
While reviewed Zimbabwean literature (Chiome, 2014; MoPSE, 2020; Muresherwa et al., 2014; Makura, 2010; Ndoziya, 2014) concurs on the lack of effective school leadership and the lack of structured training and professional development support for school heads, it has to be noted that in the past, Zimbabwe had a structured system for the orientation and professional development of

school heads. This ensured the capacity development of those recruited as head schools. The literature review further showed that the government largely relied on three avenues for the capacity development of newly recruited school heads in Zimbabwe. These were (i) the academic route in which prospective candidates have to possess the minimum of a bachelor's degree (this is still in practice); (ii) the School Management and Induction Training (SMIT) for newly appointed school heads, and (iii) various in-service professional development initiatives that are organised by the Ministry or by the national associations of school heads (these are also still in practice). These three avenues are further unpacked in the following sections to understand the past and current practices in the appointment and professional development of school heads in Zimbabwe.

2.5.1 University Graduate Avenue

According to the Zimbabwe Public Service Commission regulations (Consult an extract below from a 2019 school head recruitment advert by the Public Service Commission in Zimbabwe – Figure 2.1), for one to be appointed a school head in Zimbabwe, they should be a certified university graduate. It is imperative to note that the qualification does not necessarily have to be in Educational Leadership and Management but in any education major. For those who possess non-teaching degrees, the prospective candidate is expected to have an additional Graduate Certificate/Diploma in Education to ensure that they have a good pedagogical grounding. The research participants noted that the entry requirement of a minimum of any bachelor's degree into school headship presents a strong need for Zimbabwe to begin to think about a competency framework or set of key competencies to guide school leadership in the country. This is because the current practice results in the recruitment of candidates who are not of equal minimum standing

as far as their prior knowledge of school leadership (both instructional and transformational), management, administration, and leadership skills and competencies is concerned.



PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT | INTERNAL

MINISTRY OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

FOR DISPLAY ON OFFICE NOTICE BOARDS

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VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT NO: 18 of 2019

REFERENCE NO : G/8/1

DATE OF ISSUANCE : 20 June 2019

DEADLINE FOR APPLICANTS: 25 July 2019

Summary of Heads and Deputy Heads Vacant Posts

	Province	Heads Secondary (HDS) (E3)	Deputy Heads Secondary (DHS) (E2)	Heads Primary (HDP) (E3)	Deputy Heads Primary (DHP) (E2)	Row Totals
i.	Bulawayo Metro	3	2	0	5	10
ii.	Harare Metro	10	8	23	34	75
iii.	Manicaland	103	16	347	145	611
iv.	Mash Central	61	21	140	83	305
v.	Mash East	89	0	94	0	183
vi.	Mash West	42	40	109	152	343
vii.	Masvingo	58	82	66	149	355
viii.	Mat North	14	10	186	8	218
ix.	Mat South	18	10	112	65	205
x.	Midlands	55	4	165	25	249
	Column Totals	453	193	1242	666	2554

QUALIFICATIONS, EXPERIENCE AND ATTRIBUTES

- Be a certified University Graduate and a holder of a Primary/ Secondary Teachers' Certificate/ Diploma. Applicants for 'A' level schools should be holders of a degree with relevant teaching subject.
- A relevant Master's degree would be an added advantage.
- At least two (2) years' experience as Deputy Head.

Figure 2.1: Zimbabwe Public Service Commission School Heads Vacancy Announcement 2019

The requirement of a bachelor's degree as the minimum qualification for headship (without any other leadership training for prospective school heads) has resulted in a very disparate group of school heads. I reviewed two Bachelor of Education degrees offered in Zimbabwe. The first is a Bachelor of Education in Primary Education degree offered by the Great Zimbabwe University, and the second is a Bachelor of Education in Educational Management and Leadership degree offered by the Midlands State University. The core modules/courses under each of the degree programmes are summarised in the table below.

Bachelor of Education in Primary Education degree – Great Zimbabwe University	**Bachelor of Education in Educational Management and Leadership degree – Midlands State University**
Year 1 • Communication Skills • Curriculum Planning and Development • Introduction to Sociology of Education • Introduction to Psychology of Education • AIDS Education and Current Issues • Educational Media and Technology • Introduction to Philosophy of Education	**Year 1** • Information Communication Technology • Concepts in Educational Management and Leadership • Organisational Theory • Education Management and the Law • Theories of Leadership • Human Resource Management in Education
Year 2 • Research Methods and Statistics • Practical Subjects Education • Social Sciences Education • Music and Art Education • Mathematics and Science Education • Philosophical Issues in Teaching and Learning • Psychology of Teaching and Learning	**Year 2** • Research Methods and Statistics • Introduction to School Financial Management • Project Management • Instructional Leadership • Introduction to Educational Policy Studies • Philosophical Foundations of Education
Year 3 • Teaching Practice • Research Project – Dissertation	**Year 3** • Assessment and Evaluation Techniques • Gender Studies • Guidance and Counselling in Education • Introduction to Educational Planning • Financial Appreciation in Education • Entrepreneurship for Education • Curriculum Studies • Contemporary Issues in Education • Research Project – Dissertation • School Improvement and Accountability • Ethics in Educational Leadership • Inclusive and Special Needs Education
Year 4 • Curriculum Implementation and Change • Sociology of Teaching and Learning • Early Childhood Education • Educational Management • Special Needs Education	*None – 3 Year Program*

Table 2.1: Comparison of the BEd in Primary Education and BEd in Educational Management Degrees

While both degrees are equally considered in selecting and appointing one into headship, a look at the curriculum content of the two programmes shows content knowledge disparities among the candidates. Candidates who possess a BEd in Educational Management and Leadership degree most likely have a better theoretical and academic background in school leadership as opposed to those who have a BEd in Primary Education. This is because the latter degree is more inclined towards imparting teaching skills to the graduates, while the former is rooted in understanding education policies, administration and management. Yet upon appointment, the candidates who possess these different degrees will both be expected equally to excel in their role as school heads despite their varied background knowledge and perhaps varied experience in school leadership as well.

Channing (2020) and Mendels and Mitgang (2013) downplay the impact of university and college programmes as the sole avenues to developing effective leadership. The authors posit that such programmes generally lack the real human-to-human experience that is rooted in on-the-job experiences such as critical thinking and problem-solving, staff motivation and inter-human relations. In summary Channing (2020, p. 137) argues that "some leadership skills and traits are not teachable … and can never be effectively addressed by formal classroom training". Against this backdrop, Ortmeier as cited by Orazi et al. (2013, p. 493), advocates the use of competency frameworks in public service leadership recruitment when the author posits that "… it appears necessary to recruit, select and train on the basis of leadership potential, and to provide a vehicle for the development of leadership competency among those already employed in public service". The pith of this perspective is that university degrees alone might not be enough to develop the functional and hands-on leaders that the public sector requires. As such, the authors argue that there is a need to use leadership potential and competency in recruiting, selecting and training future public leaders. These notions resonate with the findings of this research as the research participants underscored the fact that the leadership capabilities of school heads must be considered beyond their qualifications; other skills and behaviours that are pertinent in the successful execution of their role should be taken into consideration.

2.5.2 School Management Induction Training

In section 2.5.1 I discussed the current selection process of school heads in Zimbabwe, highlighting that the academic qualification and one's years of experience have been used as the main benchmark for ascendency into headship. In this section, I provide a brief historical summary as I discuss the now defunct school management induction training that the country used to offer to newly appointed school heads. A relook at past practices was essential in helping me to understand the evolution of school headship in Zimbabwe as well as to have a better understanding of the experiences that the research participants shared with me in our engagements, especially given that some of them had taken part in some of these programmes.

Moyo (2002) notes that the Education Officers from the MoPSE used to orient newly appointed school heads through the Heads' Support Training Programme (HSTP), which was an orientation and training programme for newly appointed school heads in the Commonwealth group of countries. The Ministry of Education in Zimbabwe, as cited by Moyo (2002), noted that the HSTP was adapted to Africa by some countries, namely Botswana, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe, that met in 1992 to re-write and adapt the HSTP modules to the African context. The countries developed seven modules that were launched at a Commonwealth Education Workshop in Botswana in 1993 (Moyo, 2002).

The Zimbabwe Ministry of Education and Culture (1993, pp. i-v) summarised the then HSTP Modules as shown below.

Module	Module Learning Units
Module 1: Self-development for education managers	• School mission, values and objectives • Styles of management • Needs identification • Job analysis • Time management
Module 2: Principles of Educational Management	• Introduction to educational management • Government Organisation and Function • The functions of school management • Human and public relations • Delegation in a school • Communication and negotiation • Decision-making and problem solving • The management of change
Module 3: Personnel Management	• Staff selection

	• Staff development • Staff motivation • Staff appraisal, staff supervision and discipline, keeping staff records • Managing meetings • Managing conflict
Module 4: Managing the Curriculum and Resources	• Establishing the curriculum • Timetabling • Organising resources to support curriculum • Selecting and managing textbooks • Libraries, media and low-cost educational media: Examination, testing and record keeping • Resource maintenance • Finding financial resources
Module 5: Financial Management	• Sources of school funds • School budgeting • Mobilising financial resources • Basic framework and mechanism of financial management • Expending and accounting for school fees • Auditing school account books
Module 6: Monitoring School Effectiveness	• Indicators and characteristics of school effectiveness • The rationale for evaluation • Evaluation techniques • Planning a programme for evaluation • Using evaluation findings
Module 7: The Governance of Schools	• Defining the parameters of school governance • Legal basis for school governance • School managers and governing bodies • Relationships between schools and other agencies • Partners in school management

Table 2.2: HSTP Modules and Respective Training Units

Unlike the academic degrees discussed earlier on, it must be noted that a review of the HSTP modules shows that the programme was oriented towards on-the-job practical experiences for school heads. This is because the individual learning units in each of the HSTP modules attempted to reflect real-life experiences as much as possible, thus making the programme more in touch with the day-to-day experiences of school heads (Moyo, 2002). This is with reference to specific units such as *time management, school budgeting* and *timetabling*, among others, which one is not likely to encounter in academic courses. The HSTP modules were offered in a series of residential workshops that were organised by the Ministry of Education, with the actual training also being

carried out primarily by officers from the Ministry and other government departments (Moyo, 2002).

The Zimbabwean economy went into a crisis in the mid-2000s; its impact spiralled into the education sector, with some programmes being abandoned. These included orientation and capacity development initiatives for school heads (Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture, 2011). The HSTP was hence abandoned, together with many other initiatives in the sector, as the education system became increasingly vulnerable to the macroeconomic challenges the country was experiencing. This meant that as the macro-economic challenges deepened, the induction and training programme of school heads under the HSTP ceased; hence the admission by the MoPSE (2020, p. 56) that "many school heads who are in leadership positions in schools (now) have neither been capacitated nor inducted in school leadership and management positions".

While the HSTP programme attempted to root its training units in day-to-day school-based experiences, it has to be noted that it also had its weaknesses. Benza (1999) argues that the programme was not based on the identified needs of Zimbabwean school heads but rather on an international framework that was not based on locally identified gaps. As such, Dadey and Haber, as cited in Benza (1999, p.81), point out that "… optimal relevance of the contents of continuing SMT (school management training) in Zimbabwe could be achieved by conducting an analysis of the school head's training needs" before any training intervention was designed. The gist of this argument is that the HSTP programme was not informed by school heads' actual experiences as their views had not been sought, and their needs were not factored in in the development of the HSTP. Benza's (1999) recommendation is largely in line with the crux of my research as it explored the lived experiences of school heads in the discharge of their duties and leveraged such experiences to inform and contribute to improved school leadership experiences in Zimbabwe. This research is thus anticipated to fill in an existing academic lacuna in education leadership in Zimbabwe as it was based on the lived experiences of those who lived the school leadership phenomenon on a day-to-day basis, namely the school heads themselves.

2.5.3 In-service Professional Development Training

Another avenue through which attempts are being made to enrich school leadership practice in Zimbabwe is via the various in-service professional development training that different stakeholders offer. These are stakeholders such as the MoPSE itself, non-governmental organisations, institutions of higher learning, the National Association of Primary School Heads (NAPH) and the National Association of Secondary School Heads (NASH). The MoPSE (2020) notes that in-service training for school heads is an avenue through which new skills and standard practices in school leadership can be enhanced. As a result, the MoPSE has facilitated donor-funded programmes through partners such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the Zimbabwe Education Development Fund (EDF) (MoPSE, 2020). Such trainings have covered various topics aimed at improving school leadership practice in Zimbabwe but have largely been unsystematic, uncoordinated and sporadic (MoPSE, 2020). Topics covered under these trainings include but are not limited to understanding the new curriculum as introduced in 2017, syllabus interpretation, financial management training, and discipline in the school, among others (MoPSE, 2020). It is imperative to note that while the current in-service training and professional development initiatives train school heads in some operational issues pertinent to their job, they are not all fully leadership oriented. Furthermore, such training is not based on the lived experiences of school heads. Hence, this research sought to enrich school leadership research and practice in Zimbabwe, specifically from the lived experiences of the school heads themselves.

My discussion with the research participants revealed that the NASH and the NAPH play pivotal roles in staff development initiatives for school heads as most of the participants mentioned that they had received different CPD trainings through the said associations. The two associations are funded entirely from resources that are collected at the school level from the learners' school fees through a programme known as the Better School Programme Zimbabwe (BSPZ). The programme deducts US$1 per learner per term, with 50 cents going to the district office, 20 cents to the provincial office, and the remaining 30 cents going to NAPH or NASH (MoPSE, 2020). The funds that NAPH and NASH collect are mostly used to finance staff development initiatives for school heads, with the MoPSE (2020, p. 201) noting that "the associations design, implement and fund staff development programmes for both school heads and teachers in the identified areas of need at district, provincial and national levels". A review of past NASH and NAPH workshop and

conference programmes show that the associations' training programmes have in the past covered areas such as ICT for School leaders, Financial Planning for Retirement, Financial Management for non-finance managers, and Leadership in the 21st century, among other topics.

While NASH and NAPH boast these staff development initiatives, the review noted that two major weaknesses of their programmes stand out. The first challenge, as noted by the MoPSE (2020), is that the number of learners, school heads and teachers that benefit from the NASH and NAPH programmes is limited as their scope is negligible in comparison to the actual needs. This means that the associations' programmes are short in reaching large numbers; hence, their impact at a national scale also becomes limited. Secondly, NASH and NAPH programmes are not formalised and well-structured, and this makes it difficult to rely on them as sole avenues for staff development and training of school heads at the national level. This point is cemented by MoPSE (2020, p. 247) when the Ministry cautions that NAPH and NASH staff development activities "… need to be formalised and planned for the next strategic planning period ... this should be formalised with a monitoring, auditing and reporting structure". Perhaps the key point to note here is that the NASH and the NAPH have played a role in staff development, in-service training and professional development of school heads in Zimbabwe, but there is room for further improvement of their initiatives. This is because the literature review noted that the associations' current approaches are still largely informal and lack the required transparency and technical impetus to pass them for a national programme that informs the training and professional development of school heads in Zimbabwe.

The literature reviewed in this section shows that current practice in Zimbabwe is rooted in both formal and non-formal modes of professional development of school heads. The formal channel, as represented by university academic degrees, is particularly strong in that universities, by their nature, have national coverage and also have the relevant infrastructure and academic expertise to offer training and academic grounding to serving and aspiring school heads. Furthermore, university programmes can equip school heads with academic skills such as critical thinking and reflection, as well as exposing them to various perspectives, schools of thought and theories on school leadership practice. However, as noted by Channing (2020), the major challenge of university programmes is that some leadership traits and skills can never be effectively addressed

by formal classroom training. As such, university and college programmes tend to be theoretical and, at times, contain courses that may not be of relevance to the actual on-the-ground needs of the practitioner.

Zimbabwe's economic challenges have also impacted school leadership practice and professional development. Reviewed literature shows that both teacher and school leaders' motivation is very low due to continually declining incomes (Ngwenya, 2021; World Bank, 2021). The review also noted that one programme that tried to bridge academic theory and field practice in school leadership training, the HSTP, was abandoned in the early 2000s due to the country's economic challenges. This left school heads relying on less formal options like workshops and seminars organised mostly by non-governmental organisations working in education and by the national associations of school heads in Zimbabwe. In summary, the review acknowledges the current efforts in the professional development of school heads in Zimbabwe but, at the same time, exposes the great need as far as enriching school leadership competencies and practices in Zimbabwe is concerned. What is needed is training that is grounded in both academic theory and, most importantly, in the lived experiences and needs of school heads, which is the essence that my research sought to explore.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature that was deemed pivotal in the research process by discussing the importance and inevitability of school leadership in education discourse, global experiences from which Zimbabwe could borrow some lessons and best practices, competency-based leadership and its relevance to effective school leadership practice, and current school leadership practices and gaps in Zimbabwe. The review revealed that there is an abundance of literature on leadership in general and school leadership in particular. However, there appears to be a scarcity of literature on school leadership practices in Zimbabwe, especially literature that reflects the viewpoints and real-life experiences of the school leaders themselves. This is the core aspect that this research aimed to investigate. Building on this review, the next chapter discusses the instructional and transformational leadership theories, elaborating their link to the overall research and why they were selected as the theoretical frameworks to underpin this research.

CHAPTER 3: FRAMING THE STUDY WITHIN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORIES

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed relevant literature that informed my research, focusing on the importance of school leadership in modern-day education practices, the current and past pathways to school leadership in Zimbabwe, experiences from other countries and the competency-based leadership concept and how all these variables related to my study. In this chapter I discuss the theoretical frameworks that underpinned my research, elaborating on their relevance to the context of my study.

3.2 Background to My Theoretical Framework

The two leadership theories to be explored are the Transformational and Instructional Leadership theories. Based on the reviewed literature, this research posits that the best school heads are those that can combine instructional leadership and transformational leadership practices (Cruickshank, 2017; Day et al., 2020; Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Kwan, 2020; Sidhu & Fook, 2009). A combination of these two leadership approaches is regarded as an ideal combination to inform competencies for effective school leadership, as the merging of competencies from the two theories results in a whole and balanced leader (Day et al., 2020; Kwan, 2020; Shava & Heystek, 2021). This is because such a leader will be able to address both curriculum and learning (instructional) issues and organisational development issues (transformational). The following section thus discusses these two leadership theories in detail while exploring how they best fit into school leadership discourse and why they were chosen as the theoretical frameworks that anchored my study.

Reviewed literature (Antonakis & Day, 2018; Derue et al., 2011; Khan & Nawaz, 2016) pointed out many theories, definitions, types and classifications of and on leadership. Khan and Nawaz (2016, p.1) observe that “Substantial effort has gone into classifying and clarifying different dimensions of active leadership, thus generating considerable organisational and social research

of leadership theories and behaviours". This means that while academia is trying to understand the leadership phenomenon, new leadership theories and styles are being postulated.

This is because leadership means different things to different people due to the different environments, functions, roles, responsibilities and contexts in which leadership is applied and practised. What is important to note is that leadership comes in all shapes and sizes and at different levels, ranging from family or community leadership to leading billion-dollar multinational corporations. These variables help to elaborate the complex nature of leadership further and why it has been difficult for leadership researchers and scholars to coalesce one standard definition and theory of leadership. Resultantly, the diversity in the leader's competencies, the variations in the skills required of the leader, the differences in the performed functions by the leader, and the different mandated roles and responsibilities of leaders, all determine the leadership style and theory applied in each context based on the identified need. Additionally, the leaders' relations with team members and other stakeholders are crucial in shaping the leadership style and theory applied in each context and based on identified needs. As such, due to this diversity in leadership practice, many leadership theories have emerged in the last 100 years. Khan and Nawaz (2016, p. 1) posit that some of the central leadership theories that have "… emerged during the 20th century include The Great Man theory, Trait Theory, Process Leadership Theory, Style and Behavioural Theory, Transformational, Transactional and Laissez Faire Leadership theories".

However, Henman (2017, p. 11) notes, "Each theory differs slightly, indicating that there is no one best, all-purpose style of leadership. The successful leader is the one who can adapt to the unique demands of an ever-changing organisation". Perhaps the key point is that ideal leaders are born out of a combination of theories and styles. In elaboration of the complexity of leadership and the multiplicity of leadership definitions and theories, Henman (2017, p. 1) avers that "there is no universal theory of leadership and no precise formula for producing leaders", implying that perhaps the closest that one can get to ideal leadership is through borrowing from more than one leadership style to congregate a conglomerate of practices. School leadership is a complex and demanding role hence it also requires the same approaches that Henman (2017) refers to regarding the need to employ a plurality of leadership approaches and theories. The complexity of school leadership is lucidly outlined by Dinham (2011, p. 4), who asserts that school leadership "is a more

contentious, complex, situated and dynamic phenomenon than previously thought". As such, many theories and styles have been suggested as ideal for school leadership, with academia and scholars coming up with different models, theories and approaches to unpack the phenomenon.

For example, scholars and institutions such as Leithwood et al. (2020a), the Nebraska State Board of Education (2017) and Day et al. (2009) have proposed widely accepted school leadership models and theories, such as the *7 Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership, 8 Standards of School Leadership*, and the *8 Dimensions of Effective School Leadership* respectively. However, it has to be noted that there is no internationally accepted theory on school leadership as countries and jurisdictions design hybrid school leadership models that are based on different theories applicable and most relevant to their local context and realities. Seashore-Louis et al. (2010) acknowledges the various school leadership theories and research that has been conducted, but at the same time lament the fact that such past theories examined a limited range of leadership behaviours, thus making it difficult to rely on one leadership theory to influence school leadership.

The key outcome is that because of its complexity and what it seeks to achieve, school leadership cannot be based on one leadership approach or theory. Instead, it should borrow from different theories relevant to the context in which the school leader will be operating (Cruickshank, 2017). Considering that this research sought to explore the lived leadership experiences of school leaders and their resultant perspectives on effective school leadership in Zimbabwe, this section reviews and discusses literature related to two leadership theories that available research (Cruickshank, 2017; Kwan, 2020; Shatzer et al., 2014) has fused into a combination that is ideal in informing successful school leadership.

3.3 Transformational Leadership Theory

To understand the application of transformational leadership in education discourse, particularly in school leadership, one must reflect on the history of the transformational leadership theory within the broader leadership spectrum. Transformational leadership theory originated with Burns (1978) when the author differentiated transformational leadership from the earlier espoused transactional leadership theory. Transformational leadership emerged with more focus on leadership being a mutually beneficial process between the leader and the team. In contrast,

transactional leadership focused on leadership as the facilitation of exchanging rewards for performance (Chingombe et al., 2017). According to Bass (1991), transformational leadership theory redefines leadership as being focused on the needs of the followers and the integration of the followers into the leadership system. As such, transformational leadership was opposed to past leadership theories that individualised leadership; transformational leadership enables "leaders and followers to help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation" (Burns, 1978, p. 20).

As it emerged, transformational leadership differed from past and contemporary leadership theories and approaches. This difference is underscored by Khan and Nawaz (2016, p.3) when the authors point out that transformational leadership was different "… on the basis of its alignment to a greater good as it entails the involvement of the followers in processes or activities related to personal factor towards the organisation". This means that in transformational leadership, leaders are key team coordinators who engage and connect with their followers, "resulting in enlargement of morale and motivation of both leaders and followers" (Jovanovic & Ciric, 2016, p. 498). As such, transformational leadership posits that leadership is an influence process between the leader and the followers. At the same time, it is also a process whereby the leader works with the same followers to change a system, reform institutions and attain a shared vision, thus raising the motivation and morality of both the follower and the leader (Gumus et al., 2018).

Transformational leadership is oriented towards the achievement of organisational success through collaborative efforts between the leader and the team. Simola et al. (2012) underscore this concept, emphasising that transformational leadership revolves around the collective pursuit of an agreed-upon organisational purpose. This involves engaging and empowering followers, where both the leader and the followers set aside personal agendas for the benefit of the organisation. According to the theory, transformational leaders prioritise the needs, perspectives and contributions of their followers, aiming to nurture and empower them as future leaders while inspiring them towards a common organisational objective (Cruickshank, 2017).

As such, transformational leaders can identify required change within the organisations that they lead and plan for that change while gaining the consensus and commitment of their followers to create a vision that guides change and embeds the change (Bass, 2000; Khan & Nawaz, 2016).

Transformational leaders tend to treat their followers individually, creating an environment that allows for personal growth, skills development and talent nurturing in their followers. They are futuristic-oriented leaders who focus on the organisation's vision, hence their focus on rallying their teams in pursuit of that vision through a mutually agreed work plan that respects individual talents and identifies every team member as a leader in their own right. MacGregor (2003) in Khan and Nawaz (2016, p. 3) summarises this function when the author notes that transformational leaders are "visionary leaders who seek to appeal to their followers … and move them towards higher and more universal needs and purposes".

3.4 Transformational School Leadership

While the preceding section discussed the transformational leadership theory, highlighting its main tenets, this section discusses the theory in relation to the school leadership phenomenon. It simultaneously reflects on how the theory interlinked with the research process. Perhaps the starting point is to acknowledge that various scholars and authors have researched and acknowledged the effectiveness of transformational leadership theory in school leadership (Day & Sammons, 2014; Day et al., 2020; Gums et al., 2018; Marks & Printy, 2003; Zammit et al., 2007). All these authors and scholars agree that transformational school leadership is about setting the school's vision and direction, reorganising and realigning staff, and improving education outcomes (Day & Sammons, 2014). Transformational school leadership is therefore concentrated on running and building 21st century schools where the school leader plays a pivotal role in vision setting, team building and collaboration, improved learning outcomes, and individual staff development guided by staff strengths and interests. Transformational school leadership thus affirms the critical role that school leaders play in reforming their schools, particularly in introducing innovation and shaping organisational culture (Liu et al., 2021). In the same vein, Day et al. (2020) underscore that school leaders who practise transformational leadership provide inspiration to teachers and learners, promote intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration of teachers, learners and parents.

Bass and Avolio (1994) examined the abilities associated with transformational leadership and organised them into what is commonly known as the *Four Is*: Idealised influence, Inspirational

motivation, Intellectual stimulation and Individualised consideration. In the following sections I discuss the *Four Is* in the context of school leadership, highlighting how their traits are applied in school leadership environments.

3.4.1 Idealised Influence

Bass and Riggio (2006) define idealised influence as the state where leaders are admired, respected and trusted, prompting followers to identify with them and aspire to emulate their qualities. This concept underscores the degree to which leaders are perceived as role models by their followers. In school leadership practice, transformational leaders have been linked to positive outcomes, such as enhancements in the school environment, improved relations among teachers and staff, teamwork and coordination, and improved learning outcomes (Shatzer et al., 2014). This suggests that transformational leaders motivate their followers by integrating them into the organisational vision, thereby increasing their awareness of the significance of organisational objectives. Bass and Riggio (2006) note that idealised influence pertains to the leader's behaviour and the leadership elements that are attributed to the leader by their followers. Consequently, a school leader should exemplify qualities that teachers admire and should establish systems aimed at enhancing the school's effectiveness, with such initiatives being credited to the school leader.

By serving as a role model to teachers, transformational school leaders inspire teachers and help them realise their value, thus encouraging them to work towards improved education outcomes. As a result, teachers tend to prefer school leaders who are inclined to adopt the transformational leadership style (Kareem et al., 2023).

Hauserman and Stick (2013, p. 185) note, "Teachers strongly preferred behaviours that aligned with the aspects of transformational leadership"; this is because transformational leadership puts emphasis on collaboration and a collective approach to achieving the school's mission. In the same vein, research on transformational leadership practices in South African schools by Khumalo (2019) concluded that principals who use transformational approaches promote teacher commitment and sustainable development in their schools. Ideally, this implies that in schools where a leader practices transformational leadership, teachers are likely to be motivated, thus showing that school leaders significantly affect teachers' motivation and approach to work.

Hauserman and Stick (2013) also note that transformational school leaders nurture the leadership capacities of their teachers and promote communication and reflective peer learning while emphasising teamwork and collaboration as pivotal pillars in the success of the schools that they lead.

3.4.2 Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational motivation has to do with the extent to which the leader articulates a vision that has total buy-in of their followers and motivates these followers to work towards the attainment of that vision (Bass & Avolio, 2004; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders have the ability to motivate their followers to have a positive outlook on the future and are also known to inspire those around them by infusing significance and challenge into their followers' tasks (Bass et al., 2003).

In his research on transformational leadership in secondary schools in the USA, Cooper (2012) notes that school leaders rooted in the transformational leadership theory are visionary leaders with a clear vision of the school's future as an organisation. Cooper (2012) also notes that such leaders can communicate the organisational vision to the teachers and other team members in an effective manner that highlights the essentialness of that vision to the organisation's growth while at the same time inspiring them to commit and work towards the realisation of the school's vision and goals. This means that schools run by transformational school leaders are likely to perform better as transformational leaders have the charisma to coalesce their teams into a shared vision. This notion is seconded by Hauserman and Stick (2013, p.189) who aver that "High-functioning schools were found to have transformational principals who shaped the school vision and learning processes within the organisation, thus creating a positive learning culture". The key point to note is that through the transformational leadership trait of *inspirational motivation*, the school leader can rally and motivate the team towards a shared common vision and inspire all stakeholders to work towards that vision. School leaders rooted in the transformational leadership theory are thus visionaries who see into the school's future and work with all stakeholders towards the set vision.

In their studies of the relationship between transformational leadership, school climate, and learner achievement, Hadebe (2013) and Allen et al. (2015) conclude that there is a symbiotic relationship

between transformational leadership and school climate. In the same vein, Jovanovic and Ciric (2016, p. 499) note that many studies in transformational school leadership have found that "… transformational leadership consistently predicted the willingness of teachers to devote extra effort and change their teaching practices or attitudes". This means transformational school leaders can motivate teachers to transcend their self-interest for the larger good (Day et al., 2020). This is because transformational leadership is viewed as a relational type of leadership through which a leader engages with the team and can connect with them, thereby enhancing the morale and motivation of the team members to shelve personal interests for the greater good of the school.

3.4.3 Intellectual Stimulation

Intellectual stimulation refers to the extent to which leaders promote innovation, divergent thinking, creativity and openness amongst their teams (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This attribute is particularly relevant in the 21st century context where education has and is going through many changes that call for learners, teachers and school leaders to be innovative and embrace new and emerging technologies and innovations to support teaching and learning (Hawkins & Whyley-Naace, 2023). This means that as school leaders interact with their teachers and learners, they should be able to create an enabling environment that allows teachers to innovate and apply critical thinking for improved teaching and learning. Kareem et al. (2023) note that modern day school transformational leaders can support innovation in their schools by restructuring their teams, setting a clear vision, promoting teamwork and assigning leadership roles to different team members. This means that the attribute of intellectual stimulation has to be applied in a collaborative context where other attributes of transformational leadership, such as teamwork and collaboration, are also factored in.

It is imperative to note that while intellectual stimulation particularly addresses what leaders can do to promote innovativeness, it can also be inferred that school leaders themselves have to be innovative and creative as their teams expect such attributes from them. For example, research on transformational leadership practices among Zimbabwean secondary school heads by Hadebe (2013) noted that school leaders were expected to be innovative by both their teachers as well as by the education authorities. Hadebe (2013) points out that the education authorities that took part

in the research noted that school heads' recruitment in Zimbabwe foregrounded innovativeness as key competency for aspiring school heads. This explicates the importance of intellectual stimulation as an attribute of transformational school leadership where the head is expected to be able to create an enabling environment for teachers to be innovative while at the same time the heads themselves are anticipated to be innovative and creative in their day-to-day leadership practices.

3.4.4 Individualised Consideration

Individualised consideration pertains to the extent to which leaders understand and are responsive to the unique requirements, strengths and weaknesses of their followers. It also involves the support of team members by the leader through activities such as coaching and mentorship where the leader may assign specific responsibilities to team members' personal and professional development (Bass & Roggio, 2006; Bass et al., 2003). An "essential ingredient to a great leader is boundless optimism about the potential of ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things in the world" (Ba Banutu-Gomez, 2004, p. 31). School leadership is not immune to this excellent transformational leadership quality; as such, a good school leader should not be concerned about results only but also about the environment in which these results are produced. Available literature (Gumus et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020b; Pechota & Scott, 2021) has revealed that a good school leader has good people management, staff support and organisational management skills, as the school is an organisation in its own right. Such an organisation is bound by specific organisational dynamics that may be informed by factors such as the school location, the learners, the teachers and the staff at the school, among many other factors. This is summed up by Gordon (2006, p. 240), who avers that "… a great principal, just like any other manager, is critical to retention because … most people do not leave organisations, they leave supervisors". Perhaps the most crucial point to note in Gordon's view is that a good school leader exercises good people management and resource management skills, including staff motivation and mentoring to ensure retention, thereby creating stability within the system, with all these attributes rooted in individualised consideration.

Leitwood et al. (2020a, p. 3) argue that one of the strong claims of effective school leadership is that it should help to "… improve employee performance; and … such performance is a function of employees' beliefs, values, motivations, skills and knowledge and the conditions in which they work". This means that successful school leadership should be able to create an enabling environment that allows flowers to thrive and must include leadership practices and techniques that try to address the mentioned dimensions, and particularly support teachers to improve their instructional practices through approaches such as coaching, mentorship and positive supervision.

3.5 Transformational School Leadership and the Research Context

Jovanovic and Ciric (2016) note that the last two to three decades have seen transformational school leadership taking centre stage in research and empirical examinations. The authors, however, argue that after 1999, leadership studies have primarily explored the nexus between transformational school leadership and different variables dependent on the leadership style employed. In precis, Jovanovic and Ciric (2016) state that the significant contribution of transformational school leadership to improved schools and better learning outcomes, in general, is documented in various reviewed literature sources. This literature noted that transformational school leadership has a very positive impact on aspects such as teacher motivation (Shatzer et al., 2014), job and task satisfaction (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008), professional growth (Kruger et al., 2007), organisational conditions (Day et al., 2016), school learning culture (Day et al., 2020), school climate (Allen et al., 2015), organisational health (Day et al., 2020) and learner achievement (Shatzer et al., 2014). Considering the broad spectrum of the variables that transformational school leadership has a positive impact on, as highlighted above, it can be concluded that transformational leadership, when applied to school contexts, has a plethora of benefits. Such benefits include school improvement, enhanced quality of teaching and learning, a change in teachers' classroom practices, high learning outcomes and improved achievement, enhanced learner engagement, broader collaboration of the school with the community and outside stakeholders and team collaboration among the school leader and the teachers.

Overall, this research posits that transformational leadership creates stability in schools, and by focusing on collaboration and harmonious relationships with teachers, it has an indirect positive

effect on learner achievement and progress (Day et al., 2016; Day et al., 2020; Shatzer et al., 2014). Interestingly, all my research participants identified learner achievement as being at the heart of effective school leadership. Against the given backdrop, it can thus be noted that the role of school heads as transformational leaders mainly focuses on their ability to manage the school as an organisation, motivate staff and ensure that the conditions in which the teachers and learners operate are conducive to the teaching and learning process. The role of a school leader as a transformational leader is convincingly summarised by Leithwood et al. (2020a, p. 4) when the authors posit that this role hinges on four domains, namely, "… Set Directions; Build Relationships and Develop People; Develop the Organisation to Support Desired Practices and Improve the Instructional Programme". All these attributes were deemed relevant to the context of this research as they emerged in my interaction with the research participants who identified different competencies that are linked to these transformational attributes. I discuss these competencies in Chapters 6 and 7 of this research.

3.6 Instructional Leadership Theory

While transformational leadership has many strengths, as attributed above, its impact on actual learning has been identified as a weakness. It is in this vein that Kwan (2020) points out the following:

> The effect of instructional behaviours on student outcomes is considered to be situationally contingent on the extent of transformational behaviour enactment. Despite its lack of a direct impact on student outcomes, transformational leadership serves as a necessary, although insufficient, condition for the effective implementation of instructional monitoring measures (Kwan, 2020, p. 322).

This means that in all its strengths, as discussed in the preceding sections, transformational leadership's lacuna rests in its limited focus on curriculum and instructional-related issues, a view also echoed in both earlier scholarly works (Marks & Printy, 2003) and more recent research (Day et al., 2020; Urick & Bowers, 2014). As such, regardless of building successful institutions characterised by teacher motivation, teamwork, commitment and professional development, among others, transformational leadership on its own is less likely to result in outstanding effects on learning and achievement (Allen et al., 2015; Kwan, 2020; Shartzer et al., 2014).

The biggest drawback of transformational leadership in education is its failure to explicitly focus on the instructional process, which in itself is the nucleus of day-to-day school practice. Because of this void, there is a need to integrate the transformational leadership approach with another leadership approach that addresses specific instructional and curriculum issues, particularly given that transformational leadership theory focuses on relational and organisational issues (Kwan, 2020). This has necessitated the need to merge the transformational leadership theory with a curriculum-focused theory rooted in education, that is, instructional leadership theory. The next section discusses instructional leadership theory, focusing on its benefits within the school leadership framework.

3.6.1 Defining Instructional Leadership

While transformational leadership theory is a general leadership theory whose tenets and principles are applied to leadership within education contexts to come up with the transformational school leadership theory, instructional leadership theory is rooted explicitly in education. This is because instructional leadership addresses issues related to the curriculum and the teaching and learning process. Instructional leadership is defined as any effort to encourage and support parties involved in the teaching and learning process to achieve school goals and develop a strong school social system (Day et al., 2020). Instructional leadership has also been defined as the behaviour of principals that is designed to promote and improve teaching and learning in schools while involving all key stakeholders within the school (Muda et al., 2017). In the same vein, Shatter et al. (2014) describe instructional leadership as a chain of actions that are taken by school leaders aimed at enhancing both learning outcomes and the conditions in which they take place. Instructional leadership is thus concerned with ensuring clear and strong learning goals in schools with learning being at its core (O'Donoghue & Clarke, 2010; Timperley, 2011). It also focuses on understanding and planning for the curriculum, and leading teachers and teaching in schools. It can therefore be argued that learning is at the centre of instructional leadership. Baștea et al. (2023) also link instructional leadership to other leadership attributes such as distributed leadership. In a nutshell, instructional leadership thus emphasises the role of school leaders as primarily focused on promoting improved outcomes for learners, emphasising the importance of teaching and learning (Robinson et al., 2009).

3.6.2 Exploring the Instructional Leadership Theory

Instructional leadership is best described as the influence, behaviour and power school leaders use to affect individuals and situations in their schools, focusing on learning and related factors (Sisman, 2016). What is imperative to note in Sisman's assertion is the notion that instructional leadership locates the school leader as a central player in effecting change, both within the school system and in teachers, all aimed at improved learner results. Further interrogation of this attribute points out traits of transformational leadership discussed in the preceding section, in which the school leader is identified as a change agent. However, "the most important aspect differentiating instructional leadership from other educational leadership theories is that it focuses more on the teaching and learning process in school" (Hassan et al., 2018, p. 425). The key attribute of instructional leadership theory is, therefore, that it concentrates on instruction and learning in schools and the support of teachers in this process, as well as on improved learning outcomes, something that transformational leadership does not exclusively address.

Scholars such as Shartzer et al. (2014) dispel the traditional view that school heads should focus on the general administration and management of the school only. The scholars argue that over and above any administration duties that may be associated with the role of the school leader, it should be noted that there is nothing in the school leader's role that is more imperative than ensuring that teaching and learning are facilitated effectively. Research has generally noted that school heads who incorporate instructional matters into the school's vision can strengthen their teachers' instructional abilities and serve as good models for the teachers (Gumus et al., 2018). In such a context, the school leaders' focus on monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning processes within the school broadens the likelihood of teachers receiving timely feedback on their teaching practices. This leads to gradual improvement in these practices through ongoing professional development that may be informed by the feedback received from the school leader. Against the given backdrop, it can thus be argued that effective school leaders devote time to evaluating how their schools meet instructional goals. This practice thus promotes ongoing reflection and refinement of instruction, thereby improving the school's instructional environment and contributing to quality education.

Spillane and Louis underscore this sentiment in Day and Sammons (2013) when they state the following:

> Without an understanding of the knowledge necessary for teachers to teach well – content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, content-specific pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge and knowledge of learners – school leaders will be unable to perform essential school improvement functions such as monitoring instruction and supporting teacher development (Day & Sammons, 2013, p. 12).

Based on the above statements, several dimensions of instructional leadership are brought to the fore. Among them are goal setting in terms of curriculum implementation and targets, organising the teaching and learning processes in the school, teacher support, review and evaluation of all instructional processes, and pedagogical knowledge, among others. Instructional leadership theory thus regards the school leader as the face and driver of the teaching and learning process in the school, with such teaching and learning focusing on high learner achievement and the attainment of the school's vision.

As a result, many scholars and authors have tried to break down the key philosophy behind instructional leadership theory into components and models. For example, Sisman (2016) identified five leadership roles that are synonymous with instructional leaders, namely, (1) identifying and sharing school objectives; (2) administrating curriculum and instructional process; (3) evaluating instructional process and learners' academic achievement (4) supporting teachers while enhancing their quality, and (5) creating a positive learning environment and school climate. Furthermore, other authors and researchers such as Muda et al. (2017) and Kwan (2020) have widely researched and reviewed instructional leadership literature to unpack the theory. Since my research aimed to explore school heads' lived experiences and their perspectives on required competencies for effective school leadership, I opted to rely on Hallinger's (2011) instructional leadership model as it offers a more comprehensive spectrum upon which the broader instructional leadership theory can be based. Furthermore, Hallinger's model is easy to comprehend and apply to contexts such as Zimbabwe, which has not progressed much in the school leadership domain.

3.6.3 Hallinger's Instructional Leadership Model (2011)

Hallinger (2011) proposes an instructional leadership model pivoted on three dimensions: defining the school goal, managing the instructional programme, and promoting school climate, with the dimensions branching off into ten competencies expected of instructional school leaders. Figure 3.1 summarises the instructional leadership theory as propounded by Hallinger (2011.)

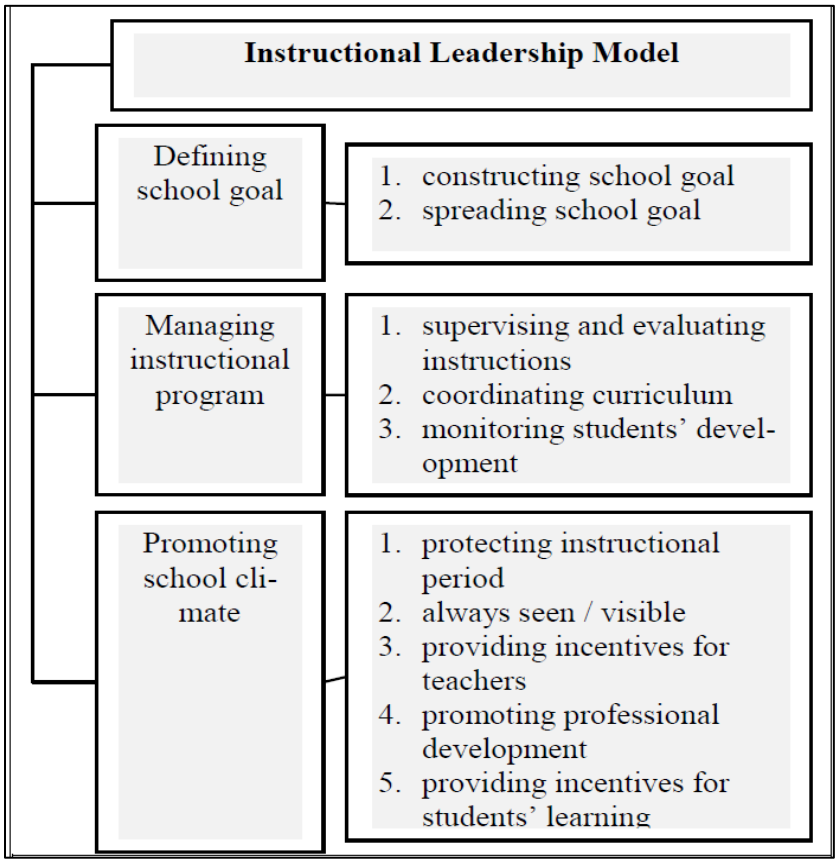


Figure 3.1: Hallinger's Instructional Leadership Model (2011)

3.6.3.1 Defining the School Goal

Hallinger's (2011) model posits that under the dimension defining the school goal, the school leader has two essential functions or competencies to exhibit: constructing the school goal and spreading it. This dimension emphasises the school leader's role in setting the school's targets, what the school needs to achieve within a specific timeframe, and the strategies for attaining this

goal. Goal setting is synonymous with successful school leadership as a school with no goals does not have a direction and hence lacks systems to monitor and evaluate whether the school's goals are being achieved (Muda et al., 2017; Shatzer et al., 2014). In summarising this dimension, various scholars (Hallinger et al., 2015; Kwan, 2020; Ng et al., 2015) have identified different characteristics that are critical in defining the school goal. These scholars note that instructional school leaders should ensure that the goal is clear and understandable; it should be focused on curriculum and academic issues and linked to teachers' tasks, and teachers should prioritise the goal in their planning (Ng et al., 2015). There should also be buy-in of the goal by all teachers; the school leader should also have a deep and well-articulated understanding of the goal, and the goal should be supported by everyone within the school community – teachers, parents, learners and other stakeholders. In a nutshell, instructional leaders are thus responsible for setting the school goal and elaborating on it while rallying and motivating the school team to attain that goal to get their buy-in in achieving it (Kwan, 2020).

3.6.3.2 Managing Instructional Programme

This dimension has three competencies expected from the school leader: supervising and evaluating instructions, co-ordinating curriculum, and monitoring learners' progress (Hallinger, 2011; Ng et al., 2015). It is imperative to note that this dimension is the most critical area for school leaders as it relates to issues of instruction, curriculum, teaching and learning that are the central functions of any school. As such, failure by the school leaders to accomplish this function of instructional management will affect the whole essence upon which schools are established, thus underscoring the importance of this dimension. Under the competency of supervising and evaluating instructions, the school leader's pivotal role, according to Hallinger (2011), is to ensure that the school goal is translated into each classroom's teaching and learning process. It is imperative to note that the school leader must supervise and evaluate the teaching and learning process. This is to ensure that the school is working within the confines of its goal, and that teachers are offering relevant instruction aimed at improved learning outcomes, and, where required, make the necessary changes within the school organisation.

For the second competency, which is coordinating curriculum, school leaders should "align teaching objectives with learning activities in the classroom, assessment process and coordinating instructional programme" (Hassan et al., 2018, p. 428). This means that the school leader is expected to coordinate the curriculum for all grades and thus needs to work with a team to assist in this role, as it also involves reviewing learner's performance and analysing the teaching and learning resources and teacher practices, among others. The third competency focuses on monitoring learners' progress, implying that school leaders should continually engage and work with teachers regarding learners' academic performance, as this is the school's core business. In so doing, the school leader should continually seek ways through which the teaching and learning process in the school can be enhanced for improved learning outcomes. Bush (2015, p. 487) posits that instructional leaders are viewed as "the primary source of knowledge for the development of the school's educational programme". This means that school leaders should be experts in all instructional issues within the school and at all levels; as such, school leaders should have the expertise, experience and knowledge of teaching and learning as they are the focus of instruction at any school.

3.6.3.3 Promoting the School Climate

The promoting school climate dimension has five competencies, namely protecting instructional period, always visible, providing incentives for teachers, promoting professional development, and providing incentives for learning (Hallinger, 2011). This dimension relates to running the school as an organisation and the school leader's ability to create an environment that supports learning. Hassan et al. (2018, p. 428) aver that this dimension refers to "norms and attitudes of teachers and students that affect the learning process in schools". This means that school leaders have a unique role/mandate to ensure that conditions within schools are conducive to learning through creating an enabling environment that ranges from provision and facilitation of required educational media, teacher motivation and incentives, teacher professional development and improved learning conditions.

3.6.3.4 Instructional Leadership Summary

The Rwandan College of Education module on Strategic Leadership for Teaching and Learning (2015) posits that a head teacher (school leader) who is an instructional leader is charged with redefining their role to become the primary learner in the school community. It is in this vein that this research submits that effective school leaders are those who possess knowledge of the curriculum and good instructional practices (Day et al., 2020; Muda et al., 2017) and are primarily concerned with the quality of teaching and learning in their schools and subsequently focus their attention on curriculum and instruction (Day et al., 2016). The gist of the argument here is that school leaders who serve as instructional leaders have a good understanding of the curriculum and the teaching and learning processes that take place in their schools. Such leaders are not only in touch with the teachers but also fully appreciate the teaching processes taking place in their schools. Bush (2015, p. 487) cements the importance of instructional leadership among school leaders when the scholar that though there are many models of educational leadership, instructional leadership is "… one of the most enduring constructs in the shifting typology of leadership models."

Therefore, instructional leadership concentrates on enhancing the teaching and learning process and provides for a coordinating role of the school leader through the involvement of teachers, parents and learners in instructional issues. It is imperative to note that while instructional leadership is rooted in curriculum issues and improved learning outcomes, it also has elements of effective organisational management. It emphasises planning issues, professional development, stakeholder engagement and promoting a school culture (Ng et al., 2015). It should be noted that instructional leadership expects the school leader to have a grounded understanding and appreciation of quality instruction and the curriculum to ensure that relevant content is being delivered to all learners (Muda et al., 2017)

3.7 Merging Instructional and Transformational Leadership to Enhance School Leadership Practices

Based on Grissom and Loeb's (2011) argument, the best school leaders instil significant energy to becoming instructional leaders while increasing their capacity for organisational management by

focusing on the relational aspects of their job. As my research focused on exploring school heads' lived experiences to identify critical competencies for effective school leadership among Zimbabwean school heads, a combination of the two leadership approaches discussed in the preceding sections, namely instructional leadership and transformational leadership became paramount. This line of thought is summarised by Suber (2011, p. 8), who underscores that "Two variables that profoundly influence student achievement are the quality of instruction provided by teachers and the quality of leadership provided by school principals". Therefore, this notion forms the foundation of the argument that the best school leaders can strike a balance between strategic leadership for teaching and learning (instructional leadership) and strategic organisational leadership for school improvement (transformational leadership). Perhaps the most significant point to note in this discourse is the unabated agreement by the different scholars (Day & Sammons, 2014; Day et al., 2020; Kwan, 2020; Shatzer et al., 2014; Urick & Bowers, 2014) that school-based quality education is dependent mainly on the school leader's capacity to exercise and apply both instructional and transformational leadership at the same time.

In light of the above-given discussions, it can be concluded that the instructional component of school leadership has more to do with the school leader managing all the teaching and learning processes within and outside the school environment. However, transformational leadership relates to people management, staff motivation, vision setting and school improvement. The need to balance instructional and transformational leadership for the effective and efficient running of the school system as a whole is successfully summarised by Kwan (2020):

> School leaders have to inaugurate robust quality assurance monitoring policies, and yet simultaneously be aware that the underpinning of successful implementation of these policies is attending to teachers' individual needs as advocated by Leithwood and colleagues in his transformational leadership model. (Kwan, 2020, p. 345)

The crux of this quotation is that effective school leaders must not only be able to craft and develop a clear school vision, which they also demonstrate commitment to, but must also be able to combine coordination and management of the instructional process with a willingness to engage and work with teachers. By so doing, school leaders will be exhibiting a key invaluable aspect of their role, namely, a balance of instructional and organisational leadership.

Day and Sammons (2014) also elaborate on the symbiotic nexus between a merger of transformational and instructional leadership practices and positive learning outcomes:

> Reviews of international evidence point to the presence in effective and improving schools of both transformational and pedagogical/instructional leadership at all levels, but especially that of the head teacher, as being a critical determinant in the quality of the psychological, physical and social environments and conditions in which teaching, and learning take place (Day & Sammons, 2014, p. 25).

The key point to note from this quotation is the averment by the authors that learner achievement and effective instruction result from a combination of leadership strategies (instructional and transformational). These, when combined, underscore the responsibility of school leaders to improve the teaching and learning process in their schools continually while at the same time addressing issues such as staff motivation and morale, setting the school vision and culture, and promoting continuous professional development among teachers.

Cruickshank (2017) notes that effective school leadership should have the teaching and learning foci of instructional leadership and the organisational development perspective of transformational leadership, as this integrated leadership approach has been proven to contribute to improved learning outcomes. Bush (2014) summarises the numerous benefits that accrue when the two leadership approaches, transformational (setting directions; redesigning the organisation) and instructional (leader trust in teachers) are combined. The ultimate result is a positive change in learner academic performance and outcomes.

Day et al. (2020) discuss how a synergistic application of the two leadership theories, transformational and instructional, influences learning and achievement. Their research noted that although the associations among various transformational and instructional leadership attributes are statistically significant, some of these attributes have greater strength than others. This emphasises the richness of a combination of leadership strategies as they tend to complement one another. As such, an amalgamation that addresses school culture and staff development (transformational leadership) while emphasising a robust commitment to enhancing teaching and learning processes (instructional) is crucial in building effective school leadership practices and promoting improvements in school conditions and learning outcomes.

In commenting on the combination of transformational and instructional leadership as a blend for effective schools, Wahlstrom et al. (2010) are even bolder in their assertion:

> Leaders who strike a proper balance between stability and change emphasise two priorities in the direction they provide and the influence they exercise: they work to develop and support people to do their best, and they work to redesign their organisations to improve effectiveness (Wahlstrom et al., 2010, p. 7).

This assertion underscores the integration of instructional and transformational leadership as it posits that a combination of the two creates a whole leader who is people-oriented, results-driven and constantly seeks to improve the organisation they lead. This is both in terms of learner performance and outcomes and running the school as an efficient organisation. In further venerating the combination of instructional and transformational leadership in education leadership discourse, Day and Sammons (2014, p. 9) state that "… we will draw upon these two main theories of leadership – transformational and instructional, which a range of research now acknowledges provide a 'best fit' with notions of the kinds of collective leadership which are inescapable in schools of the 21st century". A combination of the two leadership approaches is thus widely accepted by school leadership scholars as the best combination upon which ideal school leaders can be moulded (Kwan, 2020; Urick & Bowers, 2014).

Current and past research points out a lack of effective school leadership in Zimbabwean schools (Chiome, 2014; Mthiyane & Chiororo, 2019; Ndoziya, 2014; Nyagura, 1989; Nziramasanga, 1999); thus, the phenomenon of effective school leadership remains an underserved area in Zimbabwe's education discourse. Considering that the crux of this research was to carry out a phenomenological exploration of school heads' lived experiences and their resultant perspectives on the critical competencies required for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe, it became imperative for such an exploration to be rooted in leadership approaches and theories that enhance both learning outcomes and effective school management. These attributes were best addressed by combining the transformational and instructional leadership theories. This is because combining the two is considered ideal for developing effective school leaders (Day et al., 2020; Kwan, 2020; Shatzer et al., 2014; Urick & Bowers, 2014)

Coming from such a background where school leadership has been identified as one of the weakest links in the Zimbabwe education arena, this research sought to build on these two theories as the research's theoretical framework. It provided evidence pointing out the vast benefits countries can accrue if they employ transformational and instructional leadership theories in their school leadership frameworks. Therefore, Zimbabwe is likely to benefit from scholarly work that builds on the two theories and links them to leadership competencies identified by the school leaders themselves. This was achieved by building on the strengths of either of the theories to identify school leadership competencies that are rooted in learner improvement and effective school organisation.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed instructional and transformational leadership theories, exploring their strengths and applicability in the context of my research and within the Zimbabwean school leadership terrain. The research focused on exploring school leaders' lived experiences and leveraging these experiences to identify critical competencies required for effective school leadership. As such, by emphasising the absence of a clearly defined competencies for effective school leadership in the country, the chapter advocated adopting a school leadership lens grounded in instructional and transformational leadership. The chapter argued that a school leadership framework rooted in transformational and instructional leadership theories is ideal for Zimbabwe as it can inform the preparation, selection and professional development of school heads in the country. The chapter also discussed the importance of merging the two theories, arguing that scholars like Bush (2014), Day et al. (2020), Hallinger (2007) and Kwan (2020) propagate the amalgamation of the two leadership theories as a potent strategy for effective leadership and high-performing schools. The next chapter discusses the research methodology employed in this study, providing a comprehensive understanding of my approach to exploring school leadership as a phenomenon.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology that I employed during the research process. The research made use of qualitative research methodology and the phenomenology design. The chapter also discusses the interpretivist research paradigm, highlighting why it was selected for this study. This chapter also indicates why a qualitative research methodology and, specifically, a phenomenological design were deemed the most relevant approaches to school leadership research. The evolution of phenomenology as a research design is also discussed. The chapter also discusses other key aspects of the research process, such as the research population, the data generation methods and data analysis. It concludes by discussing issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations that bound the research.

4.2 The Qualitative Research Methodology

De Vos et al. (2011) posit that the two most prominent approaches to research are the qualitative and the quantitative paradigms. Of the two, this research utilised the qualitative paradigm of which Aiken-Wisniewski (2010) posits the following:

> In qualitative study, the researcher engages individuals in conversation, observes their practices and behaviours, or gathers relevant objects to gain deeper understanding of a phenomenon or process from a human perspective (Aiken-Wisniewski, 2010, p. 86).

Considering that my research sought to build academic knowledge based on school heads' lived experiences in leading and managing schools, a qualitative methodology was considered ideal to address my research questions fully. This is because while the issue of leadership can be seen as static due to underpinning standards, theories and principles that different leadership scholars have prescribed, it is imperative to acknowledge that in practice the leadership discourse is largely dynamic. A qualitative method was therefore regarded as the most ideal research approach as the data the research sought was largely based on perceptions and individual reflections of practising school heads based on their lived leadership experiences.

Conger (1998) is one of the leadership scholars who support the high relevance of qualitative research in leadership studies:

> As a research tool, qualitative methods have been greatly underutilized in the field of leadership. … Quantitatively based surveys have been the method of choice.… (but they) … fail to capture the great richness of leadership phenomena and instead leave us with sets of highly abstracted and generalized descriptors. …Qualitative methods are ideally suited to uncovering leadership's many dimensions (Conger, 1998, p. 118).

Given the dynamic and complex nature of leadership, this assertion is explicitly clear about the strengths of qualitative research in leadership studies. The crux of Conger's argument is that quantitative methods may work best in research involving hypothesis testing and generalisation of findings. It is, however, not the best in helping one to explore the day-to-day experiences of leaders, nor in helping to understand how leaders deal with and manage their team members. This is because quantitatively derived leadership descriptions largely fall short of providing insight into the more complex aspects of leadership (Klenke, 2016). As such, it can be argued that leadership studies are well suited to qualitative analysis because of the multidisciplinary and dynamic nature of leadership as a field of study. This is because leadership entails many facets, such as decision-making, interactions of the leader with their followers or team members, vision setting, supervision, mentorship and the exercise of discipline, with all these attributes better explored through qualitative research.

4.3 Research Paradigm

According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017, p. 26), a research paradigm is "the perspective, or thinking, or school of thought, or set of shared beliefs that informs the meaning or interpretation of research data". In the same vein, Rehman and Alharthi (2016, p. 51) note that a paradigm is a basic belief system and "it is our way of understanding the reality of the world and studying it". Research paradigms are thus a worldview of how a researcher sees and understands the world; they are about understanding the nature of human knowledge, what knowledge is, and how humans come to have such knowledge, with such understandings shaping the researcher's thoughts and views about the world and subsequently about how they will carry out their research. Rehman and Alharthi (2016) aver that a paradigm forms a researcher's view and assumptions about ontology

(beliefs about reality), epistemology (nature of knowledge and how knowledge is acquired), axiology (values and ethics) and methodology (how data is gathered). Various scholars such as Scotland (2012), Rahi (2017) and Rehman and Alharthi (2016) posit that as research has evolved over decades, new research paradigms have also emerged. These scholars agree that some of the most common research paradigms are the positivist/scientific paradigm, the post-positivism paradigm, the interpretivist/social constructivism paradigm, the critical theory paradigm and the pragmatism paradigm.

Against this backdrop, De Vos et al. (2011) argue that all research should be rooted in a specific paradigm. As such, this research employed the interpretivist paradigm as it sought to have an in-depth understanding of school heads' lived experiences and how such experiences can inform future practices in school leadership in Zimbabwe. The standpoint of interpretivism in relation to ontology and epistemology is that interpretivists regard reality as being multiple and relative (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Davies & Fisher, 2018). This means that interpretivism is rooted in human experiences, feelings, motives and meanings and acknowledges that reality is complex and multifaceted and thus differs from person to person. The interpretivist paradigm helps the researcher gain an in-depth understanding of the topic under study, based on the context and reality (Schreier, 2018).

As such, interpretivism acquires knowledge through social constructs rather than objectively determining it (Davies & Fisher, 2018; Putnam & Banghart, 2017). It is in this vein that Pham (2018, p. 3) states that "interpretivists adapt a relativist ontology in which a single phenomenon may have multiple interpretations …". The focus of the interpretivist paradigm is thus to comprehend, construe, interpret and understand the imports of human experiences and behaviours rather than generalised cause and effect of such behaviour. This resonates very well with the phenomenological design that I used for this study, as Howell (2013) points out that phenomenology produces a connection between the mind and the world and perceives the distinctions between the internal and exterior world. As such, in phenomenology, reality is thus seen as being subjective and multifarious.

According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017, p. 33), in terms of axiology, epistemology, methodology and ontology, the interpretive paradigm "assumes a subjectivist epistemology, a relativist

ontology, a naturalist methodology, and a balanced axiology". Adopting *subjectivist epistemology* implied that as a researcher, I made my own interpretations and drew conclusions of the data based on my interactions with the research participants (Putnam & Banghart, 2017). As such, within this research context, I had to interact with the selected research participants to unpack and understand the school leadership phenomenon in its natural setting exhaustively. The assumption of a *relativist ontology* refers to the multiplicity of realities in research; adopting this ontology entailed that I viewed reality as multi-faceted, while providing meaning and understanding of the phenomenon under study through interactions between myself and the school heads (Putnam & Banghart, 2017).

By interacting with serving school heads and exploring their lived experiences in the discharge of their duties, I was exposed to many realities about the school leadership phenomenon in Zimbabwe, with these realities being merged to give meaning to the collected data. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017, p. 33) state that a *naturalist methodology* relates to the researcher being a participant observer who uses the data gathered "… through interviews, discourses, text messages and reflective sessions" to draw meaningful research conclusions. In the same vein, a *balanced axiology* implies that the research findings will "reflect the values of the researcher, trying to present a balanced report of the findings" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 34). As such, my research findings were primarily informed by the research process. I ensured that all research values and ethics were upheld and that research findings hinged on collected data and its interpretation and not necessarily on my own personal views and/or feelings.

The basis for using the interpretivist paradigm in this research is best summed up by Edirisingha (2012):

> The researcher remains open to new knowledge throughout the study and lets it develop with the help of informants. The use of such an emergent and collaborative approach is consistent with the interpretivist belief that humans have the ability to adapt, and that no one can gain prior knowledge of time and context bound social realities (Edirisingha, 2012, n.p.).

This means that the interpretivist paradigm offers a thorough grasp on the phenomenon being studied as well as the factors that led to the phenomenon taking the form it did. Since the focus of this research was to explore school heads' lived experiences and to leverage these experiences to identify critical competencies required for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe, the

interpretive paradigm was thus regarded as ideal. This is because the paradigm allowed me to unpack and explore school leadership in its exact context through interactions with school heads while building on their views, perspectives and lived experiences to make meaning. Interpretivism is reflective in nature, and reflection helps the researcher grasp the topic under study more thoroughly. Furthermore, Dangal and Joshi (2020) argue that through the in-depth interviews that are carried out in a phenomenological study, the interpretive research paradigm enables the researcher to gain thorough insight into the participants' lived experiences.

4.4 Research Design

Based on the background outlined, a qualitative research approach, specifically phenomenology, was used for this study. This is because the researcher sought to explore school heads' lived leadership experiences and develop a deeper understanding of the competencies required by public school heads in Zimbabwe to run their schools effectively. To elaborate on the power of a phenomenological study in matters related to lived human experiences, Qutoshi (2018) argues that the prime purpose of a phenomenological study is to explicate the essence, structure and meaning of the lived experiences of an individual and or group of persons around a specific phenomenon. A phenomenological study thus enabled me to explore the full meaning of school headship as a lived experience and extract that which my research participants knew about the phenomenon (school leadership) as a result of their lived experiences.

Van Manen (2017) argues that phenomenology goes beyond just looking at the lived experience as there is nothing unusual, rich nor hidden, and nothing deep about a lived experience. The author argues that the strength of phenomenology is that it seeks to bring out "the phenomenality of the phenomenon" (Van Manen, 2017, p. 811). He adds that what makes phenomenology stand out from other qualitative designs is that in phenomenology, "any ordinary lived through experience tends to become quite extraordinary when we lift it up from our daily existence and hold it with our phenomenological gaze" (Van Manen, 2017, p. 812). This means that as a phenomenological researcher, I should be able to probe and establish the phenomenal meaning behind the lived experience and unpack what it is like to actually live through that phenomenon. This construct brings to the fore the importance of using a phenomenological approach in my research as it

allowed the research process to explore the lived experiences of school heads fully and unravel what it is like to practise leadership within school settings and leverage these lived experiences to locate critical competencies required for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe. This implies that my inquiry as a researcher went beyond exploring school leadership as just an experience by those who serve in the position. Instead, I delved more deeply into school leadership as a lived phenomenon and sought to understand the actual essence of leading schools in the Zimbabwean context.

Neubauer et al. (2019, p. 91) argue that for one to truly understand phenomenology, one has to develop "an appreciation for the philosophies that underpin it". Perhaps at this point, it becomes imperative to discuss the historical evolution and the philosophical underpinnings of the phenomenological research design. This is particularly important as it allowed me to explore the origins of phenomenology, the different philosophical thoughts behind the designs and why I opted for phenomenology as the best research design for this study.

4.4.1 The Evolution of Phenomenology as Research Design

The phenomenological research design offers researchers a theoretical framework for comprehending occurrences at the level of subjective reality (Moustakas, 1994; Qutoshi, 2018). The idea of subjective reality is crucial in comprehending how the research participants feel about a certain occurrence or phenomenon that pertains to their lived experiences. Van Manen (2017, p. 810) argues that a phenomenological study is not just about one's lived experiences but should rather unpack the "experiential concreteness, vividness, and descriptive detail" of the lived phenomenon. The goal of phenomenology is thus to describe the meaning of this lived human experience – both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced (Neubauer et al., 2019). This was the case with the focus of my research as the phenomenological approach enabled me to explore what school heads experienced in their leadership journey and how they experienced these leadership encounters. Zahavi (2018, p. 1) notes that phenomenology has gone through many transformations, and as a result, numerous fields of phenomenology have emerged over the years. These include "realist phenomenology, descriptive phenomenology, pure phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology, static phenomenology, genetic phenomenology, existential

phenomenology, embodied phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, material phenomenology and analytic phenomenology". This means that as scholars unpacked and tried to understand phenomenology as a research design, numerous phenomenology fields emerged.

Yet all these different phenomenological approaches have their roots in various conceptions of the *what* and the *how* of human experience (Neubauer et al., 2019). Each phenomenological approach is rooted in a distinct school of philosophy. As a result, a researcher who employs a phenomenological research design must consider their philosophy and what they seek to achieve before selecting the methodology. For my research, I employed hermeneutic phenomenology as it was closely linked to my interpretive research paradigm. This is because hermeneutic phenomenology is often referred to as interpretive phenomenology (Neubauer et al., 2019; Van Manen, 2017; Zahavi, 2018) as it emphasises that only people who have experienced the phenomenon can transmit its meaning to the outer world by allowing the researcher to interpret the essence of their lived experiences.

While my study employed hermeneutic phenomenology as propounded by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), I briefly discuss transcendental phenomenology as informed by the thinking of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). This is because hermeneutic phenomenology evolved from transcendental phenomenology. Hence, discussing the former without first unpacking the latter might not do justice to this discourse.

4.4.2 Transcendental Phenomenology

Phenomenology can be traced to early philosophical thinkers such as Aristotle though Edmund Husserl is credited with being phenomenology's founding father (Zahavi, 2018). The foundation of Husserl's phenomenology is the idea that knowledge-based intuition comes before empirical knowledge. As such, Husserl was of the view that "no assumptions should inform phenomenology's inquiry; no philosophical or scientific theory, no deductive logic procedures, and no other empirical science or psychological speculations should inform the inquiry" (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 92). As a result, the researcher's objective in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is to attain transcendental subjectivity, which is a state in which the impact of the researcher on the inquiry is continuously reviewed, and biases and presumptions defused so that

they do not influence the research process. This is the process that Husserl referred to as the epoché and the transcendental reduction or simply bracketing (Giorgi, 2012; Van Manen, 2017; Zahavi, 2018). The epoché (bracketing) is thus the central principle in Husserl's phenomenology as it argues that to understand the essence of lived experiences and engage the phenomenon in a broad sense, the researcher must set aside all past knowledge and preconceptions. It calls for the researcher to set aside or disconnect from any prior theories or knowledge regarding the phenomenon and refrain from giving it existential assent (Van Manen, 2019). In so doing, the researcher is anticipated to explore a phenomenon using its own inherent system of meaning without influence from the researcher's own prior experiences or knowledge.

It is imperative, however, to note that Husserl's emphasis on bracketing and neutralisation of prior knowledge became the point of conflict with later phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, who, according to Zahavi (2019), rejected Husserl's methodology and made no reference to epoché and reduction. The author further argues that while Husserl advocated for the epoché, its relevance outside of transcendental phenomenology remains very limited, therefore implying that it is possible to carry out a phenomenological study that does not involve bracketing. Husserl's thoughts were thus challenged by some philosophers who came after him, such as Heidegger who was his student, as well as other scholars such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Hans-Georg Gadamer. These philosophers challenged the concept of bracketing and argued that bracketing was impracticable as humans cannot ignore prior knowledge; hence, there is no research that cannot be presuppositionless (Suddick et al., 2020). These philosophical thoughts gave birth to hermeneutic phenomenology, which I discuss below.

4.4.3 Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a branch of phenomenology that strongly believes in interpreting phenomena through the lived experience of those who experience them (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen; 2014a). It is largely attributed to Martin Heidegger and was a build-up yet a diversion from Husserl's thinking. As discussed in the prior section, the fundamental tenet of transcendental phenomenology is that one can suspend one's personal opinions to understand reality and that one should be detached from one's perspective when exploring a phenomenon (epoché or bracketing).

Contrastingly, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology underscores a process in which the researcher and participants work together to explore and develop their understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Lauterbach, 2018). Hermeneutic phenomenology thus views the researcher as an interpreter of the lived phenomenon as Alsaigh and Coyne (2021, p. 2) indicate that in hermeneutics, the researcher relies on the interpretivists paradigm to explore "culturally derived and historically driven interpretations … to clarify the meaning of a phenomenon". Perhaps the key point to note is that in hermeneutics, there is what Gadamer (1977) called *a fusion of horizons* where the researcher's prior knowledge is used as a basis upon which the research participants' lived experiences and their essence can be understood (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). This means that prior knowledge cannot be divorced from the research process as it helps the researcher develop meaning and better understand the phenomenon. Creswell (2013) further argues that the researcher's interpretations of gathered data cannot be divorced from their own experiences, histories, and preconceived notions, thereby dismissing the concept of epoché and phenomenological reduction. As such, in hermeneutics, true understanding of data occurs only through a dialectical process where the researcher's prior knowledge and the text under review are brought into consonance, thus a *fusion of horizons.*

The inevitability of the researcher's prior knowledge and its contribution to how the researcher interprets the research conversations is best summed up by Koch in Lauterbach (2018) when the scholar posits the following:

> Hermeneutics invites its participants into an ongoing conversation. Understanding occurs through a fusion of horizons, which is a dialectic between the pre-understandings of the research process, the interpretive framework, and the sources of information. The implication for hermeneutic inquiry is that research participants are also giving their self-interpreted constructions of their situation. (Lauterbach, 2018, p. 2883)

Thus, it can be concluded that in hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher is seen as a key figure in understanding and interpreting the phenomenon. This is because discovering the intrinsic meaning of a human experience is dependent on the exploratory conversation between the research participant and the researcher. As such, researchers grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology see the researcher as the primary point of analysis for the research data, with Merriam (2009) arguing that the researcher remains the most important component in the qualitative research process. As

such, it can be argued that the attempt to create a dichotomy between the researcher and their prior knowledge is largely fallacious and theoretical because as researchers engage with the participants, and as they analyse data, they engage in a process of explicating assumptions and preunderstandings (Van Manen, 2016).

It can, therefore, be noted that there is a striking distinction between Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenological philosophies as Beck (2021, p. 14) argues that "For Husserl, description was critical, while for Heidegger, interpretation was critical, as he professed that it was the basic form for knowing". This means that for Husserl how research participants describe their experiences was the most important, hence his emphasis on bracketing that seeks to ensure that researchers do not interfere with the descriptives of the research participants by diluting them through their own experiences. At the other end, Heidegger sees interpretation as key; hence he regards bracketing as an inhibition to the researcher's ability to interpret and make meaning of what they discover in the research process.

It can thus be surmised that, on the one hand, Husserl emphasised a philosophical, epistemological, and descriptive approach that requires the researcher to create a barrier between their prior experiences, prejudices and knowledge of the phenomenon and the research process through bracketing. On the other hand, hermeneutic phenomenology, as propounded by Heidegger and later scholars such as Gadamer, is largely interpretive and cognisant of the researcher's prior knowledge and how such knowledge serves as the basis upon which the researcher can make meaning of and interpret his/her conversations with the research participant/s. In this vein, my research was rooted in Heidegger's phenomenology as I employed the interpretivist paradigm, which gives researchers the liberty to interpret research data based on their own prior understanding of the context (Dowling, 2007; Pham, 2018; Schreier, 2018).

4.4.4 Relevance of the Phenomenological Research Design to My Study

By exploring the lived experiences of the selected school heads, the research contributed significant knowledge to the existing body of literature on school headship in Zimbabwe. This is because the reviewed literature (Poloncic, 2016) seems to highlight that, even though school

leadership has been extensively examined, very little of this research has taken into account the perspectives and actual lived experiences of working school heads.

This is significant as the limited current and available literature and research on school leadership in Zimbabwe and Africa, in general, is also not rooted in the lived experiences of school leaders themselves. Instead, it is rooted in concepts, research and practices from other jurisdictions, particularly the global North and the Western World (Eacott & Asuga, 2014). A phenomenological study thus allowed me to explore the full meaning of a lived experience rather than "… dividing it into parts without understanding the basic meaning structure, which gives sense to the whole experience" (Castro, 2003, p. 47). This assertion brings to the fore the importance of using a phenomenological approach in my research, as it allowed me to fully understand the lived experiences of school heads and build on them to identify core competencies deemed pivotal for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe. A phenomenological approach was thus the most appropriate as endeavouring to break people's lived experiences into parts without a full understanding of them may result in false conclusions. Furthermore, a phenomenological study accorded me a chance to fully explore the lived leadership experiences of the research participants, and this ensured that my interpretations were not primarily informed by my own understandings and perceptions of school headship as a researcher but rather by the participants' lived experiences.

Zahavi (2021) argues that the primary findings resulting from phenomenology are a deep comprehension of a phenomenon as seen through the eyes of those who have experienced it. Considering that the central question for this research hinged on trying to define and identify key competencies deemed pivotal for effective school leadership as defined by the school heads themselves, a phenomenological study became the most appropriate approach. This is because phenomenology's descriptive nature allows the researcher to explore concrete accounts of actual events from the perspective of the research participants' daily lives (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021; Dowling, 2007). I thus identified shared and common experiences that emerged from the lived experiences of school leaders and, in the process, generated propositions on critical competencies required for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe. As such, I did not aim to make generalisations from the collected data; rather, I sought to locate the essence of the school heads' lived leadership experiences.

4.5 Sampling

Sharma (2017) defines sampling as follows:

> … a technique (procedure or device) employed by a researcher to systematically select a relatively smaller number of representative items or individuals (a subset) from a pre-defined population to serve as subjects (data source) for observation or experimentation as per objectives of his or her study. (Sharma, 2017, p. 749)

Within the same vein, Fink (2003, p.1) defines a sample as a "proportion or subset of a larger group called a population...a good sample is a miniature version of the population of which it is a part – just like it, only smaller". Sampling, therefore, refers to the process through which researchers select a small subset of individuals from the larger or whole part of the population for study purposes. Sampling techniques are used for cost-effectiveness, convenience and time efficiency in research, as testing every individual within a population is impractical.

In the case of my research, my population was Zimbabwean school heads, and I sought to understand their lived experiences in leading schools in Zimbabwe. Considering that Zimbabwe has over 10 000 schools (MoPSE, 2022b), it follows that the country also has the same number of school heads. As such, the feasibility of interviewing more than 10 000 school heads was farfetched and would have been an impossible, expensive, cumbersome and time-consuming process.

For this reason, I utilised the purposive sampling technique to come up with a representative sample that allowed me to reach meaningful conclusions in my research.

4.5.1 Sampling Strategy – Purposive Sampling

In line with my phenomenological research design, I used purposive sampling and, specifically, the criterion sampling technique. DePoy and Gitlin (2019) underscore that in cases where the required credentials of the research participants are already known, criterion sampling is the most ideal. This is because it involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance. In the same vein, Palinkas et al. (2015) posit that the criterion sampling technique is the best method in situations where the researcher may be seeking information-rich sources and key informants who may have first-hand information on the topic under review.

The strength of criterion sampling in selecting research participants who have a pre-defined experience is further accentuated by Creswell (2013, p. 3), who argues that of all the purposive sampling techniques, criterion sampling is the best technique in "finding individuals who have experienced the phenomenon". Against this backdrop, I was convinced that criterion sampling was the most ideal approach as the key informants for this research process were already pre-determined to be school heads whose lived experiences were going to inform my research process.

Ramsook (2018) argues that representativeness and generalisability are non-issues in hermeneutic phenomenology as the sample size is limited by the detailed explorations that phenomenological interviews pursue. Furthermore, Ellis (2016) argues that a sample size of six to twenty individuals is sufficient in a phenomenological study. Earlier scholarly work by Creswell (1998) recommends a sample size of five to twenty-five participants in phenomenological research, while Morse (1994) recommends a sample of at least six participants. Based on these perspectives, I selected six school heads from six different schools in Zimbabwe. I was convinced that limiting myself to the six participants would allow me fully to explore and unpack the research participants' lived experiences while at the same time having enough time to extract the phenomenality within the phenomenon (Van Manen, 2017), which is the essence of these school heads' lived leadership experiences.

I selected the research participants from a list of serving school heads that was provided by each of the three provinces that were covered during the research process; I designed criteria to allow for easy selection of the final research participants. Each participant was selected on the basis that they were a serving school head whose experience in running a school was seen as pivotal to the success of this research. This is because the research largely relied on the lived experiences of these participants to reach meaningful conclusions. Selected participants were expected to have served in school headship positions for at least four years, as this experience was deemed pivotal in providing key research information that the researcher was seeking. The research participants were drawn from at least three provinces to create geographical diversity, thus drawing on different lived experiences to inform the research process.

Three of the selected school heads were primary school heads, while the other three were secondary school heads. The selected heads were a mixture of rural and urban school leaders to

widen the experiences that were being explored during the research process. Since the research used criterion sampling, other selection criteria included qualifications of the school leaders, with a mixture of those with a bachelor's degree and those with a master's degree. The years that one served as a class teacher were also factored in, as well as overall school performance as rated by the district office.

Table 4.1 below summarises the criteria upon which the school leaders were selected, based on the variables explained above that were deemed to be relevant to the research process. I selected six principals whose highest qualifications varied from a bachelor's degree to a master's degree.

The minimum qualification for headship in Zimbabwe is a bachelor's degree; hence, having obtained a bachelor's or master's degree was to enrich the data sources along with the different qualifications of my research participants. The headship experience of the participants was supposed to be a minimum of four years with no limit on the number of years in headship. This was important to the research process as it allowed me to have participants whose years in headship varied from novice experience to seasoned heads. Such intergenerational experiences were also anticipated to enrich the research process as they strengthened diversity of the lived experiences by cutting across from heads who were into their early years of headship to seasoned heads who had served for more than twelve years in the role. The selection of the participants was non-gender related, as the main variable of interest was school leadership experiences regardless of gender. In Chapter 5 (Consult 5.2), I give a more detailed discussion of the research participants and present a brief profile of each participant. As shown in the table, the acronym SL means School Leader, with the sequence SL1 to SL6 representing each of the six school leaders that took part in this study.

School Leader	Highest Qualification	Years in Teaching Service	Years as SL	School Level	Geographic location
SL1	Bachelor's degree	0-10	4-8	Primary	Rural
SL2	Master's degree	10-20	8-12	Primary	Urban
SL3	Bachelor's degree	20+	12+	Primary	Rural
SL4	Master's degree	0-10	4-8	Secondary	Urban
SL5	Bachelor's degree	10-20	8-12	Secondary	Rural
SL6	Master's degree	20+	12+	Secondary	Urban

Table 4.1: Selection Criteria for Research Participants

I used these criteria on the basis that I was convinced that it provided a diverse yet rich data set to inform the research process.

4.6 Data Generation Methods

Goldkuhl (2019, p.28) defines data generation as the process comprising activities such as "… searching for, focusing on, noting, selecting, extracting and capturing data". The scholar argues that *data generation* is now the commonly used term in place of *data collection*. This is because the term *data collection* is now seen as being problematic by researchers "… since it may presuppose that researchers can access 'ready-at-hand' data that they need to only simply collect" (Goldkuhl, 2019, p. 29). In essence, data generation goes beyond the simple definition of it being just a process of how researchers obtain empirical data. Rather, it involves the researcher's ability to structure the data-gathering process in such a way that they gather rich, relevant, and meaningful data that allows them to carry out effective analysis and draw reliable conclusions.

Researchers can choose from many data generation methods based on the data they are looking for and the research methodology they are employing, among many other determining factors. I employed in-depth interviews as my main data generation method for this research. Participant diaries were also utilised as additional data generation methods. These two data generation methods are elaborated below.

4.6.1 In-depth Interviews with Selected School Leaders

I carried out one-on-one, face-to-face in-depth interviews with the six school heads that were selected for this research because interviews are highly flexible and allow for easy follow-up on emerging issues during the research process. Alsaigh and Coyne (2021) argue that in phenomenological research, interviews are best described as the process of gaining understanding through a dialectic process. The scholars posit that understanding a phenomenon and how it was lived can only be achieved through open dialogue where one understands the other. As such, hermeneutic phenomenological interviews are an in-depth dialogue between the researcher and the research participants characterised by openness and convergence of horizons where the researcher's horizon becomes key in understanding and interpreting the research participant's responses (Gadamer et al., 2004).

Bevan (2014, p. 138) proposes steps to be followed in carrying out a phenomenological interview, namely "contextualization of the phenomenon under study, apprehending the phenomenon, and clarifying the phenomenon". Contextualisation of the phenomenon involves descriptive and narrative questions, and apprehending the phenomenon involves reflective dialectic processes while clarifying the phenomenon involves active listening (Bevan, 2014). These steps were thus utilised in the research process as they enabled me to "examine a person's experience both actively and methodically … to enable phenomenal clarity that produces a sound basis for interpretation" (Bevan, 2014, p. 143). Considering that the crux of my research hinged on the interpretive paradigm, Bevan's (2014) three steps to phenomenological interviewing were regarded as the most ideal. This is because they allowed me to unpack school heads' lived leadership experiences fully and get clarity on the essence of these experiences, thereby leveraging them to identify the core leadership competencies deemed critical for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe. An adaptation of Bevan's (2014) phenomenological interview is presented in Table 4.2 below with examples of questions from my interview guide in the *Example Question* column.

Phenomenological Attitude	Researcher Approach	Interview Structure	Method	Example Question
Phenomenological Reflexivity	Acceptance of Natural Attitude of Participants	Contextualisation (Eliciting the Lifeworld in Natural Attitude	Descriptive/Narrative Context Questions	Tell me about your professional journey to headship
	Reflexive Critical Dialogue with Self	Apprehending the Phenomenon (Modes of appearing in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive and Semi-Structural Questions	Tell me about your typical day as a school head
	Active Listening	Clarify the Phenomenon (meaning through imaginative variation)	Imaginative Variation: Varying	What are the key leadership com-petencies that you consider pivotal to school improvement?

Table 4.2: Carrying out a Phenomenological Interview (Adapted from Bevan, 2014)

It must be noted that Bevan's (2014) original interview steps consider bracketing as part of his interview process. However, the bracketing that Bevan (2014) proposes is different from that originally proposed by Husserl. By the scholar's own admission, "… total abstention is impossible" (Bevan, 2014, p. 138). Hence, to Bevan, bracketing is more about the researcher becoming aware of their own thoughts and perspectives about the phenomenon and being able to be *reflexive* during the interview process. As such, the table above is an adaptation of Bevan's interview steps, where for the avoidance of confusion, I replaced Bevan's *Phenomenological Reduction* with *Phenomenological Reflexivity*. This is because I did not practise bracketing since the hermeneutic approach that my research employed does not support bracketing. As such, if I had adopted Bevan's model as it is (including bracketing), it would have conflicted with my hermeneutic approach. The other steps that Bevan proposes were, however, adopted as the author originally proposed.

Reflexivity in phenomenology, like in any qualitative design, refers to the researcher's awareness and active consciousness of their own biases, perspectives on the research matter, and preconceptions throughout the research process. Olmos-Vega et al. (2022, p. 242) define

reflexivity in qualitative research as "a set of continuous, collaborative and multifaceted practices through which researchers self-consciously critique, appraise and evaluate how their subjectivity and context influence the research processes". As such, phenomenological reflexivity allowed me to be aware of my own biases, prior knowledge and perspectives of the phenomenon while maintaining a fundamental level of validity. This was attained by being loyal to the accounts of experiences provided by the interviewed school heads and by accepting that this is how they described their reality (Bevan, 2014) while seeking convergence of these realities with my own pre-understandings – hence a *fusion of horizons.*

All interviews were recorded using an audio-recording device, and I took notes as the interview proceeded. A similar interview protocol/tool was used for all participants. In line with upholding research ethics, I sought consent from all participants before conducting the interviews. Research participants were also alerted of the purpose of the interview and assured that the results of the research would be communicated to all participants after the end of the research process.

4.6.2 Participant Diaries/Journals

To capture some lived experiences of the research participants as they unfolded, I utilised participant diaries/journals, which I gave to my research participants to capture some encounters or experiences that they deemed vital in leadership. Alaszewski, as cited in Morrell-Scott (2018, p. 28) defines a diary as a personal document that individuals create to maintain "… a regular, personal, and contemporaneous record of their day-to-day life experiences". Participant diaries are thus a data collection method used in qualitative research in which participants are asked to record their thoughts, experiences and observations in a diary or journal over a specified period. In this research, my research participants were provided with diaries over a period of six months which equates to two school terms in Zimbabwe. Jacelon and Imperio (2005) caution that participant diaries are not as common as other qualitative data collection methods, and their terminology may differ across disciplines. For this research, I used the terms *participant diaries* and *participant journals* interchangeably.

Participant diaries in phenomenological research have been noted to be very effective (Morrell-Scott, 2018; Polit & Beck, 2009). This is because diaries are personal and reflective, thereby

allowing research participants to provide deep insights into their daily life experiences, their emotions at particular intervals and their perspectives on certain episodes of their lives as they unravel. Cudjoe (2022) notes that participant diaries are more effective when combined with other data collection methods, such as interviews, as this complementarity provides a rich source of data about participants' day-to-day activities. Against this backdrop, I chose to employ participant diaries as an additional data-gathering method for my research so that they complemented interviews and literature review which I have already elaborated on above. Morrell-Scott (2018, p. 4) best sums up the advantages of using participant diaries in phenomenology as they note that diaries "minimise intrusiveness, which is associated with much social research", and they allow for "a contemporaneous insight into the lived experience of the person completing the diary". Given that my research focused on school heads' lived experiences, utilising participant diaries as a complementary data collection method was highly relevant as it allowed me to capture the contemporary experiences of my research participants and merge their reflections with the data they provided through the in-depth interviews.

4.7 Data Analysis

The data analysis was informed by phenomenological data analysis approaches propounded by Castro (2003) and Sleiman (2004) who both identify almost similar steps to follow when conducting data analysis in phenomenological research. Combining the two data analysis approaches from the two scholars made the analysis more thorough because while their steps are almost similar, there are slight differences in their steps, which I bridged by combining the two analytical approaches.

My first step was to organise all the interview transcripts into soft format as well as hard copies for backup purposes, after which I conducted the analysis. Both Castro (2003) and Kleiman (2004) consent that the first step in a phenomenological data analysis is to read all the transcripts several times to get an overall understanding of the whole. The transcripts were read again, this time slowly (Kleiman, 2004), as I was searching for phenomenological essences in which I could find similar, consistent and invariant patterns of the phenomenon (Castro, 2003). Building on these patterns, I then organised the data into what both authors refer to as *meaningful units* (Consult Table 5.2).

According to Kleiman (2004), these units must arise from the words of the participants, who, in the case of my research, were the school heads that I interviewed. This phase, according to Castro (2003), seeks to "discriminate the different units or blocks that express a self-contained meaning" (p. 51), meaning that at this stage, I was now further breaking down the units into smaller manageable blocks with similar themes to prepare for a thorough exploration and review of the units in the next phase (Ratner; 2001; Giorgi, 1986).

The next stage of my analysis was what Castro (2003) refers to as *imaginative variation*, while Kleiman (2004) refers to it as *free imaginative variation*. This stage, according to Kleiman, as cited in Offredy and Vickers (2010, p. 198), involves determining which of the 'meaningful units' is "… essential for, and is made up of, a fixed identity for the phenomena you are studying". As such, it was when I began to explore each respondent's experiences while reflecting on the possible meanings of these experiences. Through this process, I elaborated on my findings while isolating emerging meanings as I carried out the analysis. Offredy and Vickers (2010) note that in phenomenological data analysis, structure is of paramount importance:

> The structure of the phenomena is the major finding of any descriptive phenomenological inquiry. This structure is based on the essential meaning that are present in the descriptions of the participants and is determined by [imaginative variation] and by the insights which arose from the process analysis to which you subjected the text" (Offredy & Vickers, 2010, p. 198).

Castro (2003, p. 54) speaks of two types of structure, that is, *situated structure* that focuses on "… the concreteness of the situation in which the phenomenon takes place" and *general structure* that centres on "the most general and essential meaning of the phenomenon under study". By synthesising the data based on the two structures, this step of the analysis allowed me to explore the meaning units and interpret the aspects of the school heads' lived experiences that are essential and general while at the same time common among many participants. The last stage was the critical analysis and integration of the meaning units to discover essential patterns and meaning, which resulted in the "… final identification of the essences of the phenomenon" (Castro, 2003, p. 55). In Chapters 5 and 6 I discuss these patterns and meanings that emerged from the data analysis.

4.7.1 The Hermeneutic Circle

Given that my research was grounded in hermeneutics, the use of the hermeneutic circle in my data analysis became inevitable. Theodore (2021) underscores the following:

> The hermeneutic circle signifies that, in interpretive experience, a new understanding is achieved not on the basis of already securely founded beliefs. Instead, a new understanding is achieved through renewed interpretive attention to further possible meanings of those presuppositions which, sometimes tacitly, inform the understanding that we already have. (Theodore; 2021, n.p.)

The underlying assumption is that knowledge consists of the whole and of parts, and humans cannot acquire new knowledge and give it meaning based on just looking at the whole, which Theodore, in the above quote, refers to as 'already securely founded beliefs'. Instead, hermeneutics argues that we derive new knowledge and new meaning from available data by looking at it in an iterative way, where, as researchers, we must vacillate between the whole and the parts in a cyclic way and, in the process, build new knowledge. Smith et al. (2009) also underscore this point, noting that in interpretive phenomenology, data analysis must be an iterative process in which the researcher must constantly shift between the whole and the parts. By so doing, hermeneutics argues that comprehension of the entire text is shaped by examining its individual components and understanding that each component is influenced by considering the text as a whole. Fig 4.1 below presents a pictorial impression of the iterative nature of the hermeneutic circle.

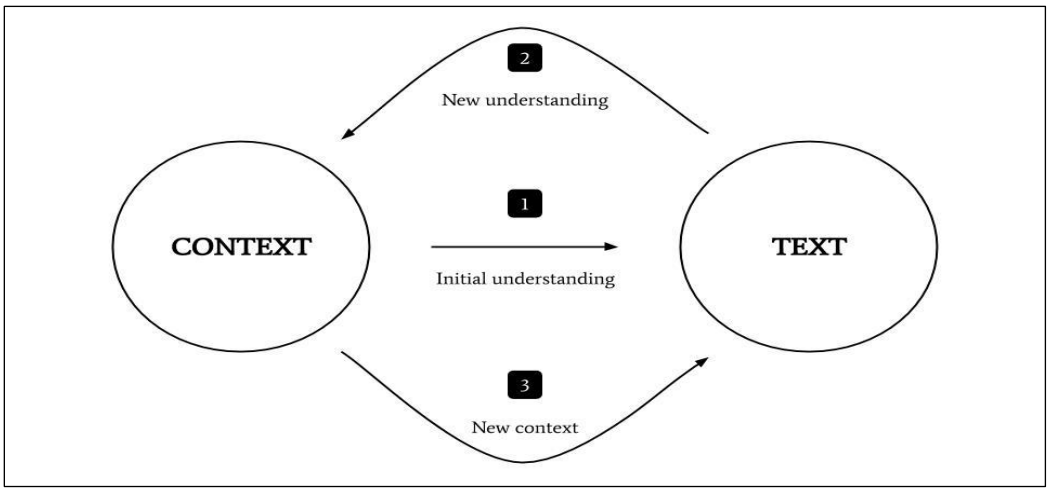


Figure 4.1: The Hermeneutic Circle (Adopted from Anne-Laure Le Cunff, https://nesslabs.com/hermeneutic-circle)

While I carried out the data analysis using the earlier highlighted steps from Castro (2003) and Kleiman (2004), I did so within the hermeneutic circle context. As illustrated in Fig 4.1, in the context of my research, *Context* refers to school leadership practice, the environment in which school leaders work, and the overall context in which this research took place. As a researcher, I had my own *initial understanding* of the phenomenon, hence the number 1 in the diagram signalling prior knowledge and perceptions. As I interacted with my data, which is the *Text* and in the hermeneutic context, the part, I developed new insight into my presuppositions and my understanding of school heads' lived experiences as a whole. This is signified by the number 2 in the diagram, where the researcher's interaction with the part, which is the text, gives them a new understanding of the context. With this new understanding, the researcher then returns to the context again and relooks at it from a new perspective. This cyclical process emphasises the iterative aspect of comprehension, in which each stage contributes to and is shaped by the other.

As highlighted earlier in this chapter, in hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher does not ignore their preconceptions; rather, they engage with them critically and continually refine their understanding through an iterative and dialectical process of moving between parts and wholes. In summary, as I carried out my data analysis, I was guided by the hermeneutic circle. Thus, my analysis involved intensive reading of the text and relating it to the context in a continuous manner until a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the research participants was gained.

4.8 Issues of Trustworthiness

Connelly (2016) argues that trustworthiness in qualitative research relates to confidence in the whole research process, from the research data to its interpretation and methodology. Its focus is to ensure the quality of the research process; thus, trustworthiness is summed up under four broad areas, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the data (Cohen et al., 2018; Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patnaik & Pandey, 2014). I therefore used multiple strategies such as long-term involvement with my participants, peer debriefing and *thick* description (Creswell, 2013) to ensure that all four the above-mentioned tenets of trustworthiness were addressed.

To ensure credibility I maintained contact with my research participants over a period of nine months to ensure that essential meanings of their lived experiences were well captured. Each interview was conducted with sufficient time allocated, and in some cases, I conducted more than one interview with the participants to ensure that the data gathering was exhaustive. Participants were allocated participant diaries, which allowed them to provide additional contemporaneous data. I also utilised peer debriefing to ensure issues of credibility were addressed. Lincoln and Guba in Cohen et al. (2018, p. 253) describe peer debriefing as a process "… of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind". Peer debriefing was therefore utilised during the different phases of the research to expose the research process to scrutiny by neutral reviewers who were not immersed in the research process and were thus able to provide critical, valuable feedback to enrich the research process and improve overall research quality.

It is imperative to note that issues of data transferability are a topic of debate in qualitative research (Shakouri & Nazari, 2014) and, more particularly, in phenomenology. This is because phenomenology deals with individual contexts and experiences and may often provide individualistic data. To ensure that my data was transferable, I employed purposive sampling, and this allowed me to identify participants who met the criteria that I had set. The in-depth interviews, the exploration of the heads' lived experiences, and the participant diaries allowed me to delve more deeply into school leadership as a lived phenomenon and have first-hand encounters with the participants. My research sought to understand the lived experiences of serving school heads and gather their perspectives on critical competencies for effective school leadership. Given that the research was informed by serving school heads, this contributed to the transferability of the data as it emanated from reflections on the practice of school headship in Zimbabwe by those living and practising the phenomenon under study.

Mabuza et al. (2014, p.3) point out that dependability refers to "the extent to which similar findings would be obtained if the study were repeated … (and that) the best way of supporting the dependability of the research is to ensure that the methods are described in sufficient detail that they could be replicated by someone else". As such, in this report, I presented a clear outline of

my research method, highlighting why I chose a phenomenological approach as the research design for my study. The steps I employed can be easily followed as they are clearly outlined and explained, including the philosophical thoughts behind the methodology that I employed. Using participant diaries as a complementary data generation method aided in strengthening dependability as they provided insight into the research participants' experiences and perspectives in an uninterrupted way, allowing research participants to express themselves without interference from the researcher. A thorough literature review was carried out to have multiple data and research sources as Creswell (2007, p. 208) states that if research themes and findings are a product of converging numerous data sources and multiple views from the research participants, such research will pass the validity test.

The beauty of phenomenology is that, unlike other qualitative research designs, it allows for a deep description of the phenomenon by pursuing how it was lived and experienced (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). This means that the deep exploration that takes part in a phenomenological research process limits the researcher's influence on the research process. Furthermore, it must be noted that the hermeneutics approach that I employed discards bracketing, which would have been key in creating data confirmability. Hermeneutic phenomenology, however, places great emphasis on reflexivity as a way of being conscious of one's subjectivity and how one addresses such during the research process. As indicated earlier in this report, I practised reflexivity as a researcher, meaning that I was aware of my presuppositions. Excerpts from the interviews and the participant journals are provided verbatim in the data analysis chapters of this report, thereby elaborating that generated data was captured and analysed as presented by the participants.

4.9 Ethics Issues

Ethics are a critical component of the research process. Resnik (2013) posits that ethics are the norms for conduct that distinguish acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in research. In the same vein Cohen et al. (2018, p. 111) posit that ethics have to do with "... what researchers ought and ought not to do in their research and research behaviour". Ethics thus play a significant role in research as they are the guiding principles and the code of conduct on how the researcher conducts the research process, how they interact with the research participants and how the collected data

will be used. Ethics are thus concerned with two aspects: the individual values of the researcher and the researcher's treatment of those involved in the research (Nicholas, 2011).

In light of these ethics considerations, I ensured that there were no risks or violations that were to be associated with my study. Ethics clearance was sought from the University's Ethics Committee of the School of Education to ensure that the research met the University's minimum ethics requirements. Approval of the research process was also sought from Zimbabwe's Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to which school heads belong. Further clearance was also sought from the Education Provincial Offices of the three provinces from which my research participants were drawn from. I ensured that all research participants fully understood the research process and what it sought to achieve; hence, informed consent was a prerequisite for all research participants. The right of participants to withdraw from the research process was observed and respected. Participants' privacy, confidentiality and anonymity were upheld, especially given the self-reflection and personal nature of phenomenological interviews as they explored their personal experiences. This was attained through maintaining the anonymity of the research participants and safeguarding interview transcripts, ensuring that they were not shared with any parties that were not of interest to the research process. Throughout the research process, I strove to build a relationship founded in trust with each research participant, as Merriam (2009) advocates.

4.10 Limitations of the Study

Simon (2011, p. 11) notes that "limitations are potential weaknesses in your study and are out of your control" as a researcher. It is, however, imperative to note that while limitations are out of the researcher's control, they may affect the study design, time, quality of research and the research findings – hence a need to declare them before the research process begins (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). One major limitation of this study was the limited literature on school leadership in Zimbabwe, which made the literature review and analysis difficult. I, however, utilised this limited but available literature from the country as well as universal literature on school leadership and drew a comparison to the Zimbabwe situation. Thus, it is hoped that this research will be a major contribution to education literature in Zimbabwe, particularly in school leadership, given the current scholarly gaps in this field of study.

Considering that the research utilised a qualitative approach and specifically phenomenology, another limitation was time, as qualitative studies are by nature time-consuming (McGrath et al., 2019). Exploring the lived experiences of six school heads, understanding their success and challenges, and interviewing them face-to-face, and reading through their participant diaries was time-consuming and required good time management while ensuring good research quality. As such, as a researcher, I developed and adhered to a clear timeframe agreed upon with the supervisor to ensure that all key dates and timelines were met. Long-term contact with the research participants was also maintained, and in some cases, second interviews were held to ensure all research questions were adequately covered. In some cases, second interviews were necessitated by the heads' busy schedules, which, in some cases, made it difficult for them to sit through hours' long interviews.

Of the six participants, one participant did no return or complete the participant diary regardless of prior consent that they were going to complete it. This is acknowledged as a limitation as this participant's views were captured only through the in-depth interviews, creating an imbalance with other participants who took part in both data generation methods. Effort was made to follow up on the diary, but I remained cautious in my follow up to ensure that I did not violate ethical issues related to participant consent. Despite this set back, I am convinced that the feedback provided by other participants through this data generation method was sufficient to inform my research process and maintain the validity of my research.

Another limitation was that part of my studies was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this affected my research in several ways. In 2020, as I was working on my research proposal, I had to limit my consultations with the supervisor to virtual mode due to travel restrictions. Securing authorisation letters from the Ministry was also cumbersome, partly due to the closure of government offices in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic. Constant follow-up with the relevant government offices and constant updates and progress meetings with my supervisors were pivotal to addressing the mentioned constraints.

4.11 Chapter Summary

The chapter discussed the research methodology that I employed to generate and analyse data. It outlined the use of the qualitative methodology in leadership studies and elaborated why I employed a qualitative approach due to the dynamic nature of leadership. I also discussed the interpretivist paradigm, highlighting its linkage to the phenomenological research design, particularly hermeneutic phenomenology that I employed in this research. The chapter thus elaborated on the phenomenological research design, highlighting why I chose it as the design to inform my research. Merriam (2009, p. 199) avers that the phenomenology methodology allows research participants to share their varied and unique lived experiences; thus, it is one research methodology that allows for exploration of the "phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions". Given that my study sought to establish the critical competencies that Zimbabwean school heads deem pivotal to effective school leadership based on their lived experiences, phenomenology was regarded as the best research design as it allowed me to explore school leadership as a lived experience from the different perspectives of my research participants. I also discussed the data generation methods that I employed and how I carried out my data analysis using specific phenomenological data analysis steps as propounded by Castro (2003) and Kleiman (2004). Other key research areas such as sampling strategies, data generation methods, ethical considerations and the limitations of this study, among other critical areas that informed the research process were also discussed. The following chapter centres on my data presentation, focusing on the descriptive analysis of the research findings.

CHAPTER 5: NARRATIVES ABOUT SCHOOL HEADSHIP AS A LIVED EXPERIENCE

5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter detailed the methodology employed in the research, discussing various aspects and their relevance to the study. This current chapter is the first of the two data presentation chapters. In this chapter, I unpack and discuss the similar and unique experiences of my research participants and present a descriptive analysis of their perceptions of effective school leadership as informed and shaped by their lived experiences. The school heads' narratives and first-hand encounters provide insight into how specific aspects of school leadership were discussed and shared by the participants themselves. This chapter thus centres on their experiential accounts, shedding light on the research participants' lived experiences of school leadership. Given that the research aimed to identify critical competencies that Zimbabwean school heads consider essential for effective leadership, the shared lived experiences provided in this chapter offer context to their views on such competencies. Thus, the perspectives and experiences narrated in this chapter serve as a foundation for understanding the critical competencies for effective school leadership that are discussed in Chapter 6.

The critical research questions that informed this study are restated below.

5.1.1 Critical Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following critical research questions:

1. *How do Zimbabwean school heads describe their lived experiences that have influenced their competencies in leading schools?*
2. *What leadership competencies do Zimbabwean school heads perceive as crucial for leading schools, and how do they believe these competencies contribute to effective leadership and professional success?*
3. *What lessons can be learnt from the lived leadership experiences of school heads regarding leadership competencies in Zimbabwean public schools?*

These research questions sought to explore school heads' subjective experiences and perspectives and build narratives on how they perceived and practised leadership. The focus was on how their lived experiences in school leadership shaped their perspectives and practices in this domain, and most importantly on leadership competencies that they deemed pivotal to effective school leadership. Various interview questions were drawn from these three broader questions (Consult Appendix 3 – Interview Guide), and these interview questions are the crux of the research findings as they allowed for the in-depth conversations that I had with my research participants.

The extensive nature of phenomenological interviews necessitated the separation of this study's data presentation and analysis into three distinct chapters. Chapter 5 focuses on retelling the participants' lived leadership experiences, perspectives and narratives as recounted in their own words. By presenting data through a descriptive analysis of my research participants' first-hand accounts, I immersed myself in the participants' unique lived experiences and comprehended them from their viewpoint. Chapter 6 foregrounds analysing school heads' lived experiences and unpacks the heads' resultant perspectives on critical competencies required for effective school leadership. The underlying assumption was that because of the different experiences that heads go through in their role, their successes and failures in the discharge of their role, they became the best placed participants to share their perspective on what competencies they deemed pivotal to the success of their job. Chapter 7 discusses the identified competencies within the context of the instructional and transformational leadership theories that underpinned this research and draws upon themes identified in Chapters 5 and 6. These chapters, therefore, present the findings from in-depth interviews of six Zimbabwean school heads who were my research participants. Additional data was gathered through participant diaries/journals that I provided to the research participants to capture vital leadership-related experiences that they encountered in the discharge of their headship roles over a period of six months.

In this chapter, several overall themes regarding school heads' experiences emerged from the analysis and are discussed herein with reference to their verbatim statements. These include school leadership being viewed as challenging but fulfilling experience, the participants' perspectives on successful and effective school leadership, attribution of work ethic to self-accountability, viewing school leadership as being rooted in decision-making, essences of lived experiences and their

influence on leadership practice, and common disabling factors to effective school leadership. Various sub-themes emerged from some of these themes. The ensuing sections of this chapter are thus a descriptive analysis of these themes, and their sub-themes as shared by the research participants.

5.2 Participants

The research participants were drawn from three of Zimbabwe's ten provinces to allow for geographical variation, with equal representation of rural and urban schools. Participants were equally drawn from both primary and secondary schools, as my research was primarily on lived leadership experiences regardless of school level. Of the six participants, two were female, with the remaining four being male. Their years of experience as school heads ranged from four to twenty-four years. Three had at least one bachelor's degree as their highest qualification, with the other three having at least a master's degree as their highest qualification. One of the master's holders was in the final stages of a PhD in Educational Leadership and Management during the time of the research. The learner population of their schools ranged from 489 to 1 856 learners (Consult Table 5.1 below).

While Table 5.1 provides an overview of the research participants regarding their schools, years of service, qualifications and experience in headship, in the next section I provide a brief profile of each participant to give my readers a better understanding of the participants. As previously mentioned, I employed coded acronyms ranging from SL1 to SL6 to safeguard their identities, and the names of their respective schools were anonymised. In introducing each participant, I allocated italicised sub-headings for each individual participant, drawing insights from my interaction with them. These sub-headings reflect the key issues I identified as central to each participant's perspectives and values concerning school headship, derived directly from their narratives shared during the interviews.

Participant	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4	SL5	SL6
Age Range	41-50	51-60	61+	30-40	51-60	51-60
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Male	Female	Male
Highest academic qualification	Bachelor of Education (Curriculum)	Master in Teacher Education (Educational Psychology)	Bachelor of Arts (Economics)	Master in Education (Education Management)	Bachelor of Science (Physics)	Master of Education (Education Policy and Management)
Number of years served as a teacher	10	12	14	9	13	15
Number of years as a deputy head	3	6	8	3	6	6
Number of years as a school head	4	8	16	4	9	11
Any other professional qualifications	Certificate in ICT; Diploma in Counselling	Certificate in Project Planning and Management. Advanced Certificate in Monitoring and Evaluation	Post Graduate Certificate in Education; Diploma in Agriculture	Certificate in School Leadership	Diploma in Teacher Education; Diploma in Theology	International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL); Police Service Training
School Type*	P3	P1	P3	S2	S3	S1
School Enrolment	918	1532	1074	489	1856	1011
Total Teaching Staff	17	33	22	14	37	24

Table 5.1: Profiles of the Research Participants

*School Type: *Zimbabwe categorises its schools as both primary and secondary according to their location, which determines funding received from the national level. The designations P1 and S1 refer to primary and secondary schools in low-density urban areas (including privately owned schools), while P2 and S2 refer to schools in high-density urban areas. P3 and S3 refer to schools in rural areas. P and S denote primary and secondary respectively.*

In the table above, I disclosed the gender of the research participants; in analysing their responses, I opted to employ gender-neutral identification as this enhanced their anonymity and confidentiality. As such, I use the pronoun *they* to refer to all the research participants regardless of number or gender. Cameron and Stinson (2019) posit that the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) acknowledges and supports the use of *they* as a singular pronoun in cases where the researcher may seek not to identify the participants by gender. It is, however, imperative to note that in cases where the research participants shared gender-related experiences that were of interest to the research questions. In such cases, I selectively identified some responses and experiences by gender to buttress a point.

5.2.1 Research Participant 1: SL1

The greatest mark of effective headship is setting up functioning and sustainable systems[2]

SL1 was 46 years old and indicated that they had served as a teacher for 10 years before being promoted to deputy headship. Of all the research participants, SL1 had served the shortest period in deputy headship, which was about two years and eight months, a fairly short period when compared to the years that other participants and deputy heads in general took before being promoted to full school headship. SL1 was one of the shortest serving heads of my research participants, having been a school head for about four years. SL1 shared that their journey to headship was not by mistake but rather a planned trajectory. They indicated that they had started applying to be promoted to school headship in less than the mandatory two years that are required for one to serve as a head. They attributed their short service in deputy headship to this *daring* approach, which gave them the … *guts to apply to be a headmaster, even when* they were not yet eligible. Their general view regarding the rise to headship in Zimbabwe was that it was an intrinsically driven pathway; thus, if one puts one's mind and focus on it, one can rise along the headship ladder in a fairly short space of time.

Though they had started their career as a Youth HIV and AIDS counsellor, they had eventually chosen education because, in their own words, they believed ... *education was the best vehicle*

[2] Italicised responses are provided verbatim and have not been edited.

which I could use to make a positive impact in people's lives, and I realised that counselling was not going to be a fulfilling part for me; hence I chose education. So, in SL1's view, they joined education because they believed it was an avenue to impact children's lives positively.

Regarding school headship and their experiences in leadership, they noted that, in their view, the best school heads are those who can set up systems in their schools. They believed that effective school leadership is rooted in functioning systems that survive or last beyond personalities. As such, to them, effective leaders can be taken out of the system that they preside over, and that system should be able to survive without the leader. They attributed this to many factors, such as the leader being a mentor who can groom others to carry the system beyond them, setting up strong systems that survive beyond personalities and setting a vision that team members can buy into. Overall, SL1 viewed school leadership as a calling and was of the view that Zimbabwe could produce the best school leaders if the government were to invest in training and continuous support of serving heads.

5.2.2 Research Participant 2: SL2

The solution to effective school leadership is teamwork and collaboration.

SL2 was one of the two female research participants who took part in this research. They had been a school head for about eight years, and their combined years of experience in both teaching and headship amounted to about twenty-six years. They had obtained a master's degree in Teacher Education, and they shared that they had received job offers to be a teacher trainer (lecturer at a teachers' training college), but they had turned such offers down because they enjoyed the autonomy and responsibility that came with school headship. They said, *... the greatest tragedy of the current generation of heads is that they do not want to read and upgrade themselves education-wise.* As a result, they felt that school leadership standards in Zimbabwe had drastically fallen, and the government and the current crop of school heads were equally to blame. This was because, in their view, the government was not making an effort to develop school heads through structured CPD programmes and at the same time, school heads were not making any effort to upgrade themselves. They pointed out that this was a great weakness in the country's education system, and it needed to be addressed as soon as possible.

SL2expressed that the greatest competency that any school head can have is the ability to promote and foster teamwork and collaboration. In their view, *the solution to effective school leadership is teamwork and collaboration, and any head who fails to cultivate a team culture in his team is bound to fail*. This was because, to them, anything that happened within the school environment was rooted in teamwork; hence, they did not see how effective leadership could exist independently of teamwork and collaboration.

5.2.3 Research Participant 3: SL3

The best competency that is required for us to lead our schools better is financing.

SL3 was the most seasoned of the research participants. They had built a career in education spanning almost four decades, of which sixteen years were as a school head and eight as a deputy head. SL3 provided deep insight into how school leadership had gradually deteriorated over the years and lamented that the current crop of Zimbabwean school heads was ill-prepared for the task. In their many years in leadership, they noted that they had mentored many young and new school heads, and this had made them realise that there was a lack of a standard measure of what constituted an effective head. They shared that school heads were a very heterogeneous group regarding their competencies, and they blamed this on the lack of a well-defined framework for school heads' performance in the country.

In their view, positive performance by school heads was driven by adequate financing, and they felt that the lack of financing from the government was the biggest drawback to effective school leadership in the country. They argued that they had been in the system for many years; hence they had seen how the country's economic meltdown had directly affected the education sector. In one of our interviews, they jokingly said, *I do not think we are so much of underperformers per se; I think our huge constrain is lack of funding from the government … and without money, everyone is an under-performer, even the Minister will underperform*. They shared that in their many years in headship, they had encountered many challenges, but the biggest lesson they had taken from this was that effective headship was a balance between adequate resources and one's capabilities, and this combination, in their view, solved the challenges that heads encountered in their leadership journey.

5.2.4 Research Participant 4: SL4

An effective head should seek to continually improve themselves; they have to be better than their teachers in every sense.

SL4 was the youngest of my research participants and younger than the average school head in Zimbabwe. Their quick rise was attributed to the fact that they were serving in a security-sector-owned school, and in their own words, this had spared them from the *... typical long and tedious journey* to headship. They noted that school heads were being outpaced by their teachers regarding academic qualifications and modern issues like ICT because the post made people *... redundant, and most do not even take the initiative to say let me upgrade myself in this area, let me be an expert in this field. Running the schools become their sole focus, forgetting that to run that school in a good way, you need particular skills and knowledge that a teacher's college never gave you.* According to SL4, headship should be and is a continuous learning process. One should learn from one's day-to-day experiences and continually upgrade oneself by acquiring new knowledge.

They also shared an interesting view that the government should create a blend of younger heads and older ones, because, in their view, the technological advancements happening in the world were outpacing the older heads and *... even our learners now know computers better than most of these heads*. The crux of their argument was that most heads were not tech-informed; as a result, they could not push innovation in their schools because current technology at the time of the research was well ahead of them. SL4 advocated intensive training of all heads in ICT-related issues and noted that ICT should be a core competency for any head in the 21st century. SL4 was a firm believer in training and continuous support for heads. They also repeatedly lamented poor knowledge of policy and legal issues among heads and singled out this as a key competency area where all heads needed support. They noted that most heads were operating in an environment where they did not understand the laws and policies governing them; hence, most were found wanting. SL4 did not complete/return the participant diaries that I shared with my participants.

5.2.5 Research Participant 5: SL5

Women make better school leaders than men, we actually need more research on this, and I know my point will be proven correct.

SL5 was the second female among my research participants and shared that they got into school leadership because they had been inspired by other women who had become school heads. SL5

had a combined twenty-eight years' experience in the education sector, nine of which were as a school head. They were also a member of the clergy with one of the local churches, and they noted that leading in both the church and education had sharpened their leadership skills. In their view, teamwork was the most important pillar in effective school leadership, as the leaders should be able to coordinate and work with everyone towards a common vision. In their words, *I have seen many headmasters failing, their schools performing poorly, even the presentation of the schools, you get there it's an eyesore, but I realised the challenge in all this is some heads want to work alone, they feel that delegating will take away their power and authority*. As such, SL5 emphasised that teamwork and coordination were key competencies that each head should have and should be trained in. SL5 shared that in their school everything was centred on teamwork and collaboration, and they promoted complementing one another and riding on one another's strengths.

SL5 shared an interesting perspective that, in their view, women make better school leaders, and the government should continue promoting women into headship. They argued that they had carried their own *study* as they called it, which was basically a social observation, and they noted that they had observed that schools with women heads tended to perform better than those led by males, and they encouraged further research into this topic. SL5 also expressed that they were a strong believer in the concept of leaders being made rather than born; as such, they were of the opinion that Zimbabwe needed to develop a thorough training programme for those who aspired to be school heads, and they should be trained and tested and certified before being offered the responsibility. This, they argued, would rid the system of those heads who *just rise along the ladder but with no commitment to the job*.

5.2.6 Research Participant 6: SL6

Effective school leadership is high learner achievement; this is what schools were established for.

SL6 had a combined thirty-two years in the education service, eleven of which were at headship level and six as a deputy. SL6 was in the final stages of a PhD degree in Educational Leadership at a local university. They noted that they had pursued PhD studies to *prove that headmasters can reach the highest academic level in the country*. They indicated that they would not leave headship even after completing their PhD because they wanted to excel in leadership and motivate younger heads to be excellent school heads while at the same time upgrading themselves academically. In

their view, excellence in leadership was attained or shown through the learners' results. They argued that the best heads were those whose schools were performing well in public examinations, which, in their view, was the key measure of a school's success. They argued that everything that a school head did should be for the good of the learner and nothing else, To foreground this point, they shared that *if you are a head and you see yourself doing something that does not benefit your learners, directly or indirectly, stop immediately … everything is about my learners, they are the ultimate goal, so if I am pushing my teachers to work hard, I will be doing so for my learners, for me that is my philosophy.*

5.3 Data Analysis Process and Creation of Meaning Units

As reflected in Chapter 4, the data analysis was based on Castro's (2003) and Kleiman's (2004) phenomenological data analysis steps that include reading all interview scripts individually to get an overall understanding of each interview; reading the transcripts again to extract similar, consistent and invariant patterns of the phenomenon; establishing self-contained meaning units from the interviews, and imaginative variation that involves unpacking the meaning units to explore the actual meaning of the participants' experiences. Building on these steps, I carried out a process that Castro (2003) calls structuring in phenomenological data analysis, where the scholar notes that there are two types of structure: general and situated structure. The use of structure in phenomenological data analysis enables the researcher to examine the concrete details of the situation where the phenomenon occurs. Simultaneously, it permits a focused exploration of the most general and essential meaning associated with the studied phenomenon (Castro, 2003). These two types of structure and their implications for the data analysis process are discussed in detail in Chapter 4 (Consult Section 4.7).

Following these outlined steps in carrying out the data analysis enabled me to explore the meaning units and interpret the essential and similar aspects of the lived experiences of school heads, which were simultaneously common among the research participants. The concluding step involved critically analysing and integrating these meaning units to unveil fundamental patterns and meanings, ultimately identifying the phenomenon's core essences. These emerging themes and patterns complemented findings from the literature review and the theoretical framework of my study, particularly the assertion that school leadership becomes more effective if one has a set of

core competencies that are focused on both teaching and learning and leading the school as an organisation (transformational), with learner achievement and improved learning outcomes being at the centre. The themes and patterns that are shared and described in the ensuing sections and chapters of this report are thus the common patterns and meanings (essences) that I derived from the data analysis, having followed the outlined steps. Table 5.2 below shows how I created the meaning units using the participants' experiential narratives. Some of the narratives in the table are also quoted in this report, while some are extracted from the data but not quoted verbatim. The meaning units in the table below are not in sequential order but I randomly picked them from data analysis just to illustrate the process that I embarked on in creating my meaning units.

Themes/Meaning units	**Evidence in school heads' experiential narratives**
School leadership as a fulfilling but challenging experience	*… Yes, of course, it's a fulfilling job. Fulfilment comes from achieving something, like a dream right. As I tick off on the achievements during the course of the year or the term, I find fulfilment that I am achieving.* *This job is very challenging. But I would do it again and again if I were to be given a chance. One thing I have learnt in all these years is that any head worth their salt gets satisfaction from the success of their learners, for me that's my fulfilment, that's my contentment.* *So, it's a very fulfilling experience for me and I am happy where I am. In my many years I have actually learnt a lot especially in managing people, I have gained what the author Daniel Goleman calls emotional intelligence.* *In my view being a head is a cumbersome task, imagine the issues that we have to deal with every day. I have dealt with all the issues you can think of, but I am still here … regardless, I find it to be a great job, I am happy to be contributing to the development of my country through this role.*
Attribution of work ethic and self-discipline to self-accountability	*We deliver because once, you are a head, it's wired in you to be responsible, you develop that sense of responsibility that forces you to be accountable. You do not even need to be supervised.* *One important issue for us is the issue of self-accountability were as an individual, you should be able to account to yourself before the system.*

	In all these years in headship, one key lesson that I have learnt from my experiences is that this job is all about accountability. Accountability is being able to remain loyal and truthful even when there are no eyes that are looking at you.'
Novice years of headship characterised by limited competencies and lack of a support structure	*My first year as a head was very difficult for me. I had to learn a lot from experience, and I was fortunate to have one of my former heads as a mentor, but I still struggled, and I know of many peers who also equally struggled.* *I remember I was almost fired after authorising an ineligible payment, but the SDC Chairman and the Bursar had told me everything was above board. And this was my first term in the job … My point is if I had been properly oriented and trained, maybe I would have picked that there was something …* *… so obviously people struggle to settle in, the movement from being a deputy head to be substantive is still challenging. At times it's like you are starting from one, especially if your head was not supporting you and mentoring you during your deputy headship years.* *… there is no support structure at all, it's like the Commission just appoints you and leaves you to learn to swim on your own, and I think most colleagues had the same experiences.*
Teamwork and team coordination as a leadership competence	*I would say teamwork is a key competence in my view. If you are a head and you cannot bring everyone into one solid team, how will you run your school?* *Another competency that is key for school improvement, I've mentioned before, it is the ability for you to coordinate as a leader, to work with your staff as a team because school improvement comes from teamwork, effective leadership is a product of teamwork.* *Effective leadership is about effective team management, the two are inseparable.*
Low teacher motivation and morale	*A big challenge for me at the moment is teacher motivation. The motivation amongst our teachers is very, very low … and you know this is because of financial issues.* *But you know, it's very difficult for you to motivate teachers who are working under very difficult conditions. So, it's like you're saying I want 100% but don't ask me about your*

	remuneration, your conditions of service and so forth. So naturally it creates resistance. *… the system is declining and for me, the biggest blame is on the conditions of service for our teachers. Imagine your salary being reduced to a tenth of its value a few years ago, but the workload is increased tenfold.*

Table 5.2: Themes or Meaning Units and Evidence

5.4 School Leadership is a Challenging but Fulfilling Experience

Reflecting on school leadership as a lived experience, the participants expressed a variety of perspectives. Still, there was a general sense among them that school leadership is a challenging but fulfilling life experience. The participants were of the view that while the role came with many challenges, it gave them room to achieve, set targets, self-regulate and be accountable. Participants noted that as they met targets and discharged their duties, there was a sense of fulfilment. As one participant said:

> *School leadership as a lived experience is a fulfilling experience, it's enriching, it's touching. Like I said, you live leadership every day. You are leading each and every day and every time, you are leading in one way or the other. Because whenever someone knocks on that door, and they come in here, the moment I react or respond to whatever issue that they have brought, it's an act of leadership because I have to make a decision.*

Sharing the same sentiments, another participant noted that they got a sense of fulfilment from being able to set targets with their team and being able to achieve them:

> *Yes of course, it's a fulfilling job. Fulfilment comes from achieving something, like a dream right. So, in our case I think we go through this very regularly. I sit at the beginning of each year and agree with my team on what we want to achieve. We also sit every term and even more regularly with the parents and we agree on what we want for our school. As I tick off on the achievements during the course of the year or the term, I find fulfilment that I am achieving. I love that about this job because if I do not get that fulfilment, it drives me to work harder.*

Another head had this to say:

> *So, it's a very fulfilling experience for me and I am happy where I am. In my many years I have actually learnt a lot especially in managing people, I have gained what the author Daniel Goleman calls emotional intelligence. So, I can relate to people, understand their needs and balance all this in line with policy provisions and creating rapport with my*

stakeholders. So, serving people and being able to address issues that are brought to my attention is what is at the centre of achievement for me.

As the excerpts above show, school heads underscored the fulfilling nature of school leadership as a lived experience. They shared that while many challenges characterised: the role, it was still a fulfilling and worthwhile personal experience. There was consensus among them that the feeling of fulfilment was derived from succeeding in different things, like achieving set targets, introducing new innovations into the school, serving clients and parents to their satisfaction, and solving problems brought to their attention. They, however, noted that learners excelling in their examinations were the greatest sense of fulfilment for any head. These sentiments foreground the multifaceted dimensions of school leadership and show the paramount value that school heads placed on the success and achievements of their schools and learners in particular.

5.5 Perspectives on Successful and Effective School Leadership

The second research question of the study was, *What leadership competencies do Zimbabwean school heads perceive as crucial for leading schools, and how do they believe these competencies contribute to effective leadership and professional success*?" Several interview sub-questions were developed to unpack this question and prompt the research participants to explicate leadership competencies they viewed pivotal to their practice, based on their own lived experiences (Consult Appendix 3 – Interview Guide). Six themes emerged from their descriptions: (a) they linked successful and effective school leadership to the achievement of results and set targets; (b) they all viewed an effective school environment as one that is leaner-centred and promotes effective instruction; (c) their recognition of exceptional school leaders was based on high learner achievement and the ability of these leaders to run their schools in an organised manner; (d) they viewed accountability as being at the centre of successful and effective school leadership, (e) they viewed decision-making as one of the cornerstones of school headship, and (f) they all lamented the lack of a clear school leadership framework for public school heads in Zimbabwe. The proceeding section of this report explicates each of these themes, giving insight into the research participant's perspectives on successful and effective school leadership as told through their own words and first-hand experiences.

5.5.1 Linking Successful and Effective School Leadership to Achievement of Results and Set Targets

There was a shared perception among my research participants that successful and effective school leadership is epitomised by the achievement of results and meeting set targets. These results and targets shared by the research participants were linked to learner achievement. In their view, schools' sole purpose is to ensure instruction takes place and with instruction comes learner achievement. Thus, they viewed a successful and effective school leader as one who can achieve the targets that they set, with such targets being linked to high learning outcomes, good pass rates and general learner achievement.

Commenting on the link between successful and effective school leadership and achievement of set targets, one participant said:

> *Another competency for me is you have to be results oriented because remember, as a school, what we want are results. We want our children to pass. That is the reason why they wake up every day in the morning, coming to school, it's because they want to pass. So, if you cannot set targets for yourself and say I want to achieve these results, if you cannot reflect and say, OK, last year we had a pass rate of this percentage – this year we want to increase by this margin, then in my view you are not worth being a head.*

In the same vein, another participant echoed similar sentiments:

> *In my view successful leadership, according to my experience it is to do with being able to meet your organisational goals that you set for yourselves. In light of the resources that you have as a school, you say, let's do 123 by the end of this term. If you then achieve that then you are successful in my view, because leadership is about setting a vision, about meeting a target then you are successful. But if you can't meet those targets, those objectives, then you would have failed. So, in my thinking, I think being an effective, a successful head is all about meeting the targets that you have set for that particular term and that of course is if your resources permit.*

Building on this perception, another participant noted that their lived leadership experiences had taught them that setting targets and achieving them was central to successful leadership. Still, one had to work with a team to achieve this. In their view, achieving results, be they academic results or administrative targets, cannot be accomplished through unitary actions but rather through teamwork and coordinated team efforts:

> *Of course, one has to be good at setting goals and achieving them. They have to be realistic as well. You cannot say you want to increase your pass rate by 50% in one year that's impossible. And to achieve these results and the goals, you need to work hand in glove with*

your teachers. Because if you don't work with the teachers well, without mutual understanding there is a tendency that they will sabotage you and you will not achieve your goals at the school if you are divided. So, you need to be a unifier in a way, you need to unite them to work together and have a common goal together with your teachers.

What is important to note from these sentiments is that school heads placed achievement of results and set goals at the centre of success and effectiveness. As highlighted through the shared interview excerpts, they viewed effectiveness as the ability to achieve what one and one's team had set. In their view, failure to achieve one's own goals and failure to coordinate and work with one's team to achieve these goals was a mark of failed leadership.

5.5.2 Viewing an Effective School Environment as Leaner-centred and Promoting effective Instruction

The research participants shared a common perception of what constituted an effective school environment. In their own words, an effective school was one that promoted teaching and learning; was learner-centred; promoted instruction; gave freedom to learners; was inclusive and was results-oriented. One participant shared that for them, everything centred on teaching and learning because for a school to be effective and for a leader to be deemed successful, they had to champion instruction and learning in a conducive environment:

An effective school environment from my experience is one that promotes and is conducive to children's teaching and learning. For us to say this environment is conducive to leaners it means as a leader you must have provided the relevant teachers for them. Do you have adequate supply of teaching and learning materials too? We also look and say is there discipline and order in the school? Are your learners able to interact with other schools, maybe through sports and other extracurricular activities? So, an effective school environment, in my view is one that has the best interests of the students, the leaners at heart. Because if you have them at heart, it means you will work the whole school system towards these children's success.

Another participant shared the same perspective:

You know at the centre of the Ministry's vision is the provision of equitable, quality, inclusive, and relevant education. This means that our core business as schools is to facilitate learning. So, an effective environment in simple terms is one that ensures that this vision is attained. You cannot talk of an effective school environment and not talk about leaner achievement and student welfare.

Still locating school effectiveness as being intrinsically linked to leaner-centredness, another participant highlighted that an effective school was child-friendly:

A good head ensures that their school must be inclusive and all encompassing. Whoever comes to that school must feel equal. Then there is the issue of learner friendliness. You know, an effective school should be learner friendly. There must not be any hazards, anything to harm the learner – not just physically but even emotionally.

These responses indicate that school leaders equated an effective school environment with learner-centeredness. Based on their leadership experiences, they believed that a school could not be considered effective or a leader successful unless they fostered an environment that prioritised learner growth, development and success.

5.5.3 Recognition of Competent School Leaders based on High Learner Achievement and the Ability of These Leaders to Run Their Schools in an Organised Manner

In their reflections on fellow school leaders that they admired and deemed competent and effective, most participants associated such competency and effectiveness with learner achievement and how organised one's school was. There was a common view among the participants that those they viewed as competent were the ones leading schools that were performing well in national examinations, as shown by high leaner achievement in public examinations. Another shared sentiment among most participants was that the school leaders that they looked up to were those who ran their schools in an organised and efficient manner. One participant noted the following about a fellow head that they admire and view as competent:

I consider him to be competent because his school has been achieving very high pass rates at Grade 7. And for me, remember I said you cannot divorce pass rates from the school head. We have seen schools which were performing very well then someone is deployed to that school and the pass rate begins to drop or vice versa. So yes, I regard him as a competent and successful head because of the high results that that he has achieved and maintained, and it's because he has established a system.

Elaborating on the perception of competent fellow heads being those that achieved high pass rates, another participant added the following:

I will mention why I regarded him as successful. One, his school was located in a high density, and you know some challenges that we face with high density schools, parents not paying school fees and so on, and it affects the functioning of the school, but he still excelled under those circumstances. His pass rate was also very high in comparison to

other schools in his locality, meaning he was doing something different. That school had a very high pass rate percent I tell you.

Another perspective that featured prominently regarding how participants viewed competent and successful school leaders was that such leaders ran their schools in an organised manner. Building on this sentiment, one participant pointed out the following:

> *One such head for me is the Headmistress of 'X' (name deleted) school, if you go to her school, you will think you are in a corporate set up. The school is organised and it's not just about the student's performance, it's about how her school functions as a whole unit. I think she mastered the art of team management and setting up a system that works because everything seems to be in the right place. I remember joking with her the other time when I was asking her whether her parents pay different fees from ours because everything for her seems to work. At the end of the day, you just look and say yes, this is competent leadership in practice, you know, leadership that delivers.*

While a variety of perspectives were expressed by the research participants regarding those, they deemed competent and successful leaders, a common theme emerged: successful leaders consistently achieved high learner pass rates and maintained well-structured administrative systems in their schools.

5.6 Attributing Their Work Ethic to Self-accountability

One recurrent theme throughout the interviews and in some personal diaries/journal recordings was that most school heads consistently expressed that their motivation to excel stemmed from their commitment to accountability rather than external pressures like district oversight or compliance. Commenting on the importance of accountability to their own leadership practices, one participant noted, *one important issue for us is the issue of self-accountability whereas an individual you should be able to account to yourself before the system*. In the same vein, another participant shared the same sentiments, citing:

> *I have a legal contract, a job contract, but I also have a social contract with the Community. That social contract is the belief that as the head I'm supposed to facilitate effective teaching and learning that will enable their children to have good education that will give them a good future. So, I then have to be accountable and be responsive to that social contract, so I wouldn't say I rely on the Ministry's supervision for me to do my job. No, no, no, no. I rely on the social contract, my number one supervisor is myself, I supervise myself. Yes, the DSI will supervise me as my superior, the province or even head office or whoever comes in and says they supervise me. But I'm saying, I am my own first supervisor. That is accountability, and once you master that you will realise that everything falls in place. You are the one who was talking about competencies. Accountability should be*

competency number1 for any head, if they do not have that, then the Ministry should not waste time on such a person, (because) they are the ones that turn out to be rogue elements and tarnish the profession's name and the Ministry at large.

Echoing an almost similar sentiment, another head concurred that if a leader does not have accountability as a key competency, they should not be allowed to head any school, as accountability is the fulcrum upon which effective school leadership is built:

In all these years in headship, one key lesson that I have learnt from my experiences is that this job is all about accountability. Remember, I told you about accountability. And I said one of the issues that a school head is entrusted with is accountability. Accountability is being able to remain loyal and truthful even when there are no eyes that are looking at you. Personally, I believe in accountability. I believe leadership is being able to be accountable. So, I would not say because the ministry is going to visit then I will start doing my job. If I have that character, then I don't think I deserved to have been appointed in the first place because in my view, I'm supposed to deliver even without anyone watching me.

Also sharing how their leadership practice was driven by accountability and a sense of responsibility rather than external factors such as Ministry's supervision visits, another head shared the following:

We are mostly driven by self-will, it's a self-motivation because it's a position of responsibility. So, it's intrinsic in the sense that you are self-driven more than you are driven by exterior influences like the Ministry or the superiors. Because we are more like directors at our schools, so a director may not actually necessarily need to be pushed by the superior. So, it's the position that you hold that will push you to act and get things going. So, I am driven internally, it's entirely on my own accord. I am accountable to myself for this commitment, so I act without any push.

Another participant supported the same notion as follows:

Our ministry at times can go for a whole term without coming for supervision visits or without anyone from the district or province coming to supervise me. So, if I then say I will only do my job when they are coming, it means I would throw away three to five years of learners' lives. So, I don't do my job simply because the Head Office is coming. That's irresponsible. I do that because I'm accountable and the government has entrusted me with the lives of the more than 800 boys and girls that are here. The government has entrusted me with more than 20 teachers and the support staff that are at this school. The parents have entrusted me to look after their children.

In summary, it is evident that the participants shared a unanimous agreement on the factors that drove their motivation to work. According to their perspective and lived experiences, effective school leadership should prioritise accountability as its core principle. They believed that one can achieve and surpass expectations by holding oneself accountable.

5.7 Leadership is About Decision-making

The research participants all averred that their leadership journeys involved numerous experiences that consistently challenged and assessed their leadership abilities. According to them, the role of the school head demands making crucial decisions daily, as each day presents new tests and calls for significant decision-making. One participant emphasised this by stating this:

> *Your leadership, if you are a school head, is tested every day because every day you are dealing with a different issue. You are dealing with a different matter, be it from teachers, be it from learners, be it from parents or any other stakeholders that might have an interest in education or in the affairs of your school. And as you deal with all these matters and with all these people, you have to make decisions, and some decisions are difficult ones because they will be good for the school, for the learners but perhaps not for the stakeholders or other interested parties.*

Another head underscored the following:

> *Every day as a leader you are confronted, you know, by critical decisions that you must make, everyday your leadership is being tested in one way or the other. For now, when you look at the way this economy is structured, it has not been easy on us and the pressure alone, every day, is a key test to leadership because this is where most fail or succeed.*

Another participant argued that in headship, decision-making is the *first among equals*. This was because, in their view, the success or failure of one as a leader hinged on their decisions. They argued that all the dimensions of headship, whether related to teaching and learning, administration matters, or the school's relations with the parents and community, were dependent on the head's decisions:

> *I remember when I did Education Planning our lecturer used to always say 'planning is the first among equals'. But for me, having been a school head and deputy all these years, I can tell you that decision-making is the first among equals. Everything rests on your decisions. The decisions that I make determine how this school will come out and whether we will succeed in our plans or not. So as head I have to be smart when making decisions, I have to be proactive, whether it's about my students' learning, about teachers, admin issues, community involvement and so on, I have to think out of the box.*

By and large, these school heads' accounts revealed that school heads viewed effective decision-making as a pivotal competency to headship. This is because, in their view and based on their lived experiences, they were entrusted with numerous responsibilities, and their ability to make sound decisions significantly influenced the overall success and functioning of their schools. As highlighted in the above excerpts, their everyday decisions ranged from decisions on teaching and learning to resource allocation and from addressing intra-school conflicts to cultivating a positive

school culture. As such, the research participants had a shared perception that navigating these decisions in a way that promoted the success of one's school while ensuring that all stakeholders were happy was a pivotal competency that every head required.

5.8 Essences of Lived Experiences and Their Influence on Participants' Perspectives on School Leadership

The first research question of my study was, *How do Zimbabwean school heads describe their lived experiences that have influenced their competencies in leading schools?* Several interview sub-questions were developed (Consult Appendix 3 – Interview Schedule) to unpack this question and prompt the participants to share their perspectives on school leadership based on their lived headship experiences. Several themes emerged from their descriptions: (a) they had followed an almost similar journey to headship, but they had different motivations to be school heads; (b) they all concurred that their initial years into headship were marred by various challenges due to lack of proper orientation; (c) they had faced resistance from fellow teachers during their novice years in headship, and (d) each had experienced certain events that had put their jobs at risk. In the ensuing section of this report, I explicate each of these themes and offer a descriptive analysis of these themes as shared by my research participants.

5.8.1 Similar Journey to Headship but Different Motivations

Most interviewees followed an almost similar path to school leadership. This is the path in which most of them had risen from being teachers to senior teachers, then deputy school heads and subsequently school heads. For example, one participant had this to say about their leadership journey:

> *So, after finishing my B. Ed, I went back to the same school and now I was just a senior teacher. … In 2001 I then applied to be a deputy head, and I went for the interviews, which I passed, and I was appointed to be deputy head in the same District but at a different school. So, I went to that school, and I was deputy head but also acting head because when I got there, the person that I was replacing was getting into retirement, and the School Head had just been promoted to the District or Province I am not sure. After six years as substantive Deputy Head and acting Head, I was then appointed head after passing the interviews.*

Reflecting on an almost similar journey, another participant noted the following:

> *It's not an easy journey, I think the education sector is one sector that takes time for one to rise, imagine from the time that I joined the teaching service up until the time I was appointed a School Head, it took me almost 14 years, starting as teacher, then senior teacher for almost 7 years, then I was deployed to the rural areas, a very remote place as a deputy head and had to work my way back to the city until I was appointed school head.*

One school head reflected that they had also pursued the same pathway; however, they stated that for them, it was a straightforward process as they were passing interviews at every stage:

> *My journey was, you know, it was an easy one because I never really struggled, all the interviews that I went to from deputy head to School Head, I just excelled, though the opportunity to move from one level to the other took time.*

This almost similar journey to headship could be attributed to how the country's education administration system operates. It has a clearly laid out path on how one is promoted from being a teacher to being a school head. It, however, must be noted that some outlier participants had not endured the long, tedious journey to headship as they were thrust into acting headship straight from college. In both cases, such participants had bachelor's degrees in education and were deployed in schools where all teachers had a Diploma in Education; hence, they found themselves thrust into leadership, albeit in an acting capacity by virtue of having the highest qualification in the school. Reflecting on this sudden rise to leadership one participant explained as follows:

> *By the time we graduated from university, there was mass exodus to the so-called green pastures by qualified personnel. So, I became a school head automatically, immediately after six hours of receiving my appointment letter to be a teacher, I became an acting head. There were no qualified people in schools, and going there with a degree I was a saviour to the district officials.*

Another participant also reflected that their journey to school headship was *accidental* and was rather *thrust* upon them by the district officials. However, once they were in headship, they embraced the role:

> *You know for me, I can say this was never planned, it was accidental, I mean when I was appointed, I remember going home at the end of the day and I was like wow, so I am now a headmaster, because it had never occurred to me that I would find myself in this seat one day. In fact, I actually wanted to leave teaching the day that I entered it. It was never my calling, in fact I wanted to be a businessman, and take over my father's grocery shop and butchery that he had left me. But I remember when I was deployed, I spent 2 two terms at my first school and then they opened a new school in the area, it had been built by a mining company, they asked those that wanted to transfer, and I volunteered. We got there and the DEO (District Education Officer) said I want a Headmaster for the school, because they had official opening of the school in a few days and the Minister was coming. They had not*

> *sorted their deployment issues to that school and transferring us was the easy avenue. So, he said to me (the DEO) you look jagged-up plus you have a Degree, so you will be the Acting Head when the Minister comes. We are still sorting the permanent placements for this school so until we deploy substantively, I want you to be in charge. I ended taking up that role for several months and once I was in, I became motivated to be a Head and started my own path. You know that Shakespeare quotation, '*some men have greatness thrust upon them'*, that was me in this case.*

What is telling in these experiences is that the journey to headship in Zimbabwe followed an almost similar path. However, in some cases, some teachers tended to take a faster route to headship due to qualifications and school location. It is however imperative to acknowledge that such fast-tracked avenues were granted in an acting capacity only; hence, one still needed to rise through the system from being a teacher to senior teacher to deputy school head, and eventually to substantive school head.

While the journey to headship was almost *cast in stone* in terms of the phases one followed due to the structure of the country's education system, shared lived experiences revealed that school heads were motivated by different factors to take up the school leadership role. However, a common shared motivation amongst the research participants was that most of them had assumed the path to headship due to personal intrinsic motivation to be a leader. Others attributed their motivation to inspiration from others.

Sharing their motivation to be a school head, one participant said:

> *For me the motivation was more from within, I never wanted to be a teacher in the first place and once I found myself as one, I just told myself that I had to have the best position that the job offers and from there I set my target on being a head."*

Similarly, another head pointed out the following:

> *I could feel leadership is within me, so I told myself that one day I will be a headmaster, so I started being proactive from my early days in the profession. I would volunteer to do things for the heads, so at times I would spend more time at the office instead of the class. I was the go-to guy for the heads that I worked with, and I was learning in the process.*

Another participant who also attributed their choice of becoming a school head to intrinsic motivation said:

> *You know for some of us who grew up in the rural areas, teaching was the quickest way out of poverty. Once I did my Form 4, I was ready to go to a teacher's college then the Salvation Army church paid for my A-level through some scholarship program that they had. After A level, university was a non-starter, so I went to Hillside Teachers College to*

train as a secondary school teacher. I had accepted teaching long back, but I had also told myself that I just don't want to be a mere teacher. I knew from day one that I will be a Head. Nothing really motivated me save for my own internal drive and my quest to achieve more.

For female heads, the motivation was mostly drawn from seeing other women serving as headmistresses. One female participant said:

So, I went to this school in in Gweru … and to my surprise, the head there was a woman. All the other schools that I had worked in, the Heads were all men. And here was a woman, a very charming woman. And you know it inspired me to realize that I could also become a school head. It's something that I had never thought of before I went to that school. So, I would say she's the person who inspired me.

Similarly, another female research participant shared that being a school head had never crossed her mind until she came across female school heads and from there on, she realised that she could also become a school head:

If you were to ask me when I was in teacher training whether I would one day become a Headmistress, I would have dismissed you outright, but once I got into the teaching service, and the more I saw female heads, and realized how they were excelling, I became motivated. I started working towards self-improvement and registered for my undergraduate so that I upgrade from the Diploma, and that's how my journey started.

While the participants' path to headship followed an almost similar path as earlier highlighted, overall, these submissions suggest that most school heads were internally motivated to take on the role. While others might have found themselves in that position at the district's request due to peculiar school circumstances, the decision to become a school head typically stemmed from an individual's internal determination and motivation. The responses also highlight that women in school leadership were often motivated by observing other women in similar roles, inspiring them to pursue a similar path.

5.8.2 Novice Years of Headship Characterised by Limited Competencies and Lack of a Support Structure

Reflecting on their early years in headship, there was consensus in which all my research participants shared a common perspective: upon appointment, they faced considerable challenges in adapting to their new roles and establishing authority within their schools. Chief among them was the absence of proper orientation and a supportive framework to facilitate their transition into the new position. This meant that most of them did not have the requisite competencies to run their

schools effectively upon appointment, and with no proper support structure, they had to learn on the job.

Reflecting on this phase of their career, one participant said:

> *This appointment was a learning process because you know when you come for the first time (as a head) you will be empty. Of course, I had done my Bachelor of Education and I had learnt one or two things on leadership and management, but to be honest with you, for most of the things, I have had to learn on the job. Because when you get promoted now, the Public Service Commission doesn't even train us – to say you are going to be a school head. You may encounter 1234. They used to do so long back but not now. Now you just go for those interviews, and they give you scenarios, it's very theoretical. And once you sit in this chair you will say heeey why didn't they tell me it will be this hard, but we survive.*

Sharing the same sentiment another head added the following:

> *I feel this is one area that our government needs to address. You know long back, for those appointed before 2002 thereabout, they used to go to training centres like Domboshava, ZIPAM and so forth, and they would be trained in a residential program, well prepared and they would even bring seasoned headmasters to share with you some tips, some challenges that they encounter and so on. But now they just send you to the schools like cattle being released into the feeding paddocks.*

Another participant also lamented the lack of orientation and support systems for novice heads, citing that they had personally struggled upon appointment and that they had made blunders that could have cost them their job*:*

> *I remember I was almost fired after authorising an ineligible payment, but the SDC Chairman and the Bursar had told me everything was above board. And this was my first term in the job, now I can never make the same mistake again, never. My point is if I had been properly oriented and trained, maybe I would have picked that there was something wrong with the expenses that I was made to authorise.*

While the participants expressed lack of orientation as a critical challenge in the initial phases of headship as they had to learn on the job, they acknowledged that years of service as a deputy head, a phase that all of them had passed through in their journey to headship, had imparted crucial leadership insights and lessons and essentially served as a *de facto* orientation for them.

Reflecting on this, one participant stated the following:

> *For me the biggest lessons about this job I learnt them when I was a Deputy Head. That is when I began to see what the job entails. And you know I was luck y to have Heads who were more like mentors. I remember one Head I deputised at X) primary school (name deleted). He would always say, Madam, this is how it's done, you have to learn because*

> *one day you will be the Head. Or he would leave to make decisions and say that is how you learn. So, by the time I was promoted to substantive school head, I had learnt a lot of things. But you know with this job you will stop learning when you retire.*

Another head shared the same perspective, noting that one's years as a deputy head prepared them for the headship role. They were, however, quick to caution that this was dependent on the head that one was assigned to. As the comment below shows, they believed that heads were mentors, but, in some cases, they did not act as such:

> *As a head I am a mentor to my deputy, to the senior master and senior woman or to any teacher who aspires to head a school one day. The challenge is not all heads are aware of this important role. In some cases, you will find a very selfish head, that type that thinks closing the space for everyone is leadership. They want to be in charge of everything. So, if you deputise such (a person) you will never learn anything. They will supress you rather than mentor you. I had one head like that when I was acting deputy years ago, he would not even consult you on anything. We used to call him 'One-man Gang'.*

The key outcome of these school heads' experiences is the recognition among the research participants that assuming and partaking in a school headship role was a continuous learning process. They emphasised that a significant portion of their learning occurred on the job, primarily because of the absence of a well-defined orientation and support system. Simultaneously, they highlighted the perceived importance of deputy headship in grooming individuals for future headship responsibilities. They, however, underscored the fact that the effectiveness of this preparation was contingent upon the level of support and mentorship that the school head one reported to was willing to provide.

5.8.3 Resistance by Fellow Teachers in Novice Years of Headship

Another issue that emerged as common experience among the research participants was that they had all faced resistance when they transitioned to their new schools after being promoted to headship. A common view among the participants was that school heads who were promoted into a new school tended to struggle to settle in as there were always *gatekeepers* at these schools. These were those who were ready to challenge the new head and constantly undermined the head's authority, mostly because they knew the school context better by having served at that school for a long time. One participant reflected on this difficult phase of their leadership journey:

> *One of the most difficult phases in my leadership journey was when I was promoted from Deputy Head to School Head, and you know normally this comes with a change of school.*

> *The school that I was posted to, was a nightmare, the teachers there, led by the guy who had been acting School Head for years, they made sure I struggled. They wanted to run a parallel administration, and everything was jumping me, I was a lame duck, I almost quit. But I said, I earned this position and I have to step-up. I started by requesting the District Office to bring me a new deputy head, because this one, the troublemaker, he was not even a substantive deputy, he was just a senior teacher.*

Reflecting on similar circumstances, another participant said:

> *I remember after promotion I was posted to 'X' Secondary School (name deleted) and the team there was resentful from day one. I'm not sure who they thought I was, but I think humans we are naturally resistant to change. I had to employ divide and rule tactics and slowly I ascertained my authority. I appointed new HODs and reassigned people to new roles, I targeted the team leader and gave him an office and made him the Senior Master, a lot happened but it was not an easy start. If I had not been smart and cunning, I am sure I would not have lasted a term at that school.*

Another participant also shared their challenges during transition to headship at a new school, noting the following:

> *You know, when I came here there were some people who were very experienced teachers more than myself in terms of years of service and knowing the school, the parents, and the community in general. So, it was a bit terrible for me because some could not accept me, so I had some challenges in terms of getting on with others and in building a team. Some of the teachers had been acting heads before I was appointed for some years. And myself, I was just newly appointed in the system, and I had nobody above me who could teach me on how to head a school, the dynamics of dealing with community and all the roles, so I had to start it on my own. The journey was very difficult because it had to involve understanding the school context, liaising with the local leadership, getting used to the teachers, the SDC and all the related issues, so I can say my first term was just learning and studying the school and now I am here.*

The above verbatim responses reveal that the transition period for newly appointed school heads, particularly those who moved to new schools upon promotion to headship, was characterised by opposition from those who were already part of the school community. As the extracts above show, upon assuming leadership roles, participants shared that they encountered resistance from existing staff members, particularly from those who had previously served as acting heads, resulting in a challenging adjustment process. These collective experiences of the research participants reflect the need for education authorities to design strategies that facilitate smoother transitions for newly appointed heads.

5.8.4 Experiences That Put Their Jobs at Risk

One common experience that was shared by all research participants was that they had all encountered experiences that had put their jobs at risk, yet at the same time, required them to manoeuvre the terrain by applying their leadership skills and aptitude to save both their jobs and the situation at hand. One head shared about a school teacher who had abused funds for the registration of learners for the national O-level examinations:

> *There was an incident when my Deputy Head disappeared with examination fees. You know, I had sent him to ZIMSEC (Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council) to go and do the payment, but he disappeared. You can imagine, because all the 90 something candidates they were not going to write because he had just vanished. So, I sent him he did not come back. What happened was that it was our election time in 2008, at the height of the economic crisis. So, I sent him to go and deposit the exam fees in the ZIMSEC account but instead he disappeared. I made inquiries with ZIMSEC and said maybe he disappeared after depositing the money, then that would be fine. But if he did not, then it was going to be problematic, and apparently, he had not deposited the funds, the registration fees. I was told by the ZIMSEC officers that you are the only school that is not registered for this year. They said we don't know what you're going to do. I almost fainted.*

Narrating an experience that almost cost them their job, another participant said the following:

> *I remember one case in which I had a fall out with a teacher. I had charged him for improper association with a female leaner and he told me that he was going to fix me. And I think he went and reported me to the district and to the local Chief that I was abusing school funds. I do not know how he did it, but the Ministry actually send auditors to my school, and they seemed to believe this guy. So, I had some auditors that came to the school and the district even initiated a disciplinary hearing for me as some anonymous letters were sent to them. This was a huge test for me because at one point I considered suicide, I was lost and did not know what to do.*

Another head shared how they had got into trouble with the Ministry of Education because they had asked parents to pay US$10 per child since the Zimbabwean dollar fees were almost useless. This was a way of keeping the school afloat, but the government regarded it as corruption:

> *I remember once I was almost charged by the DSI (District Schools Inspector) after she had learnt that my school was charging and demanding US Dollars from parents. We did this because there was no other way, I couldn't keep this school afloat and I think that I was put to test because one, I was sort of defying government in a way because government would then insist that we use the local currency and also that we use the official exchange rate. But you know that the official exchange rate was low, so may be that US$10 if you were to change it on the official exchange rate, it would reduce to maybe something like $2-3. So, when the DSI summoned me, I said audit the books and if a cent is missing, I am happy to be charged. Plus, I had supportive parents through the SDC (School Development*

Committee). But it took long I think a charge sheet was actually created for me, but the cause was noble.

Reflecting in their participant journal, one head documented an experience that had occurred during the research process that they felt was a threat to their job:

> *I was asked to record some leadership related experiences that I encounter in my job for this research. Being a school head is a difficult task, it is challenging, and people tend to underestimate the tasks and burdens that we have to carry every day. Yesterday I had a challenging experience worth sharing. A few months ago, I had an alleged case of sexual abuse involving a Form 2 pupil and her male relative that was brought to my attention by one of the female teachers. I called the leaner in question, asked her to open-up and I even discussed with her the different options she could use. She dismissed everything highlighting that these were just allegations by a jealousy friend because the relative in question had bought her a phone. Yesterday I was surprised to be called by the police that I had a student who was being abused and that I had discouraged her from reporting to the police. The police wanted to know why I had blocked her from reporting, I was shocked why she would report such despite the help that I had tried to offer. They were noting that some NGOs will publish my name and they will take me to court. Today I asked my daughter to link me with her lawyer friend for legal advice.*

These experiences reveal that school heads went through many experiences in their leadership journey where their jobs and careers were put at risk. This was even though, in most cases, such risks might be emanating from actions that were borne out of goodwill and the betterment of the school. The heads seemed to act in good faith, but at times, such actions were at variance with existing policies or rules. In their responses they noted that in such cases, one needed great leadership dexterity to be able to come out of these situations unscathed and to manoeuvre around these challenges and resolve them amicably.

5.9 Common Disabling Factors in Effective School Leadership as Experienced by School Heads

While the research participants shared varied disabling factors that they had encountered in dispensing their leadership roles, there were some common disabling factors that they agreed on. The disabling factors that all participants shared, after reflecting on the outstanding day-to-day challenges they faced in dispensing their leadership roles, revolved around teacher motivation and morale in a challenging economic environment, non-payment of school fees by parents, high expectations from education stakeholders despite a difficult operational environment and context,

deficiencies in understanding government policies and their application, career stagnation due to lack of incentives, and challenges related to financial malpractice.

5.9.1 Lamenting the Lack of a Clear School Leadership Framework for Public School Heads in Zimbabwe

Another recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense amongst the research participants that Zimbabwe did not have a clear competency framework for school heads. As a result, the participants felt there was no standard approach or benchmarks to what constituted effective and successful school leadership. This, in their view, had led to each head defining success based on their own terms:

> *I wouldn't say there's a guiding framework per se, maybe what is there is just a general philosophy that if a child is in school, as a school head, I have to make sure that they are protected and that they have to learn in a friendly conducive environment that I create. I know teachers have to be supervised. But I have not heard of the framework you talk about. Even on qualifications, there is no clear guideline or incentive for further education, that's why you find one head has 2 master's degrees, we even have another head who has a PhD. But you also find in the same system another one with just a first degree. This is because there is no framework that speaks to self-improvement. You go to teachers, it's the same. You find that there's one teacher who is well read. They have done everything - certificates, master's and so on because they are continually developing themselves, but you can also find, in the same system a teacher who qualified in 1980 at independence, has been in the system for four decades, but they have never done anything to upgrade themselves, maybe they have just attended workshops that we second them to.*

Building on the lack of a competency framework for school heads and how this is creating inconsistency in school management and leadership, another participant said:

> *As far as I know, there's no framework that I can stick on the wall here in my office and say this is the framework that the ministry has given me. I talk about accountability a lot. It's an area that I'm interested in. So, you realize there is no framework and it's more of you as an individual becoming accountable for your actions and for delivering the Ministry's mandate. The big challenge comes in that some of us are not accountable which is why you will find two schools, same locality but different results, even the general outlook of the school, one will be impressive the other one will be dilapidated and so forth. But if there was a clear framework that says on teacher management you do this, on procurement you do this, on this you do as such, you will find that all schools will do well because there will be a common benchmark upon which we will be judged. At the moment I would say it's a laissez-faire kind of approach.*

Another participant also echoed the same sentiment, emphasising the different approaches that heads used to deal with similar issues due to the lack of a clear framework for school leadership:

> *Ministry trains us as school heads, maybe to enhance some of these competencies that you mentioned, but I wouldn't say there is a framework guiding all that. So maybe it's high time that the ministry puts together something that guides us such that if you talk to any headmaster wherever you are, they would refer you to that overarching framework, we would then refer to it and say this is what is expected on teaching and learning, this is what is expected on financial management etc. Some time ago they introduced the Teacher Professional Standards which also encompassed standards for headmasters but I think those standards were a still birth because there was no framework to support or operationalise them. In fact, we have not heard of them since.*

Sharing the same point of view, another head noted that a competency framework for heads was key as it would help in decision-making and help school heads decide and know what was expected from them as leaders:

> *So, there is no consistency, there is no that framework and I think in my view it would be good if this could be designed by the government. It makes our job easy as school heads because from my experiences you realise that at times you act out of your own discretion as opposed to having a framework that guides you. Once we have a guiding framework, even decision-making becomes easy. At times we grapple with the right decision to make because you are not clear on what the policy says on a particular matter.*

What stands out in these responses is the perspective of school heads that the country should have a competency framework to direct the daily practice of school leaders. According to them, such a framework could address decision-making challenges and provide greater clarity on policy guidelines. As evident from their input, the framework could contribute to a more standardised approach to school leadership.

5.9.2 Low Teacher Morale

Sharing perspectives on issues around low teacher morale due to poor conditions of services and remuneration because of a struggling economy, one head said:

> *A big challenge for me at the moment is teacher motivation. The motivation amongst our teachers is very, very low. It's very low and you know this is because of financial issues. Our teachers are not happy. They are not being paid well, but we appreciate that the government has introduced some U.S. dollar component of the salary. But again, motivation is a big issue because trying to motivate someone to perform, trying to motivate someone to deliver when they are not happy, they are not motivated. So, I think the government has let us down.*

Echoing the same sentiments and experiences another participant expressed the following sentiment:

> *But you know, it's very difficult for you to motivate teachers who are working under very difficult conditions. So, it's like you're saying I want 100% but don't ask me about your remuneration, your conditions of service and so forth. So naturally it creates resistance. Those teachers, they are no longer motivated as they used to be and some of them don't come to work every day because they tell me that no, I cannot afford transport, so I'll come twice, but at the same time you want results as a head. So again, that's a very big challenge.*

Another head also lamented the low levels of morale among the country's teaching force as a key stumbling block to effective leadership, noting that schools were in a state of inertia due to a dysfunctional economy. Drawing from Isaac Newton's law of physics, the head explained that the country's education system was in a state of inertia because poor conditions of service demotivated teachers who were the movers of the system:

> *Nothing is moving young man; we are in a state of inertia. I trained as a science teacher, and you know one of Newton's laws argues that an object will remain in a state of inertia until an external force is applied. That's exactly where our education systems is, our teachers are in inertia and they need an external force that is money and better salaries. So, for you to expect me to improve a school as your research is advocating for, how do I do it with this inertia. Even myself as a head, I have had to lower my expectations from these teachers.*

Writing in their participant journal, one participant who was reflecting on the issue of teacher motivation and its impact on school heads' effectiveness wrote the following:

> *What I see every day is very sad. Today, X (name deleted) came into my office and was sharing how he has to take care of his diabetic elderly mother and his epileptic adult sister. He sends medication to the rural areas, but he has to walk more than 7 km to come to work. He cannot afford the bus fare, so he walks early in the morning, to avoid being seen by pupils and other teachers, then end of day he takes public transport, but on other days he walks as well, on such days he has to wait for everyone to dismiss. So, teachers have become a symbol of poverty. Very sad.*

Echoing the same sentiments on how teachers were struggling and how it was affecting their work as school heads, one research participant said:

> *I don't know how we are going to advocate for better conditions for our teachers, and ourselves as well. But we really need to think about the welfare of the teacher, it is a cause for concern to us as Heads. We are talking about their access to health facilities, decent accommodation, clothing allowance, transport allowances and fees payment for their children. Someone has to address these critical needs otherwise it is not just us Heads who will fail, it's the whole country. I wonder what those Unions (teachers' labour unions) are*

doing – I don't know their mandate because teachers have been reduced to paupers under their watch. Even the government, at one point they said they were establishing a Teaching Professional Council, to help in uplifting our status, so that we are recognised as professionals but that never materialised.

Another head attributed the illegally paid extra lessons that teachers were embarking on as a way of raising extra income. It was an illegal act in which government teachers offered lessons at a cost to learners in their classes or in the community for a fee:

Our teachers are not happy and at times when you see teachers engaging into some of these acts, like, you know, extra lessons, it's not their fault. They are demotivated and poor. So as a head I might know that teacher so and so is doing extra lessons, teacher so and so is having weekend lessons with their kids and sometimes here in the school. But you just cast a blind eye because you know that they are doing it for survival. The moment I stop them I will demotivate them and why should I do that.

This theme recurred throughout the interviews, suggesting that it was a significant challenge for school heads. They seemed to concur that their ability to carry out effective supervision and inform quality instructional practices by teachers was negatively affected by the state that teachers found themselves in due to poor conditions of service and low remuneration.

5.9.3 Non-Payment of School Fees by Parents

Another recurrent challenge in the interviews was a sense amongst my participants that failure by parents to pay school fees was crippling schools and inhibiting them from effectively discharging their duties. Given that public schools in Zimbabwe primarily relied on school fees, most participants noted that failing to pay these fees was tantamount to them being set up to fail. One participant noted the following:

One of the biggest challenges that I have, in fact it is the biggest, it's the low payment rates of school fees. Imagine a big school like mine more than 1500 learners and only 500, that's a third, have only paid. How do I run a school like that, using money from 500 to carter for 1500, and they still expect me to work miracles? Whatever competencies that I have, whatever skill, it vanishes because I cannot work miracles.

Sharing a similar challenge another head noted that government's standing policy that barred the expulsion of defaulting learners was fuelling non-payment of fees:

It has created chaos in a sense that, you know, we rely on school fees and on levies to operate these schools because government does not give us any cent, we don't get money like what they used to do long back when grants would be given to schools. As the economy started to bite, the government left that system to you and me as parents. So now it's the

parents that run the schools. But now we have had a challenge where government pronounced that kids that have not paid their school fees should not be chased away and as result no one is paying fees. And with fees not being paid it means I have no money for teaching and learning materials, I have no money for my teachers' participation in capacity development initiatives, no money for sports, for support staff and so on

Talking about the same issue, another participant said:

This is a key challenge because parents are not paying, and you know the nature of our schools, without resources you cannot be very effective. So, we will need learners to pay school fees, government pronounced the policy that no child will be chased away. And I agree, no child should be chased away, but they didn't go further to say how do we then handle cases where parents are defaulting. You see, in private schools they just deny you access and as result the parents pay 100% and look at their results. It appears like we are not working, yet we are actually working.

One participant encouraged fellow heads to be innovative and venture into income-generating projects to supplement school income. They noted that from their experiences, relying on school fees alone resulted in their school failing to reach the targets and plans that were set out in their school development plans. As a result, they had to seek alternative funding to supplement school fees:

Every head you will talk to for this research you are doing will tell you that school fees is a big challenge. We rely on the levies, the fees for every expense that you can think of. This is a Council school (owned by the local authority – City/Rural Council) but the council only supplies us with detergents for the kids' toilets. Their support for anything else is erratic. So, for me I said parents are not paying, the RDC (Rural District Council) is not giving us anything, I can't be a cry-baby and continue to cry. So, I appointed a fundraising committee, and they came up with brilliant ideas. I will show you around, we have a viable piggery and broiler project, and we are actually failing to meet demand. Actually, we have solarised our whole admin block with proceeds from these projects. So as heads we can't just cry and say fees, fees, fees. My question to you is yes fees is not being paid but you, what are you doing, what have you tried?

The heads lamented the detrimental impact of parents' low payment rates of school fees on their ability to fulfil their duties effectively. Given that Zimbabwean schools heavily relied on school fees for functionality, as this was the money that funded the school budget and catered for all operational costs, non-payment of school fees means that schools would operate below their capacity. Participants pointed to challenges around the procurement of teaching and learning materials and the resultant limited support to teachers effectively to deliver instruction as some of the common challenges emanating from failure to pay fees by parents. Consequently, the

participants expressed a shared concern that their effectiveness as public school heads was significantly compromised by the current school financing model.

5.9.4 High expectations in a challenging context

Closely linked to the issue of non-payment of school fees, participants said that their experiences had shown that there were high expectations from different education stakeholders, such as parents and the Ministry of Education to deliver quality education, to work on school improvement and to run effective schools, despite the difficult operational environment hat heads were working in. For example, one participant argued as follows:

> *One of the biggest challenges that I have faced in leadership is being able to live up to my stakeholders' expectations, you know, the parents, teachers, the district, the learners. Everyone wants you to be effective, they want you to be competent, they want results, but they don't care about the environment in which I have to produce those results. They do not care about school fees that has not been paid and that because of that I have no operational costs for the school. They do not care about the meagre salaries that teachers are being paid. All they want are results. I get irritated every time when our Grade 7 results drop and you get a call or a visit from the district asking you why your pass rate has dropped this year, and I ask myself, don't they see the chaos that our country, our education system is in?*

Echoing the same sentiments, another participant said:

> *When you speak of being a school head as a difficult job you cannot avoid mentioning the high expectations, the standards that everyone expects from us. I mean, by its nature, it's a job that relies on standards and there is always expectations from one person or the other, that as a school you have to deliver, be it in academics, in sports, in extracurricular things like quiz competitions and so forth. But you see my worry is people have all these expectations and they think as Head you have to deliver it all, they forget that there has to be a budget to meet all these expectations.*

One head also shared that the job was full of expectations, which was good because it pushed heads to perform better. They, however, noted that in most cases, these expectations were not commensurate with the environment in which the heads worked. In their view, as highlighted in the comment below, there was a high demand for them to succeed in a constraining environment:

> *As a head there are obviously many expectations from different people. Even you as a parent, if you do not have certain expectations from a school then you would not bring*

your child to that school, right? So, in a way it's good that people have expectations from us because it pushes us to perfect our ways. It pushes us to want to succeed and to want to be better than the next school or to be the best in the district. But you know what I have noted over the years, is that the demands on us are just there, they are not linked to anything. My point is the district has not given you a cent, but they want you to perform, the parents, yes they are a key stakeholder and they finance the school so they also have their expectations.

What is important to note from the participants' experiences is that school heads expressed a sense of being overwhelmed by high expectations from different stakeholders. They were expected to oversee school improvement and to be effective leaders. Yet, those that placed these demands on them did not factor in the challenging context in which the school heads were operating, particularly the challenging macroeconomic environment that Zimbabwe found itself in. Also, while there were these high expectations, the participants felt that the support from central government was minimal and close to zero in terms of providing resources.

5.9.5 Deficiencies in Understanding Government Policies and Their Application

Another common disabling factor that the research participants all seemed to have encountered and kept on encountering in their leadership was a limited or varied understanding of government laws, policies and their application to and in the education sector. Commenting on this challenge, one head referred to it as a *lack of understanding of the law and its application to and in education*. In their perspective, school heads in Zimbabwe frequently encountered situations where they had to make decisions with legal implications. However, they sometimes acted contrary to the law due to a lack of awareness about what the law or government policy stipulated regarding particular matters. Resonating with these sentiments, one participant said:

People tend to undermine us and just say aah this is a mere headmaster, but we need to know complex things like even the law. Imagine making a decision that can cost the whole school legally. I remember when I was still at X school (school name deleted), I had employees that used to be employed by the City Council, then the council retrenched them and said, since the schools collect fees, they can pay these guys. So, they moved them to our school, and they became our general workers, you know caretakers…after some time they said we want our benefits that we had when we worked directly for the Council. You know things like medical aid, funeral policy and so on. And they took us to the Labour

court, and they won. Maybe if I had knowledge of labour law, this case might not even have made it to court.

Sharing their perceptions on the same matter, another participant added the following:

I did not really appreciate that there are certain things that can spill into courts on issues that relate to learners and teachers. Especially issues to do with labour, you know, we employ some, cleaners, janitors, security guards, etc. Those guys can actually sue you as a school and say you are under paying us. Even teachers they take the state to the labour court, after being charged by us heads and in most cases, they win those cases. So, the government, the state is losing money because of our limited understanding of the law and certain policies emanating from those laws. I am not saying we should be lawyers no; I am saying as a head, you must have a legal understanding of those issues that we deal with every day and be equipped to deal and address them.

Another participant gave a more comprehensive perspective, noting that the issue was more about understanding the whole spectrum of education policy and its implications for the work of school heads. They argued that heads generally had limited knowledge of some policy issues, and as a result, they made blunders in judgment, resulting in legal issues. In their view, heads should be trained on policy issues, given that policy is not static but dynamic as it responds to emerging issues:

In university, I think it was for my post grad, there was a course on education policy and another one on legal perspectives. So, for me, I have a better understanding of the policy issues but it's not enough. Nowadays the laws are just changing so you need to know – is this in line with the law, is this in accordance with the new Education Act and so forth. The government is just changing laws, but no one tells you as a head to say these are now the implications of the new policy on your work. They wait for you to fail, and they say you violated this policy.

Another participant echoed the same challenge, noting that non-governmental organisations were training heads on some new laws and policies while the government was not taking any initiative. They referred to the Education Act, which was amended in 2021 and had implications for issues like the expulsion of learners from school, application of corporal punishment and barring pregnant girls from entering school:

Look at the Education Act; it has introduced a wholesale of changes; now, we cannot apply corporal punishment, we cannot expel pregnant girls and many other things. These are serious policy issues, but I do not remember the government bringing us as Heads in this District to say these are the new laws, so we now have this policy to respond to the law.

We have had to be trained by these NGOs. I feel we need a training or a manual that the ministry can develop, which every headmaster has in their office that tells us that these are the policies that govern discipline, this is what the ministry expects on teacher support and supervision, these are the laws that have been amended …

It can be noted that the participants identified a lack of policy and legal understanding as a key challenge in their role. As a result, heads were making decisions that were sometimes not aligned with existing policies and new laws introduced by the government. In their view, there was a need for the government to incorporate policy and legal issues in the training of school heads or their orientation so that heads could keep abreast of the latest policy and regulatory issues in education.

5.9.6 Financial Malpractices

The research participants also shared a common perception that financial malpractices were widespread in Zimbabwean schools. In their view, these malpractices were primarily driven by school heads' insufficient understanding of financial management and accounting. Drawing on their own experiences, participants recounted instances in their career journeys where numerous heads had lost their jobs due to issues related to financial mismanagement. Importantly, they emphasised that, more often than not, these heads were victims of inadequate financial management knowledge rather than intentional acts of theft. One participant echoed these sentiments:

You know if you were to speak to my DSI (District Schools Inspector) today, he will tell you that I am one person who always makes noise in our meetings regarding training on financial management. I have seen many colleagues, innocent colleagues, being traumatised and haunted by the system over financial issues. Imagine one was just a languages teacher and they are promoted to be head, and they are given a termly budget of $US100 000 or $US 200 000 to deal with, depending on the school size. Maybe the last time they did serious mathematics, or serious accounting was in secondary school, they will sink in the figures. I know we do not handle the finances directly, but according to the Ministry we are the chief accounting officers in our schools. So, if the Bursar (school accountant) takes advantage of my financial illiteracy, I might take the fall because I am the chief accounting officer.

Another participant shared an almost similar perspective:

You know my brother, many headmasters in Zimbabwe have actually been in hot soup because of financial abuse, and at times, they are not even guilty, they have not stolen. It's just that they don't understand. They don't have the technical know-how, yet they are the chief accounting officer at any school. So, if your bursar does any shenanigans, it will cost you and at times, by the time it's realized that you are innocent it will be too late.

A participant pointed out that they had once been charged for financial embezzlement. Though they were later acquitted, this experience made them view financial management as a *thorny issue* in Zimbabwe's school leadership discourse:

> *I was once charged for financial embezzlement but like I said earlier, I was acquitted which is why I am still here. But my point is I understand these things. You see, the financial management aspect is one of the thorny issues in school leadership and management in Zimbabwe today, in fact I would say procurement and financial management, it's a hot topic and many have gone home (fired) because of it. When the auditors come, they can recommend you to be incarcerated. And that's what they did to me, the auditors were very overzealous, the DSI was even worse. But at the end my innocence was proven. Imagine if I was not so lucky.*

The most important factor to note from this is that the research participants believed that school heads in Zimbabwe often got into trouble due to financial management-related issues. Some shared personal experiences in which authorities charged them on financial-related charges. In their view, this emanated from limited knowledge of financial management and how heads were thrust into dealing with financial issues. Yet, most of them had not gained any experience in dealing with such issues. While deputy headship presented learning opportunities for some, as indicated in earlier responses, learning opportunities during deputy headship were contingent on the type of school head one was deputising. Consequently, there was no guarantee that individuals who previously served as deputy heads were well-versed in financial matters.

5.9.7 Career Stagnation

The research participants lamented that there was career stagnation as the opportunities to rise in the system were limited and, at times, were allocated based on political patronage. There were some participants who, however, attributed the stagnation to a lack of incentives for one to rise beyond headship. In the latter's case, the research participants argued that there were more incentives for them as heads at their schools as they had budgets and more autonomy than being promoted to the district as an inspector of education.

Sharing their perspectives on career stagnation due to limited opportunities and political interferences, one head argued as follows:

> *Look, I am a seasoned head, I have seen people without master's degrees being promoted to the district and you realise some of us we are open-minded and we have opposed the ruling party, so when promotion time comes, they overlook you and take those Heads that*

> *are either active in ruling party politics or seen as not being problematic. In my case, I was once very active in opposition politics; I have been victimised and all, but I know they will never promote me upwards because of that history. So, in my view, it's a combination of two factors, one the opportunities are limited – imagine this District has more than 100 schools, it means all heads are eligible to be Inspectors and eventually the DSI, but we have one DSI, so it's the 100 of us eyeing one post. Then secondly, if you are not politically correct, you will die a head.*

Another participant argued that the stagnation of most heads was linked to a lack of opportunities and not politics. In their view, the positions after headship were just too few for all heads; hence, in their own words, it was a *triangle concept where the higher you go, the less you become*:

> *To be fair, we have to consider that as you go up the ladder, the positions become less. We have one Permanent Secretary to oversee 10,000 plus headmasters and 150, 000 teachers. So that alone shows you that for one to rise from the 150 000 teachers to be one of the 10 000 heads, then again from those 10 000 to be one of the 72 DSIs, then one of the 10 PEDs (Provincial Education Directors), it takes a lifetime. You have to be the best at what you do. So, I think it's more of a triangle concept because the higher you go, the less the posts become. And that is why the post of a head in Zimbabwe appears like you stagnate once you reach here; it's the triangle effect. But of course, we cannot rule out those who refuse to be promoted even when the chance is offered to them; there are many of them, me included.*

Building on the sentiment that some heads refused to be promoted, another participant shared a personal experience in which they refused an appointment to be an inspector in the district because there was no incentive for them to take up that post. As highlighted in the comment below, their view was that as a head they had more autonomy and authority than they would if they were to move to the district office:

> *As a school head I enjoy a lot of benefits and privileges, I have my own budget that I execute based on my own priorities and my parents (school community). I have the liberty to plan with my teachers and parents and say this time we want to do ABCD, and we do just that. I was once interviewed for the Inspector post at our District, I passed the interview and was offered the job 6 months after the interview, unfortunately the long waiting time gave me room to reflect and when the offer eventually came, I turned it down. I realised there was nothing for me with that move, maybe just a title, and more chances to be DSI but that's just that.*

The key observation arising from these contributions is the concurrence among the research participants that the headship post in Zimbabwe might result in career stagnation. They believed most individuals often remained in this position until retirement, with limited progression to other roles. However, the factors contributing to this stagnation show diversity based on participants'

experiences. For some, stagnation was a deliberate choice driven by the satisfaction they derived from the autonomy of being a head, leading them to forego promotional opportunities that arose in their career path. In contrast, others lamented limited options to transition out of headship, attributing this limitation to the scarcity of positions in the career hierarchy above headship. Others also pointed out political interference, mainly by the ruling party, which barred the promotion of heads that were seen to be contrary to the party's agenda. Despite these varied and nuanced reasons for stagnation as highlighted in the research participants' accounts, the overarching theme is their shared perspective that headship commonly represented the ultimate career destination, owing to limited opportunities and incentives for upward career mobility.

5.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter delved into the rich narratives of school heads' lived leadership experiences and explored their perspectives on school leadership. The data presentation and analysis are based on the qualitative data generated through the in-depth interviews and the participant diaries from the six school heads who were my research participants. I also presented the summarised profiles of the research participants to provide a glimpse into their biographical backgrounds. Gender neutrality was maintained in analysing the responses and narratives of the research participants. This is because gender was not a variable of interest to my research process; instead, the interest was in the participants' lived leadership experiences regardless of gender.

Various themes emerged from these narratives. A look at these themes shows that they can be categorised under two broad themes. The first theme centred on the essence of school heads' lived leadership experiences and how these experiences had shaped or influenced their perspectives regarding school leadership. Various sub-themes emerged from this theme, highlighting common issues such as the motivation behind the leadership journey, shared disabling factors in school leadership, and a collective perception of school leadership as challenging and fulfilling. The second theme focused on participants' perceptions of successful and effective school leadership. Sub-themes centred on perceptions of successful headship, with a common view that successful headship depended on achieving set targets, promoting effective instruction, accountability to self, and adeptness in decision-making. The next chapter discusses the critical competencies that were

identified as being pivotal to school leadership in Zimbabwe by the school heads based on their leadership experiences to date.

CHAPTER 6: SCHOOL HEADS' PERSPECTIVES ON AND EXPERIENCES OF CRITICAL COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 continues the data presentation and descriptive analysis but delves into the competencies that emerged from the discussions with the research participants. Their perspectives on these competencies were derived from their lived experiences and the experiences that they had in their school leadership journey, most of which were discussed in Chapter 5. In undertaking this research, I argued that school heads' positions and day-to-day experiences presents them as key primary sources best qualified to articulate the competencies crucial for success in the school headship role. My research was thus based on the premise that the varied experiences, achievements and challenges encountered in their roles provided them with unparalleled insights into what competencies they deemed pivotal to the success of a school head in the Zimbabwean context.

This chapter aims to unpack participants' insights into the essential competencies, knowledge and skills that they deemed pivotal to effective school leadership; my interview questions were designed to elicit responses based on the lived experiences of the participants. While a variety of perspectives were expressed on the key competencies that they deemed pivotal to effective school leadership, certain recurring competencies were identified by all heads as pivotal. These centred on the following themes: understanding of policy issues that govern education; establishing systems and standards within one's school; financial literacy; familiarity with disciplinary procedures for both staff and learners; teamwork and team coordination; people management; leadership for learning; teacher supervision; vision setting and planning; ICT competencies/EdTech Literacy; accountability to oneself, and the ability to lead. The ensuing sections of this research discuss these competencies, analysing them based on the research participants' perspectives as shared through their words and experiential narratives.

6.2 Data Presentation: Emerging Competencies for Effective School Leadership

As highlighted earlier, the research participants had converging perspectives on various essential competencies that they deemed crucial for effective school leadership. It is imperative to note that these competencies were identified by the research participants based on their lived experiences. As such, it was through their practical leadership encounters that they discerned shared attributes in these competencies. It is also essential to note that, being a phenomenological study, I did not just derive these competencies from what the school heads shared directly. Instead, I also derived meaning from the essences of their stories, what Van Manen (2017) refers to as the phenomenality within the phenomenon. This means that I did not only examine overtly shared competencies but also decoded implied and covert meanings from the participants' lived experiences, extracting the essences from which the perception of these competencies was derived. Therefore, the competencies discussed in this chapter are not just mere reflections of participants' first-hand encounters, but they also offer nuanced insights shaped by the participants' experiences, daily engagements with the multifaceted responsibilities of school leadership, practising it every day, knowing the indicators of success in the role, and the pitfalls and struggles associated with the post.

6.2.1 Understanding Policy Issues that Govern Education

There was a common view among the research participants that understanding policy and legal issues in education management and school leadership was a pivotal competency required by any school head in Zimbabwe. Reflecting on some of the challenges that they had encountered in their leadership lifetime, most heads indicated that a lack of understanding of policy issues in education had put many heads into trouble with parents, education authorities and other interested parties:

> *The issue of policy is key, and I mean understanding education policies, interpreting them, and applying them. I feel we need training or a manual that the ministry can develop, which every headmaster must have in their office; that tells us that this is what the ministry expects on discipline. These are the laws that have been amended, and these are the implications for you. And it guides us on financial management to say the policy, the procedure says you do ABC. In teacher management, you discipline this way, when engaging partners, this is the procedure and so on. I say so because I have seen many heads being charged and told they breached policy, but which policy? Remember, I shared with you earlier about how I mobilised resources for a new classroom block, but we took ages to build it because someone in some office said the policy was not followed*.

Commenting on the same matter, another head shared the same sentiments. They underscored that the education policy environment in Zimbabwe was changing, and new laws, innovations, practices and ways of doing things were emerging. Yet as heads, they had been left in the dark with no clear guidance on policy direction:

> *Our policymakers have let us down; in my view, it seems they do not realise that policies are dynamic because they operate in a changing environment. Yet there is a gap between us as the policy implementers and those who make the policies. For me, the gap is actually in two ways: one, they take time to change policies to meet the changes happening, and two, when they make these changes, many times, they do not communicate. You will only know when you have faltered; that's when you will know that there is a policy on this issue.*

In engaging with the heads, I noted that this sentiment was shared across all the research participants. The crux of their responses was that the government did not clearly communicate key policy changes to school heads, and in most cases, the heads were only made aware of such changes when a challenge arose. The heads shared that from their experiences, most had gotten into trouble unknowingly because top-level communication in policy change and implementation was ineffective. In Chapter 5 (Consult Section 5.9.5), I offered insights into some experiences the research participants shared on this topic, highlighting it as a key challenge that they flagged because it stalled their performance. As such, it is not surprising that they also identified this challenge as a key competency that any head in the country required:

> *Then I think the other important competency for me is comprehension of education policy issues, especially legal perspectives that govern education. I do not think it's covered much in preparing new heads or even us already on the job. To complement what we learn at B Ed, MEd, and so forth, the government should have training for us on legal issues in education…as a seasoned head, it's your role to guide the teacher. But like I am saying, most of the heads will also be clueless on policy matters.*

Echoing the same sentiment, another head emphasised the need for one to keep abreast of *laws and procedures governing* their work. In their view, this was a pivotal competency as it informed everything that the school head did. They argued that school headship was a sensitive field with much vested interest from different parties such as parents, government and political players. As such, incumbents needed a good grounding and comprehension of the legal and policy framework that guides their work.

Another participant emphasised the importance of understanding the policies that governed school leadership, particularly within the Zimbabwean context. They argued that this understanding

resulted from a combination of one's practical experiences in the role of a school head and one's understanding of policy directives outlined in educational regulations. While acknowledging the significance of comprehending education policy and its regulatory frameworks for any school leader, they also emphasised the crucial role of on-the-job experiences in interpreting and implementing these policies. According to them, effective day-to-day leadership involved a balance between adhering to policies and regulations and relying on personal judgment, which was often informed by past on-the-job experiences:

> *But overall, I would say in terms of day-to-day leadership practice in my schools, I have largely relied on my own judgement, but you know, there are regulations that you obviously follow. So, I can say it's a combination of understanding policy and these regulations and your personal judgment as well. And the judgement is largely based on past experiences, I mean on-the-job experiences. So, once you become seasoned, you must know what the policy says and what the regulations say, but you look at a situation and say, I have dealt with this situation before; the policy says you must do 123, but I will handle it this way. So, policies guide us in making decisions, but the decisions can be premised more on experience than the policy itself.*

From the foregoing responses it can be noted that the research participants saw a key relationship between leadership experience and how one interprets or applies education policies. It can also be inferred that school heads in Zimbabwe possessed a limited understanding of the policy landscape within which they operated. As highlighted by one of the participants quoted above, a notable deficiency existed in knowledge across diverse policy domains, such as discipline, legal frameworks, financial management and stakeholder engagement. This presented a significant challenge as it inhibited school heads' ability to lead their schools effectively and foster school improvement. It is thus befitting that they identified understanding policy issues in education leadership as a pivotal competency for Zimbabwean heads because their experiences as shared in the above extracts had shown them how important policy appreciation in school leadership practice in Zimbabwe was.

6.2.2 Establishing Systems and Standards within One's School

Another key competency that was drawn from the research participants was the ability of the school leaders to establish functional systems and standards within their schools. The participants coalesced around the idea that an effective head should be able to establish systems and standards that can exist or survive beyond their tenure at a particular school. In their view, it was the mark

of great leadership for one to be able to establish a system where various approaches, responses and strategies are synthesised into one whole system that increases the efficacy of the school. Specifically, the participants highlighted establishing functional systems and standards for the school as a crucial competency for every school head. According to their perspective, the ability to establish systems involved the school head's capacity to integrate numerous components into a cohesive system approach. This comprehensive system should effectively guide the school community in dealing with various aspects, such as learner behaviour, teacher management and disciplinary issues, among others. In essence, the participants emphasised the importance of a school head's skill in creating a well-organised and integrated framework to address all matters related to the school. Such a framework was envisioned to be unique to the specific school context, forming an integral part of the school's overall system. One participant averred the following:

> *I feel an effective school environment is one that has systems. So, a good school head should establish systems that guide procedures and standards in their school and can be followed even if I am not there. So, even if you are not there, the deputy head should be able to run the school because you would have already set the structure. This is great leadership that is centred on systems and not on individuals…in your school, if you don't have systems, then your school cannot be effective. So, whatever you do, whether it's sports, student assessment, teacher in-service training and so forth, there has to be a system that guides your school because if you don't have systems to guide the school standards, then you are brewing chaos. Look at billionaires, they have built strong businesses but maybe they have never set foot on some of their business (premises) but the business still pays them. It's because they set a system that functions even if they are not there.*

Echoing the same sentiment, another head noted that the *head's ability to set a functional system for the school is a pivotal competency because it brings order to the school*. This sentiment was common among the research participants. As they shared it, they reflected that in their life encounters they had grown to learn that the school head was the source of stability for any school; hence, the whole school community looked up to them for guidance. As such, one had to have a system in place that allowed one to bring order to the school, maintain standards, and have a somewhat uniform approach to matters. Building on this sentiment, one head said:

> *Running the school as an organisation is another key competency for me. I think this is very key to say how you organise your school because setting up systems within the school is very key. You have to have systems to say if this happens, how will we deal with it, not to deal with issues from a pragmatic kind of approach. You need to deal with issues from a system perspective to say, OK, if this happens, we deal with it this way. Yes, you can be pragmatic in one way or another, but a good school head should have a system that is in place. For example, if it's disciplinary cases for learners, you say OK, this offence, our*

> *system deals with it this way. This matter in our system we deal with it this way, this one we refer to counselling and so on. But it's all part of setting up a system. My experiences over these years have shown me that it's a key competency that anyone requires to run an effective school.*

Another participant equated the school system to a train that has many parts but is guided by the driver, who in this case is the school head. They argued that the school head should be like the driver of the train that guides all the many parts into one direction and on one track, with the ability to do so being a critical competency that every head should possess:

> *Schools by their nature have many numerous moving pieces that require the head to step in and make sure that these pieces are moving together. It's like a train, it has many pieces, but they follow the head and as the headmaster, you are that head that gives direction. So, no matter how many pieces you have in your system, no matter how many things are happening in your school, effective leadership that we are discussing should be able to control and bring together all those pieces, and for me that is a pivotal competency that every head must have otherwise schools will be a circus.*

The primary sentiment expressed in my discussion with school leaders on this issue is that they perceived the absence of organised systems in a school as an indication of failure, negatively impacting the school's effectiveness. According to their perspective, a capable school leader should possess the ability to evaluate the school, identify its needs and goals, and subsequently create a comprehensive system that provides cohesion. This, in turn, enables the entire school to operate as a unified entity with interconnected and interdependent components. Additionally, they emphasised that their experiences had revealed instances where a lack of this crucial competency in leadership could lead to a school descending into *utter chaos* as emerging issues would be dealt with in an unsystematic, ad-hoc and desultory manner. This underscores the essential role of systematic leadership in maintaining order and efficiency within the school environment. They also echoed that they had seen some of their peers failing as heads, and this normally manifested through *poor learning outcomes*, *a bad school reputation*, *reprimands by the DSI in district meetings*, and *negative feedback from the communities*. In their view, one of the key drivers behind such failures was the lack of a coherent school system in such schools. One head shared that they had had a chance to mentor a struggling novice head who had approached them for assistance as s/he was failing to cope with the demands of headship:

> *I remember one young head approached me and said I want to learn from you; you are highly regarded in the community and in the education circles…As I started working with him, trying to understand what his failures and challenges were, I realised that he simply*

had no systems at all. He was not even following basic systems laid out by the government, such as teacher login and out, teacher supervision etc.; I told him, young man, if you want to be successful, the first task I will give you is to go and develop a school system with your teachers and stakeholders. Sit down and say what is it that we want this school to achieve, what are the inputs that will help us to be there, how do we manage these inputs and processes, and who is responsible for what? I told him that if you achieve this, you are home and dry because you would have set up your school as a professional organisation and organisations run on systems. I told him that he was not a failure but that he had just failed to establish and set up a system that helps him to link the school's day-to-day activities to the school's vision and objective and the overall goal, which is good learning outcomes.

Based on these sentiments, it can be noted that in the research participants' views, the ability to establish functional systems and standards for the school was a pivotal competency for all school heads in Zimbabwe. This is because in their views, as highlighted above, a competent school head should be able to establish different systems that contribute to the efficacy of the school. Such systems could be related to teaching and learning, school administration and or stakeholder engagement, among others. The participants underscored the fact that good leadership entailed one's ability to be able to integrate the many interactions and sub-systems in their school into a one cohesive whole that functioned for the betterment of the school. As such, they deemed this ability as a critical competency as it helped in leading and managing their schools in a more systematic way, thereby contributing to better teacher management and improved learning outcomes.

6.2.3 Financial Management

In my discussions with the research participants, one recurring issue was the many challenges that heads faced as a result of limited knowledge of financial management. In Chapter 5 (Consult Section 5.9.6), I explored this issue, elaborating that all the research participants had singled it out as one of the biggest challenges that they had encountered and continued to face in their role. They shared that most of them had been charged or cautioned about financial or procurement-related matters. Some had even witnessed colleagues being dismissed because of financial issues, although they often believed that the mistakes stemmed from a lack of knowledge in financial management rather than intentional financial misconduct. Given that the lack of financial management knowledge was flagged as a key challenge by the heads, it is not, therefore, surprising

that they identified functional proficiency in financial management, procurement and accounting as a pivotal competency that any Zimbabwean school head should possess.

In their experiential narratives, the school heads shared the many incidents that they had personally encountered and how they struggled to fulfil the role of financial management. Hence, their commonly held view that functional proficiency in financial management, procurement regulations and general accounting was an inevitable competency for any Zimbabwean school head who sought to execute their roles efficiently and successfully. Sharing this sentiment, one participant said the following:

> *We are just called financial managers, but we don't have the skill of financial management. But that one is a requirement, especially for headship, because when something goes wrong, you will be held accountable for misappropriating school funds because you don't know how to manage, how to allocate the school funds according to their votes and things like that. So, you need to have that know-how, the financial literacy; otherwise, you sink.*

Commenting on the need for all heads to possess *financial literacy* as a key competency, one head echoed the same sentiments as those highlighted above:

> *This has become a continuous need, in fact it's a permanent need in the leadership journey – financial literacy, there is a really huge gap. We need to be eligible financial managers. It's a challenge for me. I have been trained, but I think I need more training, especially with all this exchange rate chaos; heads will be caught offside, I tell you. So, we need continuous capacity development in this area; they should actually offer refresher training because I would say this is one of the most important competencies in my view because parents have entrusted us with their money. They expect us to deliver and offer the best service for their kids, but all that is meaningless if you do not know how to manage the resources. Corruption can happen under your nose, and you will be thinking everything is normal.*

Another participant emphasised the need for heads to be trained in financial management but brought in a different dimension. They argued that the knowledge that the school head must have in financial management should not just be about income and expenditure statements. Rather, incumbent heads should show competency in other aspects, such as financial planning and budgeting, procurement, income generation and projection of school income and expenses over time:

> *Then financial management is a key competency because, you know, we handle lots of money and at times from different sources, parents pay school fees, we can get money from partners at times, like the school improvement grants from UNICEF that we got in the past. I have also received support from World Vision (an international NGO). They put up that*

block there that you saw as you were coming in…we had to open a separate account for their money to manage that project. So you see, as a head, the competency is not just, to say, financial management, no. There is more that comes with that aspect of our job. You have to know how to budget; you have to be a financial planner, and you even have to know how to make projections. For example, our school improvement plans can have a 5-year lifespan, so if you do not know how to project, like in this inflation-ridden context of ours, how will you survive?

What is clear from all these school heads' experiences is that school heads viewed the possession of functional knowledge on financial management and related aspects, such as procurement, as a pivotal competency. As such, it can be concluded that the identification of this competency by school leaders resonates with some of the life challenges that they narrated and are discussed in Chapter 5 (Consult 5.9.6). Furthermore, it is reflective of their operational terrain in which they handled large sums of money due to the country's education financing regime, where school operations were financed by user fees that were paid directly to the school and utilised at school level. This is against a backdrop where many heads, by their own admission, had limited knowledge of financial management; yet they were expected to excel in this particular function and in their leadership role in general.

6.2.4 Familiarity with Positive Disciplinary Procedures

The research participants collectively perceived familiarity with discipline and the ability to enforce discipline as a crucial competency for effective leadership in schools. In their viewpoint, school leaders were responsible for maintaining discipline among both learners and teachers. They were expected to possess the expertise to establish and uphold discipline, as well as address the potential risks that could lead to instances of indiscipline within the school environment.

The research participants linked this challenge to a constantly changing policy environment. They observed that the adoption of the Amended Education Act of 2020 brought about significant changes in issues related to learner discipline in Zimbabwe. For instance, longstanding practices such as corporal punishment, traditionally used for discipline in Zimbabwean schools, were now prohibited. Similarly, the expulsion of pregnant girls from school, once considered a disciplinary measure to discourage others from becoming pregnant while in school, was also now prohibited and deemed illegal. The school heads expressed frustration at these changes, highlighting that their schools were experiencing *chaos* as they grappled with adapting to positive discipline methods.

One participant shared their concerns about the impact of these changes on school standards, expressing dissatisfaction with the perceived deterioration:

> *One issue that I feel has not been given as much attention is the whole issue around discipline, and for me, I look at it from both ways: teacher and student discipline. But you see, the serious one is learner discipline, we need training in this area, a serious one. The Ministry says we now apply what is called positive discipline, where learners cannot be beaten or chased away from school. But I am old school. I disagree with that; it does not work here in Zimbabwe and maybe in Africa as well. We even discussed this with the DSI in one of our District meetings… talk to any head, and they will tell you they are struggling with discipline issues because learners are becoming ungovernable by day and very disrespectful.*

Another participant shared the same sentiment on discipline, sharing a personal incident in which they caned a learner who reported them to the police, and they had to deal with the matter as a criminal charge:

> *I think we need training as heads on how to institute discipline in our schools in line with the new constitution and the new age that we are living in. You see, most of us were trained in a system that used and believed in corporal punishment as the main enforcer of discipline in the school and now we are in this new age where we are told no, find other ways to maintain order in your school, to foster discipline in you learners you don't beat them, talk to them. I remember last year I had an incident; I canned a student for bullying; they reported me to the police, and the police came here and said they would make it a criminal offence, but the officers themselves told me they were just doing their job otherwise they said they do not believe in it. Of course, the charges were dropped after we engaged the parents, who were actually more disappointed in their child and not me. The father even said you should have beaten him more.*

Another head also lamented the issue of a lack of discipline in schools, citing that Zimbabwean and African schools were designed to inculcate the values of *Unhu/Ubuntu* in learners, and one way that they ensured these values were maintained was through instigation of corporal punishment in learners. In their view, they were afraid that schools would churn out criminals with no discipline due to the new disciplinary procedures that the government had instituted:

> *We need to inculcate the philosophy of Ubuntu because we don't want people who are social misfits, to produce people who will not fit into the society. You know, I've always doubted this policy of banning corporal punishment, I understand it has been outlawed. But you know, as long as there is no discipline in schools, we have a serious problem in that aspect. We will not be able to incorporate the Ubuntu/Unhu philosophy. And I think, as schools, we have a role to play. You remember, in teacher training, we spoke about whole-person development, and I think Ubuntu is part of that under the affective domain. But if my learners are ill-disciplined and all, how will I inculcate these values? I would*

> *consider myself unsuccessful if criminals and misfits were to come out of my school, no, no.*

Against the given backdrop, the research participants identified familiarity with positive learner discipline as a critical competency because they view the head as the *chief disciplinarian* in the school. As such, if the head was not in control of discipline or did not fully comprehend the new disciplinary strategies, it presented a key challenge. Another head shared that they actually supported positive discipline, but they just did not know how to institute it effectively:

> *We are not saying we want kids to be beaten, no, we actually want to understand how the new form of discipline works, I personally want to see how it works because I have tried all the methods that have been provided but you realise good behaviour is deteriorating since the law was passed.*

Quite telling in the above extract are the school heads' actual thoughts on the matter. While they did not necessarily oppose the outlawing of corporal punishment, it seemed they lacked sufficient understanding of how effectively to implement positive discipline to achieve the desired outcomes.

The key issue to note, as emanating from these responses is that Zimbabwean school heads identified familiarity with positive disciplinary procedures as a must-have competency, particularly because of the changes in policy that had taken place during their time in headship. Their perceptions reflected frustrations regarding the new disciplinary approach that the government had enforced through the amended Education Act. They felt that they were disempowered to discipline learners, and they did not have the know-how to institute discipline through the new way that the government was recommending. Whereas for years they had been used to instituting corporal punishment as a way of disciplining learners, deterring errant and delinquent behaviours and maintaining order in their schools, they now found themselves in a situation where they had to use other disciplinary strategies that they had not used or rarely used in the past. As such, in their view, their schools were slowly becoming *chaotic,* and they now felt as if they were not in control; hence their perception that the ability to apply discipline in line with the new provisions that outlawed corporal punishment should be a key competency for a modern-day Zimbabwean school head.

6.2.5 Teamwork and Team Coordination

A recurring theme in my engagement with the research participants was their commonly shared perception that one of the most important roles for the school head was team leadership; hence they viewed adeptness in teamwork and team coordination as one of the pivotal competencies required for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe. According to their perspective, the key to achieving the school's objectives while fostering a secure, inclusive learning atmosphere that is conducive to high learning outcomes lay in having a well-coordinated team. In their view, the primary purpose of schools was to promote instruction and learning and foster learner achievement; achieving this was, however, a product of many players and many pieces that had to be brought together. It is in this vein that they concurred that the school head was the team coordinator and the fulcrum upon which all the teamwork in the school was rooted.

In my interactions with the research participants, they shared different experiential narratives that made them realise the importance of teamwork in headship. Some reflected that school headship was a learning journey, and one of the key lessons that they had picked in this journey was that for one to be effective and achieve their goals and the school vision, they had to organise the different stakeholders in their schools into a team. Most importantly, they pointed out that school headship had taught them that every team member was important and that, as a leader, one should never underestimate anyone within the school environment:

> *Another competency that is key for school improvement, I've mentioned before, it is the ability for you to coordinate as a leader, to work with your staff as a team because school improvement comes from teamwork, effective leadership is a product of teamwork. You cannot achieve success as a head, whether it's in results, whether in sports performance, whether in enrolment. Basically, in anything that you can think of in education, you cannot achieve it as an individual. Your role as a school leader is to coordinate and make sure you have the right people in each position. Leverage the power of your team members and make things happen. So, you need that ability to be able to coordinate, and if you don't have that ability, then there is no effective leadership to talk about. So, team coordination as a competency becomes key.*

One issue that participants were clear about and shared the same sentiment on, is that they viewed effective leadership as being associated with learner achievement, specifically with good examination results. In the previous chapter, I elaborated on this matter, highlighting that the participants held a joint perception that schools were established for learners to pass; thus, they viewed learner achievement as the core business of any school (Consult 5.5). As such, they

regarded teamwork and the head's ability to lead a team as being critical to achieving these positive and high learning outcomes:

> *Closely linked to the issue of good pass rates is the ability of the head to lead a team. I think a successful school leader is one who is able to facilitate good teamwork and collaboration because good results and pass rates cannot be achieved if the school does not operate as a whole. Good results require good teams. So, if you do not have this skill, then you are bound to fail. You can't run a school on a laissez-faire basis with no coordination – one is going in that direct, another one in that direction and so forth.*

Another participant said that in their career, they had seen some heads who were selfish to the extent that they wanted to run the whole school on their own. They said such heads could not delegate roles because they did not understand that *the concept behind school leadership is team leadership*. They argued that such heads tended to struggle in their role because they did not have a proper support structure:

> *I have seen many heads struggling in this role, but when I looked deeper, I realised that they were very selfish. They think that for a leader to shine, they have to go it alone. Yet it's the opposite, you have to work with a team. In my case, I'm not ashamed to say that I feel I'm a team leader. Because I do staff meetings with my teams every week, we touch base on any issues. I delegate. I don't do everything by myself. I say OK, this is for the Senior Woman to deal with and report to the team, this is for the Deputy Head, this is for teacher so and so. Even the learners, we give them tasks here. So, I'm a team player, I delegate and in so doing I just don't allocate roles. My experiences have taught me to appreciate people's strengths and weaknesses. So, when I delegate, these are the things that I look at. And for me, that's leadership. That ability to look at your team and delegate roles and tasks based on their strengths. That way, you are building on the strength of your team members for the success of your school.*

Sharing a similar experience in which they had witnessed failure as a result of lack of teamwork, another head submitted the following:

> *I can safely say I am a good example of how lack of teamwork can affect one's performance as a head. I remember in my early years of appointment; I used not to consult any one in my school. I would just delegate because I saw myself as the alpha and omega of all the school's business. I wanted to be everywhere from the school garden to district meetings to sports. But one day I realised that my school was poorly ranked, and people were talking of me as a bad self-centred leader. I was stressing myself out and all, and I did realise that I had a whole team at my disposal, you know, capable men and women that could help me to run the school…yet I had overlooked them. So, you can't tell me about the importance of a team now, I know it because I lived it and I saw what not having one can do to a school*

The participants emphasised the importance of teamwork because their life experiences had shown them that one was bound to succeed and achieve more in their headship role if they worked with

a team than if they were working alone. They regarded the ability to promote teamwork and coordination as an essential competency that allowed school leaders to navigate the complex terrain of headship, promote collaboration within the school environment, capitalise on the diverse strengths and capabilities of team members, and promote a positive school culture, with all these variables aimed at ensuring the overall success and well-being of learners who in their view were the *chief clients* of any school.

6.2.6 Stakeholder Management and Engagement

The Zimbabwean education landscape has many interested stakeholders due to the many people involved in the running of the school. While the school head remains the key coordinating point in all the school affairs, the research participants pointed out that their success in doing so was largely dependent on how they engaged with the other stakeholders who had a vested interest in the school. The participants underscored the fact that their experiences in the school headship role had made them realise that beyond the learners, there was no stakeholder who was more important than the other; rather, they were equally important as they contributed to the well-being of the school and the success of the learner in different ways.

Commenting on the role of stakeholders in the success of the learners, the heads shared that stakeholder and people management was a key attribute in school headship because it was linked to learner success. They mentioned that as a school head, one's role was to maintain cordiality with and between the different players in the school with the ultimate aim of ensuring that the established and existing relations within and outside the school all contributed to learner success. As one head noted:

> *A school head has to be very good in people management, the Ministry loves to call it stakeholder management, but I call it people management. And you know, from my experiences, I have noted that in this job, I interact with people at any point; it's a relational management job because the interaction is every hour, I mean every minute. Learners are the most important for me, then parents are critical stakeholders too, so are teachers, community stakeholders, other school heads, community leadership and politicians…. You know, parents come with school fees issues, and you have to address them. You also have to deal with conflict among teachers and so forth. When I was heading in the rural schools, community leaders were a key stakeholder in the school. You know, the headman, the Chief, they were a powerful stakeholder because those ones can even say we do not want teacher X in our community, and the Ministry listens to them. So, you have all these stakeholders coming in with many demands and needs, but at the same time, you*

> *want to achieve a clear vision. As a head, you want children to learn, you want results at your school, you want a very good pass rate. That's your core aim, at least for me, but you won't achieve that when you cannot manage people, the stakeholders. So, people management is very key for me because I feel it is the centre of heading a school.*

The above excerpt underscores the importance that the heads placed on stakeholder management as a key ingredient to the success of their learners. As highlighted earlier, there was a resounding consensus across my research participants that learner achievement was at the core of their leadership role. As one head said, *… this means that everything that I do, I have to say, how does it benefit my students, even if a stakeholder comes in with an issue, my first question is, how does this benefit my student, then I take it from there*. As such, the participants shared that they saw their role in this attribute being linked more to sustaining relations and cultivating relations that contributed to the betterment of their schools and ultimately improved learning outcomes. They viewed the role of stakeholder and people management as a public relations job where the school leader's role evolved into that of a public relations manager:

> *A head is a public relations officer. You must be huge in public relations because the school has its own communities, stakeholders and interested parties, many of them. So, you must be very, very good at liaising with these many communities or circles of people that you have to deal with on a daily basis. You become the PR (public relations) face for your school and for the Ministry as well. It's not an easy task.*

From the above sentiment it can be inferred that the heads, therefore, regarded their role as involving maintaining relations not just for their respective schools but also for the Ministry of Education. In their view, they were the face of the Ministry even at the community level; hence, when they engaged with any stakeholder, they were doing so in a dual-pronged role: one for their school and the other for their Ministry.

The school heads also noted that stakeholder management and engagement was crucial for school improvement. Because in their view, an effective school head should be able to empower their stakeholders to utilise their distinct influence to contribute to the improvement of the school. I noted that as they were sharing their life journeys and sentiments regarding this attribute, they underscored the importance that different stakeholders could play in assisting the school and the school head to succeed in whatever projects or endeavours that the school would be pursuing. Sharing their experiences on how different stakeholders had helped them to improve their school, one participant highlighted the following:

I think communication skills and engagement with stakeholders is a very important competency for any school head because as a head you have to have communication skills and the ability to mobilize stakeholders around you. Engaging with people like the community leaders, the business community, and the Chief that's how I've managed to improve this school, especially when I wanted to have electricity and when I wanted to construct our ECD (Early Childhood Development) block. It was through my interaction with the Chief, Village Headsmen, the MP, the Councillor and the parents. We engaged them and allowed them to allocate roles among themselves, they formed a committee and here we are, we have electricity and my ECD centre was finished. So, those people are very important and pivotal in the school's functioning; they will help you improve the school. I'm talking of groups that could be useful in terms of helping to uplift the standards of the school so that your school can improve…as a leader, you need to establish networks along that line… it will help you, and it is pivotal to the development of the school and school improvement. So, without the ability to network, communicate and bring your stakeholders together, there cannot be school improvement.

In summary it can be argued that Zimbabwean school heads viewed people management and stakeholder engagement as essential competencies for any school leader as they contributed to greater collaboration among the school's stakeholders, thereby creating a school environment that was inclusive and where everyone involved was motivated and committed to the shared vision of the school.

6.2.7 Teacher Supervision

The school heads emphasised the importance of teacher supervision as a key role that the head played to ensure that teaching and learning took place in a learner-centred approach. They also underscored that this was one of the most crucial roles that they played as heads because it was directly linked to the core business of schools, which was the facilitation of learning. They all concurred that in their headship journey they had witnessed improved learner performance and continuous improvement in the schools' outlook as a result of teacher supervision. Another key issue that they raised was that effective teacher supervision should be carried out with positive and good intentions and should not be a fault-finding mission. In their view, teacher supervision should be linked to quality assurance and improved learning outcomes and should help both the teacher and the school head identify instruction-related challenges and work together in addressing such challenges. In this way, teacher supervision became intertwined with the continuous professional development of teachers and created a collaborative environment where both were working

together towards improved learning outcomes. Reflecting on the importance of supervision, one head shared the following thoughts in their participant diary:

> *One aspect that I have found enriching about my job is teacher support and supervision. I see myself as a mentor, especially when I am dealing with newly qualified teachers and student teachers (trainee teachers) …I have learnt that if feedback is provided in a positive and healthy way, it will always be well-received. After learning on the importance of teacher supervision in one of my Master's courses, I have made it a priority in my work.*

Building on the same sentiment, another head emphasised that they needed training and refresher courses on teacher supervision as they had observed that many heads tended to confuse teacher supervision and lesson observation:

> *When we speak of teacher supervision, we are talking of an ongoing process not a once off event. I think on this one the Ministry ought to train most of my peers because I have observed people doing it (supervision) wrongly. You ask someone about teacher supervision – their answer is on lesson observation… they will tell you aaah, I observe my teachers' lessons regularly and they will even tell you that this term I did 50 lesson observations. But that is not teacher supervision, in fact, lesson observation is one of the many things that take place under teacher supervision. And what is also important is for us to understand that when you are supervising your teachers you are doing so to mould them and for them to help you achieve your targets as a head.*

Highlighting the link between teacher supervision and learner performance, one participant said the following:

> *Teacher supervision is probably the most important competency in our work. I am expected to supervise my teachers and see if they are teaching well. Are they applying student-centred pedagogy? For me, I actually sit with my teachers to review their work, look at learner performance and ask them about areas where they need help to improve their teaching for better results because I want results; without results, I feel like I am a failure. So, it's an art, I must say, where you are not just supervising to fulfil and meet the Ministry's demands. You should be supervising in order to get results, learner results. If you realise teacher A is lagging behind, your supervision role is to support him or her so that they produce better results next time.*

The gist of these sentiments is that the research participant responses underscored the idea that teacher supervision should be done in a positive way and should be looked at as a team effort where the head and teachers worked together, with the ultimate aim being improved learning outcomes. They regarded teacher supervision as a support and a professional development role as opposed to a monitoring role where the focus should not be faulting the teacher. In their view, any head who applied teacher supervision in this way (fault finding) was an ineffective head and was

bound to fail. As one head noted, *Teachers can be very resistant, especially if they realise that you are not on their side, that you are always blaming them for poor students' performance*.

While the research participants elaborated on the importance of supervision in school headship, they also made constant reference to the new curriculum and how teacher supervision had become more necessary for the country's new curriculum.

Commenting on this issue, one school head shared the following:

> *What I have seen is that under the new curriculum our supervision role of teachers has actually increased. The curriculum has brought with it many changes to the way teachers teach. Now, we focus on competencies. But I think our examinations are still content-driven; maybe they will address that, especially with the continuous assessment framework, but all the same, I see us doing more supervision because we have to check if teachers are also focusing on competencies, we have to check if the teaching is child centred. There is also an emphasis on the professional development of teachers, so I need to know how my teachers are developing themselves to address the needs of the new curriculum.*

Although the school heads acknowledged the importance of teacher supervision, as detailed above, they also expressed concern over a lack of sufficient skills and knowledge regarding the competency-based curriculum approach. They noted that this challenge existed both among themselves and their peers and was, in their view, a hindrance to fulfilling the supervisory role effectively within the parameters of the new curriculum framework. Commenting on this point, one participant said:

> *Supervision is obviously a pivotal competency, especially under the updated curriculum, but the question is, do we all have the skills to supervise it effectively and achieve what it requires? My answer is a big No*.

Such sentiments and the need for further training to upskill supervisory abilities under the new curriculum were a recurring matter across all the research participants. As highlighted earlier, the school heads underscored the fact that the implementation of the new curriculum had brought many changes that called for teachers to change the way they taught, while the heads now had more responsibilities in supporting teachers. Resultantly, the role of school heads had gained increased significance in ensuring adherence to this new approach. The crux of their reflections centred on the point that, for decades, teachers had got accustomed to teaching for examinations, whereas the new curriculum insisted on the competency and skills of the learners. As such, under the new curriculum, school heads saw their role inter-linking with both the supervisory function

as well as the support and mentorship function, where they were not just supervising the teachers, but also mentoring and advising them on providing effective teaching and learning within the dictates of the new curriculum framework. It is against this backdrop that teacher supervision and support emerged as pivotal competence that the school heads identified as being key to their practice.

6.2.8 Leadership for Learning

Another competency that the school heads concurred on as being pivotal in school leadership in Zimbabwe was *leadership for learning*. This competency was mainly attributed to their increased role in supporting learning under the new curriculum. The concept of *leadership for learning* is closely linked to instructional leadership, and in most cases, the two terms have been used interchangeably. The school heads shared that under the country's new curriculum, they were now expected to play a more active role in supporting actual teaching and learning in their schools. They pointed out that schools were established to facilitate teaching and learning; thus, it was inevitable for any school head not to have competencies that addressed supporting, guiding and leading teaching and learning.

One participant argued that the world was going through a learning crisis where learners attended school, but they were not learning, and they regarded school heads as having an active role in averting learning crises in their schools. They pointed out the following:

> *In my readings about the SDGs and education globally, I came across the term 'learning crisis', and it ignited an interest in me. Basically, the concept argues that the world, especially us in Africa, we are going through a learning crisis where kids are coming to school every day, but they are not learning and you know, for us here in Zimbabwe, we see low pass rates at O-level, and people make noise but it's because kids are in school but they are not learning, and the results of this will only manifest after 15 years in the school system at O-level…I think our government was clever to say that as heads, our role now involves supporting learning under the new curriculum, this means that I have to ensure that my students are learning. Now I have a bigger role of ensuring that I create an environment that allows this learning to take place so that my school does not descend into a learning crisis.*

Another participant echoed that the role of school heads had rapidly changed over the previous decade in Zimbabwe, and the new curriculum further compounded this change as it called for school heads to be more involved in the teaching and learning process. They noted that previously,

the heads were mainly administrators, and their focus was on ensuring that the school regulations were adhered to and that teachers were teaching but without necessarily focusing on how they were teaching or the effectiveness of their teaching:

> *There is a huge shift, a paradigm shift in the way we are heading schools now when you compare it to the past. In the past, we were more like gatekeepers. Just administering the school and making sure everything is in order. The focus was more on following the laid-out procedures. Even in teaching, teachers adhered so much to the syllabus; there was limited creativity, and the focus was on making sure students passed, so it was more like teaching for cramming. But now, with the concept of instructional leadership, we have to be involved in teaching and learning. Not to say we teach ourselves, no, but to support it in any way possible, including planning the curriculum and reviewing the teaching and pedagogical content with our teachers, making sure teachers are being innovative in their teaching.*

Echoing the same sentiments, another participant added the following:

> *I think the new curriculum if properly adhered to, can be a game changer for our education system. For us as heads, it is pushing for more of our involvement in children's learning. They are saying an effective head also has to be at the centre of the learning that takes place in their school. My role is to now focus more on making sure there is learning, that is, whether my students are acquiring new knowledge, how we can test their competencies, and so forth. And we discuss these things with teachers because they are the facilitators of the learning. For me, my role is then to support my teachers to make sure that they are able to facilitate that learning in an environment that is conducive. But of course, we have the issue of resources that constrain us in creating this environment, so at times you speak to us like this, you realise we have the ideas we know what needs to be done, but without the necessary resources, then this whole thing might be a waste of good ideas, especially for us in the public schools.*

This point of view acknowledges the strengths of leading for learning but also quickly cautions about the need to support schools with the relevant resources to ensure that the heads were able to support learning processes effectively. It was also a recurring sentiment among the participants that while the new curriculum was good in fostering learning and apportioning bigger instructional-related tasks to heads, it was bound to face challenges if the country's education system remained resource-constrained as it was at the time of the study. In Chapter 5, I discussed the issue of resourcing and financing, highlighting how this was a challenge for most public school heads in Zimbabwe (Consult 5.9.3 & 5.9.4). In summary, it can be concluded that the research participants identified leading learning as a crucial competence. They were aware of their increased roles and responsibilities in leading learning due to the changes brought about by the

new curriculum. Additionally, they recognized the significant role that education financing played in achieving effective leading for learning in Zimbabwean schools.

6.2.9 Vision Setting and Attainment

The school heads echoed that effective school leadership involved setting a vision and attaining that vision, acknowledging that their role involved not only developing a shared vision with stakeholder buy-in but also mobilising these stakeholders to work collaboratively towards achieving that vision. The participants also emphasised that their own experiences, both as school leaders and as teachers had provided them with first-hand insight into the impact of school heads on schools' successes or failures. They noted that over the years, they had observed experiences and instances where school leaders who lacked a clear vision had led their schools into failure while those leaders who collaborated with their teams to achieve the school's vision had attained notable progress. These experiences provided them with leadership lessons that they indicated they were applying in their headship journey. As one head noted:

> *As they say in Shona, kugara nhaka huwona dzevamwe (to succeed or to leave a legacy you must learn from others). I have always argued that at times we seek all these structured training, university post-graduate qualifications, a certificate in this and that, but I feel the biggest source of learning could be from our peers, exchanging knowledge among ourselves. I think I have learnt a lot from others, from my fellow heads, from the headmasters that I deputised and even those that I served under as a teacher. One of the most important lessons that I have learnt in all this is that school heads can make or break a school. I have worked with and under many heads for me to learn this. But what I can tell you is that the key lesson for me is that the success of any school starts with a vision, and as heads, we are the custodians of that vision.*

Another head shared the same sentiment, equating the school head to an engine that drives the vision and determines the pace at which this vision will be attained:

> *I always say that once a vision for the school is set and agreed upon, the first and most important thing is to ensure that you have total buy-in as a head from your teachers, your students, and all stakeholders. After that, the head becomes the engine that drives all these people towards that vision. And as the engine, you determine the speed at which you will drive towards that vision. Maybe I can say we are both the engine and the driver at the same time because we drive all people towards our vision, but we are also the nucleus, the engine that drives the whole process.*

This sentiment shows that Zimbabwean school heads appreciated the important role that school leaders played in the attainment of the school vision. Their sentiments revealed that they had

encountered life experiences in school headship or in their career journeys that had made them realise the importance of vision setting as a school head and, most importantly, of driving one's school and its stakeholders towards that vision.

One participant expressed the belief that the crucial stage in the role of a school head was the initial phase of setting a vision. They contended that once a head had established a clear vision, it served as a guiding force for the entire school. Drawing from their experience in leadership, they emphasised that having a well-defined vision, coupled with widespread stakeholder support, galvanised various elements within the school to work collaboratively towards achieving that vision. This unified sense of direction not only clarified the school's trajectory but also instilled a collective responsibility among individuals to actively contribute to the shared vision as part of a team effort:

> *I have been a headmaster for years, and I can tell you, young man, without hesitation, that the most successful heads that I have seen in my life operated on the premise of a school vision, and by vision, I mean a vision with everyone's buy-in. I remember when I was still deputy, and in our District, there was this headmistress that I admired so much; her school was structured, the grounds were well-manicured, you know, the students were just super smart. Everything about her school was just perfect. I asked her once, "How are you doing all this? Where are some of us failing"? Because even with her examination results, she was always the best in the district. … But in short, I realised that her school had a collective vision, and everyone believed in that vision, so once a vision is there and all your key stakeholders believe in it, you can even be on autopilot, but things will move because everyone knows their task. I guess we can say setting the vision is the most important stage because it will guide what everyone in your school will do.*

Building on the same sentiment, another participant said that in their experience they had seen that while the school head was the focal point in the attainment of the school vision, the attainment of such a vision required the school leader to employ other leadership strategies and skills for their team to work towards the attainment of the vision. They argued that vision attainment required other attributes, like distributed leadership, where the head distributed leadership tasks, roles and responsibilities across their team members. The key point from their contribution on this matter was that vision setting and attainment were a *product of team effort, and they require skilled effort by the head to organise everyone within the team to play their part in attaining that vision.*

As the above extracts show, the research participants all concurred that school heads had a pivotal role in setting a school's vision and attaining that vision. They noted that a head's role went beyond

just setting a vision but should focus on attaining that vision and rallying all stakeholders towards the vision. In their view, the head was the most strategically positioned person within the school to drive the vision as they occupied a vantage point that allowed them to interact with the many stakeholders that were involved in school affairs in Zimbabwe.

6.2.10 EdTech Literacy

Like in any other place in the world, the use of EdTech in Zimbabwean schools is increasing at a rapid pace, and this has placed new demands on both school leaders and teachers, with all the research participants noting that their schools were using EdTech in one way or the other. For example, some heads noted their schools were using low-cost initiatives like WhatsApp groups for teachers and learners and pre-recorded radio lessons, while those from better-resourced schools were using advanced hardware like interactive boards. The heads also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent school closures had rapidly increased the use of technology in their schools, but they also admitted that humungous gaps still existed in their knowledge on the use and manipulation of EdTech software and devices as well as in their use in their schools. Basically, they noted that the use of EdTech varied across school types, geographical locations and school income. As such, some of the research participants raised equity concerns around EdTech as they noted that its benefits were likely to be realised more in urban and well-resourced schools than in rural and poorly-resourced schools.

Expressing concern about how EdTech had outpaced most school heads in Zimbabwe, one research participant noted the following:

> *Another competency is Computer literacy. Information and technology are vital for the school and a competent school head would actually need to have computer literacy in this day. In fact, you should be ahead of your team so that they look up to you. You know most teachers are not computer literate, so a good school head should provide that leadership, and they should look up to me and not the other way around. But you know the biggest challenge is that most heads, including myself, we are totally lights out. And the challenge is that technology is moving way faster than us, and I don't think it will be easy to catch up. Just look at all the innovations that came with Covid-19… my worry is that most heads, and I think 99 percent of us, we have become bystanders in this technology revolution, we are lights out.*

Sharing the same sentiment, another participant also added that Zimbabwean school heads were lagging far behind relating to computers and EdTech. They noted that while COVID-19 introduced

new innovations in education delivery, they were already lagging before such changes were brought into the system; hence, COVID-19 had actually exacerbated their deficiencies in EdTech knowledge and its application:

> *I think the 3rd key challenge for me is ICT. This is a field that has evolved way ahead of us. You know some of us were BBC, born before computers. So, it's difficult to catch up with the digital age. So yes, you try to self-educate, but it's not an easy task. I think the Ministry should assist with a training program on basic ICT for school headmasters; this will bring us up to speed. I am however not sure if this will be an effective strategy because when COVID_19 came, we were already behind, behind even our learners, you see. I am not sure if it will be possible for our generation to be salvaged. But I still think that with where the world is going, the government needs to put ICT competency as a pre-requirement for any new head because how will we guide learning if we do not have the technical know-how our self? Remember, under the new curriculum, they now speak of integrating ICT into everyday teaching and how will the head support that or supervise that when they themselves need help.*

Another participant also echoed the same sentiment, noting that with the new curriculum that pushed for critical thinking and innovation among learners, teachers, and heads EdTech skills and competencies had become more necessary than ever. However, like their peers, they also expressed concern that public schools were not well-resourced to keep abreast of evolving and emerging technologies in education. Hence, at times, they observed that both heads and teachers were sometimes outsmarted by their learners because learners tended to have more exposure. This is because some families could afford to expose their children to various EdTech hardware and applications:

> *One key challenge that I face is that our teachers, even myself, are failing to innovate. I think education is developing at a much faster speed than we are professionally developing ourselves. Now we talk of computers, you know, and a lot is happening in that world, in the digital world. And our teachers here in public schools are left out because we cannot afford the basics. You will find that, like here, maybe we have six to eight students for one computer… when we trained, the teacher used to be the repository of knowledge. The students would call us the data man or the data woman because we had the knowledge that we would be passing to them, they called me data man in my days. But now it's a completely different story; the students are now the data, boys and girls. So, trying to locate the role of the teacher as a facilitator of teaching and learning in such an environment where you know your learners might even now be knowing more than you, it's a challenge. But I try to encourage my teachers; I always tell them to use Google, watch the news, and take short courses. Look at the curriculum, people cry and say the new curriculum is difficult, but I think the learners are coping very well. Actually, where I'm finding the challenge is actually with the teacher more than with the learners. I think it's because the learners have found*

their own way. Some come from well-up families, so they have that exposure that their struggling teachers don't have.

What is apparent is that Zimbabwean school heads appreciated the role that EdTech played in modern-day teaching and learning. They were also aware of its benefits and how it could aid teaching and learning for better learner results, as their experiences during and after the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed them to the many benefits of EdTech. However, their sentiments revealed a deep-seated concern that EdTech was evolving much faster for them than to be able to keep abreast of modern trends, and this was worsened by the fact that most of them possessed elementary knowledge and skills on EdTech interventions.

In acknowledging the role that EdTech could play in assisting them to run their schools more efficiently, one school head said the following:

The benefits are obviously immense ... you can have an ICT system at the school, like a database of all your learners and teachers, for easy management. That's a good thing that you may have at a school, you know. Even for resource management in terms of the assets of the school, how are they controlled, you can take inventory of the available resources and assets and move away from paper-based controls. You know, you may lose quite a number of resources at the school due to pilferage, but if you computerise, you get rid of some of these challenges. People tend to associate technology only with the teaching side, but even in management, it helps to give you systems. Look at the bursars. Now, they can track school levy payments easily using computers and Excel.

The same notion was shared by another school head who added that while they had capacity challenges in utilising and manipulating EdTech applications and gadgets, they appreciated technology's power in strengthening management and administration systems, thereby making their role as a school leader much easier:

I think as school heads, we have a lot of capacity needs. I was saying earlier to you, I am happy I feel I have most of the competencies that we are discussing, but if you remember, I did mention the issues of ICT. There I have a lot of needs that I see in myself, and I would be happy if I were to receive capacity building on that, particularly not just using computers but on being able to use computers for easy administration. If it means we develop a school-based application that just helps us to manage the school better, whether they are student registers, teacher daily log-ins and outs, whether they are school records or what, I feel ICT can provide solutions to all that. Even emails from all my teachers, those personalized emails we can have at the school level so that it's easy to communicate with my team. For me, all this is part of my long-term plan; if private schools have these things, why can't we? So, I do hope that I get capacity development in ICT issues because I have to implement all these ideas that I have and have also seen other heads doing.

The sentiments shared herein show that Zimbabwean school heads were aware of EdTech's many proven benefits and how it was reshaping both instruction and learning and education leadership and management. They acknowledged the importance of school heads having ICT skills and being digitally literate as the rapid expansion of ICT in education was necessitating the need for heads and teachers to be digitally competent to be more effective in the 21st century educational landscape.

6.2.11 Self-regulation and Accountability

In Chapter 5 (Consult Section 5.6), I discussed how the research participants shared a common view on how they viewed accountability and self-regulation as being at the centre of successful school leadership. It was the school heads' contention that *any head who cannot self-regulate and hold themselves to self-accountability* was not fit to serve in that position. In their view, self-accountability was the pith of school headship because they viewed it as a position of trust in which many stakeholders, such as parents and the Ministry would have placed their trust in the school head. Given the emphasis that the heads placed on self-regulation and accountability to oneself, it is not surprising that they also identified it as a critical competency for effective and successful school leadership. As one head shared, … *you cannot be successful in this job without being accountable to yourself first.* As such, their argument was that effective headship was synonymous with self-regulation and accountability to oneself because, in their view, once one has become accountable to oneself, one develops a sense of responsibility and will seek perfection in everything that one does.

Commenting on how they viewed self-regulation and accountability as both a mark of successful leadership and a pivotal competency for effective school leadership, one head shared the following:

> *I remember in my early years in headship, I was not accountable, not at all, let alone to myself. I would do things that you do not expect a professional to do. I remember in 2008, I even left my school unattended and went to South Africa, only to come back in 2009, and I remember claiming that I was not feeling well, and I had gone to South Africa for medical attention. It's history now, but my point is, imagine if I had remained that kind of a head, would you have found my school as orderly as this? Maybe I would have been fired long back.*

Another head noted that being a school head came with many responsibilities. They stated that as a head, one was in charge of ensuring learner well-being in a conducive learning environment; they had to supervise teachers and ensure that learner-centred instruction was taking place, and they oversaw the overall school administration, including engagement with different stakeholders. The heads argued that one could not succeed in all these roles without self-regulating because their job was semi-autonomous, and as some of them shared, the Ministry did not inspect them every day; hence, they saw self-regulation and accountability to self as key behavioural competencies as these allowed one to work independently with minimal supervision. In underscoring this notion, they shared the following sentiments:

> *As I have indicated earlier on, we are not inspected every day; I can spend the whole term without anyone from the District or Province coming here. But do I stop doing my work because the Province has not come? And I think that is where good school heads are different from the bad apples of the profession because we still deliver even when no one is watching. I was once like that, but I think with experiences and some of the challenges that arise, you begin to adjust as a person. You look back and say ooh here I failed because I did not take leadership and accountability, so I guess over time any well-meaning heads will develop this competency because of the nature of the job.*

Another participant drew a comparison between accountability to oneself and accountability to the education system, stating that the former was superior to the latter. They argued that when the two forms of accountability were compared, being accountable to oneself led to better performance because it drove everything that one would do:

> *When one is accountable, it means they are transparent in their actions, but most importantly, I think it is because you want results, and you want to succeed. In my view, when you speak of my accountability as a head, I would say it's two-way. I am accountable to myself. The Commission (Public Service Commission) even told our group when we were promoted that the first stage of being a good civil servant is to be accountable to oneself, that's the value of integrity. Secondly, we are accountable to the whole system: the parents, my SDC, the Ministry, the District and so on. But I think one cannot pass the second phase of system accountability when they are not accountable to themselves. It's like in a marriage; imagine if one partner is not accountable, it means they will just be roaming around and catching whoever they meet.*

In essence it can be deduced that Zimbabwean school heads considered self-regulation and personal accountability as essential qualities of successful school leadership. They identified these attributes as crucial competencies for effective school leadership, asserting that accountability,

self-regulation and maintaining a positive *self-view* motivate school leaders to excel and strive for the betterment of their learners.

6.2.12 The Ability to Lead

During my interaction with the research participants, I observed divergent opinions on the origins of leadership, as some contended that they were inherently born leaders, while others attributed their leadership skills to learning and on-the-job experiences. However, a shared perspective among them was that possessing inherent leadership ability was a prerequisite for being an effective school head. In their discussions about the essence of leadership ability, they pinpointed various competencies that they associated with effective leadership. For the purpose of this research, I grouped these competencies within the broader category of *the ability to lead*, as participants emphasised them in their responses, although they were not as explicitly delineated as the other twelve competencies that were discussed as standalone in this chapter. Some of these attributes included decision-making, inclusivity, flexibility and assertiveness.

Commenting on these many attributes and how they were linked to leadership practices, one participant provided the following overview:

> *As heads, we live leadership every day, and for me, it has been a learning experience. If I were to underline a keyword, I would say leadership has been a learning experience for me because you learn a lot of things. It's also an experience that requires flexibility because you have to be flexible. But at the same time, you have to be firm, to be assertive so that you maintain law and order in your school. You also have to be flexible at the same time and not be rigid because you are leading people of different political inclinations. People of different religious beliefs, people of different social upbringings and social beliefs. And this applies to both teachers and learners, so it's a balancing act, but ideally it goes back to one's ability to lead. I feel that's why some people will be teachers for decades and not even attempt to be Heads, perhaps they will be knowing that they do not have that ability to lead people.*

Building on the same matter, another participant argued that they viewed the ability to lead as a key competency because, in their view, not everyone was born a leader:

> *If I look at my journey from the time, that I joined teaching to promotion up to now, there are many colleagues that I found in service, but I overtook them and maybe some are retired now because they were already senior, and some are still in the classroom. In fact, my best friend from college is now a Lecturer at X (actual name deleted) teachers' college. I remember after we finished our bachelor's degrees and I said, now let's apply to be heads, she laughed at me and said, you go ahead, for me I cannot be a headmistress, leadership*

> *is not my thing. I think I will pursue the academic route; because that is what she enjoyed. So, leadership, in my view, is a choice as much as it is a competency in itself. That's why we cannot all be leaders.*

Some participants attributed their ability to lead or their leadership practices to the teaching profession itself. They argued that teaching as a profession prepared one to be a leader as it instilled universal leadership attributes, such as inclusivity, teamwork, decision-making, goal-orientation and resource mobilisation:

> *Teaching as a profession actually prepares us to be heads. For us to be able to lead effectively, I always say teachers make the best leaders because of all the leadership qualities that we are taught in leadership training. You name them: teamwork, inclusivity, goal setting, decision-making, resource management, empathy and so on. They are all cardinal practices in teaching. Look at how many decisions you have to make as a teacher, the inclusivity you practice in a class of fifty children, teamwork with other teachers and your students, I could go on and on…. but for me, I think teaching prepared us well for the job, and we are able to lead because we were prepared for years.*

Another point that emanated from the school head's narratives that I found interesting is that in emphasising the ability to lead as a competency, they saw one's inert ability to lead and one's experience taking precedence over academic training:

> *I have noticed that what counts is experience and your own leadership skills and abilities as person. I have seen heads with two master's degrees failing to run their schools. Some even with degrees in education management, leadership and so forth, but when you look at their outcomes, the student results, teacher management and so on ... you ask yourself, did the degree really work.*

Building on the same sentiments another school head added the following:

> *I find my learning on the job and my interactions with more senior heads more enriching in as far as building me into a good leader is concerned. I am studying for an MBA (Master's Degree in Business Administration) with a focus on leadership but I can assure you that it's just a paper for self-actualisation and for promotion purposes. Because as a head, I have learnt it all. I mean all the concepts that we cover in the course, I always reflect and realise in one way or the other, as a head, you are practicing them every day.*

The crucial outcome of these sentiments is that the research participants emphasised the significance of pre-existing or acquired leadership abilities as fundamental competencies for school headship. They asserted that an individual must possess an inherent drive for leadership while remaining open to learning new leadership traits and approaches to refine their leadership style. According to their perspective, the debate over whether leaders are born or made is

inconsequential, as they believed that the willingness to lead and the openness to learn from practical leadership and life experiences were more paramount.

Moreover, the participants highlighted that one's ability to lead was influenced by subtle behavioural competencies, such as flexibility, inclusiveness, assertiveness and decision-making, among others. Despite these attributes being seemingly small, the participants argued that they were crucial contributors to one's ability to lead, constituting key qualities that effective leaders should and must possess. They also regarded formal leadership training through post-graduate qualifications as having minimal impact on one's leadership practice when juxtaposed with on-the-job experiences. In summary, Zimbabwean school heads perceived school leadership as a calling for those willing to lead. Thus, they considered the ability to lead as a critical competency for effective school leadership. Interestingly, they dismissed the leaders-being-made-or-born dichotomy, placing more importance on the individual's capacity to lead and ability to learn and adapt, based on lived experiences. This underscores their belief in the significant roles of leadership training and personal learning in shaping the competency of the ability to lead.

6.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter elaborated on the competencies that the research participants viewed as pivotal to effective school leadership within the Zimbabwean education context. It is imperative to note that these competencies were derived from the participants' lived experiences, what they had observed in their teaching and headship journey and the challenges and successes that they had encountered in leading their schools. From their responses it can be noted that the identified competencies did not work or exist independently but were rather interdependent and connected to one another; hence, they were equally important in contributing to effective school leadership.

While this research was grounded in transformational and instructional leadership theories, the identified competencies that I discussed in this chapter were not segregated or organised along these two leadership theories. The rationale behind this decision is that, in the next chapter, I examine these competencies within the context of the transformational and instructional leadership theories. Simultaneously, I discuss these competencies backed by existing literature related to the identified competencies. This approach aimed to integrate and synthesise the identified

competencies into a cohesive framework aligned with both transformational and instructional leadership theories.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: CONTEXTUALISING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES WITHIN THE RESEARCH'S THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

7.1 Introduction

Chapters 5 and 6 offered the presentation of findings. Chapter 5 focused on the lived experiences of the participants and allowed my readers to explore the leadership experiential narratives of the school heads as a lived experience. Using the participants' voices and narratives, I outlined the different life encounters of the participants, highlighting the experiences, successes, and challenges that they encountered in their leadership journey. Chapter 6 was a continuation of the descriptive data presentation, and it built on the participants' lived experiences to determine their perspectives on competencies that they deemed pivotal in effective school leadership practice in Zimbabwe. Being a phenomenological study, it is imperative to note that the lived experiences and the competencies that I shared in Chapters 5 and 6 emanated from the meaning units that I developed in the data analysis. As Ratner (2001) and Giorgi (1986) note, meaning units reflect the distinct aspects of participants' experience as drawn from their perceptions, thoughts and beliefs as well as other aspects of their subjective experience. As such, as a hermeneutic phenomenological researcher, I interpreted the essential aspects of these meaning units to construct coherent structures and deepen my understanding of the lived experiences. This chapter thus presents an interpretative discussion that builds upon the previous two chapters.

The chapter discusses the critical competencies that emerged from the findings that Zimbabwean school heads experienced as being pivotal in effective school leadership. This was the essence of this research. In chapter 6 I had already discussed the emerging competencies as narrated by the school heads where I shared their perceptions and experiential narratives that had made them to identify these competencies and single them out as being pivotal in effective school leadership within the Zimbabwe school context. In this chapter, I revisit these competencies and discuss and locate them within the underpinning transformational and instructional leadership theories. The discussion on competencies in this chapter is also backed by relevant literature that I reviewed throughout the research process. I grouped some competencies under a domain that I termed *cross-cutting competencies* as I deemed these competencies to apply to both transformational and

instructional leadership theories. The chapter introduces some areas that emerged from the data analysis and in the discussions presented in both Chapters 5 and 6. I termed these topics *Enabling Factors* as they are not necessarily competencies but were deemed and identified by the research participants and reviewed literature as being key enabling factors in effective school leadership. These aspects are teacher continuous professional development, teacher motivation and morale, training of aspiring and novice school heads, professional learning circles, and a well-resourced education system.

7.2 Contextualising the Research Findings

The two leadership theories, instructional and transformational, were adequately addressed in Chapter 3, serving as the theoretical framework for this research. The justification for why I used them and the key philosophical underpinnings that drive these theories were thoroughly discussed. As such, in this section, they are only briefly explained as precursors to the discussion on the research findings. This chapter thus focuses on the competencies that the research identified as well as the other leadership aspects that are not necessarily competencies, but that the research identified as being pivotal in effective school leadership discourse and practice in the Zimbabwean context. I termed these aspects *Enabling Factors* to effective school leadership. It is also worth noting that there were other competencies that could straddle both transformational and instructional leadership theories, as certain aspects of these competencies were deemed to be applicable to both theories. As such, to enhance clarity of the discourse, I discussed these competencies under a sub-topic that I termed *Cross-cutting Competencies*.

7.3 Transformational School Leadership Theory and Related Competencies

The significance of transformational leadership in school leadership has been extensively covered by various research and literature that recognise its effectiveness. Scholars such as Day and Sammons (2014), Day et al. (2020), Gumus et al. (2018), Marks and Printy (2003) and Zammit et al. (2007) point out that transformational school leadership involves setting a vision, reorganising staff and improving education outcomes. Transformational leadership not only plays a crucial role in shaping the vision and direction of schools but also involves relational aspects of leadership, focusing on how the school leader relates to and interacts with his/her team (Day et al., 2020). Furthermore, research by Khumalo (2019) suggests that transformational leadership promotes

teacher commitment and sustainable development in schools. As such, good school leaders, rooted in transformational leadership, possess people management skills and the ability to motivate staff, ultimately contributing to staff retention and creating a stable environment.

As highlighted in Chapter 3 (Consult 3.3; 3.4 & 3.5), transformational leadership is associated with four core practices, namely idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Building on the data presented in the previous chapter and in analysing and discussing my research findings, four competencies that emerged from the research process were seen to be directly linked to transformational school leadership. These are proficiency in teamwork and team coordination, stakeholder management and engagement, self-regulation and accountability, and vision setting and attainment. Below, I discuss each of these competencies elaborating their linkage to the transformational school leadership theory.

7.3.1 Adeptness in Teamwork and Team Coordination: Fostering teamwork and collaboration within the school environment

The participants emphasised the importance of a school leaders' skill in teamwork and coordination as essential qualities for effective leadership. This competency aligns closely with the concept of inspirational motivation in transformational leadership, which focuses on leaders' ability to unite their team around a common vision (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Overall, the participants, drawing from their experiences in leadership roles within schools, recognised that successful leadership hinges on effective teamwork. In Chapters 5 and 6, I presented accounts where some school leaders observed failures in their peers' roles, leading to chaotic school environments due to a lack of emphasis on fostering teamwork. Furthermore, the participants highlighted the importance of delegation and distributed leadership, which are fundamental components of effective teamwork. They argued that in contexts like Zimbabwe, where school leaders juggled numerous responsibilities such as teacher management, student welfare, teaching and learning oversight, administration and financial management, propagating teamwork and coordination competencies became essential. This is because in their view, managing these various aspects of the school environment relied heavily on the leader's ability to organise teachers, staff, parents, learners and stakeholders into a cohesive team working towards shared goals.

It is crucial to emphasise that the shared perception among the research participants regarding the necessity for a school head to function as a team leader is also widely acknowledged as a vital competency for successful school leadership by numerous education scholars. For instance, Leithwood et al. (2020a) identify distributed leadership as one of the fundamental components of successful school leadership, with teamwork and team coordination at its core (Baștea et al., 2023). Similarly, Tingle et al. (2019, p. 5) elaborate on the significance of teamwork in effective school leadership, asserting that "leading a school effectively is not a solitary endeavour by one person, it takes a team". Echoing the same sentiment on the importance of teamwork and team collaboration as well as leveraging everyone's expertise to produce the best results in the school, Ahmad and Ghavifekr (2017, p. 54) state that "leadership … means inclusion – include everybody to enable them to accept and feel they own the 'change' … everyone should be made to feel they are wanted as part of the team". The key message from the views of the cited scholars is that they all echo the same sentiments as those held by the research participants, that effective school leadership is rooted in teamwork and team collaboration. Most importantly, they noted that the leader's ability to leverage his/her team member's unique strengths and harness them for the greater success of the team is the hallmark of exceptional leadership and an art that every head should have.

One issue that also stood out from the data is that the participants did not just view teamwork and coordination as a competency that they needed to possess; rather, their perception was based on life experiences that had made them realise that for one to achieve success in their role, they had to work with the greater team in the school. As per their narratives, they had seen their peers fail as a result of monocratic leadership, but they had also experienced successful leadership as a result of teamwork. Practising leadership every day and working with different people with different roles and interests in the school had taught them that success and effectiveness in the role was intrinsically and dependently linked to teamwork; hence, they cited adeptness in teamwork and team coordination as one of the key competencies that they deemed critical for effective school leadership in the Zimbabwean context.

By and large, the key message from this discussion is that through their leadership journey and experiences, the research participants had a common perception of the school head's adeptness at teamwork and team coordination as one of the pivotal competencies required for effective school

leadership. They regarded teamwork and the head's ability to harness the team's strengths for the good of the school as a key leadership strategy that directly responded to the demands and complexities of school leadership in Zimbabwe. The participants acknowledged that their experiences had taught them that effective leadership was best applied through collaborative, inclusive and distributive leadership, where the leaders delegated some of their roles to their team members, leading to the greater success of the team.

These attributes were also linked to both instructional and transformative leadership theories, which formed the foundational theoretical framework for this research. Both theories put an emphasis on the need for teamwork to achieve improved learning outcomes. However, I placed this competency primarily under the transformational leadership domain as teamwork tends to be more emphasised through the transformational tenets of idealised influence and inspirational motivation that all emphasise teamwork with the leader being at the centre.

7.3.2 Stakeholder Management and Engagement: Creation of networks with different stakeholders

The research found that the participants viewed stakeholder engagement and management as pivotal competencies in effective school leadership because their leadership experiences had shown them that different stakeholders wielded different powers and influence. As such, an effective school leader, in their view, should be able to work with all these stakeholders and harness their influence and power towards the betterment and well-being of the learner. Various scholars (Bush, 2020; Day et al., 2020; Mendels, 2012) have extolled the strength of stakeholder engagement as a key ingredient to building effective school leadership. The scholars posit that stakeholder engagement in school leadership and education management helps in enabling collective decision-making by bringing key stakeholders together and rallying them towards contributing to the school's vision.

The MoPSE (2021a) identifies various groups of stakeholders that the head is supposed to engage with, update, work with and serve. These range from learners, teachers, school support staff, parents, the SDC, the community, community/traditional leadership, political actors and education authorities, among others. The participants shared that the Zimbabwean education landscape had many stakeholders with great interest in their schools. As such, they viewed the school head's

ability to engage and work well with these stakeholders as a key competency because it contributed to the overall success of the school and also interlinked with the other competencies discussed herein.

The importance of stakeholder engagement in effective school leadership is cemented by Maak (2007, p. 229), who argues that it is part of responsible leadership, and it helps in creating "… value networks … of multiple stakeholders, which enhance social capital and thereby contribute to both a sustainable business and the common good". While Maak's sentiments were in reference to broader business leadership, the author's sentiments equally apply to school leadership, with the crux of the argument being that stakeholder engagement helps school leaders create a network of different stakeholders who can collectively contribute to the success of the school and improved learning outcomes, using their different spheres of influence and convening power.

In the data presentation chapters, I shared some experiences and sentiments of the school heads regarding the importance of working with all stakeholders for the success of the school. Given that transformational leadership has a focus on relational aspects within the job setting (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Kwan, 2020), this competency was regarded to align more with the transformational leadership domain as it emphasised the school head's ability to establish and sustain relations with different stakeholders that had an interest in the school. Furthermore, the transformational leadership tenets of idealised influence, inspirational motivation and individualised consideration are all active contributors to stakeholder engagement and management as they have some focus on working with teams and the role of the leader in supporting different team players and stakeholders as well as the leader's ability to understand the individual needs of each of these stakeholders.

7.3.3 Self-regulation and Accountability: The importance of being accountable to oneself

The research participants identified self-regulation and accountability as key competencies for successful and effective school leadership. In their view, the ability to self-regulate and to be accountable to oneself was fundamental for anyone in a leadership position within the education system. They argued that this competency was critical because school heads held positions of trust, and stakeholders such as parents and the Ministry relied on them based on trust and responsibility. The participants highlighted that effective headship was synonymous with self-regulation and

accountability to oneself, fostering a sense of responsibility and a pursuit of perfection in their duties. They asserted that their experiences and their interactions with their peers had shown them that self-regulation was necessary for success, especially in a semi-autonomous context like Zimbabwe, where regular inspections by the district office were not guaranteed.

Building on the same sentiment, DeMatthews and Serafini (2021) note that school heads tend to be inclined towards what the authors termed *self-view,* which is basically self-regulation and accountability based on how one views oneself. The authors argued that "… self-view has a moral component, as individuals are motivated to view themselves as ethical, honest, trustworthy and fair" (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2021, p. 339). As such, it is the scholars' contention that good school leaders tend to have self-accountability or self-view as they are bound by ethics and fear of failure. Examining school leadership and teaching in Zimbabwe, Shava et al. (2021) found that accountability, both at the level of the school head and within the broader school environment, played a pivotal role in learner success.

As such, the common theme that emerged from my interaction with the school heads is that the nature of their job called for them to be accountable primarily to themselves as well as to the broader school and education systems. They viewed this as must-have critical competency because in their view, if a leader was not able to be accountable to oneself, they could not foster learning, oversee teacher supervision and ensure maintenance of order for improved learning outcomes in their schools. The participants argued that schools by their nature ran on the basis of accountability as the district or the province cannot supervise them every day. As such, in their view and based on their experiences, effective school leadership could not exist outside of individual accountability on the part of the head.

In addition, they also distinguished between accountability to oneself and accountability to the broader education system, arguing that accountability to oneself was more important. They argued that personal accountability drove better performance and transparency, a view also supported by scholars such as DeMatthews and Serafini (2021), who as earlier highlighted, averred that good school leaders exhibit a strong *self-view* characterised by self-regulation and accountability, grounded in ethics and a fear of failure.

Overall, the findings suggest that Zimbabwean school heads considered self-regulation and personal accountability as pivotal competencies and indispensable qualities for effective school leadership. Given that transformational leadership is rooted in attaining the school's vision and goals through fostering collaborative efforts, I placed the competency of self-regulation and accountability in the transformational leadership domain. This is because effective leadership encourages self-regulation among individuals and establishes accountability mechanisms to ensure the realisation of the school's vision and goals.

7.3.4 Vision Setting and Attainment: The significance of vision setting in school leadership

Experiences shared by the participants highlighted the critical impact of school leaders on the success or failure of a school's vision. They shared life experiences from their time as teachers as well as their time in headship where they had seen visionary school heads who were able to drive their schools towards the agreed vision of the success of the school. Conversely, they had also witnessed school heads who were not driven by vision, and often, they had seen such heads failing and leading their schools into decline. In summary, the research findings strongly affirmed the critical role of school leaders in setting the school vision and creating the conditions necessary for that vision. As such, they viewed this as a critical competency that school leaders required to be effective because, in their view, a school leader with no vision or the know-how to work with their team and stakeholders towards the attainment of that vision could not be an effective school head. Vision setting and rallying the school stakeholders towards that vision are attributes that have long been associated with transformational leadership (Bush, 2014; Kareem et al. 2023), hence their inclusion in the transformational domain.

The notion of school leaders being the vision bearers of their schools has gained prominence in education and school leadership discourse, with various scholars identifying the school head as the fulcrum upon which the school's vision is rooted (Day et al., 2020; Stronger & Xu, 2021). As such, school leaders are regarded as the main drivers towards the success of their schools' visions as much as they can be the inhibitors to the attainment of that vision (Stein, 2016). This underscores the significant role of school leaders in either shaping or impeding the school's vision. Various Scholars (Strong & Xu, 2021; Stein, 2016; Bush, 2020; Day et al., 2020) underscore the

irreplaceable and essential role that school heads play in setting the school's vision and its attainment. They acknowledge the school head as a central figure responsible not only for formulating a shared vision with stakeholder support but also for mobilising stakeholders collaboratively to strive towards realising that vision. These sentiments were equally shared and confirmed by the research participants; hence their coalescence on vision setting and attainment by the school leader as a critical competency for all school heads.

The MoPSE also drew a close nexus between effective school leadership, vision setting and team collaboration when they pointed out that "Effective school leadership is about collaboratively creating a school vision and planning for the future of the school with the help of all the teachers" (MoPSE, 2021a, p. 4). This shows that the sentiments expressed by the research participants on vision setting, while largely inspired by their lived experiences as shared in their experiential narratives, were aligned with the Ministry's perspective on school heads and their role in vision setting. Additionally, it underscores the importance of supporting school heads in establishing a school vision and collaborating with their team members to achieve it, as the research participants highlighted this as a crucial area of need.

It is worth noting that while the concept of vision setting has long been recognised as a vital attribute in school leadership by various scholars (Bush, 2020; Day et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020a), the findings discussed herein specifically address vision setting within the Zimbabwean school leadership context. The participants stressed that in a setting like Zimbabwe, where limited efforts had been made to train school leaders in various thematic areas, including vision setting, merely identifying vision setting as a key competency for school heads might not be sufficient. Therefore, they elaborated on the need for additional support were they particularly singled out the importance of *training in setting the vision* and the strategies to achieve this vision. These sentiments not only acknowledge the significance of vision setting in school leadership, as advocated by the scholars mentioned earlier, but also demonstrate an understanding of the specific challenges in the Zimbabwean context, where school heads required additional support and training in vision setting, and attainment, among other areas.

7.4 Instructional Leadership Theory and Related Competencies

The essence of instructional leadership lies in prioritising instruction and learning as the fundamental activities of any school, highlighting that effective leaders focus their influence on teaching and learning processes to enhance learning outcomes (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 28). In contrast to transformational leadership that relies on motivating teachers for effective instruction, instructional leadership places the responsibility of understanding instruction primarily on the school leader. As earlier cited, the Rwandan College of Education Module on Strategic Leadership for Teaching and Learning (2015) asserts that instructional leaders should redefine their role to become the primary learners in the school community. The argument here is that instructional leaders should be able to comprehend the curriculum, teaching, and learning processes in their school, thereby staying connected to their teachers and understanding the teaching dynamics (Day et al., 2016). As such, this research contends that effective school leaders possess knowledge of the curriculum and instructional practices, prioritising the quality of teaching and learning in their schools (Day et al., 2020; Muda et al., 2017; Timperley, 2011).

In summary, instructional leadership focuses on enhancing teaching and learning, with school leaders coordinating efforts involving teachers, parents and learners in instructional matters. While rooted in curriculum issues and improved learning outcomes, instructional leadership also encompasses effective organisational management, with an emphasis on professional development, stakeholder engagement, and fostering a positive school culture (Ng et al., 2015). As elaborated in Chapter 3, it is crucial to recognise that instructional leadership demands a thorough understanding of quality instruction and the curriculum by the school leader to ensure the effective delivery of relevant learning content to all learners.

In discussing the research findings, three competencies were found to be directly linked to instructional school leadership. These are Teacher Supervision and Support, Leadership for Learning, and EdTech Literacy. Below, I discuss each of these competencies, elaborating on their linkage to instructional leadership theory.

7.4.1 Teacher Supervision and Support: Supporting teachers for effective instruction

It is imperative to acknowledge that past and modern academic works have identified teacher supervision as a key competency or attribute of school leadership that can be found in both

instructional and transformational leadership theories (Kwan, 2020; Warman et al., 2021). This highlights the connectedness of the research findings to the overall theoretical framework that underpinned this research. The research participants acknowledged the pivotal role that teacher supervision played in aiding effective school leadership, serving as a key competency for school heads. This is because, through ongoing supervision, school leaders can ensure quality assurance in teaching and learning as well as the alignment of their schools' instructional strategies with the country's curriculum framework. Furthermore, as Brandon et al. (2018) note, teacher supervision facilitates collaborative support and learning among the school head and the teachers, fostering teamwork and enhancing overall teaching and learning quality within the school. While the school heads identified teacher supervision as a critical pillar in school leadership, they did, however, lament the insufficient skills and knowledge among themselves and their peers to fulfil this critical role. I elaborated on these sentiments in Chapters 5 and 6 where I shared the heads' perceptions on teacher supervision versus the demands of the new curriculum. This underscores the need for training and capacity development for Zimbabwean school heads in teacher supervision, particularly in the context of the new curriculum. Given the symbiotic link between teacher supervision and instructional leadership, it made sense for this competency to be placed in the instructional leadership domain.

By way of background, in 2015 Zimbabwe implemented a new curriculum framework for primary and secondary education, marking the first major revision of the country's basic education curricula since the country had gained political independence in 1980 (Gasva et al., 2019; Mupa, 2020). This curriculum overhaul introduced several new learning areas that were originally not present in the previous curriculum, along with a fundamentally different approach to education in Zimbabwe. Unlike the traditional focus on content knowledge, the new curriculum prioritised competency-based learning. Additionally, it advocated continuous learner assessment and exit profiles in place of conventional summative examinations (Gory et al., 2021). Given that these changes took place after more than three decades of using the same curriculum, this meant teachers had to change their approach to teaching while school heads had to adjust theirs to teacher supervision accordingly. I provide this contextual background to better explain the research participants' perspectives on teacher supervision within the context of the updated curriculum.

These sentiments are supported by findings from previous research that investigated the challenges that school heads encountered in implementing the new curriculum in Zimbabwe. For example, Mupa (2020) discovered that Zimbabwean school heads had cited a lack of knowledge and supervisory skills to supervise some of the newly introduced learning areas as a key challenge. The school heads that had taken part in Mupa's study had shared sentiments, like "*It requires a lot of knowledge of supervision to meet the demands of effectively supervising this new curriculum* and *Some of us have never done supervision as a course and it's really taxing to cope with these requirements"* (Mupa, 2020, pp. 88-89). This literature extract further cements and complements the research findings that while school heads in Zimbabwe acknowledged teacher supervision and support as critical competencies, they lamented the lack of a support structure to build their capacity in this aspect, especially in the context of the new competency-based curriculum that the country adopted in 2017.

In chapter 3 (Consult Section 3.6.3) I discussed Hallinger's (2011) instructional model, noting that one of the three dimensions of instructional leadership that the scholar identified was *managing the instructional programme* that encompasses teacher supervision and support. It is imperative to emphasise that this aspect of instructional leadership holds utmost significance for school heads as it pertains to matters of teaching, curriculum and learning, which are the core pillars of any school. Consequently, if school leaders fail in executing their role in instructional management that encompasses the identified competency of teacher supervision and support, it could significantly impact leaner achievement, which the participants recurrently identified as the key outcome that every head should pursue. Against this backdrop, I placed the teacher supervision and support competency directly in the instructional leadership domain of the theoretical framework as it addresses issues related to instruction and learning.

While the participants identified teacher supervision and support as an indispensable competency in school leadership practice in Zimbabwe, they also underscored the need for targeted professional development. Such professional development is meant to equip Zimbabwean school heads with the necessary skills, understanding and expertise to supervise and support teachers within the context of the competency-based curriculum. In so doing, it is important to reiterate that my research participants acknowledged the significance of teacher supervision not just under the new curriculum but also in the broader school leadership realm. This is because in their view, this

was a largely neglected area in Zimbabwe, an area that most of them noted that they had never received any training in. Resultantly, this led to different understanding and practices of teacher supervision in the country. Regardless, they still reiterated the importance of teacher supervision and support as a pivotal competency for Zimbabwean school heads.

7.4.2 Leadership for Learning: Facilitating an effective and inclusive instructional environment that promotes learner success

There was a consensus among the research participants on instructional leadership as a competency for effective school leadership. As highlighted in Chapter 6 (Consult Section 6.2.8), the school heads shared the view that an effective leader should be able to provide instructional leadership by leading the teaching and learning processes in their school. Given that my research was grounded in instructional and transformational leadership theories, and to avoid confusion between instructional leadership as one of my foundational theories and instructional leadership as a competency, I elected to group the school heads' perspectives on instructional leadership as a competency under the theme *Leadership for learning*. This is also because while some of the research participants' views and perceptions could easily pass for instructional leadership, many of their responses centred mostly on their role in supporting learning, and this role might be broader than instructional leadership. Commenting on the linkage between leadership for learning, instructional leadership, leading learning, and pedagogical leadership and how educators and scholars have developed various terms around this type of leadership, Timperley (2011) posits the following:

> … as with any idea that gains currency in education, the labels for this kind of leadership abound and have usually taken an adjectival form of instructional, pedagogical, or learning-centred leadership. Alternatively, it is expressed as leadership of or for something, such as leadership for learning. (Timperley, 2011, p. 145)

In fact, O'Donoghue and Clarke (2010) emphasise a distinction between instructional leadership and leading for learning, asserting that the latter involves a more comprehensive perspective, encompassing the creation of conditions conducive to learning. These include aspects such as learning, teachers' facilitation and leadership, organisational learning, school effectiveness, building school culture, and developing learner-centred school policies. In summary, leadership for learning refers to the role of school leaders in creating, guiding and facilitating the overall

learning and educational experiences of their learners. At its centre is the creation of a positive and effective learning environment and ensuring that learners are actually learning.

Global evidence in education research and practice shows that the world is currently going through a phenomenon that modern education scholars (Beeharry, 2021; World Bank, 2018; Pritchett, 2013) refer to as a learning crisis. These scholars concur that schooling or being in school does not equate to learning; hence learners could be physically in an upper grade but in a lower grade in terms of their content knowledge. This means that school leaders, teachers and education players have to change their approach to ensure that learning actually takes place in schools. This notion resonates very well with the concept of leading for learning, where the research participants highlighted that with the introduction of a new curriculum in Zimbabwe, they saw an increased role of the school head in supporting learners; hence, their perspective on leading for learning as a key must-have competency for all Zimbabwean school heads.

From my discussion with the participants, it can be inferred that they linked the learning crisis to their role, arguing that they were the main drivers of teaching and learning in Zimbabwean schools; hence, if there was no learning in their schools, they shouldered the biggest blame. It is against this backdrop that they identified leading for learning as a pivotal competency because, in their view, they were the ones responsible for creating conditions that prevented a potential learning crisis in their schools.

In Chapter 3, I explored Hallinger's (2011) theory of instructional leadership, where *managing the instructional programme* is highlighted as a central dimension. According to Hallinger (2011), the competencies associated with this dimension include supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum and monitoring learner progress and development. Notably, the participants foregrounded these competencies as crucial to their roles. For instance, they stressed the importance of teacher supervision, noting that effective school leaders should support instruction through supervision and encouragement rather than criticism and fault-finding (Consult 6.2.7 & 7.4.1). Regarding curriculum coordination, the school leaders mentioned that the country's new curriculum framework placed significant emphasis on learner-centred instruction and competency-based outcomes. As such, they acknowledged a paradigm shift in their responsibilities, emphasising a departure from being mere school administrators to active participants in the teaching and learning process.

Throughout my discussion with the research participants, a recurring perspective was their unanimous belief that learner success should be the primary focus of their work. They viewed everything within the school environment as being geared towards learner well-being and learning outcomes. Therefore, they saw the primary role of school leaders as facilitating an effective and inclusive instructional environment that promotes learner success. The participants stressed the fact that improving instructional competency required ongoing training and professional development, especially since the new curriculum demanded greater involvement of school leaders in guiding learning processes within their schools.

Against this backdrop, it can be noted that Zimbabwean school heads identified leadership for learning as a key competency for every school head from a dual pronged perspective. Firstly, they regarded it as crucial because school heads should be capable of supporting their teachers to deliver instruction in a learner-centred and inclusive manner that yields successful learning outcomes. Secondly, they viewed leadership for learning as a critical competency for headship due to the demands of the new curriculum. They argued that the new curriculum required them to be fully engaged as instructional leaders, leading them to believe that success in the modern Zimbabwean education landscape necessitated leadership competencies deeply grounded in instructional leadership, which I refer to in this section as leadership for learning.

7.4.3 EdTech Literacy: Sustained capacity development to enhance EdTech literacy

While the participants mostly used the word *ICT* or *ICT in education* during the research process, in this report I opted to use the term *EdTech* as it is the more modern term used to refer to ICT in education. The term *EdTech* that emanates from the words Education Technology, is now more commonly used across the globe and encompasses the use of technology for both teaching and learning purposes as well as for education management. EdTech has been defined as the interlink of instruction and technology and basically refers to the practice of utilising existing and emerging technologies to develop and facilitate teaching and learning in innovative ways and propagate the effective management of education institutions (Robinson et al., 2015; UK Department for Education, 2021). The National University (2021, n.p.) notes that EdTech covers a broad range of software and hardware that is used within and outside the classroom and school environments and includes but is not limited to "… educational apps and games, podcasts, learning management

systems (LMSs), video conferencing software like Zoom, and online discussion forums, to name just a few". This shows that the array of hardware, software and applications that fit into the EdTech category are insurmountable and can vary from locally designed solutions to more popular and widely used applications like video conferencing (for example, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex) and hardware such as laptops, tablets and interactive boards, among others.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the use of EdTech in Zimbabwean schools, as in many parts of the world, has seen a rapid increase, driven in part by the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, where schools had to close for more than six months or more. As shared in the school heads' narratives, school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic exposed them to the endless possibilities of EdTech in aiding learning and creating access to educational media. This saw the increased use of EdTech hardware, applications and software to aid teaching and learning. Furthermore, EdTech is increasingly used in education management and administration, with scholars such as Hawkins and Whyley-Naace (2023) positing that the use of EdTech in the administration tasks of the school leadership role helps in increasing efficacy of the school head. In essence, the research participants acknowledged the immense benefits that the education sector has realised from the digital age, noting that EdTech is helping in modern-day teaching and learning by increasing access to usable knowledge and providing teachers with powerful new means of expanding and strengthening their instructional strategies.

The participants shared the view that they had seen platforms like WhatsApp, which used to be a mere social media platform, playing a key role during the learning-from-home phase as teachers formed WhatsApp groups where they would share learning content with their learners. Moreover, the Ministry had developed a Learning Management System (LMS) called the Zimbabwean Learning Passport, which had online and offline materials, including textbooks and tasks. They also pointed out that low-cost EdTech innovations like pre-recorded audio lessons that were distributed via mass storage hardware like memory cards and flash drives also provided access to free learning content for learners from disadvantaged families.

While reflecting on these experiences primarily driven by the response to COVID-19, they highlighted numerous opportunities for the country to explore and enhance emerging EdTech initiatives going forward. Importantly, they emphasised the urgent need for extensive capacity development and training in EdTech utilisation for both school heads and teachers, acknowledging

that they were lagging behind regarding ongoing innovations. As such, they noted that many school heads needed continuous training and support to catch up with existing and emerging technologies. This perspective was further supported by the MoPSE who also emphasised the necessity of capacity development in EdTech among school heads noting that "… technical skills in ICT, which are indispensable today, need to be developed on a continuous basis as once off training is not sufficient" (MoPSE, 2020, p. 208). This sentiment underscored the fact that while the research participants regarded EdTech literacy as being pivotal in the discharge of their duties, they were also aware of their limitations at the time of the study, a point that was acknowledged by their Ministry; hence an emphasis on sustained capacity development to enhance EdTech literacy as a vital competency for Zimbabwean school heads.

The school heads also emphasised the need for the government to support public schools with resources to meet the normally high costs associated with setting up or procuring EdTech hardware and applications. As such, while the school heads identified EdTech literacy as a critical competency for any school head in modern day Zimbabwe, they also cautioned that successful EdTech appreciation and utilisation would only be achieved if it was supported by activities like training and upskilling of school heads and their teachers as well as procurement of related hardware and software by the government to support poorly resourced public schools.

I included EdTech Literacy in the instructional leadership domain because my participants discussed it mostly in the context of teaching and learning and less relating to management, but it is important to note that some attributes discussed under EdTech Literacy in Chapter 6 can also make it fit in the transformational domain.

7.5 Cross-cutting Leadership Domains and Related Competencies

It is important to clarify that the *cross-cutting leadership* domain is not an established leadership domain or theory. I introduced this term to highlight competencies that combine elements of instructional and transformational leadership. Five competencies emerged as directly linked to the cross-cutting leadership domain, as they exhibit attributes of both transformational and instructional school leadership. These are Understanding of Policy and Legal Issues in Education Management, Establishing Functional Systems and Standards for The School, Functional Proficiency in Financial Management, Procurement and Accounting, Familiarity with Positive

Disciplinary Procedures in Line with New Statutory Provisions, and The Ability to Lead. In the following section, I discuss these competencies building on the first-hand narratives of the research participants that I shared and discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

7.5.1 Understanding of Policy and Legal Issues in Education Management

The research participants identified understanding policy and regulations as a critical competency for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe. They averred that it was crucial for school heads to possess a good understanding of policy and regulatory frameworks in education due to their role as the custodians of institutional governance in their respective schools. In their view, they regarded their role as encompassing both the interpretation and implementation of national education policies and regulations. The participants thus stated that an effective school head had to have a comprehensive understanding of policy and regulations. They shared that their life experiences in headship had shown them that when one has a good grounding in policy understanding, one could easily navigate the legal, administrative and compliance complexities that they encounter in their headship role. In the previous two chapters, I shared their narratives and experiences in which they pointed out the importance of understanding policy and how this can help one to deal with issues such as teacher and learner discipline, interaction with stakeholders, financial management and curriculum issues, among others (Consult 5.9.5 & 6.2.1). The crux of their views was that when heads have a limited understanding of policy and regulatory frameworks, they cannot discharge their duties effectively as heads need to ensure that their schools are operating within established guidelines.

The participants did not just view policy comprehension as the ultimate competency. Instead, they argued that experience derived from years of headship should always complement one's understanding of policies and regulations for one to make sound decisions as a head. They, however, cautioned that this understanding could be insufficient if not complemented by experience. This sentiment resonated with one of the challenges that I discussed in Chapter 5 (Consult Section 5.8.2), where heads indicated that they struggled in their novice years, with one of the challenges being a lack of understanding of how to apply government policy, especially in sensitive cases such as teacher and learner discipline.

The competency of understanding policy and regulatory issues in education leadership and management cuts across both instructional and transformational leadership as understanding of regulatory frameworks equally applies to both theories. This is because understanding policy and regulatory frameworks enables school heads effectively to translate different education policy directives into actionable objectives and targets at school level, an attribute that is applicable to both theories that grounded this research. For example, Hallinger's (2011) instructional leadership model, as discussed in Chapter 3, places emphasis on the role of instructional leaders in promoting and supporting teaching and learning excellence for better learning outcomes. It can thus be argued that a grounded understanding of policy allows school heads to align their schools' instructional targets and goals with national and provincial policy directives, thereby ensuring locally driven but nationally guided efforts in improving learning outcomes. Additionally, given that transformational leadership is largely viewed as a relational focused leadership style (Bass, 1999; Kwan, 2020), comprehension of policy from a transformational perspective thus empowers school heads to engage with different stakeholders more effectively, driving collaborative partnerships that support policy implementation at school level.

Against this backdrop, various scholars have identified understanding policy, legal issues and regulatory statutes as a key competency for school heads in the 21st century. For example, Bush (2020) observes that school leadership has increasingly evolved into a decentralised responsibility, with central governments and bureaucrats delegating tasks such as education planning, financing and provision to lower tiers of government like provinces and districts. While decentralisation grants more autonomy to school heads, it also requires a deeper understanding of the policy landscape within which they operate.

In the context of Zimbabwe, school heads possess a semi-autonomous role, making independent decisions on certain issues while being guided by districts or provinces in other cases (MOPSE, 2021a). This underscores the importance of school heads staying informed about policy matters to ensure their decisions align with legal, regulatory and policy provisions. In this vein, Rambe et al. (2023) contend that the school head plays a pivotal role in implementing and interpreting policy within a school. According to these scholars, school heads engage in *micro policymaking* by formulating school-level policies based on national or regional policy frameworks.

As such, it can be inferred that school heads are central to interpreting and applying policy at school level, underscoring the necessity for their mastery and understanding of relevant policies. As earlier highlighted, while the research participants coalesced on the view that understanding policy and regulatory frameworks is a must-have competency for any Zimbabwean school head, they, however, lamented the status quo where many serving school heads lacked a grounded understanding of policy frameworks. They attributed this deficiency to limited continuous professional development support and a lack of orientation programmes for newly appointed school heads – against a constantly changing policy environment. This perception confirms the views of some scholars referenced in Chapter 2, such as Muresherwa et al. (2014), whose research pointed out policy inconsistencies and limited knowledge and skills as some of the challenges that Zimbabwean school heads identified as common barriers that they encountered in their job. In contrast, in their draft school leadership manual, the MoPSE underscores the comprehension of policy and regulatory environments as a pivotal competency for every school leader in Zimbabwe. The MoPSE contends that the "School head's role as a supervisor is to ensure that the school operates efficiently, effectively, and within the legal and policy framework of the MoPSE" (MoPSE, 2021a, p. 14).

Examined within the context of this research and the narratives shared by the research participants, the above excerpt from the MoPSE exposes the disjunction between theory and the practical realities of school leadership in Zimbabwe. While official documents emphasise the imperative for school leaders to be well-versed in policy, legal and regulatory matters, the actual experiences recounted by the participants reveal a substantial gap in their understanding of the policies and legal issues governing their roles. Resultantly, they have encountered various challenges, and in some cases, as shared in their experiential narratives, they have committed chargeable offences due to this lack of policy understanding. As such, in their view, understanding policy and legal matters complemented by knowledge gained through practice has emerged as a crucial competency and an indispensable requirement for every school head in Zimbabwe.

In summary, it can be argued that school heads in Zimbabwe consider a deep understanding of policy, legal, and regulatory matters in educational leadership and management to be a crucial competency for effective headship. As shared in the previous two chapters, this perception is based on their lived experiences that have made them to appreciate that having such a competency helps

one in several ways. Firstly, they noted that it enabled them to avoid legal consequences that could jeopardise their careers and reputations. Secondly, it was their view that understanding policies and regulations that governed their work equipped them with the skills needed for sound and effective financial management in their schools. Thirdly, it allowed them to navigate the intersection of legal and policy requirements with community and stakeholder interests and demands given the pivotal role that communities play in Zimbabwean schools. Lastly, they argued that possessing this competency provided them with the necessary knowledge to understand and implement new and emerging policy-related issues and make informed decisions. They made reference to issues such as the new curriculum, the amended Education Act and the new provisions on positive discipline, which they all argued had brought in new policy demands that required one to be adept in policy understanding and application.

7.5.2 Systems Thinking: Establishing Functional Systems and Standards for the School

The research participants highlighted the importance of the competency of school leaders in establishing functional systems and standards within their schools. They emphasised that effective leaders should create systems that would outlast their tenure, integrating various approaches into a cohesive framework to enhance school efficacy. The ability to establish these systems involves integrating components such as teaching and learning, learner behaviour, teacher management, stakeholder engagement and disciplinary issues into a comprehensive and well-organised structure that is unique to the school context. The school heads also stressed the importance of systems in guiding procedures and maintaining order within the school, cautioning that failure to do so might result in their losing control of the school, leading to school decline, poor learning outcomes and a bad school reputation, among others.

All these sentiments reveal a critical theme, which is the significance of what is called systems thinking in school leadership, which suggests that to be effective leaders, school heads have to view the many components in their school in a holistic manner, recognising the interrelatedness and interdependency of various elements within the school system (Shaked & Schechter, 2017). Systems thinking is thus “a set of synergistic analytic skills used to improve the capability of identifying and understanding systems, predicting their behaviours, and devising modifications to

them in order to produce desired effects" (Arnold & Wade, 2015, p. 675). This means that a school leader who applies systems thinking does not only have to understand the many elements in their school, but they also have to be able to utilise these elements to produce the desired outcomes. It was thus the participants' view that the ability of the school leader to bring together these elements and steer them towards their success is thus pivotal in successful headship.

In their research on school leaders' performance in Hong Kong, Pang and Pisapia (2012) discovered that school leaders who applied systems thinking in their day-to-day leadership practices were deemed to be more effective than their peers who did not apply it. The scholars also noted that such leaders were reported to be goal-oriented and transformational and tended to promote voluntary commitment to the school's vision and goal among their team members. These attributes can be directly linked to the transformational leadership competencies that I discussed in Chapter 3 (Consult Sections 3.3; 3.4 & 3.5) where transformational leadership was identified as one of the most effective leadership approaches that school heads can employ as it is rooted in setting the school vision and rallying all players within the school towards that vision, an attribute that can be located within the idealised influence tenet of transformational leadership.

Systems thinking has also been proven to be effective in strengthening instructional leadership. Shaked and Schechter (2017, p. 178) argue that systems thinking is a key enabler of instructional leadership since instructional leadership "… necessitates seeing the whole picture and discovering the connections between various school elements". These scholars conclude that the infusion of a systems lens to instructional leadership enhances attributes of instructional leadership such as "… improving the curriculum, developing school-based professional learning communities, and using performance data" (Shaked & Schechter, 2017, pp. 187-188). Based on these scholarly views, it can thus be argued that when school heads look at their school as a whole system where each component, each player and each stakeholder have a role to play in the broader school functioning, they are bound to improve efficiency in their schools and impact their schools from both an instructional and transformational leadership perspective.

In countries like Zimbabwe, where school heads play a pivotal role in addressing day-to-day challenges and ensure overall school functionality, adopting systems thinking becomes essential. By applying both transformational and instructional leadership practices as interconnected and interdependent approaches, school leaders can enhance effective leadership and school

improvement within the entire school system. This aligns with this study's focus on instructional and transformational leadership competencies, asserting that combining these two approaches is a potent strategy for cultivating effective school leadership in Zimbabwe, particularly if a systems thinking lens is applied.

7.5.3 Functional Proficiency in Financial Management, Procurement and Accounting

In Zimbabwe, school heads serve as the primary accounting officers for their respective schools (MoPSE, 2021b). This responsibility holds them accountable for all aspects of the school, including financial management and procurement-related matters. The research noted that in public schools, the government only pays teachers centrally, and does not disburse to or support schools financially in any way. Resultantly, public schools are financed through school fees and levies that parents pay directly to the school, with this money fully retained and utilised at the school level (MoPSE, 2021b). This means that public schools handle a substantial amount of money, with the school head anticipated to provide overall leadership on the transparent and efficient utilisation of these financial resources. A review conducted by the World Bank and MoPSE (2017) highlighted that Zimbabwean parents contributed substantially to the country's education system, almost on par with the government's contributions. For instance, in 2014, the government contributed approximately US$787 million, while parents' contributions amounted to US$779 million (World Bank & MoPSE, 2017). By 2017, it was estimated that parents' contributions had reached US$1 billion, which was equivalent to about 4.2 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Notably, this surpassed the government's contribution to education of 3.6 per cent of GDP in the same year (World Bank, 2021).

These figures are telling as far as quantifying the amount of money that is paid in Zimbabwean schools and utilised at source or school level is concerned. I share these figures to form clear understanding of the financial resources that school heads in Zimbabwean public schools handle. It is, however, crucial to acknowledge that there are disparities in these figures, particularly between urban and poorly resourced rural schools; for example, available school fees data reveals that in some cases, urban secondary schools can charge school fees that are 500 per cent higher than rural secondary schools (MoPSE, 2021b). Nevertheless, the overarching point remains: upon

assuming their roles, Zimbabwean school heads face the challenging responsibility of overseeing school budgeting, procurement, disbursements and accounting, be it in a rural or urban school. This is despite the fact that many of them admit to possessing only rudimentary knowledge of finance and accounting. While most schools have bursars or account clerks, the school head is expected to provide oversight of all finance-related matters; hence, the buck stops with them when it comes to how the collected fees are utilised and accounted for.

Different scholars have long emphasised the need for financial literacy as a pivotal competency for school leaders (Mafugu, et al., 2022; Bush & Heystek, 2006). Furthermore, different school leadership frameworks that have been developed in many countries, states and provinces identify financial management as a key skill and competency; hence its inclusion here, as reflected by the research participants, is not surprising. Rather, it serves to confirm a long-standing challenge in education leadership and management, with Myende et al. (2018) noting that the challenge of financial management is not just an African issue but a protracted challenge for school leaders and education managers across the globe.

The MoPSE contracted the audit firm Ernest and Young to carry out a holistic organisational review of the Ministry. Their report confirmed this challenge, citing that finance and administration, including basic financial competency, was one of the key technical competencies that required urgent improvement among the country's school leadership cadre. The report cautioned that "… unless the above competency gaps are addressed urgently, the following adverse results will continue to get worse: mismanagement and maladministration of finances at school level, increase in operational costs …" (Ernst & Young, 2019, p. 49). In the same vein, research by Chene (2015) on corruption in the service delivery sectors in Zimbabwe notes that the biggest challenge in education was embezzlement and financial mismanagement of school funds at school level. It is imperative to acknowledge that the MoPSE has also acknowledged this significant challenge; hence, in their draft school leadership manual, it notes that "the success of all operations in schools is dependent on sound financial management principles and practices. School leadership plays a pivotal role in the administration of public funds" (MoPSE, 2021a, p. 69).

By and large, it can be noted that the sentiments expressed by the research participants highlight a collective acknowledgement of the significance of financial literacy among school heads in Zimbabwe. Based on available literature (Myende et al., 2018; Rangongo et al., 2016; Bush &

Heystek, 2006; Mafugu et al., 2022), this perception resonates beyond Zimbabwean borders, emphasising the broader significance of financial management competency for school leaders globally. This is because effective and transparent financial stewardship is foundational to the school's efficacy, as it is a pivotal contributor in ensuring that school heads and their teams attain the school's vision and set targets.

The prevalence of financial mismanagement in Zimbabwean schools and the cases of misappropriation and financial malpractices, as highlighted by the research participants and also backed up by reviewed literature (MoPSE, 2020; Chene, 2015) thus accentuate the urgency and importance of mastering a specific competency in financial management among school heads in Zimbabwe. Financial management was regarded a cross-cutting competency as it encompassed both instructional and transformational leadership, hence its placement in this domain of cross-cutting competencies. This is because it is linked to the administration side of school leadership so whether one is rooted in transformational leadership or instructional leadership, adeptness in financial management is inevitable either way as it is symbiotically linked to one's success regardless of which leadership theory or practice, they abide to.

7.5.4 Familiarity with Positive Disciplinary Procedures in Line with New Statutory Provisions

The research participants emphasised the significance of school leaders' competency in discipline, particularly their familiarity with positive disciplinary procedures. This perspective aligns with the views of Van Wyk and Pelser (2014) who argue that discipline is essential for the proper functioning of any school and that successful learning and instruction require a structured and orderly environment. Similarly, the participants stressed that school leaders play a crucial role in maintaining discipline among both teachers and learners. However, with the outlawing of corporal punishment in Zimbabwe, the heads noted that they were struggling to enforce positive discipline in their schools. Corporal punishment had long been a topical issue in Zimbabwe. While controversial and deemed outdated and a violation of human and children's rights, in Zimbabwe and other countries, it was a largely accepted form of discipline for children in both schools and domestic set-ups (Shumba et al., 2010). Corporal punishment was outlawed in Zimbabwe in 2017 and the policies for alternatives to corporal punishment were introduced. Despite these new

approaches, it still appears that disciplinary issues are still rampant in schools, and the new strategies, according to the research participants, were not deterrent enough for learners to abstain from errant and delinquent behaviours. The research participants' perspectives, highlighted in their narratives in Chapters 5 and 6, reveal a discrepancy between theory and practice regarding the MoPSE's insistence on positive discipline. They expose a conflict where the Ministry developed and recommended disciplinary policies that may not be fully accepted or understood by those responsible for implementing them. Resultantly, the school heads revealed a reluctance to fully embrace the new disciplinary approaches, with some of them insisting that traditional methods like corporal punishment were more effective in maintaining learner discipline in their schools.

Regardless of these sentiments, the research identified familiarity with positive disciplinary procedures as a critical competency for modern-day school leaders in Zimbabwe. This is particularly important considering the paradigm shift brought about by the outlawing of corporal punishment, a method that Zimbabwean heads had relied on for years to enforce discipline in schools. Positive discipline is an approach that bars the use of punitive or physical punishment in enforcing learner discipline but rather emphasises teaching them to practice self-control, to be responsible for their actions and to foster general good behaviour and internal discipline that is self-driven (Sibanda & Mathwasa, 2020).

School heads argued that effective instruction and learning can take place only in an environment that is characterised by order, authority and adherence to procedures, policies and regulations. Furthermore, they regarded themselves as being the centres and enforcers of discipline in their respective schools, hence their perception of the importance of the school leaders' competency in being able to institute positive school discipline in line with the country's new legal provisions.

Research by Makwanya et al. (2012) on corporal punishment in Zimbabwean schools notes that about 70 percent of the interviewed school heads applied corporal punishment, and they held the belief that it "…is they only who have been empowered by the Ministry of Education to discipline school children and as such they have the mandate or are licensed to discipline children" (Makwanya et al., 2012, p. 1236). These sentiments reveal the general belief of Zimbabwe heads before corporal punishment was outlawed and resonate with the sentiments that were shared by my research participants. They viewed themselves as custodians of school discipline, yet within

that discipline, the most commonly used method was corporal punishment that was at variance with newly stipulated regulations at the time of conducting the research.

The reviewed literature (MoPSE, 2020; MoPSE, 2021a; Sibanda & Mathwasa, 2020) shows that the MoPSE has made efforts to educate and persuade school heads about positive discipline through various awareness-raising methods and training sessions. Despite these initiatives, there still appear to be gaps in information and knowledge among the heads, indicating a need for additional efforts. Perhaps at this stage, it is imperative to note that while the outlawing of corporal punishment in Zimbabwe was a welcome move as it enforced positive discipline and promoted learner-friendly environments that were devoid of physical abuse, more still needs to be done in empowering heads and teachers in the use of positive discipline. By their own admission, the heads seemed to be grappling with this concept and how it practically works in deterring errant learner behaviour.

Regardless of the said gaps, it is essential to note that the research participants were aware of the new regulations; hence they identified familiarity with positive discipline procedures as a critical competency. As expressed through their sentiments, some of them might not agree on positive discipline, but they were fully aware of the new policy directives; hence they expressed willingness to learn more about instituting positive discipline in schools. Given that learner discipline is a cross-cutting issue regardless of the leadership practice being employed, I saw it fit to place this competency in the cross-cutting domain.

7.5.5 The Ability to Lead: Willingness and ability to lead schools

The research participants held a collective perspective that the ability to lead was a fundamental competency for effective school leadership. While there were varying opinions on whether leaders were inherently born or made through learning and on-the-job experiences, the participants converged on the idea that possessing inherent leadership ability was crucial for being an effective school head. Against this backdrop, they identified various attributes associated with effective leadership, such as decision-making, inclusivity, flexibility and assertiveness. They also emphasised that their experiences had shown them that, in order to be successful, school leaders had to live leadership every day and view it as a continuous learning experience. The crux of their responses was that school headship was both a choice and a competency. They shared personal

experiences of their fellow colleagues who had chosen not to pursue school headship roles because they felt that they were not inclined towards leadership. This, in their view, underscored their argument that school leadership was a voluntary responsibility normally undertaken by those who had an inert ability to lead or were willing to learn to lead. It is in this vein that they viewed the ability to lead as a pre-requisite competency for one to be a school head. They shared that one's ability to lead could be improved and perfected over time through experience and training, but all this had to be built up from one's ability to lead and their willingness to lead.

I found these ideas relating to both instructional and transformational school leadership. On the one hand, transformational leadership places emphasis on the role of the school leader as being the vision and torchbearer of their school's vision, rallying their followers towards the set vision through the use of strategies like intellectual stimulation, idealised influence, and inspirational motivation (Bass & Avolio, 1994), as discussed in Chapter 3 (Consult Section 3.4). On the other hand, instructional leadership as propounded by Hallinger (2011) places emphasis on defining the school goal, managing the instructional programme, and promoting the school climate. All these attributes, both transformational and instructional, are aimed at learner achievement. The key argument emanating from the research is that these attributes are contingent upon one's ability and readiness to lead and apply these attributes. As such, the school heads did not regard leadership – be it transformational, instructional, or otherwise – as existing in isolation – but believed that leadership capability is enhanced by other attributes like decision-making, innovation, systems thinking and team leadership, and most importantly one's inert ability and willingness to lead.

Perhaps the key outcome is that the heads placed emphasis on the importance of pre-existing or acquired leadership abilities for school headship. As such, they argued that willingness to lead and the openness to mastering new leadership traits were critical for one to excel as a school head. In summary it can be argued that the findings show that Zimbabwean school heads viewed school leadership as a calling for individuals willing to lead. Resultantly, they considered the ability to lead as a paramount competency for effective school leadership, arguing that an individual's capacity to lead and their openness to continuous learning and adaptation based on practical leadership experiences made them an effective leader.

7.6 Enabling Factors

As highlighted earlier, the research also identified some aspects that are not necessarily competencies, but rather enabling factors that the participants pointed out as being pivotal to supporting effective school leadership. These enabling factors play a crucial role in facilitating the application of the identified leadership competencies in the Zimbabwean educational context, with the underlying assumption being that, in their absence, a school head would find it difficult to execute their mandate effectively. The enabling factors are continuous professional development of school leaders, teacher motivation and morale, training of aspiring and novice school heads, well-resourced education systems, and professional learning circles. In the ensuing section, I elaborate on each factor, highlighting why it was incorporated as an enabling factor that supports the identified competencies. It is important to reiterate that these factors were also drawn from the research participant's narratives and experiences as shared in Chapters 5 and 6.

7.6.1 Continuous Professional Development of School Leaders

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) has to do with all the individual learning that one does to improve one's practice and can be informal or formal. CPD can thus be done in multiple ways, giving infinite opportunities for professionals to acquire new skills, knowledge and expertise while on the job. The importance of CPD in school leadership has received notable attention from various scholars who identify it as a key enabling and supporting pillar to effective school leadership. For example, Faizuddin et al. (2023) declare that CPD is very important in education leadership because it assists school leaders in improving both the school's institutional performance and learning outcomes. In the same vein, Nasreen and Odhiambo (2018, p. 247) posit that "… to be effective, school principals must prioritise their own professional development as a highly important element in providing them with the insights necessary to perform their complex roles". Perhaps what is important to note is that CPD is linked to school heads' performance as it not only ensures their continuous learning and upgrading to match modern-day trends in school leadership but also contributes to improved learning outcomes.

The data analysis revealed that Zimbabwean school heads lamented the lack of government-led structured professional development opportunities; hence, they largely had to rely on ad-hoc CPD programmes from stakeholders like NGOs. In Chapter 2 (Consult Section 2.5), I discussed the

available CPD alternatives for Zimbabwean school heads, noting that this was a largely unstructured arena with various players whose efforts were, to a great extent, desultory, thus making it difficult to come up with nationwide uniform programmes. In the same chapter, I elaborated on past CPD efforts for serving and newly appointed heads that the country used to have in place. In Chapters 5 and 6, multiple references were made to the participants' narratives in which they pointed out the lack of professional development opportunities in specific competency areas that they identified as well as to school leadership in general.

The lack of CPD opportunities for Zimbabwean school heads has been flagged as a point of concern by various scholars and reports (Ernst & Young, 2019; Mupa, 2020). For instance, a study conducted by Muresherwa et al. (2014) revealed that 90 per cent of the school leaders involved in their research had never undergone any type of in-service training or CPD related to school leadership. Furthermore, while the participants flagged the twelve competencies discussed above and in Chapter 6 and identified them as being critical, in most cases, they also underscored the need for training and CPD in these areas. The emphasis was that while the identified competencies were key to effective school leadership practice, most school heads at the time of the research possessed only rudimentary knowledge and skills of such competencies or completely lacked these competencies.

The key argument by the proponents of CPD in school leadership is that improved practices and increased knowledge due to CPD in areas where school heads may be lacking ultimately enhance their leadership capacity as they would have addressed the gaps that may be hindering their performance. This is because CPD should be designed to address individual needs, with scholars submitting that an effective "… CPD programme is judged by how effectively it matches the principal's self-concept and interests, as well as by its anticipated results" (Faizuddin et al., 2023, p. 3). This means that while the government may design universal CPD programmes, especially in cases where it may be noted that a specific competency is lacking across many school heads, effective CPD should also have a personalised component to it as, in some cases, the needs of the heads may differ.

This means that the acquisition of the technical and behavioural competencies identified herein may be centralised as they were observed to be cutting across most school heads in Zimbabwe. However, individualised CPD remains a critical contribution to building effective school heads as

it entails individualised learning to build up in areas where one might be lacking or where one may want to self-upgrade.

In summary, CPD is thus discussed herein as an enabling factor to effective school leadership from a dual-pronged approach. On the one hand, it relates to system-wide capacity development initiatives that are meant to address common deficiencies among the school heads, and in this case, it may refer to the discussed competencies or any other tenets that may be identified at the system level from time to time. On the other hand, CPD also addresses self-initiated and individualised learning that school heads can take, independent of the system, with the aim of upgrading themselves in specific areas that they have identified as key to their own individual performance. Consequently, the Zimbabwean government, through the MoPSE, should facilitate an environment that enables school heads to engage in and benefit from both system-wide and individualised CPD efforts.

7.6.2 **Teacher Motivation and Morale:** Cruciality of motivation and morale support as a pillar for effective school leadership

The issue of low teacher morale, primarily stemming from poor conditions of service and inadequate remuneration due to a struggling economy, emerged as a substantial challenge from the research findings. The participants noted that teachers had seen a significant decline in their salaries as a result of a shrinking economy. Despite the government's introduction of a U.S. dollar component in salaries, the school heads noted that low motivation remained a significant issue. This point is underscored by the World Bank (2021) that also noted that a declining economy in Zimbabwe was affecting education quality in the country due to low morale amongst the teaching cadre because of conditions of service:

> Economic challenges … negatively affected the quality of education in public schools and increased inequalities. Inflation eroded public financing of education, which is dominated by expenditure on teachers' salaries. This loss of purchasing power demotivated teachers, some of whom opted to teach at schools only two days a week and offer private lessons for a fee, leaving poor students behind. (World Bank, 2021, p. 39).

The research participants also echoed the same sentiments, emphasising the difficulty of motivating teachers who work under challenging conditions. The school heads highlighted the resistance and reduced motivation among teachers who, due to financial constraints, did not come

to work regularly. This posed a significant challenge for them; hence, they shared their frustrations on how it was becoming increasingly difficult to push for good performance from demotivated staff. As such, they shared that the protracted economic challenges and poor conditions of service had somewhat led to a lowering of expectations from their teachers. Consequently, they expressed concern that their own effectiveness and success were being affected in the process. Commenting on the issue of offering lessons for a fee (extra lessons), the school heads noted that teachers were using this as a coping mechanism for the financial struggles they faced. Despite being officially prohibited by the government, these extra lessons were regarded as a survival strategy for demotivated and financially constrained teachers. As such, some school heads acknowledged turning a blind eye to such practices, citing that they were considering the teachers' plight.

Research on teacher motivation in Zimbabwe (Muranda et al., 2015; Ngwenya, 2021) also confirmed that Zimbabwe's protracted economic challenges were negatively impacting teacher motivation, resonating with the research participants' responses. This was a huge challenge for the country as available literature (Bardach & Klassen, 2021; Ngwenya, 2021) established that there is a relationship between teacher motivation and learning outcomes. This is because motivated teachers tend to commit more to their work, work better with learners and foster positive, inclusive learning environments. Furthermore, scholars such as Leithwood et al. (2020b) argue that teachers are the largest contributing factor to learner achievement, more than any other aspect of schooling. This means that teachers have a huge impact on learner performance; hence, their low morale and motivation can negatively impact learning outcomes, which are the essence of any education system.

The inclusion of teacher motivation and morale as an enabling factor in effective school leadership and a support pillar to the identified competencies is therefore not by chance but is meant to address a deep-seated challenge that the research participants identified as a key hindrance to their work. Moreover, both instructional and transformational theories of school leadership highlight the significant importance placed on teacher motivation and morale. These theories recognise the crucial and essential role that teachers fulfil in collaborating with school leaders for the overall success of both the leaders and the school. The research participants suggested that the government should consider other non-salary incentives to boost teacher morale. They noted that the government could start by honouring its promise to provide non-salary incentives to teachers, such

as access to health insurance, decent accommodation, tax rebates on the importation of cars, and school fee payments for teachers' children.

Based on the given background, it is imperative for any discussion on school leadership and leadership competencies in Zimbabwe to factor in teacher motivation and morale as an enabling factor and support pillar to effective school leadership. This is premised on the notion and assumption that even if the school heads were to possess, adopt and practise all the competencies identified in this research, their success would still remain limited if not complemented by motivated teachers with high morale. This calls for the government to create conditions of service that are conducive to and promote better morale among the teachers. It is also important to note that school leaders play a key role in motivating teachers at the school level (Jovanovic & Ciric, 2016). As such, while the key issues that are affecting teacher morale in the given examples are largely linked to conditions of service and remuneration, which is the mandate of the central government, it is this researcher's contention that school leaders can also play a part by improving motivation and morale among their members. This can be attained through transformational leadership-related practices such as fostering teamwork and acknowledging good practice by the teachers.

It is worth mentioning to acknowledge that I carried out the data collection in 2022 and parts of 2023. As such, there could have been some changes that have taken place in trying to address the teacher motivation issues discussed herein. Be that as it may, it is the research's contention that Zimbabwean school heads viewed teacher motivation and morale as a critical support pillar for effective school leadership, as it related to the school heads' role in motivating their teachers for improved learning outcomes. This thus calls for both the government and the school head to work towards teacher motivation and morale, where the government focuses on issues related to improved conditions of service and remuneration while the school head focuses on school-level efforts, such as teacher support and collaboration, team building and instructional support.

7.6.3 Training of Aspiring and Novice School Heads

The data analysis revealed that school heads lamented the lack of prior training and orientation for prospective and newly appointed school heads. This has also been noted by various scholars and in reports (MoPSE, 2020; Mudzingwa, 2021; Muresherwa et al., 2014; Nziramasanga, 1999) who

all lament the lack of adequate preparation for Zimbabwean school heads as well as the unstructured orientation support for novice school heads. In Chapter 2, I discussed the currently available training and CPD options for serving school heads (Consult 2.5), highlighting that the current practice was largely based on non-competency factors and that school heads were being appointed with no prior training. In Chapter 5, the school heads pointed out their experiential narratives in which they indicated that lack of training prior to appointment or orientation training on appointment had resulted in most novice heads facing challenges in their early years of headship. The research participants noted that they had to learn from on-the-job experiences, and in some cases, they had committed chargeable offences due to ignorance.

The study also revealed a noteworthy observation regarding the diverse academic pathways to headship in Zimbabwe. It was observed that the minimum qualification for entry into headship was a bachelor's degree in any field, provided the candidate possessed pedagogical training. This entry requirement contributed significantly to the absence of standardised foundational knowledge for novice heads. From my interaction with the research participants, their narratives, and the available but limited literature on school headship in Zimbabwe, it was noted that this resulted in significantly different entry-level competency standards among school heads. This created a landscape where Zimbabwean heads operated at different leadership proficiency levels, thereby further complicating the system-level professional development landscape. The research thus underscores the need for a more uniform and targeted approach to the entry-level qualifications for school leadership to enhance overall competency and coherence within the school leadership sub-sector. It is the researcher’s contention that such uniformity can be attained through structured training targeting aspiring school heads as well as through orientation training for newly appointed school heads.

The core argument here is that effective school leaders can be cultivated through training, leading to enhanced education systems and improved learning outcomes. UNESCO (2016) suggests that specialised training programmes, such as the South African ACE certificate and the British NPQH, can nurture a new generation of school leaders capable of adapting to the evolving needs of their respective education systems. Training of aspiring and novice heads is thus included as a support pillar and enabling factor in this discussion as the general assumption is that, as Zimbabwe seeks to enhance its school leadership practices, perhaps the country could follow examples from other

countries where well-structured government-led training initiatives for aspiring and newly appointed school heads have been proven to be effective. The argument is that adequately prepared school heads are able to run their schools effectively and can easily adopt the transformational and instructional leadership competencies identified through this research. Overall, this proposed enabling factor aligns with the perspectives of research participants, who highlighted pre-headship training and continuous professional development as crucial factors in developing effective school leaders.

7.6.4 Professional Learning Circles

The research noted that much peer learning took place among the school heads. However, such learning was not structured and was mostly bilateral, as they indicated that they normally directly engaged with those heads who would be excelling in certain areas where they found themselves lacking. This raises the need for professional learning circles/communities (PLCs) as a support pillar for effective school headship in Zimbabwe. PLCs are proposed as the heads themselves noted that much of learning could happen among themselves, with participants echoing that the biggest source of learning could be from their peers through exchanging knowledge among themselves. This means that school heads admitted that there were great opportunities for them to learn from one another, but they lamented that such initiatives were not initiated at system level.

Singe in Admiraal et al. (2021, p. 685) defines a PLC as a place "… where people continually expand their capacity to create results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together". This means that PLCs, as their name suggests, are smaller communities that allow like-mind professionals to come together periodically and review their practice while learning from one another how to improve and enhance their day-to-day practices. The introduction of peer learning through PLCs is essential, as the school heads noted that their learning did not necessarily have to be top-down every time but could also consider the knowledge and experience that they had amassed over time. Echoing this sentiment, one school head thanked the researcher, noting that they rarely encountered researchers whose studies were aimed at improving their practice based on their experiences and voices.

Perhaps what is outstanding from this discussion is that Zimbabwean heads acknowledged a great opportunity to improve their leadership practices, enhance school performance and work towards improved learning outcomes by learning from their peers. They argued that learning did not always have to be external or top-down but could happen through vicarious learning where the school heads who were strong in certain skills and competencies could act as mentors and trainers to their peers. The Zimbabwean education system has a school cluster system that groups together schools within a certain circumference into a cluster. The clusters are subs within a district, with the districts being subs within the country's ten provinces. Some participants suggested that school heads could utilise clusters as PLCs, noting that they could meet at the cluster resource centres to learn and exchange ideas with and from one another and not just for routine bureaucratic meetings only.

PLCs are thus suggested as a supporting pillar and enabling factor for effective school leadership because education practice and research (Admiral et al., 2021; Stoll & Kools, 2017) have pointed out the advantages of PLCs in promoting streamlined learning where peers can learn from one another in a smaller and more engaging group. Admiraal et al. (2021) add that one advantage of PLCs is that people tend to learn better when they interact and learn from their peers, thus emphasising the strength of PLCs in fostering peer learning and feedback. As discussed throughout this report, the Zimbabwean education landscape, like any other 21st century education arena, is continually going through many changes ranging from curriculum change, the introduction of EdTech innovations into teaching and learning, the emergence and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education, and a rising global digital village due to modern technologies, such as social media. This means that the school leaders must continually upgrade and update themselves to meet these demands. By their own admission, the participants found learning opportunities to learn from one another limited. In this context, this support pillar underscores the importance of school leaders harnessing localised learning through PLCs. Overall, PLCs can be a platform for the exchange of best practices thereby promoting peer support and peer advisory on the practical implementation of effective school leadership in Zimbabwe.

7.6.5 A Well-resourced Education System

The need for well-resourced education systems in aiding effective school leadership cannot be over-emphasised as it is almost etched in stone that effective education systems require resources, both financial and human to be sustained. Financial resources sustain education systems through the procurement and provision of educational media, construction of new education infrastructure, maintenance of existing infrastructure, payment of teachers' salaries and other support staff, financing of CPD initiatives and provision of extra-curricular activities, among others. Furthermore, research by the World Bank (2018) on global trends in education underscores the strong and positive correlation between investment in education and countries' economic growth. This highlights the futuristic benefits of well-financed education systems as they tend to guarantee a return on investment in education through well-trained human capital. Given that learning mostly takes place in schools and that schools remain the main source of learning, financing schools with adequate resources and qualified personnel becomes inevitable. As such, it can be inferred that effective school leadership and, subsequently effective learning are best implemented in well-resourced systems that strive to offer all the basic requirements that are needed to facilitate meaningful instruction and learning.

However, in the case of Zimbabwe, the research participants highlighted resource constraints that hindered their ability to support learning effectively. In Chapter 5, I highlighted the financial and resource-linked challenges that the research participants faced. The report elaborated on the education financing regime in Zimbabwe, noting that day-to-day school operations were being financed by parents through school fees and levies, with negligible financing coming from the government. Limited funding from the government means that public schools tend to struggle to access all the required resources, as school resourcing in Zimbabwe is dependent on the parents' ability to pay (World Bank & MoPSE, 2017). While acknowledging the positive impact of the new curriculum in fostering learning, the school heads cautioned that its success depended on adequate resources, recognising the critical role of education financing in achieving effective leadership for learning in Zimbabwean schools.

It is also important to note that resource challenges are linked not only to curriculum implementation but also to the general functioning of the school. As such, limited school financing as a result of the country's long-standing economic challenges has also been identified as a

contributing factor to school decline in Zimbabwe (Mthyinae & Chiororo, 2019). By and large, the research noted that the country's education system has been affected by the country's economic challenges. While parents pay school fees to finance school operations, with no financing coming from the central government, parents' resources fall short of meeting all the schools' needs. Consequently, the school heads who took part in this research expressed a concern that the education financing regime in the country at the time of the research was disadvantaging public schools as the government barred them from charging market-related school fees while at the same time not stepping in to fill the financing gaps that schools had in their budgets.

Despite the highlighted challenges, it is this researcher's contention that a well-resourced education system is an enabling factor to effective school leadership, as financing is pivotal to success and effective delivery. This means that school heads' competencies, continuous professional development and peer learning opportunities, among others, can have a very limited impact if they were to be applied in resource-constrained environments. This factor is thus pivotal in that it recognises a variable that might be out of scope of influence for the school leaders but recognises the importance of government as a key stakeholder in financing the country's education sector, thereby creating an enabling environment for school leaders to excel.

7.7 Chapter Summary

My key research questions sought to explore the essence of the lived experiences and perspectives of Zimbabwean school heads regarding leadership competencies for leading schools effectively. As such, in this chapter, I revisited the competencies discussed in Chapter 6 and I discussed them within the transformational and instructional leadership theories as well as in relation to existing literature. I enriched the discussion with references to some of the lived experiences that were shared in Chapter 5. This is because my research findings as discussed and analysed in this chapter stem from the descriptive data that I presented in Chapters 5 and 6. Phenomenology scholars (Lauterbach, 2018; Moustakos, 1994; Van Manen 2014; Zahavi, 2018) agree that in hermeneutic phenomenology the researcher is allowed to interpret data based on their prior understandings of the phenomenon under study. This is because hermeneutics acknowledges that data interpretation is intrinsically embedded within the researcher's understanding of the world and thus it cannot be entirely bracketed. This means that in this chapter I analysed and discussed the findings of the

research based primarily on the participant's narratives, experiences and perspectives as elaborated in Chapter 5 and 6. At the same time, I also made inferences and interpretations based on my understanding of school leadership practice and existing literature on the phenomenon. This marriage of my prior understanding of the phenomenon as a researcher and the participants' experiences is what Gadamer (1976) refers to as a *fusion of horizons* where the researcher's existing knowledge is used to make meaning of the research participants' lived experiences. The chapter also discussed some aspects that emerged from the research, which are not necessarily competencies, but rather enabling factors that the participants pointed out as being pivotal to supporting effective school leadership. The underlying argument is that even if a school head were to possess all the competencies that this research identified, their success in practising effective school headship will be very limited in the absence of these enabling factors. The enabling factors were all derived from the research participants' narratives and experiences, where they emerged as recurring themes.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the competencies discussed in this chapter and the enabling factors are interconnected and interdependent. Their contribution to effective school leadership emanates from their complementarity, as no single competency alone can ensure success in a leadership role. The need for multiple, interrelated competencies emerged consistently during data analysis, reflecting the participants' perceptions of the various skills and attributes required to effectively fulfil their responsibilities. This bodes well with the research's theoretical framework which was rooted in both transformational and instructional leadership theories, elaborating on the importance of complementarity of leadership practices and competencies for one's success.

The next chapter, which is the final chapter, presents a reflective summary of the research findings and conclusions. I discuss the lessons learnt that emanated from the whole research process as well as my contribution to the existing body of knowledge and recommendations for further study that could enrich or build upon the findings of this research.

CHAPTER 8: REFLECTIVE STUDY SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

8.1 Introduction

The last three chapters of this research report focused on data analysis, discussion, and presentation. Chapter 5 provided a detailed narrative of the lived experiences of my research participants. Presented through a descriptive narrative of the participants' own voices, the chapter highlighted their leadership experiences and how these experiences shaped their perspectives on school headship in Zimbabwe. Chapter 6 continued the descriptive analysis by exploring the perspectives of school heads regarding the essential competencies for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe. The participants shared personal life encounters and leadership experiences that emphasised the importance of these emerging competencies in their daily roles. In Chapter 7, the identified competencies from Chapter 6 were discussed as the key research findings. I contextualised these findings within the theoretical frameworks of transformational school leadership and instructional leadership that underpinned my research.

In this concluding chapter, I start by offering a reflective summary of the seven chapters of this research report, focusing on the key issues that emerged from each chapter and framing such issues within the context of this research. Drawing from my findings, this chapter presents lessons learnt from the study and discusses how my research contributed to the existing body of knowledge and its implications for future research endeavours. This is followed by the conclusion that is an evaluative analysis of each research question, where I link my study and the research questions to my findings. The aim is to offer my readers a summary of the critical research questions that informed this study and highlight to what extent the research findings addressed the research questions of the study.

8.2 Reflective Study Summary

This research aimed to identify the essential competencies that Zimbabwean school heads considered crucial for effective school leadership. It employed a phenomenological approach, meaning that the heads' perspectives on these competencies were shaped by their own lived

experiences in leadership in general and school headship in particular. The research process involved conducting the study, reviewing existing literature, analysing the findings and presenting conclusions across eight chapters in this report. In this section, I provide a concise reflection on the key themes and issues discussed across these eight chapters, summarising the study's significant findings and contributions to the discourse on school leadership competencies in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 1 was the introductory and background chapter, and it presented the overall statement of the problem of the study, providing the existing context of school leadership practice and how it has globally evolved and gained prominence in education research and practice over the years. The chapter also discussed an overarching overview of the background to my study, such as the motivation for my research, the delimitations of the research and the key research questions that I had employed to unpack the research topic. The chapter highlighted the fact that school leadership has become increasingly complex and demanding over the past few decades, as schools and education systems have had to adapt to a rapidly changing context. Using existing literature (Bush, 2020; Day et al., 2020; Fullan, 2001; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2020a; Leithwood et al., 2006; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2008) I provided a background to how school leaders today are responsible for a wide range of tasks, from managing day-to-day school operations to engaging teachers to impact on teaching and learning outcomes. One of my critical assumptions as backed by this existing literature was that effective school leadership had become a critical factor in improving school quality and learner achievement. As such, it was my assumption that any country that wants to improve its education systems and overall learning outcomes cannot do so without investing in school leadership.

I also presented the argument that while school leadership has gained prominence in education research and practice, particularly in Western countries, the phenomenon has not received the same level of attention and investment in developing countries, including in sub-Saharan Africa (Eacott & Asuga, 2014; Bush & Moorosi, 2019). Based on my prior understanding of school leadership practice in Zimbabwe as well as on existing literature (Chiome & Paul, 2011; Mthiyane & Chiororo, 2019; Muresherwa et al., 2014; Mudzingwa, 2021; Mupa 2020; Nziramasanga, 1999) I argued that the appointment of school leaders in Zimbabwe has historically been based on non-competency factors, such as years of service in education, one’s performance as a classroom

teacher, and one's political affiliation, rather than on a systematic competency-based approach. This has resulted in a lack of clearly defined competencies for school heads and at the same time, a diverse range of leadership capabilities among school heads, which contributed to underperformance in some Zimbabwean schools (Mudzingwa, 2021).

Against this backdrop, my study aimed at exploring the lived experiences and perspectives of Zimbabwean school heads regarding the essential competencies required for effective school leadership. I decided to employ a phenomenological study because by drawing on the lived insights and perspectives of practising school leaders, I hoped that my research would inform the development of more merit-based and competency-driven approaches to school leadership selection, preparation and professional development in Zimbabwe – based on the perspectives of those that are living and practising school headship every day.

Chapter 2 was the literature review where I examined national, regional and global literature that I considered crucial to my research. This review helped me grasp the context of my study and assess my findings against existing scholarship in school leadership. To locate the importance of the school leadership domain in education, I discussed school leadership as an evolving pillar in global education discourses. I highlighted how school leadership had gained prominence and how it is now regarded as one of the most important factors to learner achievement by various scholars (Bush, 2020; Day et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020b; Pont, 2014). Considering that Zimbabwe's education system is primarily tied to the British education system due to the countries' colonial history, and also given the strides that South Africa, Zimbabwe's neighbour, has made in strengthening school leadership, I drew lessons and best practices from these countries' experiences that Zimbabwe could adopt in its own school leadership development.

Given that my research questions centred on identifying competencies deemed pivotal by school heads, I also discussed the use of competencies in leadership and how the competency-based leadership perspective has emerged as a prevailing concept in human resources and leadership studies and practice in the 21st century (Adero & Odiyo, 2020; Boyatzis, 2009; Dinh et al., 2014). I also discussed the relevance of competencies to effective school leadership practice, highlighting how effective school leadership can be linked or rooted to competency frameworks or identified sets of competencies. To better comprehend the research participant's experiences and have a good

understanding of the current school leadership operational environment in Zimbabwe, the chapter also discussed the current and past pathways to school leadership in Zimbabwe.

As I carried out the data analysis and discussion, new issues emerged that I had not covered during the literature review. I therefore carried out an updating exercise where I updated the literature review to incorporate these emerging themes. The literature review update is not a standalone section of Chapter 2 but was rather infused into the existing literature review. Overall, the literature review revealed that there is an abundance of literature on leadership in general and school leadership in particular. However, there seems to be limited literature on school leadership practice in Zimbabwe, particularly that focuses on leadership competencies within the Zimbabwean context and has been drawn from and informed by the perspectives and lived experiences of school leaders themselves, an essence that my research sought to explore.

Chapter 3 presented the theoretical framework, underscoring the importance of grounding my exploration of school leadership as a lived experience in robust theoretical frameworks. I started the chapter by discussing how leadership, in general, had evolved and how this had also impacted school leadership. I noted that, as a result, numerous school leadership theories and approaches have emerged in the field of education leadership, with their proponents underscoring the importance of each of these theories in effective leadership practice. After reviewing the literature, I focused on two critical leadership theories – Transformational Leadership and Instructional Leadership. This is because I found these theories to be relevant to the scope of my work, and in the chapter, I elaborated on how various scholars identified these theories as some of the most potent in building effective school leadership, with their combination in practice being underscored as a critical contributor to successful school leadership (Day et al., 2020; Kwan, 2020; Shatzer et al., 2014)

Transformational Leadership Theory, originally pioneered by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1991) emphasises the leader's role in inspiring and motivating followers towards a shared vision. I discussed how transformational leaders are seen as visionary, collaborative and focused on the professional development of their teams. While the theory originated in general leadership studies, I noted that it is now largely applied to education leadership and school leadership, with scholars such as Bush (2020), Day and Sammons (2014), and Kwan (2020) applauding the

application of this theory in the school leadership context, noting its positive impact on areas like teacher commitment, team coordination, school culture and learning outcomes.

Instructional Leadership Theory plays a pivotal role in driving improvements in classroom instruction and learner achievement. It centres on the school leader's role in managing the core teaching and learning processes within the institution. As outlined by Hellinger (2011), this involves defining the school's academic goals, coordinating the curriculum and monitoring learner progress. School leadership scholars like Hallinger (2011; 2015) have underscored the critical importance of instructional leadership in driving improvements in classroom instruction and learner achievement, thereby highlighting the practical implications of this theory in the Zimbabwean school leadership context.

My underlying assumption was that an integration of these two complementary leadership approaches, namely Transformational and Instructional, would provide the most robust framework for exploring effective school leadership in the Zimbabwean context, particularly one that looks at competencies. I argued that existing literature had shown that competencies drawn from both instructional and transformational leadership were deemed to come up with an effective school head who has the ability to lead instruction in their schools while at the same time running the school as an effective organisation. As such, given the acknowledged weaknesses in school leadership in Zimbabwe, as highlighted by different scholars (Chiome, 2014; MOPSE, 2019; Mthiyane & Chiororo, 2019; Mudzingwa, 2021), a leadership model that balances both the organisational and instructional aspects of the role was deemed essential. By drawing on the strengths of both Transformational and Instructional Leadership, I hoped to uncover a holistic understanding of the competencies required for effective school heads in Zimbabwe, thereby reinforcing the comprehensive nature of my research.

Chapter 4 centred on the methodology that I employed for my research, which was a qualitative research methodology with a phenomenological design. I specifically chose an interpretive paradigm for its unique ability to provide an in-depth understanding of school heads' lived experiences. This understanding was crucial in comprehending how these experiences shaped their perspectives on leadership competencies, which they considered vital for effective school leadership in Zimbabwean schools. The interpretivist paradigm, with its view of reality being

multiple and relative, was a perfect fit for my study, aligning well with the phenomenological focus on subjective human experiences.

Given that my research focused on lived experiences and life encounters, I found the phenomenological research design the most relevant, as it enabled me to explore the full meaning of school headship as a lived experience. By interacting with the selected research participants through in-depth interviews, I was able to unpack and understand the school leadership phenomenon in its natural setting through the experiential narratives of those who live and practise the phenomenon on a daily basis. As such, I used hermeneutic phenomenology, which emphasises interpreting phenomena through the lived experience of those who have experienced them. This allowed me to develop a deep, contextualised comprehension of school headship within the Zimbabwean setting as seen through the eyes of the participants rather than seeking to identify universal cause and effect. It should be noted that my assumption from the start of the research process was that the combined experiences of serving school heads, including both their successful and unsuccessful experiences, made them significant sources of knowledge for identifying the essential competencies needed for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe.

For data generation, I conducted one-on-one face-to-face interviews with six purposefully selected school heads who met predetermined criteria related to their qualifications, years of experience, and school location and performance feedback from the district office. I also got them to keep participant diaries over a six-month period to capture their contemporaneous leadership experiences. Of the six participants, five school heads managed to capture some of their experiences in the participant diaries, with only one head failing to return the diary. I limited my sample size to six participants as phenomenological interviews tend to be data-heavy due to their detailed exploratory nature. Furthermore, scholars such as Creswell (1998) and Van Manen (2017) all caution against large sample sizes in phenomenological interviews as, in their view, bigger samples may result in the researcher failing to explicate the real essence of the lived experiences of their participants.

My data analysis was guided by the phenomenological steps outlined by Castro (2003) and Kleiman (2004) as well as the hermeneutic circle, which allowed me to iteratively move between examining the individual interview transcripts and considering the overall context of school leadership in Zimbabwe. By following these outlined steps in the data analysis, I was able to

explore the meaning units deeply and interpret the essential and shared aspects of the lived experiences of Zimbabwean school heads, which were common among the research participants. As Giorgi (1986) points out, meaning units represent specific facets of a participant's experience derived from their perceptions, thoughts, beliefs and other subjective elements of their experiences. As such, in hermeneutics, one interprets the fundamental aspects of these meaning units to form cohesive structures and enhance one's comprehension of the lived experiences. The final step thus involved critically analysing and integrating these meaning units to uncover underlying patterns and meanings, ultimately identifying the core essences of the phenomenon. These emerging themes and patterns complemented findings from the literature review and the theoretical framework of my study, particularly highlighting that effective school leadership hinges on having core competencies related to both instructional leadership (focused on teaching and learning) and transformational leadership (leading the school as an organisation), with learner achievement and improved learning outcomes as central goals.

To ensure trustworthiness, I employed several strategies. I maintained prolonged engagement with participants, conducting follow-up interviews where necessary to fully explore the participants' experiences and life encounters. I also utilised peer debriefing, where I exposed my research process to the scrutiny of disinterested reviewers and peers. Additionally, I provided thick descriptions of the research context and participants' experiential narratives to enable readers to assess the transferability of the findings. I also thoroughly discussed ethical considerations, such as obtaining informed consent and protecting participant privacy, as well as the limitations of my study, such as the time-consuming nature of qualitative research and the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, among other challenges. Overall, using the phenomenological approach enabled me deeply to explore school heads' lived experiences and derive critical competencies for effective school leadership in the Zimbabwean context.

Chapter 5 marked the beginning of the process of data analysis and presentation. This chapter offered a unique insight into the lives and experiences of the research participants, detailing aspects such as their tenure in headship, qualifications and their overall perceptions of school leadership. I split the data into two main parts: the first part focused on the school heads' lived experiences, while the second provided a detailed analysis of their views on essential competencies for effective leadership. Therefore, Chapter 5 predominantly focused on describing the participants'

experiences, analysing their journeys and how these experiences shaped their perspectives on school leadership.

In the descriptive analysis of their experiences, five overarching themes emerged and were discussed. The first theme explored the core aspects of their experiences and how these influenced their perceptions of school headship. Participants shared common experiences related to their path to headship, along with challenges faced during their early years in this role due to factors like insufficient orientation and lack of support structures for novice heads, as well as the absence of a clear national framework for school leadership. The second theme discussed participants' views on school leadership as a challenging yet rewarding journey that most incumbents had occupied out of their own will.

The third theme focused on participants' perceptions of fellow school heads that they deemed successful and effective. They emphasised that they viewed their peers as successful in cases where their leadership was linked to high learning outcomes and achieving targets. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of learner-centred school environments for effective leadership, citing that they viewed peers with high learner achievement and good examination results as successful and effective school heads. Other themes emerging from the data analysis and discussed in the chapter related to participants' perceptions of accountability and decision-making in school leadership. They identified accountability and decision-making as key attributes of effective school headship, emphasising the interconnectedness of these aspects with successful leadership practice.

In Chapter 6, I continued the data presentation by exploring the critical competencies deemed essential for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe, as perceived by the research participants. These perspectives were shaped by the participants' lived experiences and the successes and challenges encountered during their school leadership journeys. As highlighted earlier, my research approach posited that school heads are uniquely positioned to articulate the competencies crucial for success in the school headship role, given their positions and day-to-day experiences. As such, Chapter 6 was anchored on the premise that the diverse experiences, achievements, and challenges faced by school heads offer unparalleled insights into the competencies deemed pivotal for success in a Zimbabwean educational context.

While a range of viewpoints emerged on key competencies, certain competencies were consistently identified by all participants as pivotal. These included understanding policy issues that govern education, establishing systems and standards within one's school, financial management literacy, familiarity with disciplinary procedures for staff and learners, teamwork and coordination, people management, leading learning, teacher supervision, vision setting and planning, ICT competencies, accountability to oneself and leadership ability. Throughout the chapter, I elaborated on these competencies based on participants' perceptions as shared through their words and experiential narratives.

In Chapter 7, I revisited the competencies identified in Chapter 6, situating them within the theoretical frameworks of transformational and instructional leadership. This contextualisation aimed to underscore the profound significance of these competencies that align with the two theories that underpinned my research and their contribution to effective school leadership practices. Twelve competencies emerged from the data analysis, and I categorised them under the two theories, transformational and instructional, based on where each competency was more strongly aligned. Teamwork and team coordination, stakeholder management and engagement, self-regulation and accountability, and vision setting and attainment were identified to be inclined towards transformational leadership. Teacher supervision and support, leadership for learning, and EdTech literacy were located within the instructional leadership theory. In analysing and interpreting the data against existing literature, five competencies were found to be rooted in both theories; thus, I grouped such competencies in a category that I termed *Cross-cutting Leadership Competencies*. These are understanding policy and legal issues in education management, establishing functional systems and standards for the school, functional proficiency in financial management, familiarity with positive disciplinary procedures, and the ability to lead. The identified competencies were both behavioural and technical, showing a good balance to effective leadership. This is because scholarly work (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008) posits that effective school leaders must possess both sets of competencies (technical and behavioural) to be able to succeed in their complex role. It is essential to note that all the identified competencies are interconnected and interdependent, collectively contributing to effective school leadership and improved learning outcomes.

Additionally, I introduced five enabling factors identified by participants, which were not standalone competencies but crucial elements supporting effective school leadership. These were continuous professional development of school leaders, teacher motivation and morale, training of aspiring and novice school heads, well-resourced education systems, and professional learning circles. These factors recurred in the data analysis, elaborating how the participants viewed them as pivotal. The crux of the matter here is that while these factors are not direct competencies, they emerged as key support pillars and enabling factors that the participants collectively identified as being pivotal in effective leadership. Hence it can be argued that even in cases where a school head may possess all the competencies that are identified as being pivotal by this research, their success rate is likely to remain low in cases where these enabling factors are not present.

The chapter integrated references to existing literature and my prior understanding of school leadership practices, enriching the analysis and interpretation of the research findings. This *fusion of horizons*, as Gadamer (1976) describes it, allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions within the broader context of school leadership in Zimbabwe.

In concluding the study, Chapter 8 offered a reflective summary of the whole study, elaborating on how this research is structured but most importantly, highlighting the key issues that were covered by each chapter. I also offered my summarised thoughts on the research questions and how they have been answered by this research. The chapter also provides my recommendations based on the research findings. It highlights my contribution to knowledge and suggests areas for future research.

8.3 Lessons Learnt from the Study

The research generated several lessons that could serve as recommendations aimed at enhancing school leadership practices in Zimbabwe. Outlining the lessons learnt from the research integrates the research's insights with actionable implications, offering alternative pathways for stakeholders to translate the research findings into meaningful improvements in school leadership policies and practices. As mentioned earlier, the research participants recognised their role as crucial to improving learning outcomes in line with modern educational research and practice. However, they also expressed concerns about the challenges facing school leadership in Zimbabwe. The

lessons discussed here therefore aim to offer potential solutions to strengthen school leadership in Zimbabwean public schools. These include the establishment of a Competency Framework for School Leaders in Zimbabwe, Structured CPD for School Heads, Strengthening NASH and NAPH, Training Programme and Orientation for Newly Appointed School Heads, Professional Regulatory Board for Teachers and School Heads, Improved Conditions of Service for School Heads and Teachers, and Utilising the Existing Cluster System as Professional Learning Circles for School Heads.

8.3.1 Introduction of a Competency Framework for School Leaders

One significant lesson learnt from this study is the critical need for the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to establish a competency framework for school leadership as this was a recurring theme throughout the research process. The lack of a guiding competency framework for Zimbabwean school heads has also been identified by past reports and scholars as a key contributor to poor school leadership in Zimbabwe (MoPSE, 2020; Mudzingwa, 2021, Nziramasanga, 1999). This research confirms findings in literature but adds perspectives of serving school heads into reaffirming the need for a competency framework to guide school leadership in Zimbabwe. The key lesson drawn by the research is that by establishing a competency framework for its school heads, the country will have a solid structure to guide school leaders' selection and their continuous professional development while at the same time linking the school heads' competencies to the broader vision of the country's education sector and overall learner success.

In Chapter 2 (Consult Section 2.4), I discussed the competency-based approach to leadership, highlighting why it has largely become a preferred method in the selection and training of leaders across the globe, including in education. Janse van Vuuren and Van der Bank (2023) advocate structuring identified competencies into a framework once they are recognised as contributing to effective leadership. Such frameworks can be utilised diagnostically to evaluate performance in relation to school outcomes and the demonstration of leadership competency. Following this principle, the competencies identified in this research, along with their enabling factors, can be systematically integrated into a proposed competency framework for Zimbabwean public school heads. Such a framework can contribute to the discourse on school leadership in Zimbabwe, providing a blueprint that can assist in evaluating school heads' performance, guiding their

professional development, influencing selection and training processes, and, most importantly, informing future research endeavours in the realm of school leadership and leadership competencies in Zimbabwe.

The crux of this lesson is that, based on the research findings, Zimbabwe requires a competency-based framework to guide the selection, training and professional development of its school heads. This has been observed as a key gap that is currently affecting school leadership quality and practice in the country. The recommended framework could thus serve as a blueprint for providing a scope on the minimum yet critical competencies for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe. It can also provide an overview of where school heads' CPD initiatives could focus, thereby offering a structured approach to school leaders' professional development in Zimbabwe.

8.3.2 Structured CPD for Zimbabwean School Heads

Another key lesson learnt from this research is the critical need for Zimbabwe to have a structured CPD approach to school heads' professional development. The data revealed a recurring emphasis by the research participants on the existing ad hoc approach to CPD. The research noted that most of the existing CPD programmes were being financed and coordinated by NGOs and, in some cases, by the NASH and the NAPH, but their reach was very limited to have a national impact. Consequently, this resulted in school heads having widely varying competencies, with no consistency across the board. As discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapters 5 and 6, CPD efforts were not based on any assessment of existing school heads' competencies or needs but on funding priorities of those that had resources and financing the CPD efforts. As a result, some school heads shared cases where they had received training in specific areas while their counterparts in the same district or cluster did not, as their schools were not included in the funded workshops.

Against these findings, this lesson underscores the need for the MoPSE to consider coming up with a structured CPD framework to guide school heads' professional development. Such a framework could identify school heads' professional needs and design training and learning interventions to assist school heads in building their capacity. A CPD framework would identify school heads' professional needs and design targeted training programmes to enhance their skills. Throughout the research, school heads identified numerous capacity gaps and competencies that they required, underscoring the need for a coordinated government led CPD framework to support

their development. However, without a coordinated framework from the government, it is difficult for them to address these gaps. As such, some have had to embark on self-motivated learning, while others have committed offences due to a lack of knowledge, an issue that I elaborated on in Chapters 5 and 6.

Several scholars (Bush, 2019; Faizuddin et al., 2023; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018) have underscored the significance of CPD in enhancing school leadership practices and capabilities. Given the identified substantial gaps in technical competencies and practices among school heads as revealed by the research, there is a clear imperative for implementing a structured, government coordinated CPD framework. Such a framework will be crucial for addressing the capacity needs of public school heads in Zimbabwe and ultimately strengthening school leadership across the country.

8.3.3 Strengthening NASH and NAPH

Another key lesson learnt from the research is the need to strengthen the NASH and NAPH to assist them in supporting school heads in areas such as professional development, peer learning, improved practices and capacity development. The participants elaborated that NASH and NAPH played a meaningful role in supporting school heads in terms of professional development and creating a national platform where school heads can converge at national and provincial levels to discuss issues of professional interest. It was also noted that the associations had established structures from cluster level up to national level.

Regardless of these seeming strengths, the research noted that NASH and NAPH had limited capacity to implement programmes that are of national impact, especially in issues such as building school heads' competencies and skills at system level. The research also revealed that the programmes run by NASH and NAPH, lack formalisation, making it challenging to rely on them as the primary channels for staff development and national-level training of school heads. The literature review (MoPSE, 2020) also highlighted that their current approaches remained largely informal and lacked the necessary transparency and technical rigour to qualify as comprehensive national programmes guiding the training and professional development of school heads in the country.

Recognising NASH and NAPH's efforts is, however, crucial in fostering appreciation and priming them for future well-structured school heads' support programmes that have total government buy-in. The research contends that there is still ample room for improvement in their initiatives, especially if they are formalised through legal establishment, including the formalisation of their operations in line with the country's laws. Given that they have established structures across the country and that they have made an effort to provide CPD and other professional services for their members, as highlighted in Chapter 2, they offer a good foundation upon which the government could leverage to offer structured CPD, professional support, mentorship and peer learning to school heads.

8.3.4 Training Programme and Orientation for School Heads

The study highlighted significant concerns raised by research participants and supported by various scholars and reports (MoPSE, 2020; Mudzingwa, 2021; Muresherwa et al., 2014; Nziramasanga, 1999) regarding the lack of adequate training and orientation for prospective and newly appointed school heads in Zimbabwe. Against this backdrop, another lesson that emerged from the research is the imperative need for structured training of aspiring and newly appointed school heads through standardised entry-level training and certified orientation programmes. Orientation training and certified training programmes for school heads have been proven to improve overall competencies among school heads and build coherence of skills and abilities at the system level (Pont, 2014).

This lesson emphasises the need for Zimbabwe education authorities to design a training and orientation programme for newly appointed school heads that can be offered as a prior certification to aspiring school heads. Such a training programme can also be structured as a pre-requirement to headship to ensure that Zimbabwean schools are manned by school heads who have the minimum competencies required for the task. The study noted that effective school leaders can be developed through targeted training, which aligns with global recommendations such as those by UNESCO (2016) that advocate specialised training programmes like the South African ACE certificate or the British NPQH, which I discussed and unpacked in Chapter 2 (Consult Sections 2.3.1 & 2.3.2) of this report. In Chapter 2 I also elaborated on the HSTP and the SMIT programmes that the government of Zimbabwe used to have in the past but that were gradually phased out.

Perhaps the MoPSE could revisit these concepts and design a modern intervention stemming from such historical successes. By introducing training programmes for aspiring or novice school heads, the country can cultivate a new generation of competent school leaders who can adapt to evolving education needs. This lesson resonates with the research participants' perspectives who emphasised the importance of pre-headship training as this develops competent leaders who are well-prepared to assume their tasks.

8.3.5 Establishing a Professional Regulatory Board for Teachers and School Leaders

The research also revealed the essential need for creating a professional regulatory board for school heads and teachers in Zimbabwe. Such a board could be modelled after institutions like the South African Council of Educators (SACE) or the Teaching Council of Zambia (TCZ), to use some examples from the region. This lesson learnt arises from the concerns that were raised by the research participants about the absence of a regulatory body that oversees the teaching profession and school leadership from a professional standpoint. Teaching professional councils are crucial for promoting professionalism, self-regulation, ethical conduct and professional development among educators. The MoPSE has recognised the importance of such a council for Zimbabwe and has been contemplating establishing a similar body to regulate the teaching profession and facilitate structured professional growth for educators and school heads (MoPSE, 2020).

The study identified key competencies deemed essential by Zimbabwean school heads in their day-to-day practices, with a strong emphasis on CPD to enhance these competencies. However, the research also noted a gap in formal oversight and professional self-regulation, sharing that although the MoPSE had developed Teacher Professional Standards (TPS) – encompassing standards for school heads as well – there was no legal framework to enforce these standards or accredited mandatory CPD to encourage self-driven learning. As a result, the research noted that the TPS had failed to materialise into anything tangible.

Given this context, the key lesson drawn from the research is the need for forming a teaching profession council in Zimbabwe. Such a body could provide structured CPD for school heads and enforce professional standards, thereby enhancing leadership practices and overall performance among school leaders in the country.

8.3.6 Improving Conditions of Service for School Heads

The research participants emphasised that while they found school leadership fulfilling and had taken on the role voluntarily, they lamented the deplorable state of their current working conditions, which they largely attributed to the country's struggling economy. They identified several challenges that contributed to these poor conditions of service. These included insufficient remuneration, lack of incentives or allowances, and under-resourced schools due to limited government funding. Additionally, they expressed concerns about their pension scheme, which was insufficient to cover basic living expenses after retirement, leading many into financial hardships upon retirement. In summary, the school heads stated that their working environment was not conducive to effective leadership, given their poor conditions of service, which they also argued did not match their professional status. They believed this situation was affecting their performance and motivation, and this led to a loss of respect from both learners and teachers.

In Chapter 2 (Consult Section 2.2) of this report, I discussed the critical role of school heads, elaborating on how the role had gained significant prominence in global education discourse. I also highlighted its direct impact on learner achievement. As such, this lesson is based on the premise that if school heads operate in inadequate conditions where their basic needs are not met, it ultimately hinders their effectiveness and negatively impacts learning outcomes. Addressing Zimbabwean school heads' conditions of service, therefore, becomes crucial in improving leadership competencies, fostering effective school leadership, and enhancing educational outcomes.

8.3.7 Utilising the Existing Cluster System to Serve as Professional Learning Circles

One of the enabling factors that were identified in Chapter 7 (Consult Section 7.6.4) was the establishment of professional learning circles to serve as CPD platforms for continually improving competencies among school heads. This argument was based on the research's findings that there were no platforms for school heads to learn from one another and exchange notes and ideas on best practices for effective leadership. In Chapter 6, I shared the sentiments of some participants who echoed that one of the best avenues of capacity development was not from certified courses such as diplomas or certificate programmes but rather from one another through vicarious learning

and peer learning. Building on these sentiments and the data analysis, the research identified PLCs as one of the enabling factors required to support and develop school heads with the relevant competencies for effective leadership.

Given this context, this lesson underscores that Zimbabwe's existing school cluster system could be repurposed as PLCs for school heads. This system organises schools within a specific area into clusters, which are subgroups within a district. The research noted that these clusters already facilitate various activities such as cluster examinations, teacher training sessions on different subjects and sports events, with each cluster designating a central school as the resource centre. Since the cluster system has already been established and is decentralised, the research suggests that Zimbabwean school heads could leverage this system and utilise its structures and coordination mechanisms to function as PLCs. This approach offers a practical solution for localised CPD and peer learning by utilising existing systems to foster mentorship and collaborative learning among school leaders, thus enhancing their identified competencies efficiently.

8.3.8 Incentivising Further Education and Training for School Heads

The research revealed that Zimbabwean school heads were reluctant to pursue further studies, engage in self-motivated professional development or pursue voluntary in-service training. The heads noted that there were no significant incentives for school heads who had upgraded their qualifications or skills, as the Ministries of Education and Public Service did not provide corresponding rewards for these achievements. Some heads observed that even after obtaining advanced degrees or completing specific courses, the salary and allowances gap between them, their deputy heads and teachers remained insignificant. As a result, they noted that most heads were reluctant to continually to upgrade themselves as they saw no reward in doing so. Consequently, most were taking part only in mandatory professional development opportunities organised by the Ministry, which, as earlier mentioned, came on an ad hoc and less-structured basis.

A key lesson learnt from this was that the MoPSE or the government of Zimbabwe needs to develop a system that recognises and incentivises in-service training and further studies. Such a system could include upward adjustments in salary grades following the attainment of higher

qualifications compared to previously held ones. While this system of adjustments might already be in existence, the heads expressed concern about the close-to-zero adjustments currently being made.

Additionally, the government could consider non-monetary incentives to recognise school heads' pursuit of further education. These might include promotion opportunities or assigning credits/scores that are earned from CPD training or new qualifications. Such scores could be tied to structured CPD programmes offered through professional regulatory bodies as described in Section 8.4.5 of this research. These CPD scores could also be used to renew headship licences in cases where the government might decide to offer renewable headship licences. The crux of this lesson is that Zimbabwe needs to rethink its incentive system in recognition of school heads' in-service training, professional development training or further academic studies. The current lack of incentives for personal advancement has proven to be a significant demotivating factor for self-driven learning among school heads.

8.4 Recommendations for Further Research

While my research has contributed new dimensions to the study of school leadership in Zimbabwe, particularly in the domain of leadership competencies for effective school leadership as derived from the perspectives of serving school heads, it was not exhaustive. As such, as a researcher, I still see more research opportunities and the need for further research in the areas that I discuss below. Further research in these areas could build on this research findings and strengthen scholarly evidence in the domain of school leadership in Zimbabwe.

8.4.1 Exploring a Quantitative Study

My study was qualitative research that was informed by a phenomenological research design. As such, I limited my research sample to only six participants. This is because research scholars such as Creswell (1998) and Ellis (2016) argue for smaller sample sizes in phenomenological studies due to the data-intensive nature of phenomenology transcripts. The broad objective of the research was to identify critical competencies that Zimbabwean school heads deem pivotal to effective school leadership based on their lived leadership experiences. Given the qualitative approach with a small sample size of six school heads, it is important to acknowledge that this methodology may

not provide sufficient grounds for making generalised nomothetic conclusions that are not subjected to further empirical validation. As earlier highlighted, my study sought to explore leadership competencies from the perspectives and lived experiences of those experiencing the phenomenon daily, hence the selected methodology and design. This specific design, with its limited sample size, serves as a foundation for future quantitative studies that can leverage larger samples to either confirm or dismiss the findings of my research.

8.4.2 Plurality of Perspectives

The conclusions and lessons learnt dawn from my research are primarily based on the insights and perspectives shared by serving school leaders who participated in the study, complemented by relevant literature. It is important to recognise that effective leadership is inherently relational and extends beyond the perspectives of leaders themselves to include the viewpoints of their followers and others whom they interact with in fulfilling their leadership roles. Against this backdrop, there is a significant opportunity for further research that incorporates diverse perspectives on effective school leadership within the Zimbabwean context. This could involve expanding the pool of research participants to include various groups such as teachers, learners, district inspectors, parents and others whose life experiences and viewpoints could enrich one's understanding of critical competencies for effective school leadership.

By incorporating a plurality of perspectives from these multiple stakeholders, future research can offer a more comprehensive view of school leadership competencies in Zimbabwe. This broader coverage would not only complement but also potentially enhance the findings and recommendations put forth in my study, thereby contributing to deeper and better understanding of school leadership competencies and effective school leadership practices within the Zimbabwe education terrain.

8.4.3 Exploring Leadership Competencies against Other Variables

My study applied a generic approach to variables like school levels, geographical locations and gender. This was because my variable of interest was school leadership competencies regardless of the school level, the school location or the gender of the leader. Therefore, my sample included

both primary and secondary school heads, male and female heads, as well as those from rural and urban areas. The competencies that my research identified do not thus account for differences specific to school levels (primary versus secondary), geographical locations (rural versus urban) or gender (male versus female). This presents an opportunity for future comparative studies to examine the competencies and leadership practices of school heads across different school levels, geographical settings and gender or any other variable that may be deemed to impact school leadership practice. Such comparative studies could provide insight into contextual factors that influence effective school leadership while at the same time building on my research work, thereby adding more scholarly perspectives on school leadership competencies in Zimbabwe.

Additionally, the data analysis revealed several other competencies that were not elaborated on in Chapter 7, as they were not as prominent as those discussed in this research report. For example, mentoring and coaching emerged frequently in discussions with some participants, though it did not gain as much attention as those competencies discussed herein. This provides a foundation for future research, which could investigate other competencies that school heads view as critical, beyond those covered in this study.

8.5 Contribution to Knowledge

This study provides valuable contributions to the existing body of knowledge on school leadership in Zimbabwe, particularly on leadership competencies for effective school leadership. Below I discuss some notable areas the research contributes to.

8.5.1 Identification of Context-specific Competencies

In Chapter 2 of this research, I elaborated on how school leadership has evolved into an inevitable pillar in education research and practice. I also highlighted how governments worldwide are investing in school leadership development as part of broader strategies to enhance their education systems and improve learning outcomes (Bush, 2020; UNESCO, 2016). As a result, many school leadership models, theories and competencies have been developed and some have been adapted to the African context. Yet, a look at most of these models, competencies and literature shows that they are primarily adopted from the global North and not rooted in African experiences (Eacott & Asuga, 2014). Like any other country, Zimbabwe's educational landscape has unique challenges

and opportunities that can inform and shape effective school leadership within the country's context. This research contributes to existing knowledge in that it identifies school leadership competencies drawn from and informed by actual Zimbabwean experiences and considers the local cultural, social, economic and political contexts in enriching school leadership practice in the country. Consequently, this research can thus serve as a beacon of expertise in academic spaces and circles where scholars may be seeking insights into leadership competencies for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe, as identified by the school heads themselves.

8.5.2 Exploring School leadership Through Lived Experiences

In formulating this research, I argued that although there is limited existing literature on school leadership in Zimbabwe, very little of it focuses on school leadership competencies, particularly from the perspectives of school heads themselves. My research fills this gap by investigating leadership competencies for effective school leadership in Zimbabwe through the lived experiences of practising school heads. By drawing on these experiences, my research provides a detailed understanding of the daily challenges, successes and experiences of school heads in Zimbabwe. My research, therefore, offers nuanced and detailed insights into the realities of leading schools in Zimbabwe as seen through the lens, and told through the narratives of Zimbabwean school heads.

8.5.3 Informing Policy and Practice

My research could contribute to school leadership policy formulation and implementation in Zimbabwe. For instance, the research identified a set of transformational, instructional and cross-cutting leadership competencies, identified enabling factors that support effective school leadership and provided several lessons learnt that could help in strengthening school leadership practice. All these outcomes have overarching policy implications related to school heads' recruitment, training, professional development and general school leadership practice in Zimbabwe if they were to be considered or implemented. Furthermore, the research findings on identified competencies could influence the conceptualisation, development and support of a school leadership competency framework tailored to Zimbabwe's educational policy context. Given that the research highlights school leadership as an underserved area with substantial room for improvement at both the policy and implementation levels in Zimbabwe (MoPSE, 2020;

Mthyiane & Chiororo, 2019; Muresherwa et al., 2014; Nziramasanga, 1999), this research could serve as a valuable resource for shaping policy design and interventions if Zimbabwe were to embark on a journey of enriching school leadership practices.

8.5.4 Changing and Improving Leadership Practices

My research has the potential to foster positive change and improvement in leadership practices among Zimbabwean school heads. By identifying a set of transformational, instructional and cross-cutting competencies that are considered essential by their peers for effective leadership practice, my research encourages serving or aspiring school leaders to reflect on their own practices. Through evidence-based reflection prompted by my findings, school leaders who engage with my work may be inspired to invest in building these identified competencies and apply them within their own contexts. As such, my research can contribute to the enhancement of leadership approaches and practices among Zimbabwean school heads, ultimately leading to positive changes in how schools are led and managed.

8.6 Conclusions

In concluding my research, I revisit the research questions that informed and structured this study. As earlier highlighted, my study sought to leverage practising school heads' first-hand experiences in leadership and identify the critical competencies that these school heads believe are essential for effective school leadership. I assumed that the accumulated experiences of these leaders, encompassing both their successes and failures, make them valuable informants to identify the key competencies necessary for effective school leadership within the Zimbabwean context. Below, I provide my conclusions summarising this research's thrust against the research questions that informed this study, highlighting how the research questions were addressed by my research.

8.5.5 Research Question 1: How do Zimbabwean school heads describe their lived experiences that have influenced their competencies in leading schools?

The main focus of this question was detailed in Chapters 5 and 6 of this report. I provided comprehensive accounts of the personal experiences of school heads and how these experiences influenced their views on essential competencies for their role. This study generated a large amount

of data due to its phenomenological nature, resulting in the emergence of multiple issues. Through data analysis, I identified meaningful units and themes that allowed me to highlight key lived experiences discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. The sub-research questions for this research, asked during in-depth interviews (Consult Appendix 3 – Interview Guide) were specifically designed to capture participants' lived experiences related to leadership competencies.

In summary, this question was thoroughly explored as participants shared various lived experiences and common challenges, such as the difficulties faced by new heads due to lack of orientation and support, and the learning curve in early headship. Participants emphasised that school headship is demanding yet rewarding, and they strove to develop critical competencies for success and fulfilment in their role. Other perspectives highlighted accountability, perceptions on peers they deemed successful and why they viewed them as such, the absence of a school leadership framework in Zimbabwe, and decision-making in leadership. In conclusion, this research question was effectively addressed as participants provided insight into their leadership journeys through detailed experiential narratives, illustrating how life experiences, challenges and achievements shaped their understanding of leadership competencies.

8.5.6 Research Question 2: What leadership competencies do Zimbabwean school heads perceive as crucial for leading schools, and how do they believe these competencies contribute to effective leadership and professional success?

This question was effectively addressed in Chapters 6 and 7 that primarily focused on this key research question. The study identified twelve competencies derived from both instructional and transformational practices, with some competencies overlapping across both these areas. Notably, these competencies encompassed both behavioural and technical aspects, reflecting a well-rounded understanding of competencies among the school heads. Despite the many issues and perceptions of competencies that emerged during my discussions with the school heads and during the data analysis, including competencies that were not ultimately reported on in this report, the researcher is confident that the twelve competencies identified in Chapter 6 and elaborated upon in Chapter 7 were central to the research findings and were the most common and recurring ones across the

research participants. These competencies were consistently emphasised by participants who shared personal experiences and insights into why these competencies are critical in their role.

The study emphasises learner achievement and learning outcomes as central to effective school leadership. This is because the research participants consistently underscored the fact that all these competencies and their practice should focus on learner achievement, which they viewed as any schools' primary purpose. The school heads thus considered these identified competencies pivotal because they believed that, individually and collectively, these competencies were linked to learner achievement and improved learning outcomes.

In addressing this question, the study identified additional factors that I termed *enabling factors* that are supportive elements but not necessarily competencies but were highlighted as crucial to effective school leadership by the research participants. These factors were discussed in Chapter 7 (Consult Section 7.6) to underscore their importance as perceived by Zimbabwean school heads. Importantly, the perception of these factors was enriched by the actual lived experiences of the research participants. Chapters 5 and 6 provided contextual narratives of the participants regarding these enabling factors. It provided insights into their personal experiences and how these experiences had shaped the heads' views on the enabling factors, thereby elaborating why they also regarded them as important in supporting effective school leadership.

Overall, Chapters 5 to 7 comprehensively addressed this research question by identifying and discussing twelve competencies and associated enabling factors that Zimbabwean school heads perceived to be pivotal in effective school leadership practice based on their lived experiences in school headship.

8.5.7 Research Question 3: What lessons can be learnt from the lived leadership experiences of school heads regarding leadership competencies in Zimbabwean public schools?

Perhaps it is imperative to acknowledge that in addressing this research question, I adopted a comprehensive approach to data generation, analysis and interpretation. I examined the shared experiences of practising school heads, considering their professional backgrounds, journeys to headship and school contexts, among other factors. By synthesising these factors, the research managed to draw lessons on how school heads came to perceive the competencies that emerged

from the research as critical and standout qualities for effective school leaders within the Zimbabwean context. As such, it is my contention that, being a phenomenological study, I managed to leverage the participant's lived experiences and, from these experiences, generate a plethora of lessons regarding school leadership competencies in Zimbabwe.

This question was thus addressed through the data that I presented and discussed in Chapters 5 to 7. Furthermore, in Section 8.3 of this chapter, I provided a section that summarised the key lessons learnt from this research, elaborating on how the school heads' experiences and encounters had provided valuable insights and lessons that Zimbabwean education stakeholders could take into account to strengthen school leadership practice and competencies in the country. The sub-questions to this research question (Consult appendix 3 – Interview Guide) were also designed to assist me as a researcher to probe further how the school headship experiences had influenced their perspectives on school leadership competencies and what lessons could be drawn from such experiences.

As earlier highlighted, such lessons were discussed as standalone lessons in Section 8.3, but I also discussed various lessons learnt in my data discussion in Chapter 7 as I discussed the emerging competencies from the research. It can be argued that the competencies identified offer critical lessons on school leadership, derived directly from the perspectives of serving school heads who provided insights into their day-to-day experiences. Consequently, this research contributes valuable lessons on a phenomenon that has been underexplored in Zimbabwe, especially from the perspectives of those immersed in and encountering it on a day-to-day basis. As such, the rich insights shared by the school heads, combined with an extensive literature review, enabled me to extract lessons from these lived experiences and seamlessly integrate them into the data discussions, thus fortifying the empirical foundation of this study.

This integration of empirical findings and experiential knowledge underscores the significance of leveraging the voices and experiences of practising heads to shape one's understanding of critical competencies required for effective school leadership within the Zimbabwean context. By intertwining together these insights, the research not only identifies key competencies for effective leadership but also provides actionable lessons for Zimbabwean education stakeholders who may be seeking to enhance school leadership practices and competencies in Zimbabwean schools.

8.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a reflective summary of my study, outlining how I initiated my research and providing an overview of each chapter of this research report. The chapter also presented lessons learnt from my study, highlighting several lessons that Zimbabwean policymakers, school leaders, educators, and stakeholders can consider in enhancing school leadership in Zimbabwe and addressing some of the key findings from this research.

In addition, I highlighted how my research contributes to the existing academic body of knowledge by addressing a significant gap in the field of school leadership competencies in Zimbabwe. Specifically, my study fills an academic lacuna by focusing on competencies derived from and informed by the experiences of serving Zimbabwean school heads. This approach adds a unique perspective to the literature on school leadership and contributes valuable insights that were previously lacking in this area of study. As a researcher, I admit that knowledge generation is a continuum with an infinitive endpoint. Therefore, this chapter also reflects on areas that I believe future researchers could explore to build upon my work and further enrich scholarly knowledge on school leadership in Zimbabwe, particularly focusing on school leadership competencies. In conclusion, I revisited my key research questions and summarised how the research process and subsequent findings addressed these questions, confirming that the key research questions were effectively answered, and the research objectives achieved.

8.7 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, this research has provided valuable insights into school leadership practices in Zimbabwe. It specifically focuses on leadership competencies that Zimbabwean school heads perceive as critical and must have in their day-to-day practices. The research provides evidence to answer the central question on the essence of Zimbabwean school heads' lived leadership experiences and how these essences shaped their perception of critical competencies required to effectively lead schools in the Zimbabwean context. By employing a phenomenological research design, the research process allowed me to immerse myself in the day-to-day realities of leading schools in Zimbabwe and gain a better understanding of what competencies are required to be effective in this regard. The research established that Zimbabwean school heads place great emphasis on their work and are self-driven to succeed, with learner achievement being at the centre

of their work. There are, however, numerous competencies that the research participants acknowledged as lacking among them and their peers, yet these competencies are at the centre of effective school leadership. This research discussed these competencies in detail, elaborating on individual experiences and perceptions of why the research participants viewed them as such.

Moreover, the research identified enabling factors recognised by Zimbabwean school heads as essential pillars supporting effective school leadership. It argues that possessing competencies alone is insufficient without these supportive factors that are crucial for both effective leadership and improving learning outcomes. Overall, the study emphasised the need for significant improvements in the structure of school leadership in Zimbabwe, particularly in the recruitment, training, and professional development of school leaders. The absence of a national competency framework to guide the selection, professional development and overall school leadership policies remains a significant drawback hindering the advancement of school leadership as a professional field in the country.

Given the underserved nature of this field, as evidenced by existing literature (MoPSE, 2020; Mthyiane & Chiororo, 2019; Muresherwa et al., 2014; Nziramasanga, 1999), I am confident that this research should serve as a foundation for future studies. It provides a starting point for further exploration into honing school leadership competencies and practices in Zimbabwe, aiming to strengthen and enhance school leadership as a vital aspect of educational development in the country.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet

Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet



University of the Witwatersrand,
Wits School of Education
27 St Andrews Rd, Parktown,
Johannesburg, 2193, South Africa

20 September 2022

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Tapfuma Ronald Jongwe. I am a PhD student in Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr. Pinkie Mthembu. I am conducting a research study on leadership competences among School Heads with a focus on developing a competency-based framework for school leaders in Zimbabwe, which could assist in the selection, training, and professional development of school heads in the country. The study title is: ***Utilizing a competence-based framework to rethink school leadership in Zimbabwe: A phenomenological approach.***

I am inviting you to take part in an interview in which you will be invited to share your experiences and views as a school head in Zimbabwe with a focus on: your lived experiences as a school head; your perspectives on effective school leadership, your view on school leadership competences; and your thoughts on school heads' professional development, capacity needs/gaps. This will be done through in-depth interviews that I will have with you. I intend to have two interviews with you over a course of six months, with each interview session expected to last for at least 3 hours. With your consent, a third follow-up interview can however be conducted, in case additional information or further contact with you may be required. The interviews shall be conducted in English but should you have any other preferred language, necessary arrangement shall be made to accommodate the identified language. I will make the necessary arrangements to make sure the setting will be at any venue most convenient to you within or outside the school at the times most convenient to you.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interviews. This data will be stored in soft format in a password protected drive for the duration of the study and deleted after 5 years. Only the researcher will have access to the data. The interviews will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. The name of your school shall also be anonymized and will not be revealed to ensure total confidentiality.

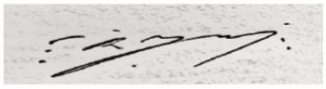
If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life, as such there are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research 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,



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Appendix 2: Participant's Informed Consent

Appendix 2: Participant's Consent Form



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Johannesburg

Name of Researcher: **Tapfuma Ronald Jongwe**

Research Topic: **UTILISING A COMPETENCE-BASED FRAMEWORK TO RETHINK SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN ZIMBABWE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH**

I, ……..……, agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree that the interview/ be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on	YES	NO

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)

…… (signature)
…… (name of researcher/person seeking consent)
…… (date)

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewer:

School Code:

Interviewee Code:

Position, school, and district of interviewee:

Number of years of experience as a school head:

Questions:

SECTION A

Table 1: Tick appropriate Box (shaded area)

AGE	30- 40	41- 50	51-60	61 +	
ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS	Standard 6	Z.J.C	"O" Level	"A" Level	Other
PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	Certificate of Education	Diploma in Education/Another Diploma	Bachelor of Education/BA/BSc	Master of Education	PHD (and above)
NUMBER OF YEARS AS A TEACHER	1-5 Years	6-10	11-15	16-20	21 & above
NUMBER OF YEARS AS A DEPUTY HEAD	1-5 Years	6-10	11-15	16-20	21 & above

NUMBER OF YEARS AS A SCHOOL HEAD	6-10 Years	11-15	16-20	21 and above	
Any other professional/academic qualification					

Table 2: Tick appropriate box (shaded area)

SCHOOL		**ENROLMENT**		**SCHOOL TYPE (P1/S1 etc.)**		**STAFF BY GENDER**	
Primary		Male		P1/S1		Male	
Secondary		Female		P2/S2		Female	
		TOTAL		P3/S3		TOTAL	

Essence of Lived Experiences and Their Influence on Leadership Practice

1. Tell me about your professional journey to school headship.
2. Based on your own lived experiences (as a school head), in your view what are the competencies required by public school heads to lead and manage their schools in an effective and efficient way.
3. In your years of service as a school head, what are some of the outstanding experiences that you encountered that you believe your leadership knowledge, skills and attitudes were put to test?
4. During your professional career, what experiences have most influenced or impacted your growth and development as a school head?
5. What are the three greatest challenges you face as a school head?
6. Overall, how do you define/explain school leadership as a lived experience?

Perceptions of Successful and Effective School Leadership

7. Based on your leadership experiences to date, how do you define successful and effective school leadership?
8. Looking at your experience as a school head to date, what would you consider as three to five characteristics of an effective school environment?
9. Are there any school heads that you regard as highly competent and successful leaders? What influences your perception of these leaders (what makes you to view them as competent and successful leaders)?
10. Are supervision requirements/visits by the Ministry the main drivers/motivators for you to do your work (Follow up if respondent does not justify their answer).

11. Does the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education have any School Leadership Standards/Framework/Evaluation, and how do these impact your everyday practice?

Key Competencies, Skills and Knowledge

12. Based on your experience as a school head, what are the prior competencies, skills and knowledge that you think you required when you were promoted to be a school head? Share some life experiences to support your submission.
13. What are the key competences, skills and attitudes that you think school heads require for them to run efficient and effective schools?
14. Do you think you have all these competences referred to in Q13? If not, how best can you be capacitated to have the requisite competences?
15. When you look at your leadership journey so far, what do you attribute your leadership practice and competences to? Is it an academic programme e.g. MEd in Educational Leadership; in-service training or self-taught on the job experiences?
16. From your lived experiences as a school head, what are the key competencies and or skills that you see as pivotal to school improvement?

Capacity Needs and Continuous Professional Development

17. Based on your leadership journey so far, what are your key capacity needs as a school head in relation to continuous professional development?
18. Describe your most meaningful professional development learning experience and why you regard it as such.
19. What is your view of the current professional development opportunities for school heads in Zimbabwe?

External Factors and Their Effect on One's Headship

20. How has the experience of being a school head affected your leadership and management competencies and perceptions regarding effective leadership and school improvement?
21. Have your professional background and experience effected your leadership and management competencies and perceptions regarding effective school leadership and school improvement?
22. Has your school context (present or past) affected your leadership and management competencies and perceptions on effective school leadership and school improvement?

Details of interviewer

Tapfuma Ronald Jongwe
PhD Student

Division of ELPS. Wits School of Education

+263772903218

1813290@students.wits.ac.za; trjongwe@gmail.com

Appendix 4: Application Letter to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

University of the Witwatersrand,
Wits School of Education
27 St Andrews Rd, Parktown,
Johannesburg, 2193, South Africa

The Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
Ambassador House
P.O Box CY 121, Causeway
Harare, Zimbabwe

18 October 2021

Dear Madam,

Re: Permission to conduct PhD research at six schools in Harare, Masvingo and Matebeleland South Provinces

My name is Tapfuma Ronald Jongwe, **Student Number 1813290**. I am studying for a PhD in Education (Educational Leadership and Policy Studies) with the Wits School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa on a part-time basis. I am seeking permission to do research at six schools in Harare, Masvingo and Matebeleland South Provinces. The six schools will comprise of three primary and three secondary schools, with the School Heads at these schools being my respondents.

I am conducting an academic research on leadership competences among School Heads with a focus on developing a competency-based framework for school leaders in Zimbabwe, that could assist in the selection, training, and professional development of school heads in the country.

The full title of my thesis is: **Utilising a competence-based framework to rethink school leadership in Zimbabwe: A phenomenological approach**. My research is motivated to interact with serving school heads and learn from their experiences since appointment, and the challenges that they have faced in trying to adjust into their 'new' and demanding role. This is because much has been studied in the domain of school leadership yet in most circumstances, rarely has any of the research been from the perspectives of practicing school heads themselves. The feedback received from

these school heads will thus serve as the fulcrum upon which a competency-based framework for Zimbabwean school heads could be built, as it will be drawn from the recommendations and lived experiences of school heads in regard to the hard and soft skills that are pertinent to their role.

The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.

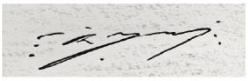
The six school heads who will take part in the research will be selected using purposive sampling and the main method of data collection will be in-depth interviews. I intend to interact with the research participants on multiple occasions so as to ensure that as much data is collected. Participants will be asked to give their written or verbal consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and identities (their names and the name of the school) will be anonymous unless otherwise expressly indicated. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

The results of the research will be communicated through my published PhD Dissertation which will be the final product of my academic journey. A copy of the Dissertation report shall also be shared with your Ministry in both Hard and soft format by June 2023.

I therefore request permission in writing to conduct my research is six of your schools. The permission letter should be on your organisation's headed paper, signed and dated, and specifically referring to myself by name and the title of my study.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely,

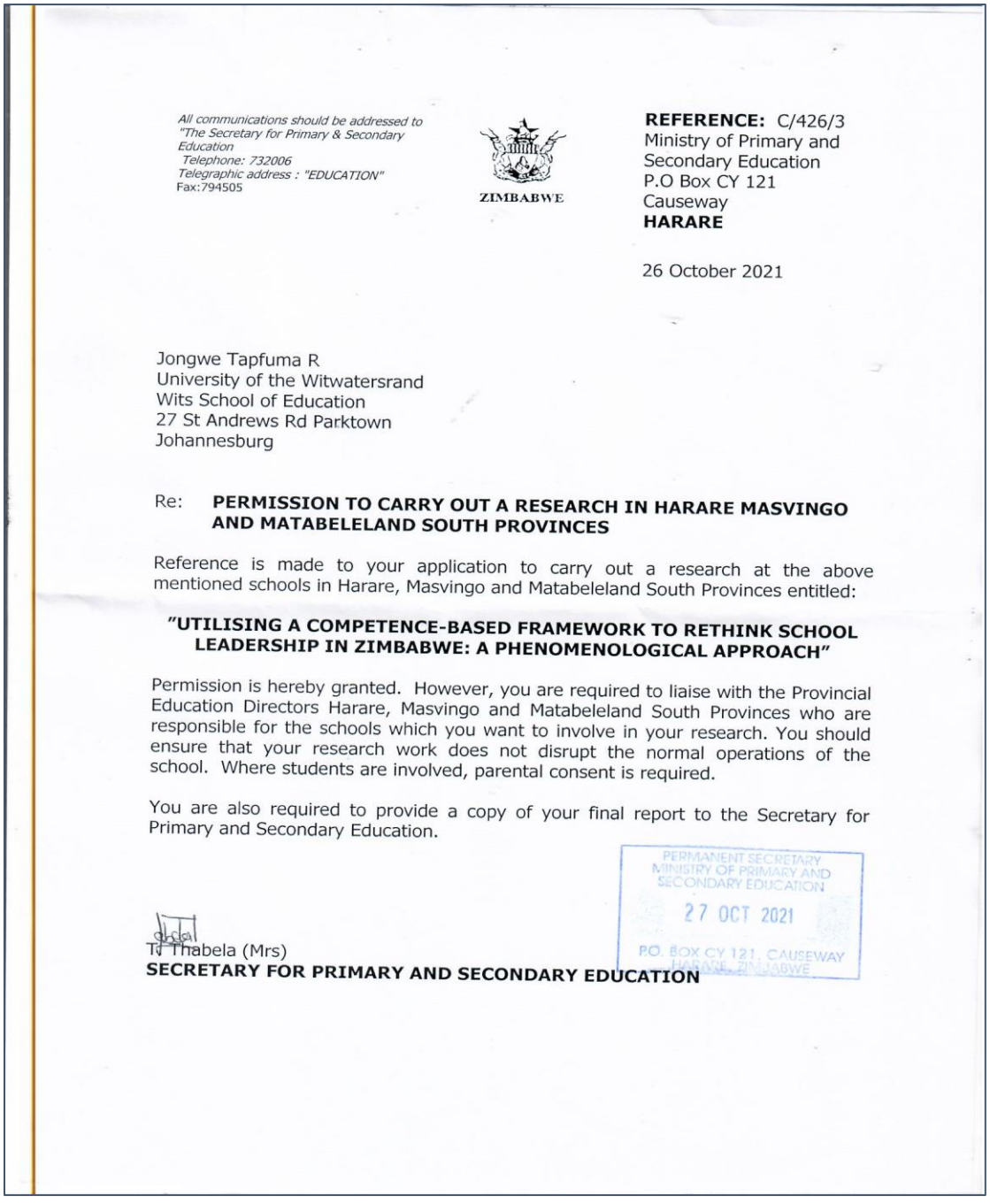


Tapfuma Ronald Jongwe
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Supervisor's Details

Dr. Siphiwe E. Mthiyane
siphiwe.mthiyane@wits.ac.za
+27733774672

Appendix 5: Permission Letter from the Ministry of Education Zimbabwe



All communications should be addressed to "The Secretary for Primary & Secondary Education
Telephone: 732006
Telegraphic address : "EDUCATION"
Fax:794505

ZIMBABWE

REFERENCE: C/426/3
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
P.O Box CY 121
Causeway
HARARE

26 October 2021

Jongwe Tapfuma R
University of the Witwatersrand
Wits School of Education
27 St Andrews Rd Parktown
Johannesburg

Re: **PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH IN HARARE MASVINGO AND MATABELELAND SOUTH PROVINCES**

Reference is made to your application to carry out a research at the above mentioned schools in Harare, Masvingo and Matabeleland South Provinces entitled:

"UTILISING A COMPETENCE-BASED FRAMEWORK TO RETHINK SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN ZIMBABWE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH"

Permission is hereby granted. However, you are required to liaise with the Provincial Education Directors Harare, Masvingo and Matabeleland South Provinces who are responsible for the schools which you want to involve in your research. You should ensure that your research work does not disrupt the normal operations of the school. Where students are involved, parental consent is required.

You are also required to provide a copy of your final report to the Secretary for Primary and Secondary Education.

PERMANENT SECRETARY
MINISTRY OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
27 OCT 2021
P.O. BOX CY 121, CAUSEWAY
HARARE, ZIMBABWE

T. Thabela (Mrs)
SECRETARY FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Appendix 6: Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Jongwe

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H22/09/07**
PROJECT TITLE	Utilising a competence-based framework to rethink school leadership in Zimbabwe: A phenomenological approach
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Mr T Jongwe
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Wits School of Education/
DATE CONSIDERED	16 September 2022
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Minimal
EXPIRY DATE	04 October 2025

DATE 05 October 2022 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Watermeyer)

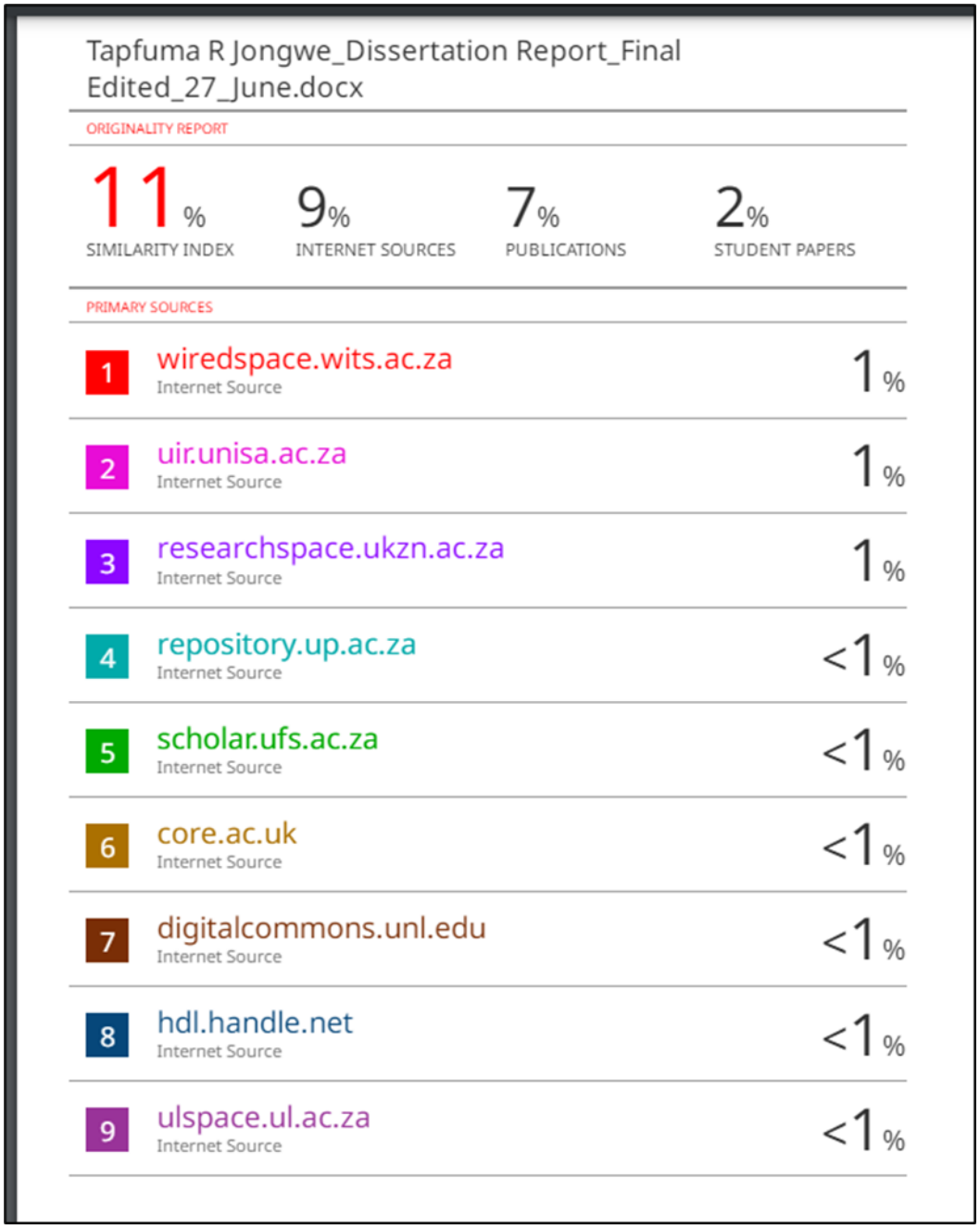
cc: Supervisor : Dr P Mthembu

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the 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 submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

Appendix 7: Turnitin Certificate Report



Tapfuma R Jongwe_Dissertation Report_Final Edited_27_June.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

11%	9%	7%	2%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	wiredspace.wits.ac.za Internet Source	1%
2	uir.unisa.ac.za Internet Source	1%
3	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	1%
4	repository.up.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
5	scholar.ufs.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
6	core.ac.uk Internet Source	<1%
7	digitalcommons.unl.edu Internet Source	<1%
8	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	<1%
9	ulspace.ul.ac.za Internet Source	<1%

Appendix 8: Proof of Editing

I HATE
MISTEAKS

TK LANGUAGE SERVICE
EDITING | PROOFREADING | TRANSLATION

Prof. Dr. Tinus Kühn
+27 82 303 5415 | tinus.kuhn@gmail.com

6 May 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the doctoral thesis titled **School Heads' Experiences and Perspectives on Critical Leadership Competencies in Zimbabwe: A Phenomenological Study** by **Tapfuma Ronald Jongwe** has been edited.

It is the responsibility of the candidate to effect the recommended changes.

Tinus Kühn

Prof. Tinus Kühn